Sustainable Development in the Ovop Movement: Human Resource Development in Community Organizations in Japan

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Abstract

This study is concerned with sustainable development in the OVOP movement in Japan. The findings of the OVOP movement are compared and contrasted according to sustainable development approach. To support this aim, this study uses qualitative method of data collection which is in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method offers insight and help to explore unexpected phenomena and the complexity of development process. The results and analysis led to the conclusion that OVOP movement is related to sustainable development. Based on the findings, the OVOP model of sustainable development was developed from this study. This model can potentially enable researchers and practitioners to have a better understanding of process of sustainable development in the OVOP movement, which may be useful to test in alternative settings or other contexts in OVOP-equivalent projects in other countries.

Keywords: Sustainable development, community organization, human resource development and qualitative approach

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Introduction

To cope with conditions of rapid change and intense competition in the world of capitalism, in the past 40 years, the momentum of the development in many countries has gradually swung towards ensuring the sustainable development. It is believed that sustainable development is important because this concept is not only respond to the needs of the present but also the needs of the future. The theoretical framework for sustainable development evolved in 1972-1992 through a series of international conferences and initiatives.The term of sustainable development was initiated in Our Common Future, a report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. According to the United Nations, sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 2011).

In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm to delineate the 'rights' of the human family and to revitalize humanity's connection with nature. In 1992, the first UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro and adopted an agenda for environment and development in the 21st Century. Agenda 21 is a program of Action for Sustainable Development contains the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which recognizes each nation's right to pursue social and economic progress and assigned to States the responsibility of adopting a model of sustainable development. According to Agenda 2, sustainable development is the integration of the economic, social and environmental pillars. The conference focuses on the expression "Harmony with Nature", with the first principle of the Rio Declaration: "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature" (UNCSD, 2011). Therefore, sustainable development is a visionary development paradigm, involving a convergence between the three pillars of economic development, social equity, and environmental protection.

The concept of sustainable development is widely accepted and sustainable development has been adopted as a desirable goal by governments, businesses, and NGOs in many countries. However, the term sustainable development suffers from definitional vagueness and ambiguity (IPCC, 2007). Also, sustainable development needs new ways and new ideas how to engage people and leader in the search for achieving the goal of sustainable development (Adams, 2006). Thus, it would be useful to understand the practical cases and how the concept was applied in the real situation by the local people and leader in the community organizations.

Why Japan? Why 'One Village, One Product' Project (OVOP)

The 'One Village, One Product' project (herein after referred to the OVOP project) was initiated in 1979 by a former governor of Oita Prefecture in Japan, Morihiko Hiramatsu. In 1995, he was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for his contributions to economic independence and development in Asian countries. There are three principles in his OVOP project: (1) produce things which are locally originated, but globally competitive;

(2) sustainability and be creative on the basis of local initiative and decision-making; and (3) seek to develop human resources in the local communities (OVOP, 2005). In this study, OVOP movement has been selected for exploring the OVOP model of development in community organizations. OVOP began in 58 villages in Oita Prefecture. Since this project was first implemented, each local community identified one or a few locally unique products, concentrated resources on its production, established it as a local brand, and sold it on the domestic and international markets (Matsui, 2011). These products in this project include both tangible things such as local products and intangible things i.e. places and events. In local products alone, there was a dramatic increase in the number of products and sales were substantially increased from 143 and 35.9 billion in 1980 to 336 and 141 billion Yen in 2001. As for intangible products, Oyama town set up a unique agricultural production system through its co-operative (Stenning & Miyoshi, 2008; Yamagami & Fukimoto, 2011), more than ten million tourists visit Beppu for its hot springs, and Yufuin town has more than 3.8 million visitors every year to see its traditional products.

During the 36 years since this project was first implemented, each province in Japan now develops products and local brands in their own style. As a result, this project has begun to be recognised not only in Oita prefecture, but also in other parts of Japan and other countries. As the aims of this project are not only to improve each community's economy but to train the local people to be self-reliant, help them take part in the sustainable process of regional development, which is based on their expertise and local know-how. Therefore, the main objective of this project is not only to raise the standard of living but also increase the human resources in the district (Fujimoto, 1992; Hiramatsu, 2008; Kemavuthanon and Duberley, 2009; Igusa, 2011; Yoshimura, 2004). Thus, OVOP movement would be a good source of data to illuminate the process of development in community organizations in the light of the concept of sustainable development. Some lessons that could be learned from OVOP movement in Japan would be useful to fully understand current models of community development and would help to generate implications for future research and practice.

Community organizations have been examined in this research because the majority of people work in medium and small businesses (Handy, 2001). Also, it is believed that community organizations needs to be further investigated to understand the process of development at the grassroots level (Burns, 2003; Kemavuthanon, 2014). In addition, the OVOP movement in Japan has been chosen as a focal area of study because the nature of this project is within community-based organizations. Therefore, it allows the researcher to investigate development process at the grassroots level.

The Objectives of the Research

The principle objective of this research is to develop an OVOP model of development. The proposed tentative model of development can potentially enable practitioners and researchers involving in the OVOP movement to have a better understanding of the processes of development. Also, the OVOP model of development and the concept of

sustainable development will be compared and contrasted. Thus, the overall aims of the research are:

1. To explore how respondents perceive the process of development in OVOP movement
2. To identify the similarities and differences between the OVOP process and sustainable development
3. To explore the cultural conditions of development in the OVOP movement

Based on the research objectives, it is important to identify the research questions in this study. The major questions are:

- How do the respondents perceive the process of development in OVOP movement?
- What are the similarities and differences between the OVOP movement and sustainable development?
- To what extent do respondents perceive the influence of culture in the process of development in community organizations?

Research Methodology

Qualitative methods are likely to be more suitable and provide confidence as they can uncover contextual variables which are grounded in people's experience. Also, qualitative approach allows the researcher to see the unexpected dimensions of process and explore it (Bryman, 2004).This research, therefore, uses qualitative research methods to study OVOP movement because they allow access to in-depth knowledge and coincidental data related to the research topic. In this research, seven respondents who involved in the OVOP movement were selected for in-depth interviews. Cases from different villages from Oyama, Yufuin, Ajimu were considered. Also, the data were collected from the Oita government officers and staff at the Oita OVOP international Exchange Promotion committee to understand the OVOP policy and implementation.

Table 1
Description of the Respondents

Respondent	Position	Location
J 1	The Governor of the Oita Prefecture	Oita Prefectural Office
J 2	Prefectural Government Officer	Oita Prefectural Office
J 3	Prefectural Government Officer	Oita Prefectural Office
J 4	Staff at Oita OVOP International Exchange Promotion Committee	International OVOP Exchange Committee Office
J 5	President and General Managers of Oyama Yume Koubou	Oyama Town
J6	President of Tamanoyu	Yufuin Town
J 7	Head of the Green Tourism Study Group	Ajimu Town

The aim is to generate data to provide authentic insight into the OVOP movement, such as the way in which the respondents form groups, what the development process is and what their development problem and the way they cope with those problems.

Findings

Based on the findings of this research, the OVOP movement is closely related to International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)'s three circles of sustainable development that involve the balance of economic development, social development and environmental development (Adams, 2006, pp. 2) as shown in figure 1.
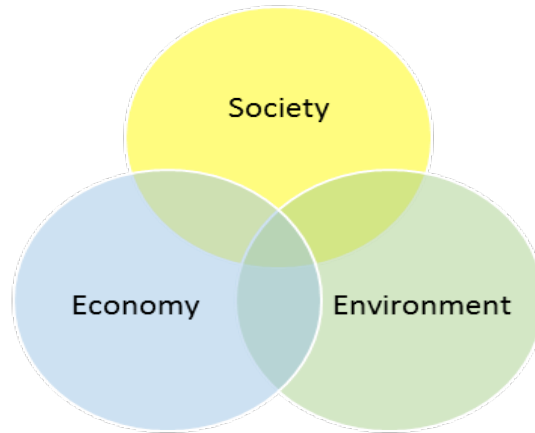

Figure 1 Three Circles of Sustainable Development

This development leads to the ultimate goals of OVOP which are not only the GNP (Gross National Product) in terms of economic development and quality of life, but also GNS (Gross National Satisfaction) involving social and environmental development, which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
The Goals of OVOP Movement

Respondents	Economic Development	Environmental Development	Social Development
J 1	/	/	/
J 2	/	/	/
J 3	/	/	/
J 4	/	/	/
J 5	/	/	/
J 6	/	/	/
J 7	/	/	/

Economic Development

In Japan, the objectives of OVOP movement is poverty alleviation and income generation; increasing employment opportunities; narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas; reducing the depopulation in rural areas and human resource development. Therefore, the government encourages tourists to the local villages. Former governor Hiramatsu organised many fairs in major cities in Japan and abroad to advertise prospective local products. Regional markets were also held throughout Oita to encourage the consumption of OVOP local products. Furthermore, former governor Hiramatsu organised many fairs in major cities in Japan and abroad to advertise prospective products. Regional markets were also held throughout Oita to encourage the consumption of OVOP local products. Also, the OVOP movement and products have been publicised through mass media.

One of the respondents (J 4) from Oita OVOP International Exchange Promotion Committee mentioned in the interview that:

> OVOP focuses on local and domestic oriented markets. Export is not the objective of the movement. Local products were sold directly to customers through, for example, Michinoeki (side road stations), Satonoeki (village stations) to sell local products, Antenna shops in Fukuoka and Kono Hana Garten (The farmers' garden cooperatives). These cooperatives have a restaurant for visitors to eat famous local products". According to the interview with the leaders of Oyama Yume Koubou (J 5), "as there are many cheap agricultural products from China and Korea, the role of marketing promotion is to provide enough information to the customers such as the quality and benefits of Japan plums. Based on the research on umeshu (plum wine), the value-added products will be encouraged through promoting the production of high quality umeshu to serve the market. The villagers involve in decision-making processes such as setting their own price and designing their packaging. Also, some of the products' packaging has their products' story and villagers' pictures who produce the products to guaranty the quality.

Based on the interview, therefore, trust, integrity and responsibility to the customers and people beyond the community is one of crucial qualities in the OVOP movement.

Also, in Yufuin town, based on the interview of the president of Tamanoyu hotel (J 6):

> The movement in Yufuin has tried to produce the 'Yufuin brand' through the networking with the well-known artists, novelists, politicians, film makers, NGOs, private sectors, intellectuals, government officers. The aims are to encourage other people to know about their town as a unique exciting place to visit. Exciting events, such as Yufuin music festival and cinema festival, are continually held in Yufuin so younger generations will be pride of their hometown as an important place.

The findings indicate that there is constant effort to improve the quality of production and to produce value-added unique products. Competition and cooperation are encouraged to develop products and help people to learn from their mistakes. Also, people who are involving in the OVOP movement understand about the value of their resources, environment, uniqueness and culture. People who involving in the OVOP movement can differentiate their products from other places by improving their packaging, R&D and offer increased services, guarantee their products such as people can return their products if they are not satisfied with the quality.

Local products were sold directly to customers through many distribution centres such as Michinoeki (side road stations), Satonoeki (village stations) to sell local products, Antenna shops in Fukuoka and Kono Hana Garten (The farmers' garden cooperatives). These cooperatives also have a restaurant for visitors to eat famous local products that are healthy for customer's health such as organic vegetable and meats. There is a trend toward 'slow food' rather than the 'fast food' which concur with the concept of 'sufficiency economy' which proposed by the King Rama IX (King Bhumibol Adulyadej) who was awarded the United Nation Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006. This concept is based on Buddhist teaching of self-awareness and the middle path approach or moderation, focusing on knowing the right time and the amount to be 'enough'; not too much or too little **(**UNDP, 2007)**.** Based on the finding 'quality' not a 'quantity' is important in the process of development. Trust, humility, respect, integrity, responsibility and critical think and doing are emerged qualities in the OVOP movement.

Social Development and Human Resource Development

Since the implementation of the OVOP project, village communities are faced with rapid changes and a competitive business environment; for example, they must cope with meeting deadlines, quality control, production capacity, logistics, design preferences, marketing challenges, and a shortage of future village leaders. Also, there have been many trials and errors along the way of development. In Japan, the governor of the Oita prefecture (J 1) and two government officers (J 2 and 3) said in the interviews that:

> the government does not attempt to help OVOP villages by providing subsidies and other financial assistance because this may obstruct the goals of OVOP movement which are self-reliance and human resource development. Instead, the prefectural government offers active support on infrastructure, technical guidance and marketing.

Based on the research findings, the OVOP movement involving not only the 'hardware' or providing R&D institution and training school but also the 'software' that support people to be able to think creatively and trust what they think and do. Therefore, the process involves how people 'think' and 'do' in community organizations. It is a long-term oriented process as people will be more critical thinking and have an ability to solve their problems for themselves.

In the OVOP movement, leaders in the villages encourage people to participate in community event, share their knowledge and experience and build networking. For example, in Yufuin Town, according to the interview with the president of Tamanoyu (J 6), "to build a unique cultural place, there is the cooperation with local networking to exchange ideas, experiences, and resources. In this regards, the leaders develop open system so that the hotel owners in the town can share information which once used to keep in secret to other hotel owners regarding the number of the guests and the services providing to the customers. By sharing information, they can build good relationship, networking and improve their services to the customers. Also, they provide the options for the customers as a package to stay in different hotels in one trip so they can enjoy the variety of the offering and services.

Also, there is cooperation with local networking; for instance, mutual cooperation between R&D, the government, producers and consumers to exchange ideas, knowledge, experiences and resources. Additionally, the growth of grassroots-level diplomacy is supported, between people of different countries. According to the interview with the respondent (J 4), "the Oita OVOP International Exchange Promotion Committee was established to promote the OVOP movement and the growth of grassroots-level diplomacy between people of different countries. The OVOP has been introduced to 104 countries through seminars, meetings, training programs and exhibitions. Also, in 2012, there were more than thousand people from 52 countries visited the Oita OVOP International Exchange Promotion Committee Office and 3,555 people from 22 countries attended OVOP lectures". Thus, the territory of the networking is beyond the community. Through the process of learning, the boundary of development is becoming blurred. Trust, respect and goodwill towards other people are key components of networking.

Also, the finding indicates that the OVOP involved the development of future global-minded, challenging leaders, who can drive OVOP to further success. For example, in Yufuin Town, according to the interview with the president of Tamanoyu (J 6), "we try to develop our younger generations to be good leaders for the community because they need to have enough knowledge, skills, capabilities, and values to bring people to the same mutual destination". In addition, as supported by one of the OVOP community leaders (J 5) described in the interview that "natural leaders often emerge from the movement. They are people who grow up and live in their areas and try to revitalize their community. They want to make their home town a happiness place to live and a good model for other towns and cities. The OVOP movement involves the development of community building".

Therefore, in the OVOP movement, the human resource development approach focuses on younger generations through the process of creating meaningful place to attract them to live and work in their home town and contribute to the better place for future generations. In the process of development, what people 'think' and 'do' is crucial in the process of development. They should have enough knowledge, sincerity to develop their home town from the 'inside', rather than force them to work for the community from the 'outside'. Thus, human resource development is centre of OVOP development process. Ability to think critically and be selective in their perceptions and make rational decisions

whether they should or should not do is crucial qualities in the process of OVOP movement.

Environmental Development

In the OVOP movement, products are harmonised with nature, the local culture and ways of life, as well as encouraging pride in the community in such areas as organic food, environmentally-friendly packaging and slow food. The policy towards protection of the environment is promoted. In the case of Ajimu town, based on the interview with the president of green tourism study group (J 7), "the movement has developed their unique agricultural places and activities to promote 'heart-to-heart relationship'. This attempt is to provide experiences in the town 'as natural as possible' not just 'as much as possible'. According to the statistic, from 2000 to 2010, there were more than 22,000 people from the mass media, students from schools and tourists visited Ajimu town to stay for a short home stay to learn about agricultural experience and activities for example cooking and picking the grapes together". Also, according to the interview with the respondent (J 4), "Each village is not necessary to have many products, only one or some amount of product that originated in their home town and they can be proud of those products". The findings concur with the concept of 'sufficiency economy' focusing on knowing the right time and the amount to be 'enough'; not too much or too little **(**UNDP, 2007**).** Each village does not need to have many products but only some products that uniquely from their home town.

Based on the findings of this research, The OVOP movement is the combination of heart (sacrifice, community spirit, compassion, goodwill, responsibility, trust and respect), the head (local wisdom, creativity, knowledge, critically thinking based on keeping wisdom and goodwill in balance), and the hands (action-orientation, capabilities, teamwork, networking and interactive learning). Thus, hidden components, such as what people think and do, are the other side of movement. Also, the OVOP movement is closely related to the goal of sustainable development that involving the balance of economic development, social development and environmental development, as shown in table 2. A model of the OVOP movement is presented in Figure 2
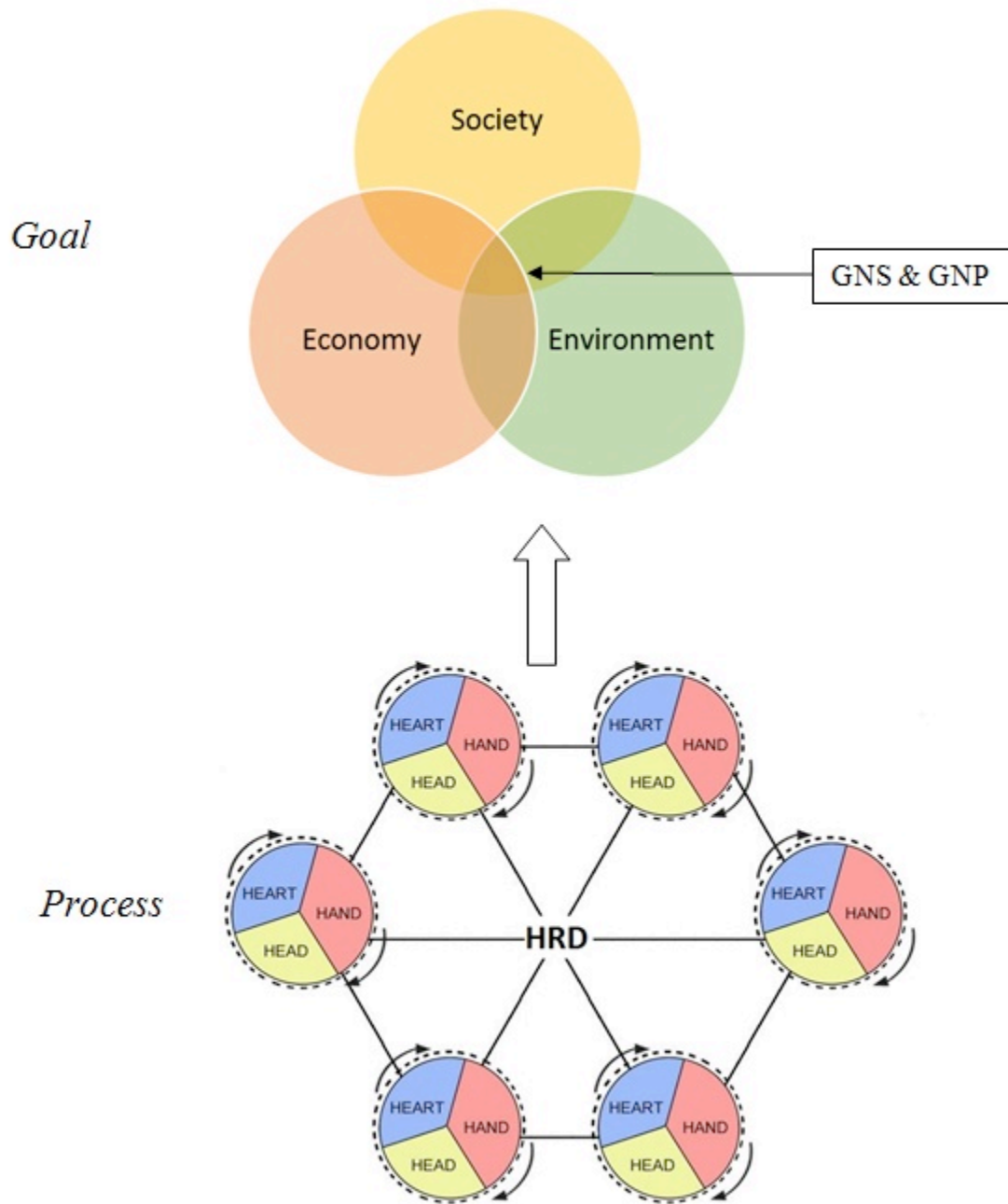
Figure 2 A Model of the OVOP Movement

The Discussion of Sustainable Development and the OVOP Movement

There are some similarities and differences between the OVOP movement and sustainable development. Based on the findings of this research, the OVOP movement is closely related to the concept of sustainable development because the OVOP movement involves the balance of economic development, social development and environmental development. The ultimate goals of OVOP movement are not only the GNP (Gross National Product) in terms of economic development and quality of life, but also GNS (Gross National Satisfaction) involving social and environmental development.

Also, the data reported here are in line with the linkage between concept of sustainable development and human resource development. According to the interviews, the process of OVOP movement involves human resource development, community building, networking and people participation. The findings are linked to the first principle of the Rio Declaration: "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature". (UNCSD, 2011). The findings are related to this principle that people are very crucial and prime concerns for sustainable development. However, the findings of this study extend the sustainable development by indicating that the process of development involving how they 'think' and 'do'. It involves the process of not only what people are 'doing' towards their goal but also 'thinking' and their 'perception' about themselves towards their environment (other people and nature). The OVOP movement is related to a set of qualities and perception which are goodwill, responsibility, integrity, capabilities, creativity, respect, critical thinking and doing, trust, sincerity, sacrifice, sense of community belonging, patient, persistence, humility, continuity improvement and lifelong learning.

Also, the findings show that the goal of development is a holistic approach and beyond self-interests. The boundary of OVOP movement is not only within the village. The scope ranges from one's own village benefit to that of other people beyond the organization. This finding is link to the concept of servant leadership theory which extends and swings the momentum of the process to serve and support others, including people in the group, villagers, customers and community at large. The findings of this study concur to some extent with Greenleaf (1998)'s concept of servant leadership, which is rooted deep in his Judeo-Christian heritage, and emphasises: increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; the promotion of a sense of community; and a deepening understanding of spirit in the workplace.

To serve others, it is the crucial role of villagers in motivation process to serve, build trust, and develop learning and a respectful environment, in order that people may become more self-reliant, enhance their capability building development and have a sense of community belonging, which will result in sustainable development and a better community to live in the long term. This idea is a shift away from the traditional autocratic and hierarchy modes of development toward a model based on teamwork, human development and community building. The idea of OVOP movement is closely related to servant leadership is possibly because the idea of the OVOP movement was

initiated by a former governor of Oita Prefecture, Morihiko Hiramatsu, a Christian whose concept was influenced by his religious beliefs (Takahashi, 1987). Also, Greenleaf (1977) notes that the idea of servant leadership, often seen as a Christian framework, was first formulated as one step in the noble eightfold path in Buddhism at least two thousand five hundred years ago. This is the path which leads to the end of suffering. It can be divided into three basic categories: wisdom (right view and right intention), ethical conduct (right speech, right discipline and right livelihood), and mental discipline (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration or absorption). It focuses the moral mind on being fully aware of our thoughts and actions, and develops wisdom by understanding the Four Noble Truths and developing compassion for others (Phra Dhammapitala, 2000).

Based on the findings, the success of the movement is the result of the development of people's thinking and doing. The process involves helping villagers to see things holistically and focus on the connection between themselves and other beings and the way in which they can live together harmoniously. The process constructed by the respondents in the OVOP movement is closely related to virtue and the moral principles of religious and cultural beliefs. The success of movement depends on the extent to which people in the village have good intention and goodwill towards other people in and outside the group. This implies that the principles of religious and cultural beliefs can be seen as an ethical component or moral side of development. Therefore, the OVOP movement should be explored in the light of cultural dimension to fully understand the phenomenon.

Also, the OVOP movement concur with the concept of 'sufficiency economy' focusing on knowing the right time and the amount to be 'enough'; not too much or too little (UNDP, 2007). Therefore, critical thinking and doing is the key element that will not harm the benefits of other people currently and the future generations. Also, the findings of this study would seem to suggest that 'thinking beyond self-interest' is crucial qualities in the OVOP movement that make other people want to be in the process. The OVOP movement tends to support Greenleaf's (2003) concept of 'servant leadership' that puts other people as the highest priority needs. Additionally, as much as thirty four percent of the population in Japan is Buddhist (NHK, 2009), the movement could be linked to ethical leadership and ancient writings on virtue and moral principles in religious beliefs which seeking the meaning and value of life, which see life as a holistic process, connecting with other living beings and the environment.

Additionally, the OVOP movement seems to be associated with the ideas of Benioff and Southwick (2004) on 'corporate philanthropy'. The focal point of this book is to encourage businesses to see the role they can play as members of both local and global community, and support an alignment of values and mission with community non-profits, as well as a challenge to include 'giving' as part of organization's value system to make the world a better place to live. This model says that philanthropy must be woven into every thread of corporate existence so that it becomes a part of the cultural fabric of the organization itself.

If the main goal of capitalism is to focus on making profit, the advantages of this system may lead to freedom to compete in the market and the encouragement of new and creative ideas. However, money is not the real and genuine ultimate goal of happiness (Phra Dhammapitaka, 2000). To focus too much on competition could lead to decreased morale, destruction of the environment and the unique culture of each community. Without an awareness of the dark side of capitalism, a widening gap between rich and poor could result in a vicious circle. Thus, the findings seem to suggest that to ensure sustainable and genuine development, the goal should be shifted from making profit alone to serving the community. The concept of 'compassionate capitalism' could be connected to the concept of sustainable development and OVOP movement and swing the momentum of the process to serve and support others, including subordinates in the organizations, customers and community at large.

Conclusion

The results of this study lead to the conclusion that OVOP movement is related to sustainable development. Based on the findings, the OVOP model of sustainable development was developed from this study. There are some similarities between the OVOP movement and sustainable development as these two approach focus on the GNP (Gross National Product) in terms of economic development and quality of life, and GNS (Gross National Satisfaction) involving social and environmental development. However, the OVOP model expands the concept of sustainable development that the process involved cultural and value in communities that was influenced by cultural and religious beliefs.

The OVOP movement involves the heart (community spirit, compassion, sacrifice, goodwill, responsibility, trust and respect), the head (creativity, local wisdom, knowledge, critically thinking based on keeping wisdom and goodwill in balance), and the hands (action-orientation, teamwork, networking, capabilities and interactive learning). Therefore, understanding the OVOP movement cannot be divorced from context. Based on the OVOP model of development, 'thinking beyond self-interest', 'critical thinking and doing' and 'human resource development' are crucial in the movement. This model can potentially enable researchers and practitioners to have a better understanding of process of sustainable development in the OVOP movement, which may be useful to test in alternative settings or other contexts in OVOP-equivalent projects in other countries.

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