



Report of the First Workshop of the ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project, January 24 to 26, 2004, Chulalongkorn University

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The first workshop of the ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project was held from January 24 to 26, 2004, at the Sasin Graduate School of Business Administration, Chulalongkorn University. The acronym 'LEMLIFE' stands for "*legal, ethical and management aspects of the life sciences,*" and this quite neatly sums up the theme of the project, which is funded by the European Union and Chulalongkorn University under the auspice of the ASEAN-EU University Programme (AUNP). The AUNP is a collaborative program between the EU and the ASEAN aiming at creating and facilitating networking and collaborations among academic situations in the two regions.

The first workshop represented the first actual gathering of the participants of the ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE project. Basically the project aims at creating awareness of the problems facing people in both the EU and ASEAN regions regarding the proliferation and diffusion of advanced biotechnology and life sciences. As we are well aware, such advances touch upon various aspects of human life, and it is a pity that the available mechanisms that serve the check those advances are seriously inadequate. Thus, this project aims at alleviating the situation through various activities, such as holding workshops, organizing seminars and training sessions, putting up websites on the Internet. However, the main activity of the project is research and production of teaching material, which will form a basis on which an international graduate degree program in bioethics will be established at Chulalongkorn University afterwards.

The main objective of the first workshop was to 'jump-start' the project by inviting all the participants of the Project to meet each other in person in an intensive, three-day session of meetings and discussions. These participants are representatives of four universities from the EU and four from the ASEAN. The EU participants are: Dr. Brigitte Jansen and Prof. Dr. Jürgen Simon from Lüneburg University and the European Academy of Environment and Economy (Prof. Simon is the European co-ordinator of the Project), Prof. Dr. Carlos-Romeo Casabona from the University of the Basque Country, Prof. Dr. Nikolaus Knoepffler from

Jena University, and Prof. Dr. Ruth Chadwick from Lancaster University. Unfortunately, Prof. Chadwick could not come to Thailand to attend the workshop, and Dr. Minakshi Bhardwaj came in as the representative of Lancaster and as a participant in the workshop. On the ASEAN side, there are nine participants: Dr. Soraj Hongladarom, who is the ASEAN co-ordinator and the main contact person of the Project, Dr. Somparn Promta, Dr. Sutham Yoonaitam, Dr. Pareena Supjariyavatr, Dr. Siriyupa Roongrerngsuke, Dr. Sarote Pornprabha. These are all from Chulalongkorn University so are local participants, and there are three more professors from ASEAN universities: Prof. Dr. Leonardo de Castro (University of the Philippines), Prof. Dr. Le Dinh Luong (Vietnam National University) and Prof. Dr. Chan Chee Khoon (Universiti Sains Malaysia).

In all there are fourteen participants to the Project, representing eight universities and four academic disciplines. Drs. Soraj, Somparn, Profs. Chadwick, Knoepffler and de Castro are philosophers; Profs. Simon, Casabona, Drs Sutham and Pareena are lawyers; Prof. Chan, Drs. Jansen, Siriyupa and Sarote are management scholars. And Prof. Le is the only practicing scientist in the group; he is Director of the Center for Biotechnology at Vietnam National University in Hanoi.

The workshop was attended by some fifty people from various institutions and academic fields in Thailand. There were also surprisingly some foreign observers who were interested in bioethical issues. The opening statement of the workshop was graciously given by Prof. Dr. Tatchai Sumitra, President of Chulalongkorn University. His talk focused on the need for interdisciplinary and collaborative work among not only people from various academic fields, but also among people from different universities and regions of the world. Thus he especially welcomed this Project, which combined at least three major academic fields, i.e., philosophy, legal studies and management science, and he warmly extended his welcome to all the international participants of the Project. Later on the two representatives of the AUNP Programme, whose office is based also at Chulalongkorn University, came to the floor to greet the participants and the attendees. The first talk was given by Dr. Nandana Gajaseni, a biologist who is now working as Deputy Director of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and is acting as the ASEAN co-chair of the AUNP Programme. Then her European counterpart, Dr. Michel Gaebel came to present his speech. The talks focused on the role of the AUNP in promoting active collaborations among universities in the two regions. The representatives of the AUNP Programme were delighted that the participants of this Project organized a three-day workshop in order to talk about bioethics, biolaw and biomanagement and to promote their studies not only at Chulalongkorn, but also on the other participating universities and beyond.

The keynote speech was given by one of Thailand's foremost scientist, Prof. Dr. Yongyuth Yuthavong. Prof. Yongyuth was once Director of the National Science and Technology Development Agency, the country's leading science policy organization and President of the Thai Academy of Science and Technology. His talk, entitled "Toward Good Governance in Biotechnology and Life Sciences," stressed the importance of the need for a sound basis of bioethical education so that the complex issues surrounding the issues are adequately comprehended. He detailed the various arguments, both pro and con, on a number of issues such as the use of genetic manipulation of organisms in agriculture, human cloning and stem cell research, gene-based diagnostics, medical biotechnology and a number of others. Most

importantly, he told the audience how important it was for the lay populace to have a sound understanding of the issues so that they can be active members in the debates and discussions that will undoubtedly ensue. He called for a 'balance' between the need for the country to drive ahead in its science and technology development programs, and effective understanding, debates and discussions on the social, legal and ethical implications of these advances.

The next lecture was presented by Dr. Nares Damrongchai, also from the National Science and Technology Development Agency. He talked about this current project, "DNA Analysis for Human Health in the Post-Genomic Era". This project is part of an APEC-wide study of technology foresight, and aims at identifying and detailing the various salient issues that emerge as a result of the advances in genetic studies of humans. He emphasized that such studies need to take into serious considerations the social, economic and historical factors that affect each locality where the genomic study is introduced. Even though Dr. Nares is not formally a participant of the Project, his contribution was a valuable addition to the richness of the thoughts and ideas presented during the workshop. And it clearly contributes to the workshop's main objective of promoting awareness of bioethics among the Thai people.

Dr. Soraj Hongladarom then gave the next lecture, which was a summary of the ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project as a whole. This was to introduce the Project formally to the audience, and the content included the history of the Project, as well as its main aims and objectives, the works to be done and results envisaged, the identities of the participants of the Project and their institutions. Then there followed presentations and discussions on the following: human cloning and stem cell research (presentations given by Dr. Brigitte Jansen and Dr. Somparn Promta), genetic research, pharmacogenomics, databanking, and gene therapy (presentations by Prof. Dr. Le and Prof. Dr. Simon), intellectual property rights, bioprospecting, trade related issues (presentation by Prof. Dr. Casabona), genetically modified organisms, agriculture, agribusiness (presentations given by Dr. Jade Donovanik and Dr. Minakshi Bhardwaj -- Dr. Jade was not formally affiliated with the Project, but was invited to talk on the issue due to his recognition both inside Thailand and abroad as an expert on the issue), organ transplantation, death criteria and euthanasia (presentations by Prof. Dr. de Castro and Prof. Dr. Knoepffler), and finally on Violent Outbreaks: SARS, Nipah, and Management of Public Health, with presentation given by Prof. Dr. Chan. Each topic was preceded by one or two lead presentations and followed by free flowing discussion and the attendees of the workshop all enjoyed the intensive discussions and their quality throughout the three-day period. As one can see, the topics are very wide ranging, and in fact one cannot delve into any kind of in depth discussion and analysis here. Nonetheless, the workshop aims rather at identifying the salient bioethics issues that need to be addressed, and as such many issues have been identified so that they can be worked on later, either by the participants themselves or by the members of the audience who might start working on their own.

In the morning of January 26, the participants of the Project met together for a business meeting and the result was a very fruitful one. The participants talked and argued with one another, trying to iron out what was to be done for the next twenty-four months of the Project. Basically the group agreed on which part to take in the writing up of the course material, which is the main output of the Project. There are going to be twelve 'extended' syllabi on a variety of courses, which are intended to be offered to the students in the

international graduate program on bioethics later on. These syllabi will be collected and published together in a volume. Moreover, the group worked together on the structure of the international program. Modelled on the regulations of Chulalongkorn, the program, leading to an M.A. degree, will consist of 36 credit hours, 12 of which are research for the M.A. thesis and the remaining 24 are distributed to 8 courses. There will be four required and four elective courses. The twelve extended syllabi will represent the twelve courses to be offered in the program.

The workshop concluded with another public discussion forum on the role of universities in the global debates on bioethics. Here the participants emphasized the fact that what universities can do best is its role in education. As Prof. Yongyuth said on the first day, there was an urgent need for the public to become better educated in order for them to understand what is going on and in order that they are able to function effectively in a democracy where decisions are made. There was a discussion on whether the role of universities should be a neutral one, acting as a neutral forum for the debates to take place, or whether it should take a more active role and act on what they believe to be right. As one can expect, there was no consensus on this point, but this also serves to show that there are more work to be done and more avenues and possibilities to explore in the near future.