

Sufficiency Economy and a Community in Transition

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Abstract

This article analyzed the Golden Land Khoiruttakwa Community, or the so-called Islam Lamsai Community, located in Bangkok. The community has successfully implemented the Sufficiency Economy and is currently undergoing a crucial transition. The aim of the study was to highlight the interlinkage between the community and the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy. Also, this study analyzed local adaptations as well as the natural and social impacts of the application of the Sufficiency Economy philosophy from 2002 onwards. The methodology was based on secondary data analysis. Results of the study showed that for 15 years, from 2002 to 2017, Sufficiency Economy provided new and valuable options for farming management and uplifted members' quality of life. The legacy of the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy has lasted and benefited people until today. However, the Islam Lamsai Community has recently entered a next wave of transition. New challenges facing the community included the de-linking of young people from the local agricultural identity and an increase in urban development, provoking locals to sell their land and move to new places. Last but not least, as the population ages and farmers retired, there was a growing labor shortage. This paper argued that to build up the sustainability of the Sufficiency Economy suitable for an agriculture-based country such as Thailand, both the cultivation of values in the young generation and broad community participation were crucial.

Keywords: Sufficiency Economy, Community, Transition, Sustainability, Bangkok

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Introduction

Chum Chon Pàen Din Tong Khoiruttakwa can be translated to English as Golden Land Khoiruttakwa Community. “Khoiruttakwa” is really a composite of two words: *Khoirut* means *goodness*, and *takwa*, meaning *to live a disciplined life for Allah*. Chum Chon Pàen Din Tong Khoiruttakwa, or the so-called *Islam Lamsai Community*, is located in Khok Faet sub-district of Nong Chok district in the east of Bangkok. It is the first community of Bangkok that was officially established in 2006 (B.E. 2549) as the New Theory Agriculture Learning Center by Bangkok Metropolis following H.M. King Bhumibol's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (Naewna, 2006). Beginning in the years 1831 to 1838, there were a number of riots against Siam by its tributary states, namely Kedah, Patani, Kelantan and Terengganu (Salleh, 2012). These attacks caused the King of Siam - *Phrabat Somdet Phra Ramathibodi Sri Sinthra Maha Jessadabodindra Phra Nang Klao Chao Yu Hua*, also known as *King Rama III*, to suppress the southern rebels with massive force and to transport war

captives from the south to Bangkok (Falarti, 2013 and Roy, 2017). The war captives described themselves as Muslim and after the forced migration, captives were mostly relocated to the eastern areas of Bangkok including Khlong Saen Saep, Hua Mark, Bangkapi, Minburi especially Nong Chok (Jitmoud, 1988). Land in the Islam Lamsai Community was first pioneered and developed approximately 140 years ago (Nong Chok Travel, 2015), estimated to be in the year of 1875 or B.E. 2418 (as of 2015) by the Muslim couple from the south, *Ibrahim* and *Sani* (Knowledge Center, 2010). The couple had performed reforestation and had cultivated their own land along the Saen Saep Canal where they had successfully expanded their lands up to 2,000 Rai or around 800 Acre. The occupied lands eventually became the Islam Lamsai Community. Their descendants later inherited their lands and agricultural products. The community has undergone different stages of transitions, morphing from a mono-cropping agrarian village to a multiple-cropping community with livestock and services based on the

Sufficiency Economy. Today, the community is undergoing a variety of new changes. This paper used the Islam Lamsai Community as a case study for studying the implementation of Sufficiency Economy to the agricultural community in Bangkok and illustrates how inhabitants adapt and negotiate crucial transitions.

Background

Islam Lamsai Community was first officially registered as a community in 1994 in compliance with Bangkok Regulation B.E. 2534 (1991). The regulation is now amended to Bangkok Regulation regarding Community and Committee Community B.E. 2555 (2012) which is automatically in force with the prior registration of Islam Lamsai Community. In 2017, the Islam Lamsai Community consisted of 12 villages with a population of 804 people in 169 households. The figure is slightly different from the first registration in 1994 where there were 133 households with a total population of 668 people. More than 90 percent of the community members are Muslims (Knowledge Center, 2010). The community is

surrounded by waterways, forests, and massive rice fields. It is located in the eastern periphery of Bangkok, at considerable distance from the city center. This remoteness was a significant cause of the slow rate of development of the community over the past few decades.

Since the early settlement, residents in the community have made a living with farming and livestock. The two key principles of the community are sufficiency and Islamic faith. Sufficiency refers to living sufficiently based on the agricultural way of life which has been adopted for many years. Community members have accessed to foods through their own land, farming and livestock which are adequate for them to earn a living from. Islamic faith underpins the way of life of Muslims in the community. The former Islam Lamsai Community leader, Mr. Somchai Samantrakul, argued that Islam is a self-reliance way of living, meaning that a good man helps himself and others (Manager Online, 2007). This fosters a supportive environment in the community. These two elements,

Sufficiency Economy and Islamic faith, have been internalized as values for more than a century. The discipline of Islam for Muslims' practices and the concept of Sufficiency Economy, i.e. self-reliance and living sufficiently, are congruent. The consistency between the two principles enables Muslims in the community to accept voluntarily the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy together with agricultural theories introduced by His Majesty King Bhumibol and to apply these principles to their everyday lives and agricultural work. The application of Sufficiency Economy has been proved to enhance living conditions, elevate strong capacity building, and raise community income. Although, the community today (as of 2018) has undergone many changes, the Islam Lamsai Community still carries out their farming and livestock management practices posited on the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

Concept of Sufficiency Economy

The collapse of Thailand's economy in 1997 followed several promising years of high economic

performance (Fischer, 1998, p. 103). The Office of the Royal Development Projects Board (ORDPB) has revealed that Thailand opted to emphasize the capitalist economy. Specifically, Thailand used GDP as a symbol of economic success in order to make itself into the industrialized and the fifth tiger of Asia following Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. The economic preferences of the government at that time were factors that led directly to the financial breakdown. In this time of crisis, the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was recommended by H.M. King Bhumibol in order to offer guidance for the Thai people to survive through the economic stagnation (ORDPB, 2014).

"Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy based on the fundamental principle of Thai culture (ORDPB, 2014, p. 3)." In fact, the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is not only limited to Thai culture. It is also applicable to other cultures as well. Bhutan and Lesotho, for example, collaborate with Thailand on the Implementation of the Community Development Model based on the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2017 and Farmer's Weekly, 2011). As such, this paper proposes that the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy should be implemented in numerous regions where the economy is based largely on agriculture. It is a tool of development comprised of three key principles: Moderation, Reasonableness, and Self-immunity. Knowledge and virtue are a map for happiness; people are advised to pursue life with intelligence and perseverance (ORDPB, 2014, p. 36). "Moderation" implies appropriateness and living and doing activities at a suitable level; "Reasonableness" implies the application of a rational thought-process when making decisions and carrying out all activities. "Self-immunity" implies the ability to cope well with unpredictable or uncontrollable situations (ORDPB, 2014). The concept of Sufficiency Economy aims at Thai people for doing things and living considerately, not irrationally following the path of materialism. In the initial period, the philosophy was widely promoted in the countryside of Thailand

through various rural development models in order to promote self-reliance. The principle of Sufficiency Economy states that it shall be in accordance with the area's topography and sociological makeup. One should not change the area's topography which consists of earth, water, wind and fire and sociological conditions or ways of living, as each community has its own unique values, religious practices, job specialties and so on.

His Majesty King Bhumibol had searched for ways to uplift the people's well-being by initiating the royal development study centers in all regions of the country and introducing the Integrated Agriculture System and the New Theory Agriculture as guidelines for those who were interested in applying the new paradigm to their farming management. Integrated Agriculture System and the New Theory advise farmers to divide land for different purposes. The New Theory Agriculture suggests that land should be separated into four parts: Residential areas and Animal husbandry 10%; Rice fields 30%; Ponds 30% and Land for Multiple

cropping 30%. The land division prevents farmers from losing all investments due to annual climate fluctuations. Members of Islam Lamsai Community have adopted notions of various Royal development models to their farm such as Integrated Farming System, The New Theory, and the establishment of learning centers in the community in which all activities they have been implemented based on the idea of Sufficiency Economy.

Results and Discussion

Transitions of the Islam Lasmsai Community

The characteristics of the community have been influenced by the agriculture-based and strongly-linked Muslim community. Few changes have occurred to the area between the time when the settlement was founded to 1987. In the initial stage, before 1987 until 2001, nearly all of population described themselves as Muslim. The relationships among the members of the society were based on kinship. Women were expected to marry only other Muslims. Inhabitants relied heavily on

rice farming as the source of income as well as for household consumption. The area was covered by forests. Electricity and water were not fully available throughout the area. The community was far from development, rendering this Muslim community isolated from other parts of Bangkok.

The second stage was from 2002 to 2017 (B.E.2545-2560). The demographic factor in light of religion was still predominantly the Islamic population. Community members were largely connected via family ties even though some women married outsiders and left their hometown. The major occupation had not changed much; residents and their family members continued farming, while some did other extra jobs. However, some members, the minority, took other career paths, for instance, sellers, workers, teachers, and civil servants. The community landscape and inhabitants' way of life could be viewed as rural and traditional exemplified by plenty of rice fields, plantations, and cattle. In the past, farmers had encountered problems with their rice fields including pest, drought,

flood, and rice price slumps. These became major difficulties for rice farmers. Every year, one or more of these problems occurred and consequently, peasants suffered losses. Persistent losses pressured farmers to find better ways to manage their plantations. In the year 2002, the government strongly promoted the philosophy of Sufficient Economy to the public (Cooperatives and Economic and Social Development, 2004) and members of the community learned and implemented this philosophy in their working fields. A New Theory Agriculture Learning Center was established in the community in 2006 in accordance with the Sufficiency Economy developed by H.M. King Bhumibol. Based on this philosophy, the significant alterations were made to their rice farming management which led to the solid capacity building of the Islam Lamsai Community. The Islam Lamsai Community has shifted from mono-cropping to multiple-cropping based on the Sufficiency Economy.

The current stage, from 2017 onwards, can be considered a crucial

transition due to various changes of value, resulting from modern development and changes in the demographic structure of the community. Residents of the Islam Lamsai Community today continue to earn their living based on agriculture. Products are farmed both for selling and family consumption. According to the implementation of the Sufficiency Economy, farmers have grown different kinds of plants together with a fair proportion of livestock which can reduce risk of loss due to fluctuations in the climate. The community also earns income from fees that outsiders pay to visit the Learning center, homestays, and small businesses that members conduct for agricultural food processing. In terms of family and social connections within the community, relationships of members are still loosely biological linked. The kinship structure of biological relations between inhabitants of the community further strengthens the communal nature of the village (Nartsupha, 1996, p. 69). The preference of women to marry other Muslims still exists, but it is more flexible. The

environment of the community can still be viewed as countryside where there are rice field, cattle, and kinship-based relationships. New facilities and developments include conveniently accessible water, electricity, landlines, roads, schools, hospitals and supermarkets. The considerable changes also affect people's values. Diverse forms of development and urbanization have caused migration and a labor shortage in the agricultural sector. This predominantly affects the way of life of inhabitants of the Islam Lamsai Community. Next this paper considers how inhabitants have used the Sufficiency Economy ideas and principles to negotiate natural and social impacts.

Local adaptation to natural and social impacts

Climate impacts on agriculture have long been a main concern of farmers in the Islam Lamsai Community. Before the introduction of the concept of Sufficiency Economy in 2002, together with numerous examples of activities from Royal development projects, members normally grew only rice in their

fields. Once flood, drought, or pest spreading occurred, they suffered losses repeatedly. Until the emergence and application of Sufficiency Economy and its component details that suit the particular locality were implemented, members adapted their working principles to improve their farming management. Since 2002, each household has developed new ways to manage their farming practices and has begun to carry more domesticated livestock.

The nature of agricultural work requires time and massive labor from all members of the household. Perhaps the most interesting finding of this study is that the community has been well equipped with capital and resources that has enabled the successful implementation of the Sufficiency Economy. The prime capital is social capital represented through members who are well connected because of the kinship-based relationships and the deep roots of the community. These have accumulated familiarity among members. These relationships also allow community members to be used to each

other and continue their farming job including establishing strong networks among members. Cultural capital is also created by a religious sense of belonging. Islamic principles involve a sense of brotherhood among Muslims, self-reliance, and sharing with others. These virtues strengthen unity and mutual support among members which make farming work feasible. Economic capital is clearly demonstrated by resources that members possess such as fertile lands, rich agricultural productivities and abundant water. Most importantly, the aforementioned three capitals are combined to become a symbolic capital of the Islam Lamsai Community. This bolsters the credentials of the community. Its leaders, as the representatives, can bring up community strengths when negotiating with other agencies. The four types of capital, namely social, cultural, economic, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1984) fit livelihoods where these capitals are beneficial for the community, such as agriculture. They also enable leaders to better advocate for the community, raising symbolic capital by emphasizing its history,

religious specificity, long farming conduct, and unique geography, that is perhaps the only area of Bangkok that needs to be conserved. The crucial characteristics of the Islam Lamsai Community are explored to empower members of the community and utilized as bargaining tools for attracting funds and subsidies from the government and non-government organizations. The Islamic identity -social, cultural, and symbolic capital including economic capital- has been used in political negotiation among government and other agencies. This has led to infrastructure development initiated by the government in the community and surrounding areas to greatly influence inhabitants to adapt in ways that improve the quality of their everyday lives.

Strengths facilitate the Islam Lamsai Community to adapt to new agricultural methods and economic systems. Members of the community have adopted the King's philosophy and community development models and have applied them to their lands, which finally became seven learning centers.

The established learning centers include

- 1) The New Theory Agriculture Learning Center: containing fruit and vegetable plantation, garden, residential area and seminar space, and a bio-diesel generator;
- 2) Integrated Agricultural System Learning Center: the components are rice field, vegetable garden, seasonal fruit, fishing husbandry, Herb processing, and Enzyme Ionic Plasma;
- 3) Livestock Learning Center: containing cattle, poultry and fish, for instance, black and white swans and catfish;
- 4) Home and Trees Learning Center: emphasizing the importance of trees and plantation. This center gathers flowering-plants, fruit trees, garden trees, and perennial plants for study;
- 5) Biochemical for life and environment Learning Center: the purpose of this center is to demonstrate that left materials such as dry and used wood can be reprocessed into gas and fuel;
- 6) Antique Utensils Museum Learning Center; this presents utensils and other apparatuses in daily life that people used in the old days; and
- 7) Sufficiency Economy, the New Theory Agriculture School, Learning School: land in this center is systematically divided

into 4 parts according to the New Theory's concept in order to educate people how the concept can be put into practice. These centers have attracted countless people who come to study how the implementation of the Sufficiency Economy into the actual community is accomplished successfully.

Moreover, social impacts are another movement that members adapt to raising the capacity building. The capacity building is reflected through three levels: building individual capacity, the organizational level, and the level of sectoral institutional support (Floridi et al, 2009). In light of building individual capacity, the Islam Lamsai Community contains a number of capable leaders who have pushed forward useful projects for the community, and the community also exhibits good teamwork among members. At the organizational level, the key characteristics of the community are reflective of the Muslim community at large and the application of Sufficiency Economy to the arguably last large agricultural area of Bangkok. These qualifications have helped the community to gain support from the

government, academic institutes, and private companies which have provided useful training for the community. Finally, at the level of sectorial institutional support, which implies cooperation with other agencies, there has been an increase in activity. Recently, there have been several coordinated efforts between the community and other stakeholders. Examples are Charoen Pokphand Group Co. Ltd, the leading company for the businesses of agro-industry and food. Through marketing and distribution this company has supported fish breed. King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang and Mahanakorn University of Technology have regularly visited the community and offered assistance by way of building a bio-diesel machine and have also run student internship programs so that students can have hands-on experience with the Sufficiency Economy in action. The government also plays a role in supporting the community. Funding of 60,000 baht is granted to the community per year for proposed community projects.

Advantages of the application of the Sufficiency Economy are not only limited to the augmentation of agricultural productivity and livestock, but also include benefits from services. These are additional positive social impacts that are enjoyed by all members of the community. The Islam Lamsai Community became well-known for its success in implementing different community development models in relation to the Sufficiency Economy. Academic institutes and travel agencies have selected the community to be a place for study to gain first-hand experience of the Sufficiency Economy in which locals earn income from their visit. It can be argued that the exploration of the Sufficiency Economy is flourishing and that the community can be a good example to others. However, it is undeniable that the community is being challenged in the year of 2018 in terms of sustainability of the Sufficiency Economy community.

Challenges and ways to sustain the Sufficiency Economy

Crucial challenges facing the Islam Lamsai Community can be categorized in three groups. First is the de-linking of agricultural work from the community. A number of young people disvalue farming work and prefer to work in the office sector which many consider to be less demanding, and which has a higher income potential and is more socially praised. Furthermore, the accessibility of education is sharply increasing, and thus people with agricultural backgrounds now have more opportunities to gain higher educational degrees and are able to decide which job sectors they prefer to work in. The idea that farmers are ranked in the low class still exists, and peasants are categorized as backward citizens that need development (Kemp, 1996, p.55). The long established social value has influenced the ideology of members of the Islam Lamsai Community and has caused some young people to abandon their farming identity. Second, there are the consequences of urbanization and development. Sirasoonthorn (2007, p.249) argues that it

is likely that more development causes urban, social, and environmental problems. In fact, the improvement of quality of life as a form of development can be accomplished together with environmental preservation as demonstrated from the implementation of the Sufficiency Economy. In the case of the Islam Lamsai Community, it encounters town expansion. Nong Chok has been transformed from a farming area to affordable residential area of the capital's suburb. Infrastructure has been provided and housing estates keep coming to the area. The land demands of the business sector causes land prices to rise and this tempts locals to accept a large amount of money in exchange of their lands. Migration and mobility then occur. Numerous members of the Islam Lamsai Community have left their land, and most importantly, their long established identity. Lastly, there is the lack of a labor force. Hoadley and Gunnarsson (1996, p. xi) analyzed that Thailand had benefited from cheap rural labor for exports of agricultural products. However, this is not the case anymore since Thai laborers today choose to work

overseas where payment is higher. Again, migrant workers from neighboring countries prefer to work in service sectors; this puts the elderly farm owners of the Islam Lamsai Community in critical condition. Aged people are not capable of exercising force like before; thus, the large amount of money from selling land can easily seem like the best option.

The abandonment of an agricultural way of life causes several problems for Thailand, including a lack of food security, the disappearance of a national culture, and possibly an oversupply of labor in industrial sectors. These challenges require sustainable development. In the vision outlined by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the commission for Sustainable Development has emphasized the role of the public sector. The public sector is to be the engine of growth that will facilitate private sectors which can benefit the macro economy, individuals and communities (Grossman, 2015, p.382). Sustainability can occur with cooperation of civil society. The state, academic

institutions, communities, and households need to play a role of socialization by strengthening the importance of agriculture and by valuing it. Most importantly, the government must further subsidize the Islam Lamsai Community in terms of funding, mentoring, and rewarding to strengthen the community and demonstrate this position clearly to young members. This will help to prevent them from becoming agricultural community drop-outs. Last but not least, the community needs to empower their members and promote community participation in order to increase their power of negotiation with the government and other agencies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since 2002, the Islam Lamsai Community has transformed itself from a mono-cropping agricultural system to a multi-cropping farming community based on methods of the Sufficiency Economy. After members in the community adopted the Sufficiency Economy to handle unpredictable climate impacts, they were no longer dependent merely

on rice plantations, but instead on diverse plantations, livestock, and services that have prevented them from investment loss. In cases of flood, where rice fields were extremely affected, farmers were still able to earn income from other sources. Three salient features of the Islam Lamsai Community are the strong ties between its Muslim members, its long history, and the unique qualities of its location. Members value their lands and the Islamic way of life. These enable the community to be united and strong. Nonetheless, the new era beginning in 2018 has challenged the sustainability of agriculture and the Sufficiency Economy due to the agricultural sectors abandonment by young people, the emergence of town

expansion, and the lack of a workforce. To promote the sustainability of agriculture and the Sufficiency Economy the cooperation of civil society is the engine needed to conserve and accelerate the sustainable growth. Smart farming should be implemented for use in agricultural production systems. It could save workforce and operation costs including resource consumption and human error. Community participation and socialization is needed in order to make young people realize the necessity of agricultural dedication. This needs to be carried out in order for them to come to value and respect a traditional Thai way of life which, without a doubt, is centered on agriculture.

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