

Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model Based on Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

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Abstract

This study proposes a comprehensive framework for assessing sustainable and self-reliant community development in Thailand, grounded in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) and the New Theory (NT) of His Majesty King Rama IX. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study draws on document analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with key stakeholders—including government officials, community leaders, local residents, and development practitioners. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using purposive sampling, and data were analyzed through content analysis. Triangulation techniques were applied to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings.

Central to the study is the Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM), which comprises five core factors, 17 elements, and 45 indicators. The five factors—effective community participation, balanced and resilient development, data- and information-driven decision-making, knowledge- and ethics-based leadership, and good governance—serve as the foundation for evaluating community performance across multiple dimensions of sustainability.

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Key findings indicate that communities exhibiting strong leadership, integrated resource management, and inclusive participation consistently achieve higher levels of sustainability and self-reliance. The SSCDM thus provides a practical and culturally grounded tool for guiding development planning, monitoring progress, and aligning local initiatives with both national priorities and global development goals.

Keywords: Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, The New Theory, Sustainable Community Development, Self-Reliant Community, SDGs.

รูปแบบการพัฒนาชุมชนอย่างยั่งยืนและพึ่งพาตนเองได้ ตามหลักปรัชญาของเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้นำเสนอกรอบแนวคิดที่ครอบคลุมสำหรับการประเมินการพัฒนาชุมชนอย่างยั่งยืนและพึ่งพาตนเองในประเทศไทย โดยมีพื้นฐานจากปรัชญาของเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง และทฤษฎีใหม่ ในพระราชดำริของพระบาทสมเด็จพระปรมินทรมหาภูมิพลอดุลยเดช รัชกาลที่ 9 โดยใช้ระเบียบวิธีเชิงคุณภาพ โดยอาศัยการวิเคราะห์เอกสาร การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก และการสนทนากลุ่มกับผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องหลัก ได้แก่ เจ้าหน้าที่ภาครัฐ ผู้นำชุมชน ประชาชนในพื้นที่ และนักพัฒนา การสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างดำเนินการโดยใช้การสุ่มแบบเจาะจง วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยวิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา และใช้เทคนิคการตรวจสอบข้อมูลแบบสามเส้า เพื่อเสริมความน่าเชื่อถือและความถูกต้องของผลการวิจัย

ผลจากการวิจัยคือ “รูปแบบการพัฒนาชุมชนอย่างยั่งยืนและพึ่งพาตนเองได้ตามหลักปรัชญาของเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง” ซึ่งประกอบด้วยปัจจัยหลัก 5 ด้าน องค์ประกอบ 17 รายการ และตัวชี้วัด 45 ตัว ปัจจัยหลักทั้งห้า ได้แก่ การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ การพัฒนาอย่างสมดุลและมีภูมิคุ้มกัน การตัดสินใจโดยใช้ข้อมูลและสารสนเทศเป็นฐาน ภาวะผู้นำที่ขับเคลื่อนด้วยความรู้และจริยธรรม และธรรมาภิบาลที่ดี ซึ่งเป็นพื้นฐานในการประเมินผลการดำเนินงานของชุมชนในมิติต่าง ๆ ของความยั่งยืน

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การวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่า ชุมชนที่มีภาวะผู้นำเข้มแข็ง การบริหารจัดการทรัพยากรอย่างบูรณาการ และการมีส่วนร่วมอย่างครอบคลุม มักมีระดับความยั่งยืนและการพึ่งพาตนเองสูงกว่าแบบอื่น ๆ รูปแบบการพัฒนาชุมชนอย่างยั่งยืนและพึ่งพาตนเองตามหลักปรัชญาของเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง จึงเป็นเครื่องมือที่มีความเป็นรูปธรรมและสอดคล้องกับบริบททางวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งสามารถนำไปใช้ในการวางแผนพัฒนาการติดตามความก้าวหน้า และการเชื่อมโยงโครงการระดับชุมชนเข้ากับเป้าหมายการพัฒนาในระดับชาติ และระดับโลกได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

คำสำคัญ: ปรัชญาของเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง ทฤษฎีใหม่ การพัฒนาชุมชนอย่างยั่งยืน ชุมชนพึ่งพาตนเอง เป้าหมายการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน

Introduction

Thailand has long grappled with inequalities, as well as vulnerability to natural disasters and other adverse effects. To address these challenges and promote a balanced way of life, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX) introduced the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP). SEP seeks to foster stability and resilience, enabling individuals and communities to live balanced and adaptable lives. Complementing this, King Rama IX also advanced the New Theory (NT), a practical guideline for applying the principles of SEP. The NT emphasizes rural development, particularly among farmers, to ensure food security and promote step-by-step progress despite social and environmental vulnerabilities. Together, SEP and NT constitute foundational development guidelines that the late King bestowed upon the Thai people. Often referred to as the King's development sciences, they aim to address grassroots problems, safeguard natural resources, and gradually strengthen the economy. The King's development approach enhances food security, income generation, and quality of life by emphasizing local resource use and environmental stewardship. This comprehensive vision requires systems, mechanisms, tools, and policy measures for continuous and effective development, supported by strong networks to achieve balanced and sustainable progress.

Meanwhile, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global blueprint for building a sustainable and equitable future. They emphasize integrated approaches that link economic growth, environmental protection, and social inclusion, with particular focus on poverty reduction, inequality, and climate change. The King's development sciences align closely with the SDGs by promoting balanced and integrated approaches that prioritize resilience, resource efficiency, and ethical leadership. These principles resonate especially with SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

This study seeks to align local and global sustainable development agendas by proposing a culturally grounded yet universally relevant framework for strengthening community resilience and self-reliance. It addresses grassroots challenges in support of the 2030 Agenda's commitment to 'leaving no one behind.' Drawing on the King's development sciences, the study develops tools to advance grassroots economic growth by drawing lessons from model communities that effectively manage water resources, livelihood opportunities, income stability, and social welfare. By analyzing shared development factors and fostering collaboration with external agencies, the study aims to bridge traditional philosophical approaches with contemporary sustainability practices.

Research Objectives

1. To extract lessons from model communities in order to develop a Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM) grounded in the King's development science.
2. To propose the SSCDM as a framework based on King Rama IX's development science.
3. To formulate training guidelines for community leaders and target groups on the application of the SSCDM.

Literature Review

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) and the New Theory (NT)

Thailand has long demonstrated its commitment to sustainable development through the application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), a holistic and human-centered approach grounded in the core principles of moderation, reasonableness, and prudence. Moderation ensures a crucial balance, reasonableness requires thoughtful decision-making, and prudence is indispensable for building resilience through effective risk management. Living according to these principles involves using knowledge wisely and ethically, with the persistent aim of achieving balanced and sustainable development (Dharmapiya, 2012). These principles also reflect traditional Thai values rooted in Buddhist teachings.

The SEP seeks to foster balanced progress and resilience across economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions, thereby contributing to sustainable development (Dharmapiya & Isarangkun, 2011). It emphasizes human-centered development by promoting the right mindset in decision-making, guided by its core principles, which align closely with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including poverty reduction, good health, reduced inequality, and responsible production and consumption. Moreover, SEP encourages community and national resilience, self-reliance, and reduced dependence on external factors, resonating with the SDGs' focus on climate action and the creation of resilient communities. Finally, SEP advocates a balanced approach to development that simultaneously considers economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions, consistent with the integrated nature of the SDGs, where social, economic, and environmental objectives are interdependent.

Meanwhile, the New Theory is a concrete application of the SEP, designed to guide Thai farmers mitigate the impacts of economic crises, natural disasters, and other destructive cycles such as flooding and drought (Office of the Royal Development Projects Board, 2018). The NT comprises three practical development stages for small farmers and rural communities:

1. *Basic stage.* Appropriate land and water resource allocation for integrated farming to ensure household food security among small-scale farmers.
2. *Cooperation stage.* Smallholder farmers form groups or cooperatives to strengthen production and marketing activities while also managing community welfare.
3. *Expansion stage.* Farmers seek external funding sources to enhance production quality, improve marketing systems, and raise overall quality of life.

The New Theory promotes sustainable agricultural practices such as water retention, crop diversification, and integrated farming systems, aligning with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). It also emphasizes empowering local communities by fostering resilient and self-reliant local economies, thereby contributing to poverty reduction and reduced inequality. In this regard, the New Theory aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), both of which underscore inclusive and sustainable economic development.

The SEP and NT highlight the importance of balancing economic progress with moral and ethical values. Both approaches are adaptable to local contexts, aligning with the global sustainable development agenda that emphasizes context-specific strategies. The King's development sciences thus offer a unique, culturally grounded framework for sustainable development that not only aligns with but also contributes to global discourse. By emphasizing resilience, ethical development, community empowerment, and sustainability, SEP and NT provide valuable models that complement and strengthen the broader SDGs.

Economic Theories and Sustainable Local Resource Management

Economic research highlights the complexities of water management, including irrigation costs, externalities, and conflicts over water use. Water resources—both surface water and groundwater—are particularly vulnerable to the tragedy of the commons because of their non-excludable nature, where excessive use diminishes availability for others.

Beyond quantity concerns, water quality is also at risk of deterioration. Effective water management therefore requires attention not only to ecological impacts but also to sustainable practices such as recycling and desalination. Incentives to encourage sustainable practices may take market-based, regulatory, or compliance-driven forms, with their effectiveness depending on factors such as farmers' attitudes, experiences, farmland conditions, and market dynamics (Pineiro et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2024).

Behavioral economics further suggests the use of nudges—such as information provision and social comparisons—to promote sustainable practices without relying on financial incentives (Chabe-Ferret et al., 2019; Čop & Njavro, 2024; Sasaki et al., 2024). However, empirical findings remain mixed, underscoring the need for context-specific strategies (Barnes et al., 2013; Chai et al., 2023; Feizi & Khatabiroudi, 2023). Additionally, Elinor Ostrom's principles for effective resource management emphasize clear boundaries, context-appropriate rules, participatory decision-making, regular monitoring, graduated sanctions, conflict resolution mechanisms, limited state intervention, and cooperative networks (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom & Gardner, 1993; Ostrom, 1999).

Characteristics of Community Leaders and Public Participation

The role of community leaders involves setting goals and objectives, engaging with community members to determine development activities, and facilitating their implementation. Once activities are defined, leaders must also coordinate within the group or across relevant agencies to secure support and resources, particularly when communities are unable to manage independently. Burns (1978) highlights the concept of moral leadership and its role in driving significant social change, which resonates with the idea of virtuous leadership in community development. Similarly, Chaskin (2001) emphasizes virtuous leadership as a catalyst for building community capacity and advancing sustainable development.

Public participation entails the involvement of community members in decision-making processes, thereby promoting democracy, equality, and effective resource management (Gaventa, 2004; Cornwall, 2008; Tuhkanen, 2023). Gaventa (2004) underscores the transformative potential of participatory governance, illustrating how participation can empower communities

and improve governance outcomes. In contrast, Cornwall (2008) critically examines various participation models, highlighting the complexities and challenges of implementing participatory approaches in community development. Tuhkanen (2023) further identifies five essential roles of participatory processes: fostering critical consciousness, promoting fair power relations, cultivating a culture of change-making, reshaping relationships among actors, and establishing a framework for long-term change.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the King's development sciences, sustainable community development is rooted in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and operationalized through the three-stage New Theory. This integrated approach emphasizes economic stability, sustainable food security, income generation, and the overall enhancement of community members' quality of life. Agricultural communities play a central role by engaging in collaborative production that utilizes local resources, while also operating community-based shops to reduce expenses and increase income. In addition, the establishment of welfare funds and communal savings mechanisms provides mutual support during times of crisis. Effective management of local resources, together with the adoption of environmental conservation strategies, is essential for achieving long-term food security while simultaneously safeguarding cultural diversity and regional identities.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for sustainable and self-reliant community development derived from the King's development sciences. The model is grounded in the SEP, which integrates knowledge- and virtue-based conditions with the core principles of moderation, reasonableness, and prudence. The NT provides the structural foundation for three interconnected domains of community development: natural resource management, income-generating activities, and community financial systems. These domains operate in a mutually reinforcing manner to advance long-term self-reliance. Sustainable management of land and water resources supports agricultural productivity, which, in turn, enables income generation. The resulting financial gains are allocated to community funds and reinvested to strengthen both environmental stewardship and economic initiatives. This cyclical process fosters a resilient and self-sustaining community ecosystem.

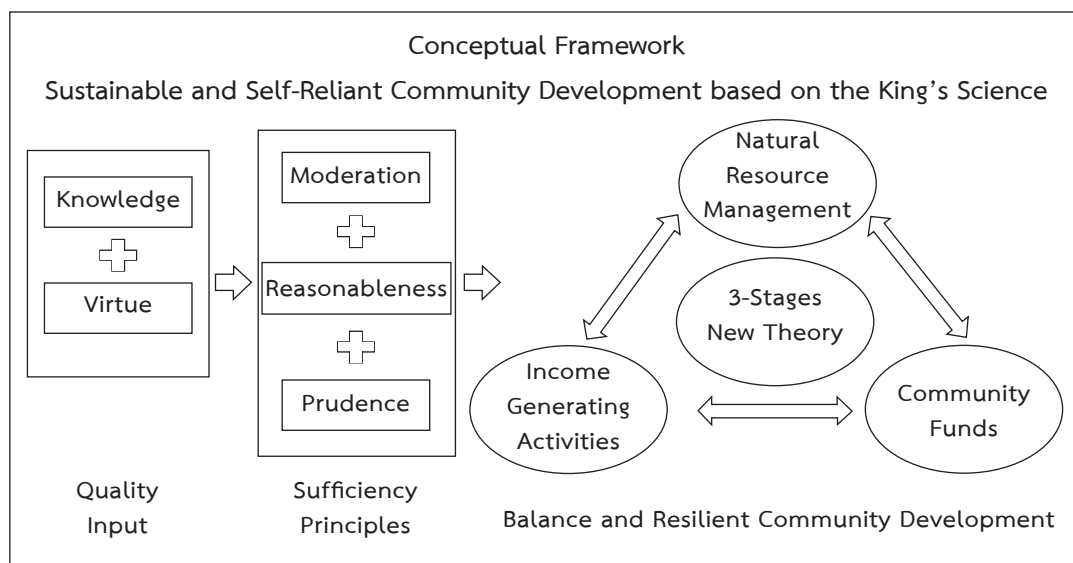


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development

This framework aligns with prevailing theories of sustainable development, which emphasize the integrated management of environmental resources, economic activities, and financial systems to enhance social well-being. By interlinking these elements, the model addresses both immediate community needs and long-term sustainability objectives, thereby strengthening the effectiveness and resilience of community-based development initiatives.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing on both primary and secondary data collected through literature reviews, in-depth interviews, and group meetings with relevant agencies, communities, and key informants. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the main research tool, enabling participants to articulate their views freely and provide additional insights. The interview questions were tailored to the roles and expertise of each target group to ensure relevance and depth of information. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in implementing the development model, the study engaged key informants from diverse stakeholder groups, including government officials, community leaders, community members, and development practitioners.

The selection of model communities was designed to capture representative cases across Thailand's diverse geo-socio contexts. This process was supported by key institutions engaged in community development inspired by the King's development sciences, particularly the Hydro-Informatics Institute and the Pid Thong Lang Phra Foundation. Four communities were chosen from distinct geographical and social settings, representing all four regions of Thailand. Each community exemplifies sustainable self-reliance and serves as a practical model for development consistent with the principles of the King's science. The selected model communities include:

(1) Dong Kheelek Subdistrict Community, Mueang District, Prachinburi Province (Central Region). Situated in a riverine landscape surrounded by canals, this community exemplifies integrated farming and community-based water resource management. With strong leaders, and by applying scientific and technological approaches, residents have improved agricultural productivity and enhanced water-use efficiency.

(2) Ban Nam Paak Community, Tha Wang Pha District, Nan Province (Northern Region). Located in highland terrain with steep slopes and degraded forest conditions, this community was highly vulnerable to flash floods. Through collective action, villagers constructed a water pipeline system supplied by multiple weirs, enabling irrigation across most agricultural zones and supporting diversified crop production.

(3) Ban Pak Suat Community, Ban Ta Khun District, Surat Thani Province (Southern Region). Nestled in a mountainous area near a national park, this community adopted a water management framework inspired by the Royal Initiative. Residents transitioned to integrated farming, engaged in upstream forest conservation, and systematically developed water sources. These collective efforts have fostered sustainable coexistence with the forest and strengthened long-term self-reliance.

(4) Ban Khok Lam – Saeng Aram Community, Nong Wua So District, Udon Thani Province (Northeastern Region). Once severely affected by drought and water scarcity, many villagers were previously compelled to migrate for work. The construction of the Huai Klai Reservoir under the Royal Initiative transformed the community's prospects by facilitating self-reliance, debt reduction, and increased income generation. Today, the community continues to progress toward a resilient and sufficiency way of life.

The research team tested the draft SSCDM in three target communities to assess its adaptability across different development stages and socio-geographic contexts. These communities, also identified by the two aforementioned agencies, represent diverse geo-social settings but remain at earlier stages of development compared with the four model communities.

(a) Khlong Rangsit Community, Nong Suea District, Pathum Thani Province (Central Region). This flood-prone oil palm farming area was transformed into a water retention zone that simultaneously generates income through improved water infrastructure and management, thereby reducing the risks of future flooding.

(b) Phu Tham Phu Kratae Community, Waeng Noi District, Khon Kaen Province (Northeastern Region). Situated in a drought-prone highland area with low rainfall, this community adopted gravity-based water management to channel runoff into a controlled system. Residents along the water route collaborated under mutually agreed rules, ensuring adequate water storage for domestic use. The community also shifted from monoculture farming to integrated agriculture, which significantly increased household income.

(c) Kaen Makrut Subdistrict Community, Ban Rai District, Uthai Thani Province (Upper Central Region). Located in a highland area within a national park, this Karen hill tribe community collectively addressed forest encroachment and degradation. Income generation was achieved through the cultivation of temperate crops and ornamental flowers—such as strawberries, Christmas trees, lilies, and tulips—as well as the development of ecotourism activities.

The pilot implementation of the model in these three target communities assessed its viability both as a self-assessment tool and as a framework for community development. Following the trials, a consultative session was convened with representatives from seven communities and relevant development agencies to evaluate the model and its indicators, which are grounded in the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Expert input from community development specialists was incorporated to refine the indicators, ensuring their relevance for effective self-evaluation and broader applicability. In addition, feedback from community leaders gathered through focus group discussions affirmed the model's practical utility in real-world settings.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee on Human Research of the National Institute of Development Administration (Certificate of Approval No. 2023/0029). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study.

Research Findings

The results indicate that lessons learned from model communities reveal key factors contributing to successful and sustainable development. These communities thrive largely because of their leaders' mindset and dedication to problem-solving and long-term self-reliance. Community leaders demonstrate sincerity, honesty, diligence, patience, and the ability to cultivate trust. Guided by the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in both planning and implementation, the communities emphasize data utilization, broad-based participation, resource efficiency, and reliance on natural methods to achieve development. Their focus on ensuring stability in water availability, income, savings, housing, and community welfare strengthens resilience at the individual, household, and community levels.

Drawing upon insights derived from model community practices and integrating the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1, the study formulated a comprehensive framework for sustainable and self-reliant community development. This framework encompasses five key factors, seventeen constituent elements, and forty-five indicators, each serving as a critical component in guiding communities through a systematic progression toward sustainability and self-reliance. The five key factors are as follow:

1. *Effective Community Participation*: Participation lies at the core of sustainable development. It entails engaging all members of the community in decision-making processes and ensuring that every individual has a voice in shaping the community's future. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, thereby reinforcing prudent community development. It also increases commitment to the success of local initiatives. This factor encompasses the establishment of common goals, shared core values, group activities, and the enhancement of individual competencies.

2. *Balanced and Resilient Development*: Based on SEP, achieving a harmonious balance among economic, environmental, social, and cultural dimensions is essential for long-term sustainability. This requires generating economic opportunities while minimizing environmental harm, strengthening social cohesion, and preserving cultural heritage. The key elements include promoting economic stability, practicing sustainable environmental management, enhancing quality of life, and fostering community pride.

3. *Data- and- Information- base-Driven Development*: Effective development depends on accurate and comprehensive data and information. Based on the knowledge condition with reasonableness and prudence principles in SEP, a database-driven approach entails systematically collecting and analyzing community information to guide decision-making and monitor progress. Key components of this factor include the establishment of comprehensive community information systems and active community participation in database utilization.

4. *Knowledgeable and Moral Leadership*: Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping community development. Based on SEP, effective leaders are knowledgeable, ethical, and deeply committed to the well-being of their communities. Visionary leadership, supported by diverse expertise and strengthened through community development networks, is essential for guiding sustainable and inclusive progress.

5. *Good Governance-Based Community Management*: Good governance ensures reasonableness and prudence in development efforts to be fair, transparent, and effective. It requires the establishment of clear rules and processes for decision-making, resource allocation, and accountability. Core principles include sound management mechanisms, efficient resource utilization, effective communication channels, and step-by-step development consistent with the principles of the New Theory.

The Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM), as illustrated in Figure 2, is founded upon the dynamic interrelationships among the above five key factors. This integrative structure embodies the model's holistic orientation and underscores its potential to address complex, multidimensional challenges at the community level through a contextually grounded and systematically coordinated approach. The framework offers a structured pathway for communities to pursue sustainable and self-reliant development in alignment with the principles of the King's development sciences. Serving both as a comprehensive self-assessment tool and a phased roadmap, it enables communities to conceptualize and advance progress based on the principle of '*explosion from within*.'

Each factor is further elaborated through 17 elements and 45 indicators, which serve as benchmarks for evaluating community performance. These indicators are designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of development, enabling a nuanced understanding of progress and challenges. Each indicator is defined across five developmental tiers (Quality Criteria Levels 1–5). These tiers provide benchmarks for incremental improvement and guide targeted actions to enhance performance. Level 3 represents the baseline standard, reflecting the average achievement of communities demonstrating substantive progress toward sustainability, and is recommended as the minimum benchmark. The scoring system assigns a total of 100 points, with each of the five key factors weighted at 20 points. Individual indicators carry weights ranging from 1 to 6 points, determined according to their relative significance. The weighting process was developed through a participatory methodology involving focus group discussions with representatives from seven communities and subject-matter experts. This inclusive approach ensures that the framework upholds both methodological rigor and practical applicability. A detailed description of the five key factors, 17 elements, and 45 indicators is provided in the Annex.

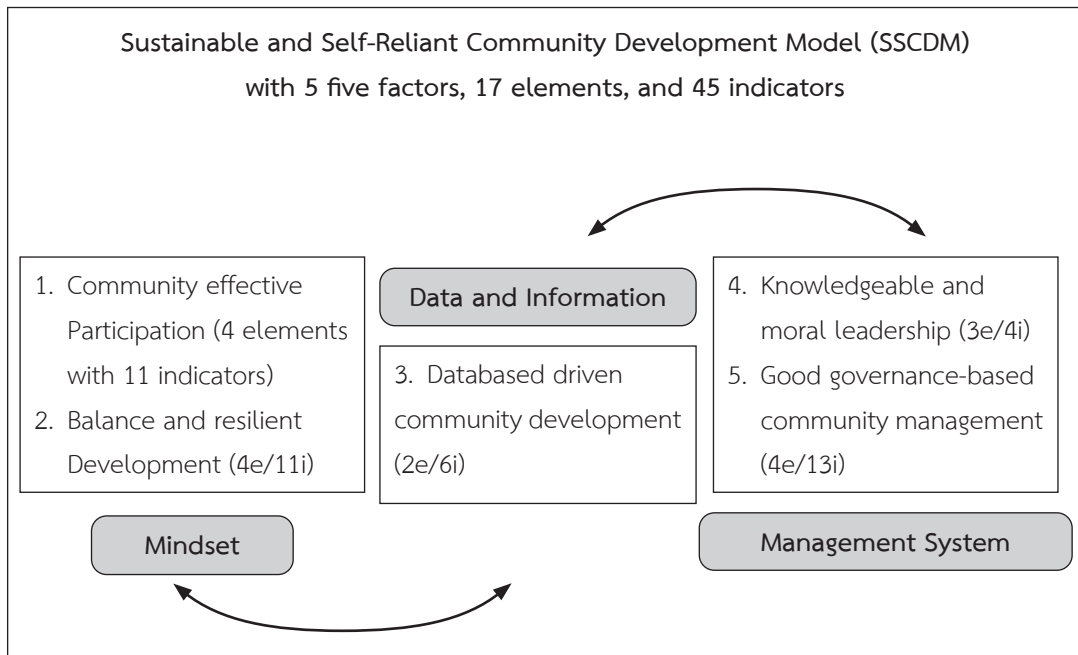


Figure 2: Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM)

Discussion

The research developed a framework comprising 5 factors, 17 elements, and 45 indicators, collectively forming the Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM), grounded in the King's development sciences and the philosophy of King Rama IX. This model offers an innovative integration of economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions within a unified approach to community development. Its interdisciplinary foundation positions the model as both a theoretical contribution and a practical tool for guiding holistic community development.

Conceptually, the SSCDM aligns with Elinor Ostrom's social-ecological system framework, which emphasizes the interdependence between human societies and ecological systems (Ostrom, 2009). Both models underscore the importance of governance mechanisms in sustaining integrated socio-ecological systems, particularly in the context of resource management and community resilience.

Next, each factor of the model is examined in relation to its alignment with key concepts of community development across multiple dimensions.

1. Community Empowerment through Sustainable Participation

- **Community Participation:** In fostering long-term self-reliance, it is essential to strengthen individuals, households, and the community as a whole. A central strategy is to empower community members through collaborative processes. The role-model communities studied are exemplary in involving members in decision-making and in selecting development pathways that directly affect their lives, families, and community. Importantly, all community members are invited to participate in data collection and in planning for community development. They are also engaged in implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement. These processes are critical for empowerment, fostering collective learning, and enhancing the skills and competencies of community members across multiple domains.

- **Common Goals:** Participation in community development and group activities typically begins with the identification of common problems or shared goals that affect all members. Addressing these issues requires thoughtful analysis and mutual recognition among community members. Awareness and understanding of shared challenges foster cooperation in collective initiatives. In this study, effective participation is defined as the extent to which a significant proportion of community members are both aware of and actively engaged in addressing these common issues.

- **Shared Core Values:** Establishing shared core values is essential for building trust and nurturing positive relationships within a community. When individuals, groups, and organizations align around common values, a sense of unity, mutual understanding, and cooperation emerges. Such alignment strengthens community dynamics and encourages collaboration toward common goals. The shared core values most evident in the role-model communities are honesty, sharing, and integrity.

- **Group Activities:** Community group activities should reflect the interests and needs of members, as these are pivotal to achieving successful outcomes. Activities vary depending on each community's context, such as vegetable-growing groups, water management groups, or forest fire prevention groups. Successful groups typically follow key principles: a willingness to cooperate, a representative committee responsible for management, clear rules known to all members, and adequate funds to sustain activities that benefit participants. Together, these elements embody community participation, reinforce shared values, and promote sustainable practices that support developmental goals while minimizing conflicts.

- **Fostering Individual Growth:** The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) emphasizes human development as a means of strengthening community members' capacity for self-reliance. This involves supporting continuous learning through practical experience, organizing training sessions and knowledge exchanges, and fostering innovation to advance community development. The integration of international perspectives, local knowledge, and the King's development sciences ensures that community development addresses diverse challenges while maintaining contextual relevance and adherence to the principles of moderation.

2. Sustainable Community Development According to SEP

The second core component of the model emphasizes achieving balanced development across economic, environmental, social, and cultural dimensions, in line with the SEP. Strategies for advancing sustainability in each of these dimensions include:

- All role-model communities-initiated group activities to overcome economic hardship. Success is reflected in the sustained increase in household income resulting from participation in these activities. Diversification of income sources helps mitigate risks from external shocks, thereby strengthening economic stability. Savings are prioritized to enhance household resilience, while effective debt management is emphasized to ensure that financial burdens do not exceed 40 percent of total income.

- **Environmental Sustainability:** Sustainable management of natural resources is critical to improving farm productivity and household income. Community-led initiatives focus on the efficient use of resources and the adoption of effective waste management practices, ensuring long-term environmental balance.

- **Social Well-being:** Community funds play a vital role in enhancing the well-being of all members. Improving quality of life involves providing community welfare, promoting inclusivity, and supporting disadvantaged groups. Social development outcomes are reflected in better housing, improved security, and a clean, safe environment.

- **Cultural Pride:** Preserving and celebrating community traditions strengthens cultural resilience and reinforces community identity as a cornerstone of sustainable development. Local wisdom and cultural festivities foster unity and harmony, creating a strong sense of belonging among community members.

These elements can be compared to the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) developed by Cornelia and Jan Flora (Flora et al., 2004), which identifies seven types of community capital: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built. The CCF is widely used to assess and strengthen sustainable communities by balancing and enhancing multiple forms of capital. This framework aligns with the multi-dimensional approach of King Rama IX's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), which also addresses diverse facets of community life. Similarly, the King's development sciences emphasize leveraging existing assets and capabilities within communities to promote self-reliance, paralleling the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) originally developed by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) (Scoones, 1998). The SLF also adopts a holistic perspective, considering how people's livelihoods are shaped by human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital. Together, the King's sciences, the CCF, and the SLF provide valuable frameworks for rural development, highlighting how communities can utilize available assets to achieve sustainable livelihood outcomes.

3. The Importance of Data in Development

One of the fundamental principles emphasized by King Rama IX in the SEP is the systematic study of information, which constitutes the knowledge condition. This highlights the importance of acquiring knowledge and exercising prudence in both planning and implementation. Decision-making at every stage of development therefore requires

a well-maintained information system. Gaining an accurate understanding of community realities through comprehensive data storage is essential for the careful planning and effective execution of community development initiatives.

Efficient data collection for community development necessitates the establishment of a systematic database. All role-model and trial communities in this research maintain comprehensive databases specific to their local contexts. These data are collected through participatory processes and cover multiple dimensions, including geography, demographics, sources of income, and household-level water usage, among others.

This database must ensure the quality and accuracy of information, remaining ready for timely application in community development initiatives. Regular updates are essential to reflect evolving circumstances. A robust community database supports prudent decision-making across multiple domains, including health, environment, economy, society, culture, and local wisdom. Active community involvement in developing and utilizing this database promotes transparency while also enhancing members' skills in data collection and analysis. Such participatory processes are vital for formulating informed and effective development strategies. Responsibilities in database creation and use must be guided by moral principles, honesty, and respect for community regulations and norms of collective living.

This factor resonates with the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model developed by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The ABCD model emphasizes identifying and mobilizing existing community assets—such as residents' skills, local associations, and institutions—rather than focusing on deficiencies. This approach closely parallels King Rama IX's development strategy, which leverages local resources and knowledge to foster self-reliance.

4. Characteristics of Leaders Driving Community Development

The success or failure of community development depends on the ability to translate ideas into actionable initiatives, a process strongly influenced by two key components: leadership and management systems. Effective community development leaders—whether acting individually or collectively—demonstrate a clear vision and the capacity to drive change. They excel in strategic planning, foster active community participation, and practice transparent communication. Such leaders actively listen to community concerns, adapt flexibly to changing circumstances, and uphold ethical standards while applying their knowledge. By demonstrating tangible results, they serve as role models and catalysts for community progress.

In many communities, leadership is composed of diverse individuals with varied expertise who collaborate effectively. These leaders engage in regular exchanges of ideas, share knowledge, and mentor the next generation of community developers through both formal and informal mechanisms. They coordinate networks, build partnerships with external agencies for support, and leverage community resources to foster sustainable development. Under their guidance, successful community initiatives often become models for other communities to emulate, thereby promoting mutual learning and collective growth.

5. Community Development Management Based on Good Governance

Effective community development management requires a robust governance framework tailored to the local context. In all role-model and trial communities examined, a dedicated community development committee was established to steer initiatives in line with the community's vision and with broad acceptance from its members. Clear rules and regulations governing harmonious coexistence, along with specialized committees tasked with specific responsibilities, ensured efficient collaboration and regular consultation in pursuit of shared development goals.

Optimizing the use of common resources—including reclaimed natural assets such as forests and clean water sources—necessitates community-wide agreements to ensure sustainable management. Decision-making processes should remain inclusive, enabling community members to actively participate in resource governance and adaptation strategies. The enforcement of mutually agreed-upon rules fosters engagement, strengthens accountability, and provides fair conflict resolution mechanisms suited to the specific needs and conditions of the community.

Facilitating effective communication channels promotes transparency, openness, and sincerity, thereby cultivating trust among community members. Sustainable and self-reliant community development, as envisioned by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and royal initiatives, prioritizes balanced and rational progress while mitigating risks. Communities capable of sharing knowledge and experiences also serve as learning hubs for others, contributing to national stability, prosperity, and sustainable development in line with Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy. In the medium term, success in this model is measured by indicators such as reductions in net out-migration, reflecting the community's capacity to retain its members through improved well-being and opportunities.

The model has been empirically validated through case studies of Thai communities, which demonstrate its effectiveness in fostering sustainable practices, improving livelihoods, and enhancing community resilience. The in-depth analysis of these cases provides robust evidence of the model's practical applicability. It also yields actionable insights for policymakers, highlighting the importance of integrating cultural values and local knowledge into development strategies. The findings suggest that this approach can generate more effective and sustainable outcomes, particularly in rural and developing contexts.

Although the SSCDM is grounded in Thailand's development philosophy, its underlying principles make it both domestically and globally transferable. Domestically, the model offers a flexible framework adaptable to Thailand's diverse geo-social contexts. While the case studies primarily focus on rural communities, the five key factors—community participation, balanced development, data-driven decision-making, moral leadership, and good governance—can be tailored for urban neighborhoods, peri-urban settlements, or communities facing specific challenges such as industrialization or tourism pressure. By integrating local traditions, resource bases, and governance structures, the SSCDM can serve as a unifying framework for community development across the country.

Globally, the SSCDM aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its focus on resilience, equity, and responsible resource management resonates strongly with SDG 1 (*No Poverty*), SDG 11 (*Sustainable Cities and Communities*), SDG 12 (*Responsible Consumption and Production*), and SDG 13 (*Climate Action*). The universal values embedded in the SEP—moderation, reasonableness, and prudence—transcend Thai cultural boundaries, reflecting ethical and sustainable principles shared across diverse global traditions. With appropriate contextual adaptation—such as integrating indigenous governance practices in Africa or cooperative economic models in Latin America—the SSCDM provides a culturally sensitive yet globally applicable framework for promoting resilience and self-reliance. Rooted in Thai philosophy, it serves as a bridge between local wisdom and global sustainability agendas, illustrating how context-specific approaches can yield universally relevant solutions.

Conclusion

The Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM), rooted in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) and the New Theory (NT) of King Rama IX, offers a holistic approach to fostering resilience and sustainability at the grassroots level. As communities worldwide continue to face challenges stemming from economic disparities, environmental degradation, and social inequality, this model provides a vital blueprint for sustainable community development. By integrating local knowledge with strategic community participation and good governance, the SSCDM not only addresses immediate needs but also lays the foundation for long-term stability and self-reliance. The findings highlight actionable insights for policymakers, particularly the importance of incorporating cultural values and local knowledge into development strategies. This approach can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes, especially in rural and developing contexts.

The SSCDM advances beyond existing models by offering a holistic and culturally grounded framework for community development. Unlike models that address isolated aspects, the SSCDM integrates economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions to achieve long-term sustainability and resilience. Its distinctive contributions include:

- *Cultural and Conceptual Foundation:* The model is grounded in Thailand's SEP and NT, providing a culturally rooted framework that prioritizes moderation, reasonableness, and prudence. It demonstrates how the King's science offers integrated development guidelines for addressing grassroots challenges.

- *Distinctive Methodology:* Beyond theory, the framework is empirically validated through case studies of successful Thai communities. The methodology combines literature reviews, in-depth interviews, and group discussions, ensuring comprehensive insights from multiple stakeholders.

- *Policy and Practical Application:* The SSCDM addresses a critical policy gap by offering a practical framework for implementing sustainable development initiatives at the grassroots level. With its 5 key factors, 17 elements, and 45 indicators, it provides a structured pathway toward self-reliance. Moreover, it bridges local initiatives with global goals, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by providing a culturally relevant framework for their achievement.

Rooted in Thai philosophical principles, this study argues that the Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM) holds potential for adaptation across diverse cultural and environmental contexts. To ensure its global relevance for communities pursuing sustainable development, further research should explore its applicability in varied socioeconomic and ecological settings.

Comparable initiatives across regions reinforce this potential. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia's PNPM Mandiri and the Philippines' KALAHI-CIDSS demonstrate scalable, community-driven development rooted in participatory governance (World Bank, 2014; Department of Social Welfare and Development, n.d.). Viet Nam's New Rural Development Program emphasizes inclusive planning for infrastructure, livelihoods, and environmental stewardship. In Latin America, Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre institutionalizes citizen engagement in municipal finance (World Bank, 2008), while Mexico's Oportunidades/Prospera links social benefits to education and health through community participation (Niño-Zarazúa, 2016). These models share the SSCDM's emphasis on local empowerment, incremental yet transformative investment, and institutional mechanisms that foster capacity and accountability—underscoring its global relevance and transferability.

Suggestions

The study's findings underscore the potential for scaling up community-based sustainable development initiatives rooted in the King's development sciences. While the Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM) offers a robust conceptual and practical foundation, its current formulation reflects a specific cultural context, relies primarily on qualitative methods, and is based on a limited set of case studies. To strengthen its broader applicability, future research should explore the model's implementation across diverse settings, incorporate quantitative impact assessments, and evaluate its long-term adaptability.

These outcomes offer practical implications and point to two strategic directions for further inquiry:

1. Scaling up sustainable and self-reliant communities within Thailand by applying the SSCDM across varied local contexts to refine its operational mechanisms and assess its effectiveness at a national level.

The model developed in this study can be utilized by a wide range of stakeholders—including community leaders, policymakers, academics, and the general public—as a detailed guide for evaluating and promoting community development. It serves as a tool for community self-assessment, enabling communities to identify strengths and areas requiring further improvement. Policymakers can also apply the model to design programs and projects that facilitate community development, guided by the five main factors identified in the research.

The role-model communities featured in this study have already applied the framework with tangible success, positioning them as practical examples and training hubs for other communities. Building on these experiences, the research has generated educational materials for community leaders and development practitioners, which can be incorporated into training programs and disseminated through workshops, seminars, and informational materials.

In addition, the study provides a foundation for the design of community engagement programs rooted in participatory approaches. By encouraging active participation, communities can be empowered to take ownership of their development processes. The study's emphasis on sustainable community development principles contributes not only to strengthening local resilience but also to enhancing national economic stability, security, and long-term sustainability.

To enhance the scalability and replicability of the SSCDM domestically, further research is recommended in the following areas:

- Longitudinal Studies: Conduct long-term studies to assess the sustainability and adaptability of the model over time, providing insights into its effectiveness across different developmental stages.
- Economic Impact: Investigate the economic outcomes of the model, including changes in household income, employment opportunities, and diversification of livelihoods resulting from its implementation.
- Social and Cultural Factors: Examine the social and cultural determinants of success, focusing on how local traditions, social structures, and community values can be integrated to strengthen the model's effectiveness.
- Environmental Sustainability: Assess the environmental impacts of the model, with particular attention to how community-led initiatives contribute to resource management, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience

2. Extending the model to diverse cultural and socioeconomic environments to examine its adaptability and relevance in international settings, thereby contributing to global discourse on integrated, community-driven development.

- **Cultural Adaptation of the Model:** While the Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development Model (SSCDM) is rooted in King Rama IX's development sciences, its principles can be adapted to fit different cultural contexts. For instance, in communities where collective decision-making and communal ownership are central—such as indigenous groups in Africa or Latin America—the model could integrate traditional governance structures and cultural practices. This would produce culturally relevant versions of the framework that respect local values and norms while advancing sustainability and self-reliance. Future research should explore how core principles such as moderation, reasonableness, and prudence can be interpreted through the lens of diverse cultural philosophies. Such efforts would benefit from collaboration with cultural anthropologists and local leaders to ensure cultural sensitivity and effectiveness.

- **Socioeconomic Adaptation in Low-Income Contexts:** In low-income or resource-constrained settings, the SSCDM's emphasis on local resource utilization and self-reliance is particularly pertinent. However, these communities often face barriers such as limited access to markets, education, or technology. Adaptations could include strategies such as microfinance initiatives, cooperative business models, or mobile technologies for education and market access. Future research could pilot adapted versions of the model in low-income communities across regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to evaluate effectiveness and scalability. Such studies should also examine how external support from NGOs or governments can be harmonized with the principles of self-reliance, ensuring that assistance empowers communities rather than fostering dependency.

- **Integration with Global Sustainability Goals:** The SSCDM can be expanded to align with global sustainability frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, integration with other frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, could be achieved by incorporating climate resilience strategies. Adaptations may involve community-based approaches to climate adaptation and mitigation, particularly in regions vulnerable to climate-related shocks.

- **Technology and Innovation Integration:** As technology advances, the SSCDM can be adapted to leverage digital tools and innovations for sustainable development. Digital platforms may enhance community participation, enable progress tracking, and facilitate knowledge exchange across communities worldwide. The integration of renewable energy technologies can promote energy self-sufficiency in remote areas, while emerging technologies such as blockchain (for transparent resource management) and artificial intelligence (for predictive analytics in agriculture) can enhance efficiency and accountability. Incorporating these innovations would allow the model to evolve in response to 21st-century challenges while upholding its principles of self-reliance and sustainability.

- **Global Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange:** The model could be scaled globally by fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among communities applying similar principles. An international network of self-reliant communities could be established to share best practices, lessons learned, and innovations. Developing a global platform or consortium where diverse communities exchange data and support one another's development would significantly strengthen global scaling efforts, ensuring the model's continued relevance across varied contexts.

- **Addressing Global Challenges through Local Solutions:** Finally, the SSCDM could be adapted to address pressing global challenges such as migration, urbanization, and pandemics by promoting local solutions that build community resilience. For instance, in areas affected by high out-migration, the model could prioritize creating local economic opportunities that encourage residents to remain and contribute to community development. Similarly, tailored guidelines for community preparedness and response could help build resilience against global shocks, such as economic crises or health pandemics. Integrating traditional knowledge with modern practices would further reinforce robust, self-reliant communities capable of withstanding global disruptions.

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Annex

A Framework for Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development

Factors/Elements	Indicators
Factor 1: Community Participation	
1.1 Common Goals: Establishing a shared vision for the community's future, with clear goals everyone can support.	1.1.1 The community has problems or common issues in community development. 1.1.2 The proportion of people in the community who are aware of the goals or common issues in community development.
1.2 Shared Core Values: The shared values unite the community and align individual efforts towards a common purpose with harmony.	1.2.1 The community has a common agreement or morality for living together. 1.2.2 The proportion of people in the community who agree with the common agreement or morality for living together. 1.2.3 The proportion of people in the community who act according to the common agreement or morality for living together.
1.3 Group Activities: Encouraging collective action through activities that bring people together, such as community meetings, workshops, and social events. These activities build trust, strengthen social bonds, and create a supportive environment where ideas and resources can be shared.	1.3.1 The community has groups to develop the community, such as professional development groups, quality of life development groups, and social development groups. 1.3.2 The groups are diverse, according to the needs of community development. 1.3.3 The proportion of people in the community who are members of at least one activity group, network, or community organization.
1.4 Fostering Individual Growth: Providing training and education to build the skills and knowledge of community members, enabling them to contribute more effectively to development efforts. By investing in human capital, communities can ensure that they have the expertise needed to address complex challenges and seize opportunities	1.4.1 There are activities to enhance the capacity of people in the community. 1.4.2 There is an exchange of knowledge and management of knowledge together within the community. 1.4.3 There is an exploration or experimentation of various innovations to be applied to develop the community.

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A Framework for Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development

Factors/Elements	Indicators
Factor 2: Balance and Resilient Development	
2.1 Economic Stability: Developing local industries and businesses that provide stable employment and income for community members. This can involve promoting entrepreneurship, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and creating value-added products and services that meet local and external market demands.	2.1.1 Income stability compared to before joining the group activities 2.1.2 The main sources of income of people in the community are diverse 2.1.3 The proportion of households that save 2.1.4 The proportion of money paid to debts to annual income
2.2 Environmental Sustainability: Implementing practices that protect natural resources and promote biodiversity, such as sustainable agriculture, reforestation, and waste reduction. Communities can adopt environmentally friendly technologies, conserve water and soil resources, and engage in conservation efforts that safeguard ecosystems.	2.2.1 Natural resources are managed for sustainable use. 2.2.2 Household waste is managed (including waste from consumption and the production process, such as garbage, wastewater, etc.) 2.2.3 Knowledge of production processes that consider natural resources and waste management is promoted or disseminated.
2.3 Social Well-being: Enhancing access to essential services like healthcare, education, and housing, improving overall well-being. This can involve building and maintaining infrastructure, providing social services, and ensuring that basic needs are met for all community members.	2.3.1 Community welfare to improve quality of life 2.3.2 Results from joining various groups in the community
2.4 Cultural Pride: Promoting cultural heritage and traditions, fostering a sense of identity and pride among community members. Cultural activities, festivals, and educational programs can celebrate and preserve local customs, languages, and artistic expressions.	2.4.1 Appreciate, cherish, and conserve good culture and traditions that are the shared identity of people in the community. 2.4.2 Promote the use or development of local wisdom to pass on pride to the next generation with dignity.

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A Framework for Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development

Factors/Elements	Indicators
Factor 3: Database-Driven Development	
3.1 Comprehensive Community Information Systems: Establishing databases that capture a wide range of data, from demographic information to resource inventories and project outcomes. These systems can provide valuable insights into community needs, strengths, and trends.	3.1.1 There is data collection for effective community development. 3.1.2 Community database covers various dimensions for use in community development. 3.1.3 Proportion of community development activities that utilize community database.
3.2 Community Involvement in Database Creation and Utilization: Engaging community members in data collection and analysis, ensuring that the information is relevant and useful for local needs. Participatory approaches to data management can enhance transparency, accountability, and community trust.	3.2.1 Community members participate in checking and updating the database 3.2.2 Proportion of community members who participate in the creation of the database 3.2.3 Proportion of community members who jointly check the accuracy of the database
Factor 4: Knowledgeable and Moral Leadership	
4.1 Visionary Leaders: Leaders who can articulate a clear vision for the community's future and inspire others to work towards it. Visionary leaders can identify opportunities, set strategic goals, and mobilize resources and people to achieve them.	4.1.1 The core leaders have the skills to lead development. 4.1.2 The core leaders have morality and are accepted.
4.2 Diverse Expertise: Leaders with a broad range of skills and knowledge, from technical expertise to interpersonal skills. Effective leaders can navigate complex challenges, build alliances, and drive innovation and continuous improvement.	4.2.1 Community development core groups can work together and can pass on knowledge to the next generation.
4.3 Support from a Community Development Network: Access to external resources and support from organizations and agencies that can provide additional expertise and funding. Strong networks can facilitate knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collaboration on shared goals.	4.3.1 There is a network that supports the community to be self-reliant.

Annex

A Framework for Sustainable and Self-Reliant Community Development

Factors/Elements	Indicators
Factor 5: Good Governance-Based Community Management	
5.1 Effective Management Mechanisms: Implementing systems and processes that facilitate efficient and transparent decisionmaking and resource allocation. Good governance mechanisms can include participatory planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation processes.	5.1.1 There is a community development committee. 5.1.2 There is a community development plan. 5.1.3 There are rules, regulations, and regulations for living together in the community. 5.1.4 The various committees in the community work together effectively.
5.2 Resource Management: Ensuring that community resources are used wisely and sustainably, with a focus on long-term benefits. This can involve managing natural resources, financial assets, and human capital in ways that balance current needs with prospects.	5.2.1 There is an agreement on joint resource management. 5.2.2 The proportion of people in the community who can benefit from the community's shared resources. 5.2.3 The community can effectively manage shared resources according to the rules.
5.3 Communication Channels: Creating open and effective channels of communication within the community and with external stakeholders. Clear and consistent communication can build trust, foster collaboration, and enhance the visibility and impact of community initiatives	5.3.1 There are various channels of communication within the community. 5.3.2 The proportion of people in the community who can access information communicated in the community. 5.3.3 The management of community information is effective and beneficial.
5.4 Step-by-Step Development: Following a structured approach to development that allows for incremental progress and continuous learning. A phased approach can help communities adapt to changing circumstances, manage risks, and build resilience over time, resulting in net migration to the community.	5.4.1 Community development is step by step, following the new theory of royal initiative. 5.4.2 It is a model community for other communities to develop according to the royal philosophy. 5.4.3 There is net immigration (the number of people moving into the community minus the number of people moving out of the community).