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**SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMILY FARMING IN THE ASIAN REGION
SMALL FARMERS' POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN THAILAND: SUCCESSFUL
STORIES OF COMPETENT SMALL FARMERS AND FARMER ORGANIZATIONS IN
DOING FARMING**

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Introduction

Thailand, like many developing countries, has a problem of poverty alleviation of indigenous people in every part of the nation. It was calculated that at least one sixth of the population or about 12 million persons are under poverty line; among them are small scale farmers of about 9 million persons whose productivity need to be improved and, whose merchandizing of their products need to be supported. The common experience amongst farmers was that they cannot sell their product at the price needed in order to cover their investment. It is rather a case of "three years loss, one year profit". This is the cause of indebtedness, loss of land, immigration and change of profession. In addition, a significant situation faced by farmers is the shortage of food security. In the past, Thai farmers have not heard of the term "food security", because Thailand is located in a tropical zone with fertile land, fishery and forest resources. This environment enabled the people to easily collect wild products for food. "Shortage", therefore, implied the lack of "something they want to eat at certain period". This did not mean lack of food security. However, when Thailand opted to go the direction of the green revolution, it had to face several adverse effects like the loss of forest area and accumulation of chemical residues in the soil and water. These have seriously weakened the richness of natural foods in the wild, which serve as a source of food security for rural population. At present, rural people have to acquire their food from urban markets. Expenses on food account for up to 25% of their total budget. It is very different when compared to their experience in the past. Thirty years ago, rural people could find their food by collecting it from the wild and exchanging with their neighbors. Food items acquired from outside were only salt and sugar, which accounted for a very small amount per annum.

Conceptual framework

Amidst negative impact of climate change and world economic crisis of today's phenomena, the only alternatives of farmers, particularly small scale producers to survive is to rely on self sufficiency for food security and sustainable economic development. Self sufficient economy in Thailand was originally introduced by H.M. the King Bhumiphol more than two decades ago. Currently, it has been acceptable for effectiveness in fighting with poverty and ignorance of indigenous people. The meaning of self sufficiency encompasses not only economic aspect but it also covers social and political aspects for which every individual person has to get involved. In other words, the one who always keeps in mind the concept of self sufficiency, takes the whole things surrounding him/her into consideration, then internalizes them or thinks about them thoroughly against his/her capability before making crucial decision in doing his/her daily



work could be able to live well amidst economic crisis of today's situation. It could be concluded that sufficiency is in one's mind, if one does his best against his capability and, is satisfied with output/outcome of the work he does, we are aware that he/she is sufficient. If one is not satisfied with output/outcome of the work he/she does but try to have more without thinking of his/her capability, we are aware that he/she is not sufficient. Insufficiency always causes suffering to anyone whose mind has never stopped thinking of having more and more.

Another major concern regarding small farmer development is to immediately provide them with assistance once they would have faced with emergency disaster for instance, flooding and drought. Emergency or sudden harm relief would help uplifting their morale in continuing their career as well as fulfilling them capacity to further invest in agricultural production.

Appropriate technology which is soundly acceptable, environmentally suitable, traditionally compatible and, economically affordable is another important issue to be promoted for wider application among them apart from credit provision.

Finally, marketing opportunity is the last end to be promoted for their access. Free trade of agricultural products should be thoroughly considered, in particular those of much impact on livelihood of the small farmers for instance, rice, cassava.

Successful stories of some small farmers and their organizations

There have been a number of small farmers or small scale producers owning accomplishment in doing their own agricultural production activities on sustainability basis both economic and social aspects. The following individuals and farmer organizations are few examples of such accomplishment.

1. **Mr. Dilok Puangphoo**, age 50 years, lives at House no.40, village no.3, Nong-pruea Sub-district, Phanasnikom District, Cholburi Province. Mr. Dilok started his agricultural career with rice cultivation in an area of 3 rai (less than a half hectare) in 1993. Currently, he has possessed an area of 107 rai (17.12 hectares) for rice cultivation. He planned his rice production as to marketing demand and, in relevance of geographical topography. He constructed an extra big land margin and, dredged a big water canal surrounding the paddy field. He planted fruit trees on the margin land and, cultivated fish in the water canal for family consumption and supplementary income earning. All of which were replicated by his neighbors. Mr. Dilok has always kept in mind that self sufficient economy would have led his family survived; agricultural products have to be qualitatively and safely produced; his family could have been secured with rice production and; the consumers are to be ensured of his product quality. Mr. Dilok has arranged marketing outlets by which he promoted group formation of the rice farmers to sell paddy rice to the Centre of Native Chicken Conservation resulting in certain rice market on one hand and, keep some high quality rice in the barns for milling every 10-day period for merchandising in the community at lower price than marketing supply on the other. He has also utilized existing natural resources for production investment as learning centre of the whole community.

2. **Mr. Sunthorn Samathimongkol**, age 49 years, lives at House no. 5, village no. 1, Mongkoldhamnimitr Sub-district, Sam-ko District, Ang-thong Province. Prior to 1995, Mr. Sunthorn had produced paddy rice but it failed due to big loss with no profit



gained. He turned to diversified farming under *the project of agricultural structuring and system improvement* in his paddy field of 10 rai (1.6 hectares) by which the land was leveled and adjusted for cultivation of mango with supplement of vegetables as cash crops while waiting for mango yield. He was provided training in mango production from the agricultural extension officers in the area including some other sources of knowledge which could be used in improving his mango production for export. He increased his mango plantation area to 20 rai (3.2 hectares) more in 1997 and, to 10 rai (1.6 hectares) more in 2005. Currently, he has possessed 40 rai (6.4 hectares) of mango orchard with 3,200 mango trees divided into 4 plots. In 2002, he formed a group of mango producers for export from which the mango products were initiatively exported in 2003. Nowadays, he has established a community enterprise for good quality of mango export comprising 103 members in the district of Sam-ko in Ang-thong Province and the nearby districts in the provinces of Suphanburi, Singhaburi, Saraburi and, Chainat.

3. **Mr. Thuan Boonsongthae**, age 74 years, lives at House no. 124, village no.5, Thoethae Sub-district, Watbote District, Phitsanuloke Province. Mr. Thuan has been well known for his agro forestry since 1994 by which he joined *the project of economic trees promotion* introduced by the Forestry Personnel in an area of 21 rai (3.36 hectares). In 1998, he faced the problem of low price of his agricultural products resulting from economic downturn and, decided to turn to self sufficient economy based on H.M. the King's concept. With self sufficient economy concept, he planted diversified crops ranging from trees, orchards, home gardening and, fish cultivation in the 6 dredged ponds including the raising of fighting cocks. All of which have followed the pattern of agro forestry. With such effort, he has earned sufficient income for his family well living all year round.

4. **Mr. Yooh Sunthornchai** at Baan Tabag village in Salakdai Sub-district, Muang, Surin Province in the northeast has done diversified farming since 1977. According to Mr. Yooh, he suggested that *we should do farming for our own consumption as the first priority and, if we have the surplus then we sell them accordingly.*

5. **The Rice Farmer Association of Thaaï Talard Sub-district** in Muang District, Lopburi Province, established on 30 June 1999 at 5/3 village no. 3, Thaaï Talard, Muang, Lopburi with first membership of 48 persons, the group has had membership of 186 persons at present. The activities undertaken for benefit and welfares of its members comprise: -

- 1). Fund raising by which each group member has to hold at least 2 shares valuing 100 baht for every business activity he wishes to take part;
 - 2). Bio fertilizer production and merchandising;
 - 3). Group savings in support of self sufficient economy mobilization by which the group members have been encouraged to deposit 1 baht a day/365 baht a year and, the group would have paid interest of 3 % a year to the participating members;
 - 4). Production of commodities on Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) for value-added of community products with participation of 50 group members;
 - 5). Promotion of career development for benefit of the group members and community people as to their interest and capability namely mushroom production, food processing, animal (cattle) husbandry, community enterprise for fish sauce processing;
 - 6). Promotion of saving for school children with participation of 53 school children.
- With attempt and all efforts applied, the group can run its activities beneficial to the members and their family members on sustainability basis.



6. **The Field Crop Farmer Association of Pong-nam-ron**, Fang District, Chiangmai Province, established on 22 November 1976 at Number 43 in village no. 5, Pong-nam-ron Sub-district, Fang, Chiangmai, with first membership of 45 persons, the group has now owned membership of 184 persons performing their career in corn production, cultivation of chili, shallot, garlic, planting lemon trees, orange trees and, litchi. The policy of grouping was placed on services provision in purchasing products at the reasonable price, promotion of self sufficient economy in doing their career, mobilization of bio fertilizer application to replace the chemical one and, seek financial source for the purchase of bio fertilizer to further distribute to the group members at the cheaper price than marketing supply. The group structure comprises 9 executive committees, 8 Unit Heads, 3 Inspectors and, 1 group officer. The group earned net profit of 14, 514.77; 252,015.77; 18,821.70 baht in 2006; 2007; 2008 respectively. In 2008 alone, the group has run business on credit provision amounting to 380,545 baht and, merchandising goods to the group members amounting to 3,557,511 baht. Currently, the group has owned assets valuing 2,368,915.26 baht with burden of debt of 358,519.85 baht.

7. **Small farmers in Mahasarakham province in the northeast** of Thailand have formed their group to merchandise non-toxic vegetables and safe native foods on every Sunday. The group members with green shirts on as their entity could have earned between 500 and 1,000 baht each at a time and, it is likely that products of the group have increasingly been acceptable among Mahasarakham citizen.

Recently, there was a study revealed by Office of Agricultural Economics that due to the study on small scale farming based on self sufficient economy, it was found that:

1. the farm size of 1.5 – 20 rai with family members of 3- 4 persons by which 2- 3 members are laborers could earned 210,686 baht per household or 74,290 baht per one laborer; the suitable production activities comprised cash crops for instance, rice, vegetables and field crops as source of income for daily living and, perennial trees as source of income for saving and natural resource conservation; in addition, animals and fish were also the source of food and income earning as well;
2. it was also found that the farm size of not bigger than 5 rai could earned 178,000 baht or 59,000 baht per person; it was therefore suggested that land allocation of about 5 rai for the small farmers with family members of 3- 4 persons, with 2- 3 laborers and, with diversified farming would have been able to earn sufficient income for living.

Office of Agricultural Economics also suggested the following key factors for career achievement of the farmers:

1. the farmers and their family members must be diligent, economic and persistent;
2. they must be based on self sufficient economy;
3. they have to do diversified farming;
4. they must have accessibility of water source for their production;
5. they must know how to sell as well as knowing how to produce.

Recommendations

Lessons learned from previous experience can be addressed for all sides concerned in making small scale farmers development for their farming successful in the following manners.



1. Identification of poverty and food insecurity: It is essential that poverty and food insecurity be identified with awareness of community people, particularly in the target areas. Certainly, integrated efforts from personnel and agencies concerned are needed for the mobilization of problem identification and analysis. This is also inclusive of possible solutions, alternative development and, activity planning. Nevertheless people's participation approach has been known to all, actual practice at the local level has still been carried out by the responsible officers with passive or silent participation of the community people.

2. Establishment of body of knowledge: By its meaning, a body of knowledge (BoK) is the collected wisdom, experience, processes, and facts that both inform a profession and provide the solid foundation from which continuous improvements and innovative change can occur. It is, therefore, essential that BoK be established at the local level to allow the desired change for sustainable development occurring which means the community people being alert of surrounding situations, able to make appropriate adjustment in conciliation with conflict and crisis and, capable of making possible solutions to the problems encountered for their well living both on the basis of collaborative effort and individual practice. Lesson learned from the project pointed out that establishment of a learning center in a target village could encourage self learning of the community people to update their knowledge and experience in consistency of the real world.

3. Natural resources utilization and conservation: Soil, water and, forest in the community are to be wisely used and improved for career development of the community people. This entity could have been occurring and being continued on sustainable basis if the community people are being convinced of the pros of having its existence and the cons of damage of these natural resources. Lessons learned from the launch of community forest, fish cultivation in public pond, bio fertilizer production and utilization pointed out that the community people were satisfied with these activities and, wished to replicate them in a wider scale. In other words, in response of self sufficient economy policy, self reliance of the community people can only occur once the have made effectively used of locally existing resources for instance, forest as their food banks including sources of humidity, public/individual water sources as fish cultivation sites for both consumption and merchandising.

4. Village funds utilization: It would be more responsive to need of the community people as a whole if there would be a regulation to be developed by the community people themselves to utilize different funds other than their own group. In other words, there should be one compacted fund amalgamated from all existing revolving fund for overall use of the community people for their livelihood development. Simultaneously, group saving should be widely promoted among the stakeholders participating in group activities not only for saving purpose but also for awareness stimulation regarding self sufficient economy approach in fighting against poverty, food insecurity and, social unrest.

5. Enhancement of farmer involvement in policy- making with concerned agencies: individual farmers should be encouraged via group process to have their delegates/representatives working closely with personnel concerned for policy- making at all levels from the grass root to national level. In doing so, it is essential that all concerned agencies be alert of reality of the community people in the respective areas, listen to their needs as reflected from their existing problems and, let them propose what they demand; simultaneously, it is also important that the farmers be suggested to



propose only what are related to their problems and needs which could have direct impact on their livelihood. In doing such challenging task, there has to be mechanism at the village/community level for which network of cooperation could have been easily linked at all levels. More important is the farmers themselves have to be convinced of their own capacity in problem- solving and, developing their own plan to solve the problem whereas the concerned agencies have to change their way of thinking from 'working alone for the farmers' to 'working in collaboration of farmers and all concerned for benefit of the whole community'.

6. Support of farmers' capacity- building: Amidst global crisis of today's situations, it is important that farmers be competent in dealing with negative impact intervened as a result of such crisis, particularly food insecurity caused by high price of production inputs, global warming caused by climate change, natural disaster for instance, flooding and drought and, animal and plant pest outbreak. Currently, most farmers, if not all, have made use of indigenous knowledge and accumulated experience in generating production activities and problem- solving. In case of sudden events in particular, those concerning impact from global crisis, would have not been tackled appropriately and timely. It is, therefore, imperative that the farmers be equipped with workable knowledge which could have been brought into use in timely manner at their locality. Experience learned from the project pointed out that the farmers wished to be trained in resource management, auditing, personnel and organizational development, career development planning.

7. Integrated effort development: Many evidences indicated successful cases resulting from integrated effort among all sides concerned in collaboratively working at each level of development intervention. At the ministerial level, the national committee or central steering committee played important roles in supervising and guiding project roadmap for the right direction. At the provincial level, participation of agencies concerned under management of the provincial governor could encourage participation of personnel in monitoring and follow-up project activity running. At the local level, the workgroup chaired by the District Officer, played very important roles in working closely with the stakeholders in the target villages. More important is, however, there should be mechanism linkage among these networks to assure smooth connection so as to allow movement proceeding to the same direction and support to each other.

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