
An Analysis of the Role of Local Leaders in Promoting Self Sufficiency Economy

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Abstract

The deterioration of natural resources due to rapid economic growth has been a major problem for many countries around the globe. As consumerism has increased, managing natural resources has become more challenging for governments; therefore, many countries have been searching for an alternative solution to managing natural resources without affecting the economy. The concept of self-sufficiency plays a key role in effectively managing natural resources. The self-sufficiency economy philosophy was first introduced in Thailand by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej in the early 1950s, and since then it has gained wide popularity in the country. The underlying philosophy of sufficiency economy is to provide economic stability, and as Thailand is an agricultural country, it focuses more on the agricultural economy. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of self-sufficiency economy promotion by Thai local leaders. After analyzing relevant published documents, it was found that local leaders play a vital role in promoting the concept at both the local and state levels. As the self-sufficiency economy philosophy is the key to natural resource management and self-reliance, it was found that local leaders should effectively introduce the concept at the school and college level. Moreover, the promotion should also include the participation of different community leaders and create awareness among community members. Local leaders should allocate a sufficient budget for its promotion and seek participation from all stakeholder groups in society; this will allow local communities to progress toward a more self-sufficient economy. In addition, the study suggests that the government should focus more on food security, which in turn creates economic stability at a certain level.

Keywords: Analysis, Role of Local Leaders, Promoting Self Sufficiency Economy

1. Introduction

The 1997 Asian economic crisis brought Asia to a financial and economic standstill. As such, the nations devised various methods and strategies to combat the crisis and consequently develop sustainable economic growth after the crisis. In Thailand, under King Bhumibol, the concept of 'sufficiency economy,' which had been put in place almost 20 years prior to the crisis, proved a successful economic strategy in such a unique economy. In his own words, the King suggested that, as a way to a creating a long-term sustainable economy, the nation had to create an economy that had enough to sustain itself- it had to be self-sufficient. As many countries worked on building factories, tripling labor forces, and implementing local and foreign measures to become economic giants, King Bhumibol had the simplest idea of creating a self-sustaining and self-dependent economy (Pimdee et al., 2017). Ideally, the concept is founded on the philosophy that the majority of people in the nation had to live to have enough to live on. Individuals had to be imparted with the right economic and technical skills for increased productivity, and hence, sustainability and self-sufficiency.

In the design of the self-sufficiency economy, three interrelated components were necessary. The three philosophy's pillars are wisdom (reasonableness), prudence (self-immunity), and moderation (Pimdee et al., 2017). Profoundly, wisdom, moderation, and prudence were guided by knowledge and morality in the implementation and needed success of the self-sufficiency economy concept. In a significant way, the model differed from most capitalists' economic models in which productivity is always maximized to maximize profits and returns, with inequality. In the self-sufficiency model, balanced life for everyone is the main focus in which long-term productivity is achieved, and equally shared profits and returns are enjoyed by everyone. As every individual benefits from local and national projects implemented by the government, the nation as a whole grows harmoniously. (Sukhahuta, P., Chayanon, S., & Srisorn, W., 2019)

The three concepts of moderation, reasonableness, and prudence are linked and rely on one another for the success of the economic model. The idea of moderation portrays the image of people leading discrete and moderate lives as opposed to extreme living standards. People should not overindulge while others suffer. Importantly, reasonableness drives people to acquire information and experience, as well as analytical skills, develop self-awareness, and enhance compassionate empathy for harmonious living and togetherness (Pimdee et al., 2017). Ideally, people need to understand how their economic and social activities affect not just themselves but also other people.

Prudence (self-immunity) relates to a person's capacity to defend themselves from any outside turmoil and to deal with unanticipated or uncontrollable situations, which are the main factors affecting most growing economies (Pimdee et al., 2017). Prudence creates the foundation of self-discipline and self-reliance. Most importantly, for the economic model to sustainably impact the nation, accumulating information with the wisdom to comprehend and interpret the information, is utterly necessary. Further, morality is also important to guide integrity, dependability, moral behavior, honesty, tenacity, and a willingness to put in a lot of effort to work toward economic growth. As such, to promote and enhance the concept in Thailand, the role of local leaders is vital through the introduction of the concept in schools, promotion of the concept among community members, and the role played in sufficient budgetary allocation towards the self-sufficiency economy.

2. Promotion of the self-sufficiency Concept by the local leaders in Thailand

2.1 The Introduction of the Self-Sufficiency Economy Concept in Local Schools and Colleges

To create a world that is sustainable, everyone needs to center their efforts on people and place equal importance on the growth of society and the preservation of the natural world made up of scarce and limited resources. In order for this to take place, there is an utter need for a shift in both the core economic beliefs as well as the manner in which we interact with one another and the surrounding environment. According to the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), everyone should have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will allow them to create a sustainable future (Dharmapiya & Saratun, 2020). Significantly, educating the young generation is a strategy that looks at the sustainability of both society and the environment as a whole, and it focuses on the whole person.

Hence, the Thai government understands that for a sustainable self-sufficiency economy, the concept should be something that should be discussed in regular conversation and be extensively taught at all educational levels. Using strategies that promote participatory learning and higher-order thinking, the introduction of the self-sufficiency concept in schools seeks to increase community-based decision-making, social tolerance, environmental stewardship, a flexible workforce, and overall quality of life through the use of these pedagogical approaches by accomplished scholars who would have gone through the educative

system made up of self-sufficiency concept. Ideally, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a way of thinking about the world and determining how to make the most of the resources which are limited for equal sustainable growth.

In order to provide a solid foundation for society through self-sufficiency thinking, Thailand has made concerted efforts to apply Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in its educational institutions. The Ministry of Education has made the principles of sufficiency economics a part of the national core curriculum that all students are required to study. As such, the idea of a sufficiency-based school has been effectively implemented, where Sufficiency Economy Philosophy directs administration, instruction, and curriculum in the classroom, and the student's actual experience of making decisions.

In addition, educational supervisors and instructors have received extensive training to support staff at all levels in putting sufficient ideas into practice in their everyday lives and occupations. This training helps educational supervisors support staff at all levels in putting sufficient ideas into reality. The sufficiency-based educational system is being successfully implemented in more than 14,000 of Thailand's almost 40,000 schools currently (Dharmapiya & Saratun, 2020). The key idea is that young people who have a mindset of "enough" have some very distinctive characteristics, and positively impact society and the environment. Further, such young people are more moderate in their use of material stuff, despite the fact that they are generous with others in terms of sharing.

Both the instructors and the students are able to gain new knowledge and comprehension while simultaneously developing their own sense of autonomy. They are more resilient, as well as logical and well-balanced in the way that they spend their lives. The objective is to contribute to the steady growth of the nation as a whole. Good education fosters creativity and the improvement of both economic and social setups. Ideally, good character can be developed in schools, especially with the effective implementation of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles. As students thoroughly study sufficiency economy concepts, the future of Thailand is in safe hands as envisioned by King Bhumibol.

2.2 Participation of Different Community Leaders in Creating Awareness among Community Members.

The philosophy of sufficiency economy in Thailand has had a commendable success through its advocacy for self-reliance and dependence. To achieve its successful implementation and outcome, the promotion of the philosophy by local leaders has been totally useful. Before the development of the philosophy by King Bhumibol, Thailand was majorly dependent on farming based on less technical skills and little advancement. Hence, reaching out to almost every farmer and other local producer, local leaders, ranging from village headmen and sub-district leaders to district leaders, are key.

The philosophy of the sufficiency economy places an emphasis on the idea that individuals who participate in the production or consumption of goods or services should first make an effort to do so within the confines of the available income or resources. This is the premise behind reducing dependence and improving the ability to govern production on one's own, which in turn reduces the danger of not being able to control the market system in an effective manner. Therefore, to educate and make sure local producers understand the concept, local leaders had the role of bringing to light the ideas and the emphasis to people.

Significantly, each local leader had the right comprehension of the natural resources in the locality. Hence, they influenced the rate and method of production utilizing the available resources. Further, as moderation is the key aspect of the sufficiency economy philosophy, the local leaders make sure productions are within the specified limits. To put King Bhumibol's plan into action, insightful education to people was necessary. As the government could not effectively reach out to everyone, the local leaders bridged that gap.

The fundamentally important factor in the development of their communities through the sufficiency economy philosophy is the knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences that the village and local leaders possess. Each leader has their own unique set of knowledge and abilities, and in order to develop their villages and themselves, the leaders of those villages need to have a variety of experiences and an eagerness to learn and impart the same to villagers as a way of promoting the concept. Agricultural practice, public speaking, working together as a team, and cooperation with governmental organizations, are key examples of the vital ways local leaders promote the sufficiency economic theory. Ideally, the leaders ensure amicable collaboration among groups helping proper organizing of their economic works and projects, and further, facilitating individuals' interactions with each and every person promoting cohesion. Importantly, cohesion brings about the 'middle path' which King Bhumibol significantly stressed as the foundation of the concept.

Further, the local leaders of each community are equipped with the skills necessary to foster productive cooperation among the residents. In promoting the ideas of King Bhumibol the leaders of the villages and localities introduce the ideas as a way of bringing assistance to the villagers and shaping their future. Hence, they bring the help of assisting locals in carrying out their duties, and as such, the villagers have developed faith in local leaders and are more than willing to cooperate with them.

It is important to note that the self-sufficient economy is a community-driven development model. Hence, local leadership was noted to be a vital factor in the promotion of the concept. As such, since 2006, the Department of Local Administration (DLA), which falls under the Ministry of the Interior, and was founded in 2002 as the primary organization to work on Community-driven developments and primarily promotes and supports the local administrative organizations (LAOs), has been applying the Self-Sufficiency Economy Program to Sufficiency Economy Villages, which are mainly headed by local leaders such as village headmen and sub-district leaders. As of 2020, there are a total of 76 provinces, 878 districts, 7,255 sub-districts, and 75,032 villages in Thailand which are ideally led by appointed local leaders who promote and oversee self-sufficient economic activities (Wattanakornsiri et al., 2020). Importantly, the Department of Local Administration provides funding in order to assist the budget for the development of the projects of the sufficient economic villages in order to build their economies and improve their quality of life within the communities.

2.3 Allocation of a Sufficient Budget to Promote the Concept of Self-Sufficiency among Community Members.

In 2017, the Thai government, through the office of the prime minister, unveiled a sustainable economic plan; 'The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan 2017-2021.' The plan's core aim was to enhance security, prosperity, and sustainability. Through the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the plan and budgetary allocations for sustainable self-sufficiency projects are continuously drafted. Ideally, the Thai national budget is highly focused on self-sufficiency projects as a distinct way of promoting the concept of national benefits to all citizens (Schaffar, 2018). As the economic policy is the people-centered budget allocation is sufficient to combat any problem facing Thai people, and improve already established sustainable projects. For instance, in the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan, NESDB proposed a 2.3-million-baht budget to help alleviate poverty problems in Buriram Province (NESDB, 2005). As a way of promoting the concept and its foundations to community members, the cabinet approved the proposal.

According to Merle (2017), the government invests heavily in tourism and related activities as a way of promoting self-sufficiency concepts to community members. As tourism is among the key economic drivers in the nations, budgetary allocation is significant in this

sector to boost destination attractiveness to benefit citizens more. Tourism contributes to about 9% of Thailand's Gross Domestic Product annually indicating its importance to the Thai people. However, increasing tourism activities come with negative effects too, especially environmental degradation and pollution. With this understanding, the government allocates more funds to invest in mitigation plans such as the adoption of 'green initiatives' and 'eco-friendliness investments' (Merle, 2017). Further, in the production processes, products must meet the 'green standards' in which the government heavily invests in. All these efforts are aimed at creating a sustainable environment for the Thai people which is a core objective of the self-sufficiency economy concept.

In line with King Bhumibol's aspirations, budgetary allocations enhance and promote the concept. In a report by Royal Thai Embassy, Washington DC (2017) on the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan, the government had largely invested in benefitting community members through its budget. Significantly, rice farming is one of the biggest economic activities which the government largely supports. In the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan, 4.9 billion baht was allocated to boost farmers for increased and effective products for sustainability. Further, another project aimed at encouraging farmers to replace rice with other fodder crops was established. The idea is to feed more animals and diversify farming to increase incomes. 3.8 billion budgetary allocations was established to promote the self-sufficiency project across 70 provinces in the plan (Royal Thai Embassy, Washington DC, 2017). To further promote self-sufficiency through diversification, farmers who replace rice with fodder crops for animal feeds receive 6,000 baht per rai. Additionally, farmers were encouraged to grow alternative crops during the non-rainy season with an established budget of 855 million baht from the government (Royal Thai Embassy, Washington DC, 2017). Each family receives 2,000 baht per rai in the project across 53 targeted provinces. Lastly, 230 million baht was allocated for fertilizers to farmers to improve agriculture.

3. Conclusion

In the spirit of equality and promoting a home-grown economy that benefits every citizen, His Majesty King Bhumibol devised an impactful and unique economic model that has seen Thailand grow into a sustainable and commendable economy. Based on 'moderation, prudence (self-immunity), and reasonableness,' the concept drives economic growth through design projects that utilize limited resources in each community without the greed of production. Ideally, everyone needs to produce just enough of what they require. As such, sustainable growth is achieved. To continue enhancing the concept, the self-sufficiency model has been effectively introduced in Thai schools and colleges to ensure young people understand the vision of the King which is embedded in the nation's culture. Importantly, the future of the nation can only be safe if the young understand the concept and learn how to continuously and creatively implement the model locally and nationally. Profoundly, the government creates sustainable plans and allocates sizeable budgets towards enhancing and promoting the self-sufficiency philosophy. All these efforts are immensely achieved through the association with local leaders since the concept is based on localism.

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