

Community Problem Solving Using the Principle of Sufficiency Economy: A Case Study of Ban Huakrok, Tambon Nongree, Muang District, Chonburi Province

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A bstract

This research on community problem-solving using sufficiency economy principles seeks to examine the effectiveness of efforts to solve village problems using the principles of sufficiency economy in Ban Huakrok, Tambon Nongree in Muang District, Chonburi Province. Made aware of the serious health problems linked to the use of agricultural chemicals by a field study conducted by the Chonburi Sirindhorn Public Health College, the residents of Ban Huakrok Village joined hands in changing their way of life by turning away from heavy reliance on chemical fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides in their farming practices. Instead, the villagers adopted sufficiency economy principles, which emphasize a reduction in the use of agricultural chemicals, a reliance on Biothai practices as a means of conserving the environment, a way of life that is in harmony with nature, greater self-reliance, and the promotion of community built-in resilience. In relation to this decision, the residents of Ban Huakrok focused on six performance areas: cutting expenses, generating additional income, saving, learning, improving the environment, and providing mutual assistance and support. The 6 x 2 index of the Community Development Department served as concrete guidelines for problem-solving at the household and village/community levels.

Keyword: The Principle of Sufficiency Economy, Community Problem

1. Introduction

For the past twenty five years, His Majesty the King has instructed Thai people from all walks

of life on the philosophy of sufficiency economy, using components such as moderation, wisdom, insight, morality, and the need for internal resilience in one's conduct and approach to life.

Ban Huakrok, Moo. 5 in Tambon Nongree, Muang District in Chonburi Province is one of the villages that have chosen to apply this philosophy to their way of life in order to foster self-reliance and community immunity. Though Ban Huakrok is only 12 kilometers from the city of Chonburi, most of its residents work on farms, with some engaged in other kinds of employment. This is still a close-knit community with a relatively simple way of life, where people show respect to their elders and their leaders, whether they are appointed by government authorities or their religious leaders, with temples, schools, and community learning centers serving as centers of village activities.

National economic development, however, has begun to change the community's traditional way of life. The introduction of labor-saving machines and other farming technologies, including a reliance on chemical fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides, has not only impacted on residents' way of life, but also caused other insidious problems that are often easily overlooked, particularly those relating to health. These health problems were revealed to the public in field work conducted by students from Chonburi Sirindhorn Public Health College, after ill villagers' blood samples were tested and the results alarmed residents. The blood tests showed an alarming amount of lethal materials in their bodies, a result of prolonged exposure to agricultural chemicals. This has been one of the major problems affecting Ban Huakrok residents requiring an immediate solution.

In 1999, Ban Huakrok residents, led by Mr. Saibua Ployket, the leader of an integrated organic farming group, and Mr. Sinchai Choopol, a government enterprise official at the Thailand Electricity Generating Authority's Bang Prakong Training Center, founded "The Effective Biothai Learning Center" to foster sustainable development, in response to the royally- initiated philosophy of sufficiency economy. The center functioned as a study and research unit on sustainable and effective Biothai practices, and disseminated knowledge in this area to participating residents on Tuesdays from 5-8 pm for almost 2 years at Ban Huakrok School. Field trips to the Bang Prakong Training Center and other learning and training centers for community leaders were added to enhance their learning and experience, with an emphasis on EM technology for waste water treatment in industrial plants, schools, and government units in Chonburi Province.

These initiatives began to have an impact on the villagers' way of life. They now rely less and less on agricultural chemicals and other factors linked to debt-creation, such as careless spending induced by current government economic stimulus programs. A large number of villagers have turned back to a more

traditional way of life, a decision which has earned Ban Huakrok recognition among other communities. The processes in solving Ban Huakrok's problems are worth being studied and documented for the benefits of other communities encountering similar problems (The Study and Community Development Center, Community Development Department, Interior Ministry, 2011).

1.1. Objectives

To study the results of community problem-solving utilizing the principle of sufficiency economy.

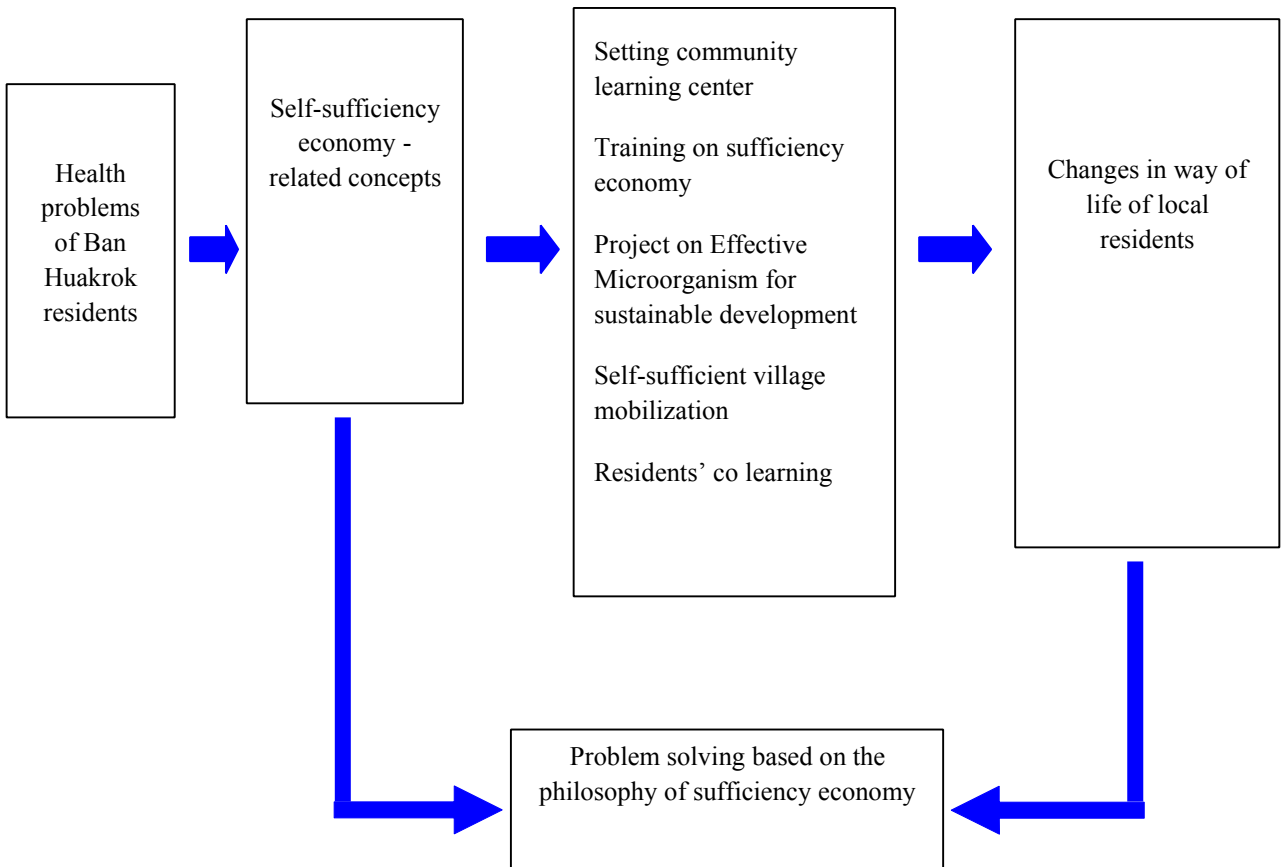
1.2. Scope

The study covered:

1. Content area: the application of sufficiency economy philosophy with 12 6-sided indices. (to be asked from the Wallop later)
2. Population area: community leaders, group / organization leaders and Ban Huakrok residents affected by problems
3. Period of study: 2010-2011

1.3. Study Framework

The framework used by the researcher to conduct this study was as follows:



1.4. Research Methodology

Qualitative Methodology was employed in the study due to its applicability for the study's data diversity and comprehensiveness, and its focus on a holistic view of the phenomenon. The relation between events and surroundings was studied as well to yield a more comprehensive understanding of the topics under study.

1.5. Summary of the research outcomes : Application of principle of sufficiency economy

Having been made aware of the health problems inflicted on them by heavy reliance on agricultural chemicals, the affected Ban Huakrok residents decided to turn away from their former farming practices and adopt a way of life more in harmony with nature. They recognized the need for greater self-reliance and immunity through 6 practices, using the 6x2 index as concrete guidelines at the family, village/community levels. The practices were found to consist of the following: Reduced spending, Increased income, Economizing, Learning, Natural resources and environmental conservation, and support and assistance for others

2. Process in problem solving

2.1. Setting up a community learning center

The community learning center was initiated in 2003 by Mr. Sinchai Chupol, a Ban Huakrok native and an officer from the Bang Prakong Training Center, Thailand Electricity Generating Authority. It was to serve as a center for idea exchange, community problem solving, and the promotion of the philosophy of sufficiency economy. It is a place where the residents learn to turn away from chemical-dependence and adopt farming practices that are more environmentally friendly, and that foster community resilience. Chupol arranged a study trip on sufficiency economy to the Bang Prakong Training Center, and other places, with Pol Pucharoen (the then Ban Huakrok village head), Sutirote Boonchu (Bang Huakrok School principal, and some Ban Huakrok residents on his team. They, then, helped set up a "community learning center" in Ban Huakrok School, the most convenient

location for the locals, since the school has long served as a community center—a gathering place between teachers and students' parents and the villagers. Later on, 23 exhibit stations were set up to expand the scope of activities at the center. Twelve additional stations are those for training, storage of raw materials, fermentation, demonstration, green nursery, composting and garbage separation, artificial stone making from garbage, fertilizer from food leftovers, Bogachi fertilizer, kitchen gardening demonstration, fish pond, and hydroponic gardening.

2.2. Training on sufficiency economy

A number of experienced Ban Huakrok locals have been active in experimenting, enhancing, disseminating, and transferring their knowledge and experience to interested people in the community.

2.3. Biothai Project for sustainable development

The model Biothai project for sustainable development was organized by the Thailand Electricity Generating Authority in order to respond to their Majesties the King and the Queen's initiatives on sufficiency economy practice, a self-sufficient approach to life, and environmentally-friendly farming. The project aimed to further encourage larger scale communities and people from all walks of life to adopt self sufficiency practices, and a way of life that leads to sustainable self-reliance.

2.4. Sufficiency economy village mobilization

The 6 x 2 index devised by the Community Development was decided at the meetings to be the most suitable index to use in mobilizing this sufficiency economy village project, due to its concreteness and practicality. Mr. Pirat Vithee, the village head, had appointed a 21-member mobilizing committee to provide support for the project participants in 5 zones (the zoning was to allocate responsibility and to facilitate the working of the committee).

2.5. Cooperation in Learning

Ban Huakrok's aspiration for their village has been its promotion to a place with "Biothai products, secure life, and environmental friendliness". Their close-knit society has been agriculture-based, with a community learning center serving as a venue for discussing

problems and finding effective solutions, a venue for village activities of sharing and exchanging experience and knowledge. These social components, together with their belief in community strength as a means to solve community problems has resulted in better social, economic and environmental conditions. Their cooperative processes in solving community problems were in the following steps:

1) Cooperation in problem recognition:

Sharing the same health condition, the residents tried to locate the root of the problem and it was revealed to them that their health problems were caused by the use of agricultural chemicals.

2) Cooperation in finding suitable problem-solving methods:

After long discussion on how to solve their common health problem, it was agreed that the application of sufficiency economy principles was the most likely response. In order to realize this agreement, Ban Huakrok School was selected as a place where a “community learning center” was later set up to serve as a venue for learning and disseminating the sufficiency economy concept. This led to the next step in solving the community problems.

3) Cooperation in technical knowledge seeking

Concrete guidelines to implement practices that would lead to success in solving problems were essential and the guidelines devised by the Community Development Department comprising 6 areas (6x 2) were used. The activities in these 6 areas included reducing spending, generating additional income, saving, learning, natural resources and environment conservation, and giving help, and were practiced in their daily life. Information and technical knowledge were sought from setting up the Organic Farming School, with Mr. Saibua Ployket as the principal, and leader of integrated organic farming groups. The Organic Farming School served as a learning site for organic fertilizers. The Biothai project for sustainable and self-reliant development, set up by Mr. Sinchai Chupol, aimed to promote the participants’ reliance on community-made organic and herbal products such as dish washing liquid, bath cream, bathroom cleaning liquid etc. In addition, the “Organic Farming and Environment Promotion School” was also set up to train the participants and interested people on health promotion and

4) Cooperation in follow-up and evaluation

A sufficiency economy village implementation committee (chaired by Pirat Vithee, a former Ban Huakrok village head) was set up to follow up on and provide necessary support for the participants, and to report the follow-up outcomes to the meeting in order to discuss effective solutions to problems.

3. Discussion

As revealed in the study, health-related problems affecting Ban Huakrok residents were caused by over reliance on agricultural chemicals. This problem has been alleviated by the residents’ adopting sufficiency economy principles on three levels: awareness, implementation, and outcome. Their success in improving health conditions together with the sufficiency evident in their community context earned them recognition as a model village, one that has succeeded in achieving success in all 6 areas of sufficiency practices: reducing spending, generating additional income, saving, way of life, natural resources and environment conservation, and giving help to others.

The centers for learning and problem solving or “community learning centers” contributed to the successful solution to problems the residents had encountered. All 4 community learning centers aimed to replace a chemical-reliant way of life with one that is organic reliant (or Biothai). These four centers, which deserve credit for the successes in sustainable community development were the Biothai Sustainable Development Learning Center on Royally Initiated Sufficiency Economy, the Organic Farming School, the Organic Farming and Environment Center, and the Herbal Medical Clinic at Smanrat Temple.

Health-related and other self-inflicted problems could not have been reduced or solved if the affected residents had not determined to change their approach to life with the knowledge they obtained from different stages of the learning process. This changed their views, and life patterns, turning them from heavily reliant on harmful industrial products in their farming practices and other life activities, to those leaning more on nature, thus resuming a traditional way of life that had been long ignored as a consequence of an influx of social changes. Now around 80% of the community residents live their lives in line with the principle of sufficiency economy, with

self-grown food, self-made consumer products, and self-reliance. Today, they set a good example for other communities.

This success, in fact, was not made possible by individual members of the community. This admirable achievement in bettering life in the community is attributable to cooperative efforts—those in identifying the problems, brainstorming, planning, performing problem solving activities, following up, and welcoming the resulting benefits.

These achievements were without doubt brought about by the “community members” who helped strengthen and sustain the community. To strengthen the community is to strengthen the community members and to intellectually strengthen the community members is, in turn, to strengthen the community.

4. Suggestions

As the study revealed, success in solving community problems was attributed to the already existing social capital, which comprised community members, leaders, a close-knit society, with willingness to better their living conditions. Change starts with people. Therefore, the following suggestions by the researcher focus on people and/or people-related issues.

4.1. Policy-oriented suggestions

4.1.1. Local administrative organizations should promote the application of the philosophy of sufficiency economy in solving relevant problems.

4.1.2 The public sector should financially and academically support families and communities with concrete development programs and expand support to a wider circle.

4.2. Performance-oriented suggestions

4.2.1. Communities should strongly recruit young people to take part in any activities related to cooperative learning, wisdom transfer, and community environmental conservation.

4.2.2. Well-recognized resource people and community leaders in community development should transfer and disseminate knowledge and experience to younger people and people in general and play an active role in promoting a new and more advanced body of knowledge.

4.2.3. Officers at learning and community development centers should promote networks with community leaders and community

resource people, and should also promote opportunities for them to join in activities on a regular basis.

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