

*Stage of Development Indicators Outlined by the Sufficiency Economy
in Highland Communities of Thailand*

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Abstract

The highland in Thailand is located in the North mountainous complex at the elevation of 500-1,400 meters above sea level covering 10.75 ha in 20 provinces, 53% of total area of the nation. Total 940,494 ethnic mountain populations are poor and limited to access of public services and political participation. In 2005, the Royal Thai government established Highland Research and Development Institute (HRDI), a public funded organization, to catalyst sustainable highland development. The HRDI operation has been based on area approach transdisciplinary development that includes agricultural production, conservation of upstream resources and strengthening the community under the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, initiated by King Rama IX, a principle that gives importance to balanced development and promotes participation at all levels from individual level, family, community to national level. This study aims to develop indicators with highland communities to reflect and assess their own community development. The indicators comprise of 7 categories and 3 stages of development, independent stage covering food security of individual and household (30 scores), interdependent stage that expands to wellbeing of collective groups and environment (40 scores) and networking stage that incorporates collaboration of different groups within community and with other entities (30 scores). The total score reflects level of community development A, B1, B2 and C respectively. The study also reveals highest relevance of the indicators with the UN sustainable development goals on poverty and hunger end, decent work and economic growth, responsible consumption and production and inequalities reduce.

Keywords: sufficiency economy, social immunity, sustainable development, highland

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Introduction

The highland in Thailand is located in the North mountainous complex at 500-1,400 meters above sea level covering 10.75 ha in 20 provinces, 53% of total area of the nation. Mountains are origins of major water a resource serving the nation and more than 10 ethnic groups with total population of 940,494 people has lived upstream for several decades. The mountain people are the poorest defined by both cash income (972 US\$/household/year) and food accessibility. Income disparities have been derived by spatial, social and resources access inequity. Located in highly remote area discourages public service access including low literacy. Harsh conditions of sloping complex and climatic conditions in mountain drops off agricultural productivity. Lately proclamation of protected areas in upstream watershed has limited size and rights of farmland. The terminology “hill tribe” means not only ethnic groups who live in the mountains but stigma of poor and least developed people.

In 2005, the Royal Thai government established Highland Research and Development Institute (HRDI), a public funded organization, to catalyst sustainable mountain development with twofold programs of development-oriented and extension services. The HRDI operation has been based on area approach transdisciplinary development that includes agricultural production under food safety practices, farmer group formation and conservation of upstream resources through 33 field offices. The first decade of HRDI operation has favorably resulted pilot farmers improved livelihood in 396 target villages targets. The HRDI’s economic survey of farmer household reveals improving average income mainly from agricultural production of 3,418 US\$/household/year in 2010 and 6,236 US\$/household/year in 2014 whereas only 17.33% remains in food insecurity. Hill tribe farmers are seen as safe food producer especially temperate crops that are applicable in mountains where mountains landscape gradually attracts eco-tourism.

Therefore, the next phase of HRDI operations aims to strengthen community to be self-reliant according to the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy initiated by King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand (King Rama IX) in 1974. The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is an approach for sustainable development which espouses moderation, reasonableness and prudence as development framework based on knowledge and virtue. The philosophy attaches great importance to human development at all levels and emphasizes the need to strengthen community’s capacity to ensure a balanced way of life and resilience, with full respect for the environment. The United Nations Organization (UN) has recognized that the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is one way that leads to sustainable development. In order to drive the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy to be applied on the ground effectively, this study aims to develop indicators with highland communities to reflect and assess their own community development as outlined by the Sufficiency Economy.

Objectives

1. To develop a set of indicators with highland community that reflect stage of community development outlined by the Sufficiency Economy
2. To facilitate the highland community using the set of indicators to internally assess their development stage

Methods

This project uses participatory action research principles including group interviews, survey, and joint observation for developing a set of indicators together with the highland communities of Thailand.

Results

1. Conceptual Framework

The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, initiated by King Rama IX, stresses the importance of adopting moderation that leads to self-reliance at all levels of society (individual, family, community and nation) and ability to cope with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid changes in economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the world. The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy comprises of three components: moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity, with two enabling conditions: appropriate knowledge, ethics and virtues. As shown in figure 1.

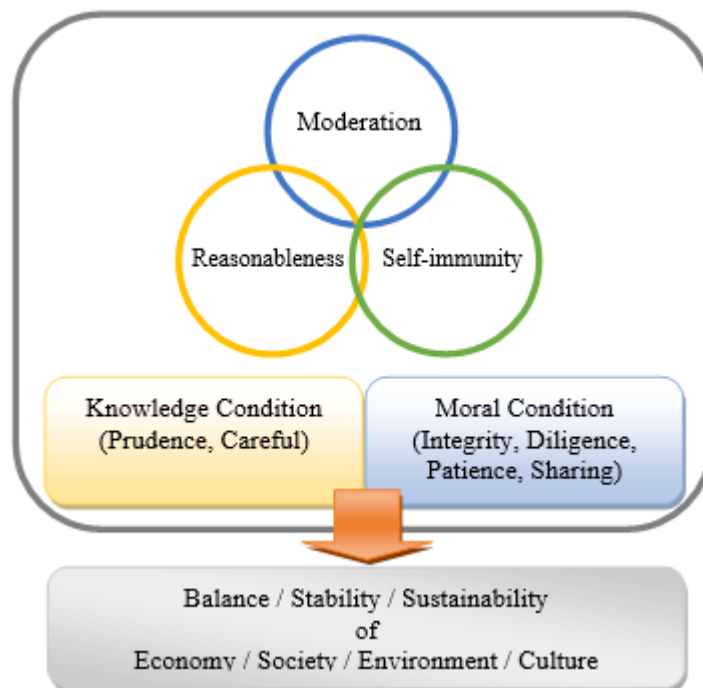


Figure 1: Summary of the Philosophy Sufficiency Economy
Source: thaiembassy.org

This study has adopted the New Theory, initiated by King Rama IX, a concrete example of adopting the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy on practice in agriculture and rural development as hill tribe in highland are primarily dependent on agriculture. King Rama IX initiated this theory to help Thai farmers who suffer from the impacts of economic crisis, natural disasters and other unproductive natural conditions. The New Theory as a system of integrated agriculture that allocating agricultural resources step by step, water resource management, soil rehabilitation and conservation and self-reliant community. It is believed that if farmers handle their farms with knowledge, beware of price fluctuations of agricultural commodities, they would see how risky it is to be dependent on one single crop the will generate large

profits. In contrast, if they adopted the principle of self-immunity, they would prepare for price changes in the market by producing enough to eat as a priority and only then think of selling any surplus. The New Theory thus the most distinct and concrete example of the application of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy to the agricultural sector to sustainable development.

The past assessment of the highland community development stage is a measure of quantitative output such as income, plants/animals that are suitable for the social landscape, have good leaders, abundant forests, infrastructure and education etc. This study had developed a set of indicators by participatory action research. The indicators were designed to measure outcome and impact of community development reflecting changes that arise in community as a result of interventions implemented by community themselves or supported by others. The community can drive local development by themselves for better quality of life and self-reliant according to the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

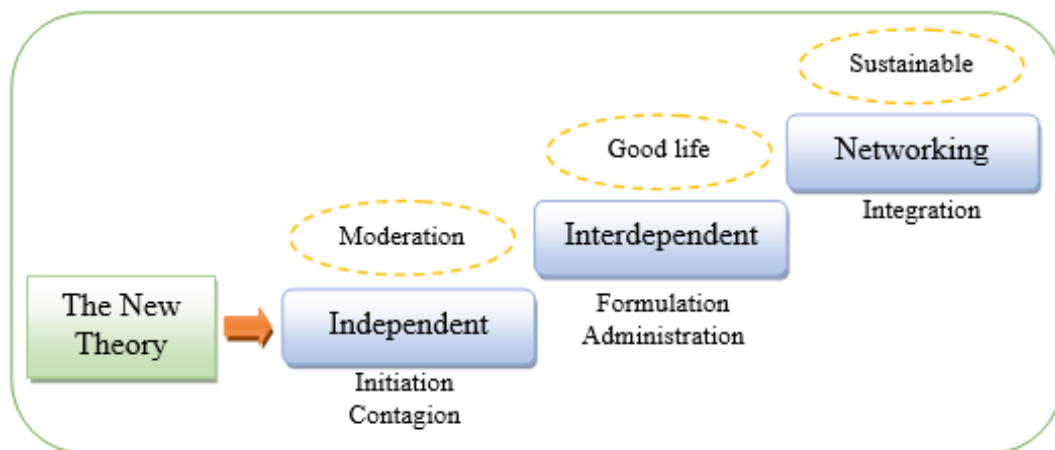


Figure 2: Research conceptual framework based on The New Theory

2. Participatory of development indicators outlined by the Sufficiency Economy

The study of stage of development in the highland community aims to justify the set of indicators guided by the Sufficiency Economy that refer to outcomes and impact by self-reflection of community, modified from the 26 indicators developed by the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) in 2017. The indicators comprise of 7 categories and 3 stages, independent stage covering food security of individual and household (30 scores), interdependent stage that expands to wellbeing of collective groups and environment (40 scores) and networking stage that incorporates collaboration of different groups within community and with other entities (30 scores).

Table 1: The indicators with highland community that reflect stage of community development outlined by the Sufficiency Economy

Stages	Indicators	Scores
Independent Stage (30 scores)	1) Food security with the cultivation of major food crops for household consumption, the rest from consumption is sold to the market and production base for food access	15
	2) Economic stability covering planning to generate income, reduce expenses, debt repayment and allocate resources for production, consumption, investment, household and farm account	15
Interdependent Stage (40 scores)	3) The production system that is suitable for the community having a good and stable career with income that can support themselves. Produce quality products that are safe for both producers and consumers and less dependence on external supports	20
	4) Readiness of infrastructure and community welfare	10
	5) Learning process and local wisdom with knowledge management by the community and application of local wisdom with new knowledge	10
Networking Stage (30 scores)	6) Sustainable use of community resources in production, consumption and conservation according to community potential	10
	7) Group systems and organizations in communities with good governance practices and extend technical, marketing and funding cooperation with external agencies	20

The total score reflects stages of community development into 4 levels consist of A with more than 91 scores, B1 is between 81-90 scores, B2 is between 71-80 scores and C is below 70 as shown in the figure 3.

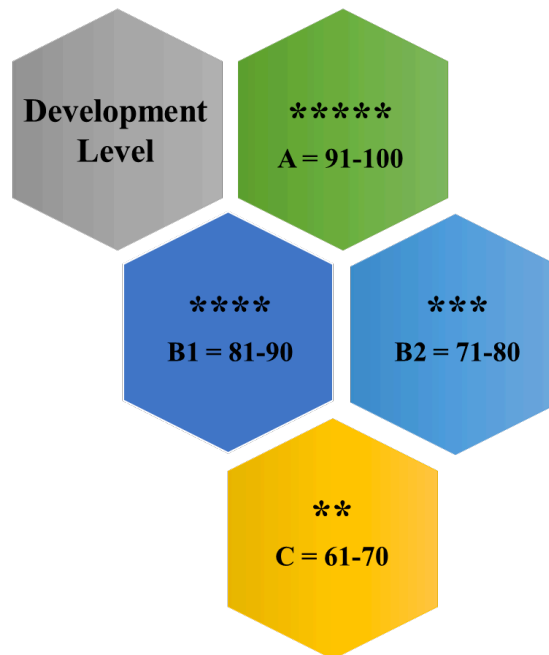


Figure 3: The score reflects stage of highland community development

3. Consistency of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The study also reveals highest relevance of the indicators with the UN sustainable development goals on poverty and hunger end, decent work and economic growth, responsible consumption and production and inequalities reduce. As shown in the chart 1.

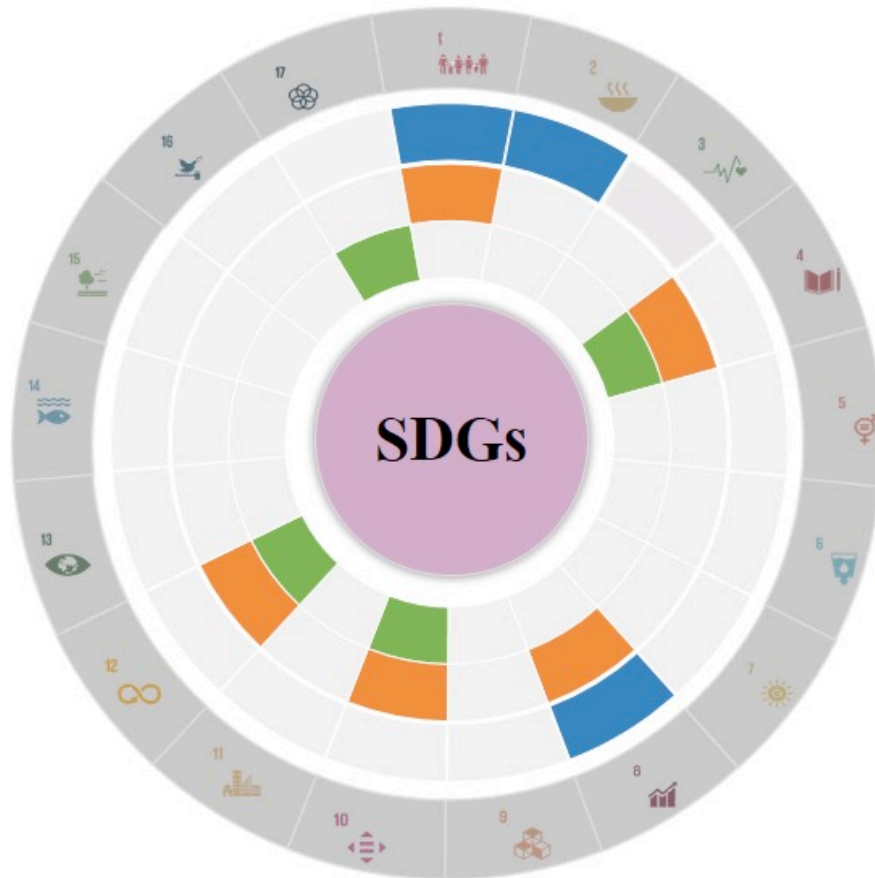


Chart 1: Consistency of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Conclusion

The development of a set of indicators to assess highland community development at outcome and impact level was guided by the New Theory concept, a concrete example of adoption of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, initiated by the King Rama IX. The principle emphasizes self-reliance and resilience to emerging risks. The indicators are divided into 3 stages, independent stage covering food security of individual and household, interdependent stage that expands to wellbeing of collective groups and environment and networking stage that incorporates collaboration of different groups within community and with other entities. The indicators will assist highland communities to conduct self-assessment of their own community development instead of external evaluation. It is useful in the next phase of HRDI operations that focuses on enhancing strong and self-reliant community to be interdependent among themselves and networking with other. This will be responding to the UN sustainable development goals on poverty and hunger end, decent work and economic growth, responsible consumption and production and inequalities reduce.

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