

## Unveiling the Gems of Khiriwong: Empower Social Enterprises

Walailak University has set a policy to fully internationalize by 2027, aiming to become a Global University. A key strategy to achieve this is the introduction of **tailored lectures** through international programs that welcome both Thai and international students. The university also emphasizes fostering academic collaborations with overseas institutions, including student exchanges, faculty exchanges, research partnerships, and other **education outreach activities** designed to enhance the skills of students and staff, preparing them for global citizenship.

Khiriwong, an ancient community in Kam Lon Subdistrict, Lan Saka District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, is known for its scenic mountains and rich natural beauty. Famous for preserving local traditions and lifestyles, it has become a prominent ecotourism destination. Despite its success in eco-friendly tourism and cultural exchange, the community has yet to reach a broad international audience.

To address this, the **programmed project**, “Unveiling the Gems of Khiriwong: Empower Social Enterprises” was initiated. This project provides free educational opportunities through **tailored lectures** specifically designed for external communities. The program promotes **education outreach activities beyond campus**, ensuring equal access to English language development and preparing the local community to welcome international tourists. The project also strengthens the relationship between Walailak University and its surrounding areas by involving students in volunteer projects and specialized training.

The project development is structured in phases, aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It focuses on SDG 4, providing free education and skill training for the community, while also fostering partnerships with local communities and agencies to promote sustainable societal development.

In 2023, led by Dr. Chengxiang Ma, Dr. Suchita Manajit and Dr. Konrawan Rattanaburi from Walailak University International College, the **programmed project** “Unveiling the Gems of Khiriwong: Empower Social Enterprises” launched its first phase. Funded by the International College, the project conducted research on "Innovative Sustainable Business Models: A New Way to Recover Beyond the Pandemic." It interviewed six local business operators to enhance their capacity to serve international tourists and uplift the local social enterprises in Khiriwong and Nakhon Si Thammarat. The project has positively impacted the local economy by improving English language proficiency, allowing businesses to expand their customer base to include foreign visitors, ultimately boosting revenue.

This **programmed project** also integrates academic coursework, providing Thai and international students with hands-on opportunities to practice English with local business owners. The first of these **tailored lectures** took place on March 8, 2024, where business operators participated in simulated English-language interactions with native speakers, preparing them to serve international customers.

For the 2024 fiscal year, the International College aims to expand the project to target restaurant operators around Walailak University and in Lan Saka District. This phase of the project focuses on

improving English language skills for local hospitality businesses, enabling them to engage better with international customers.

Additionally, the project is developing English-language resources, such as bilingual signs and payment instructions, to assist international students and staff. The training includes pre- and post-assessments, with sessions led by English language experts. The project aims to support local businesses by providing **tailored lectures** and training at no cost, aligned with SDG 4. It also seeks to create a strong partnership network with local restaurant operators and other community entities to drive sustainable business practices.

#### Objectives of the Programmed Project:

1. To promote **education outreach activities** and lifelong learning opportunities that stimulate the local economy and foster community networks in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. To develop leadership skills in Walailak University students, particularly international students, by involving them in the development of both on-campus and **beyond campus** communities.
3. To enhance Walailak University's image as a bridge connecting people, fostering unity within partner networks, and ensuring community sustainability.

#### Collaboration and Integration:

- The project involves collaboration between Walailak University International College and local business sectors.

#### Integration with Academic Courses:

- **BBA65-101: Principles of Marketing**
- **BBA65-363: Branding Strategy and Integrated Brand Communications**
- **BBA65-312: Strategic and Sustainability Management**

#### Implementation Process:

1. Conduct field assessments to understand current social enterprise practices, challenges in serving foreign customers, and the knowledge and skills required by local businesses.
2. Organize planning meetings with the project team to outline activities such as field visits, training, and English skills workshops for business operators.
3. Provide English language training and business management guidance to improve service quality for local staff.
4. Conduct **mockup** sessions where international students and staff assess service quality and provide feedback for improvement.
5. Monitor, evaluate, and report on the project's progress based on established performance indicators.