

The Integrated Development of the Community Learning Center of Philosophy of Economic Sufficiency: A Case study at Dong Kra Tong Yam Sub-district, Si Maha Phot District, Prachin Buri Province

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Abstract

This study was aimed to determine the effectiveness of rural development tactics in rural and agricultural areas of Thailand. The Participatory action research was conducted at Dong Kra Tong Yam Sub-district, Prachin Buri Province, Thailand. The key informants were community's leaders, local government officers and the local scholars. The data were collected by qualitative method consisted of field studies, In-depth interviews, focus groups, and analyzed by using content analysis. The activity was opened to promote the philosophy of self-sufficiency, in-line with Thai Royal policy. However, the action was not fully successful. The community needed government and private support, career education, a decrease in local municipal and personal debt, expansion of the Community Learning Center, and a network of local sustainable community developments.

Keywords: Community learning center, philosophy of economic sufficiency, community's economic sufficiency learning network

Introduction

Dong Kra Tong Yam is one of ten sub-districts of Sri Maha Phot district in Prachin Buri Province. There are seven villages in Dong Kra Tong Yam sub-district. The majority of residence are Thai Puan. Thai-puan or laos-puen is the ethnic group living in Central Thailand and Laos. The Thai puan are famous for hand-weaving textiles. They have their own culture and language. (Pho Samlamjiak, 2003)

The main career of the population in this sub-district is farmers, whereas some of them also have minor jobs during the post-harvesting seasons, i.e., handcrafting, weaving, and wicker working. It is considered that most of the people are poor, and have encountered with debt problems. These aforementioned problems are the main causes of a big migration of the workforce to cities in order to find jobs, and those left-behind are children and older adults.

According to the current problems, it is interesting to find out how to develop the community as a learning center for the Philosophy of Economic Sufficiency (PES) of HM The King Bhumibol Adulyadej for all to learn and share information about their products and product developments. (Chaiyawat Wibulswasdi,2009)

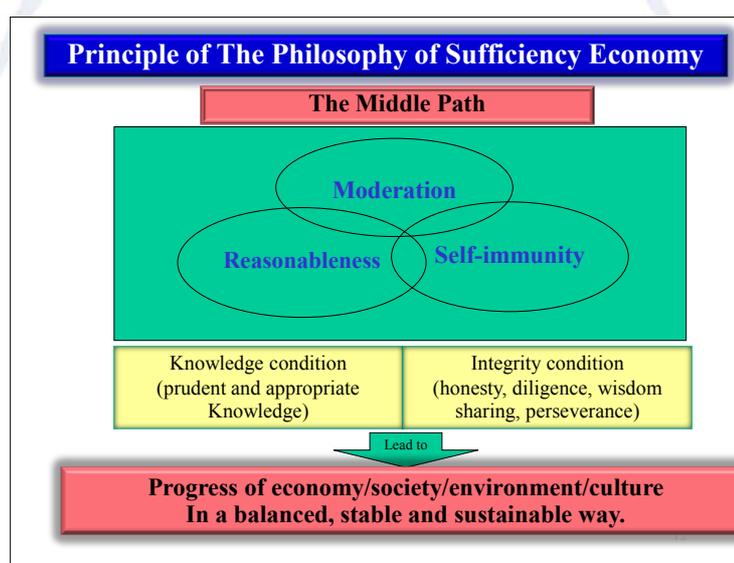


Figure 1. Principle of The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

The middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by Thai people at all levels, from family to community to country. It calls for national development and administration to modernize in line with the forces of globalization. “Sufficiency” means moderation, reasonableness, and the need of self-immunity for sufficient protection from impact arising from internal and external changes. To achieve this, the application of knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential. (Charas Suwanwela, 2009)

In particular, great care is needed at every step in the utilization of theories and methodologies for planning and implementation. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the moral fiber of the nation, so that everyone particularly public officials, academics, and businessman, adhere first and foremost to the principle of honesty and integrity. (Mongsawad, Prasopchoke , 2007)

In addition, a way of life based on patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom and prudence is indispensable to create balance and be able to cope appropriately with critical challenges, arising from extensive and rapid socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural changes in the world.

The center can also be the center for exchanging experiences between communities such as students, scholars, and so on. This will widen learning networks in their community, and strengthen the cooperation between public and private sectors as well.

This study was aimed to develop the Community Learning Center (CLC), which was based on the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy in Dong Kra Tong Yam sub-district, Sri Maha Phot District, Prachinburi Province, learning networks for exchanging experiences, and serve as the base for developing community prototype under the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

The **scope of the study** was focused on the development of the CLC under The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, which targeted participants were the leaders groups of the community, the members of local administration, occupational groups, and residents of Dong Kra Tong Yam sub-district.

The expected outcomes resulting from the development of the CLC will stimulate the awareness of the people to become realize that they have a valuable and meaningful CLC for learning and develop their own skills, improve their quality of life and their living under the PES, have community networks for exchanging knowledge within their community both in public and private sectors. Stakeholders are aware of the important of participation in building and developing their community according to The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, and people share their love and pride of their own community.

Methodology

This participatory action research (PAR) employed both qualitative approaches for collecting data. All data obtained from documents, field study, in-depth interview, focus group, were analyzed by using content analysis technique. The main focus of this study was people participation, training, workshops, and exploring and using databases within both scholars and the community.

Knowledge transferring plan

1. The researchers participated in the meeting with community for planning and conducting activities.
2. The meeting in the CLC would set up for all activities related to CLC.
3. Inviting guest speakers to deliver the principle of The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.
4. Setting up workshop for planning and develop the plans for community development. At this stage all clear directions, guidelines, and strategies for problem solving of the villages should be made available.
5. Searching for existing local wisdom within the community, and learning how to make use of knowledge for adding value to their community. At this stage, participants

should take notes; classify all information, assigning activities for transferring that wisdom, and then applying it to the community activities.

6. Analyzed and summarized the study results activities and documents

7. Presenting the study results to stakeholders so that they could apply them for enhancing participation in the community, which might be for social investigation, educating people, trainings, occupational visiting, building a body of knowledge, or even understanding phenomenon in their community. At this stage, it was important to make the community to be a learning center.

Results and Discussion

There were two centers that had been developed according to The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, namely Thai Puan Museum, which was located in Wat Ban Mai, and The Community Learning Center in Wat Raj Niyom.



Figure 2. Thai Puan Museum



Figure 3 . The Community Learning Center

As a result of having the centers, there were some noticeable points to consider in which career alertness and awareness was the first agenda. We could see that there were many groups of professions developed. Then the products of these groups were distributed to the center at Wat Raj Niyom (located in Ban Thai Dong) for sale. All representatives from the community were available at the center committees to manage, give advices, and solve problems. It was observed that there were many ongoing projects operating under the cooperation between temples, villages, and schools. Some examples of the ongoing projects were occupation training educating people, and teaching Dharma to children in Dong Kra

Tong Yam Schools by the local scholars and monks. The most important thing was that the local people knew, become aware of, and be able to apply the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy for the way of living in their daily life. They make their own organic fertilizer instead of buying the chemical ones. They also manage their household income by deducting their wasteful payments; join the occupational groups, and grow kitchen gardens to increase their income, and so on. By doing this it helps make people's quality of life better.



Figure 4. Products of Community Learning Center

Guidelines for implementation and further study

Guidelines for tourism development

This area has a very long history and has its own culture and traditions. The most valuable one is Thai Puan's, which is remarkable to be promoted to be the local learning center to the world. Campaigns such as home staying, advertising on TV, websites, or even on the radios will make it more well known, and attract visitors to come. This will finally result in increasing community income.

Guidelines for product development

Occupational groups or local producers and distributors should register for product development trainings at any levels since it is the best way to increase community income dramatically. Furthermore, marketing by introducing community activities and products on media, i.e., Internet, radios, and TV are also making them well known for buyers.

Guidelines for social development

At the present time, authentic cultures, which have been passed from generation to generation, has changed because of the openness to foreign cultures. This can also change community cultures and identities as well. In order to maintain and conserve their own cultures and identities, children and young generations of the community need to be taught to inherit traditional values, such as wearing local or traditional outfits, and weaving or traditional massage.

Guidelines for capital development

To develop community capital, groups of profession such as a savings group, occupational groups and other community funds should be formed with the objectives to help people improve their products, their occupation, or even for increasing quality of life through education, trainings, visiting, seeking for local resources, and others. The most important thing is that the groups must be operated and managed by themselves via committees.

Guidelines for management development

The management is crucial for the community potentials so committees or even members of each group must be trained on how to run their activities and manage their community for ultimate results.

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