

Self-reliance for the Nation

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Abstract

Transformation of urban attitudes is clearly reflected towards the project of “Self-reliance for the Nation”, which has fostered deep faith and understanding in the principles of the sufficiency economy through hands-on practice (Step 1). This involves practical actions in the manner of those who are poor and self-reliant, demonstrating that the decision to follow the principles of the sufficiency economy is feasible when learning through new experiences, accepting, and deciding to move forward in this path. This leads to a permanent change in lifestyle behavior, without reverting to the old ways. However, those striving for self-reliance for the nation often face resistance from family members who do not understand what drives this change (Step 2). When these self-reliant individuals encourage their close ones to open their minds, think together, and act together until they see results, it serves as concrete proof of effective actions, evident to themselves. This understanding spreads to those around them, who then join in driving the sufficiency economy forward to create a self-reliant and sharing society (Step 3).

Keywords— Self-reliance, Sharing society, Sufficiency economy

II. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Coronavirus 2019 (Covid-19) began in late 2019 and rapidly spread across the globe. Thailand's first suspected case was reported in January 2020, involving a 74-year-old Chinese female tourist who arrived in Bangkok on a flight from Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei Province, People's Republic of China [1]. Within the same year, the spread of the virus in Thailand escalated and became increasingly severe, prompting the Thai government to implement urgent measures to control the situation. These measures included social distancing, the closure of service venues and public spaces, and a lockdown in Bangkok, restricting unnecessary movements [2]. The severe situation led to widespread impacts, especially on the economy. People's incomes decreased, employment was reduced, and businesses came to a halt, affecting the country's economic growth. To address this crisis, general Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister of Thailand (2014–2023) issued an open letter to 20 of Thailand's wealthiest individuals, urging them to help the public in distress not by donating money but by initiating projects that would provide tangible assistance [3].

One of the projects proposed was the "Self-reliance for the Nation" launched by the Yoovidhya's family.

They collaborated with the Natural Agriculture Network and the Arsom Silp Institute of the Arts, focusing on adopting the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) and the knowledge bestowed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The project aimed to create a self-reliant society that could share resources, helping those affected by the Covid-19 crisis to recover and pass on assistance to the broader community. From the observations of researchers, the changes in the participants, as well as the benefits derived from the project, were evident. Therefore, this research aims to extract lessons

from 100 role model projects from the "Support Yourself, Support the Nation" initiative.

II. THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory U

Theory U describes an internal process of reflection that involves delaying judgments based on past experiences and prior knowledge. It emphasizes deep listening to foster inner awareness, leading to the emergence of new possibilities. The internal transformation process involves three stages: Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will. At the lowest point of the U, there is a realization of the "true value" of life, resulting in a profound and irreversible inner change [4].

The process of Theory U includes five stages of transformation:

Co-initiating: Halting familiar patterns and beginning a collaborative learning process through open-hearted listening.

Co-sensing: Observing and experiencing together with others and the environment, enabling a holistic perception and understanding of the true nature of life.

Co-presenting: Relaxing and reflecting, bringing oneself to a place of stillness, and opening to emerging inner insights.

Co-creating: Beginning to create something new based on the wisdom gained from the inner transformation, leading to action.

Co-evolving: Forming a new, balanced system that supports the newly emerged self, ensuring coherence and integration.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection Process

Researchers conducted fieldwork to conduct in-depth interviews using structured questionnaires to reflect the internal thoughts of the sample group (participants in the Self-reliance for the Nation's project, referred to here as self-reliant individuals). This involved observing behaviors and gathering data from various media that the self-reliant individuals had engaged with. Additionally, they questioned individuals associated with the self-reliant individuals who provided information, using structured questionnaires to extract lessons from those who participated in the self-reliance for the nation's project on the following 6-question topics:

Step 1: Problems Faced

Identify the challenges and issues that participants encounter when first entering the project.

Step 2: How to survive

Outline strategies that participants can use to overcome initial challenges and succeed in the project.

Step 3: Value Output

Describe the personal outcomes and values gained by participants through their involvement in the project.

Step 4: Value Outcome:

Identify the broader impacts or benefits of the project on other stakeholders or the community.

Step 5: Transformative Learning and New Value

Highlight the transformative learning experiences and new values that emerge from participating in the project.

Step 6: Social Entrepreneurship:

Utilize a 9-level ladder to assess stages of social entrepreneurship.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Analysis of data from in-depth interviews

From interviews conducted with various participants selected through targeted sampling, researchers scheduled appointments for in-depth interviews and participated in observational activities alongside the participants. This approach provided deep insights into responses to interview questions. Summarizing the findings:

Factors influencing participation in the "Self-Sufficiency for the Nation" project

The decision of individuals to join the project stems from a genuine interest aligned with their beliefs and a desire to gain understanding in areas they are confident about. They perceive the project as an opportunity to acquire knowledge and understanding in areas they are exploring.

The COVID-19 situation significantly affected the participation of these individuals in the project. While not directly impacting them economically or health-wise, many-faced unforeseen challenges during the pandemic. This global crisis heightened awareness of uncertainty and sudden changes, catching many unprepared to handle various impacts. Witnessing crisis work has inspired a cooperative spirit to confront multiple threats. In line with the research of [5] economic and social changes from the Covid-19 situation currently occurring where all parties focus and cooperate in solving various problems that arise because if the economy and society are not restored urgently It will result in the world's population having difficulty living in the risky situation with the COVID-19 situation.

Consequently, individuals are interested in finding ways to survive crises without focusing solely on themselves and their families. They also consider those vulnerable or experiencing significant difficulties. The primary reasons for their decision to participate in the project are as follows:

1. Influence from acquaintances who respect and trust the project, often relatives, siblings, or friends.
2. Faith in the agricultural theories of King Rama IX, despite most being urban, some have family or relatives involved in agriculture or land inheritance.
3. The crisis of COVID-19, which has affected people globally, prompted them to seek survival strategies for themselves, families, and the world.
4. Witnessing others' struggles during COVID-19 has motivated them to help those facing difficulties, shifting their focus from helping only those marginalized before the crisis.
5. Concerns about safe agriculture prompted them to seek safe food consumption, leading to health awareness adjustments.
6. Serious interest in practical training due to inadequate self-study through various media sources, prompting many to target natural agricultural curricula.

4.2 Self-reliance for the Nation's project

The course "Self-reliance for the Nation" starts with recruitment, where applicants are selected for training without any charge. The training begins at the Pannar Sufficiency Economy Learning Center, Pak Chong District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. It is called in short term "Pannar Center". Everyone have to learn about theories, concepts, and philosophies about SEP. Then, they adjusted themselves with the right attitudes and disciplines and also fostered group solidarity before practical fieldwork for five days at the training center. After that, they spent 10-day practical training at the teachers' homes. Participants reflect on their experiences as follows:

1. During the 5-day training at Pannar Center

Participants adjusted their attitudes, learned theories, built understanding and solidarity, and honed disciplined living habits. This phase helped participants:

- 1.1 Reflect on themselves and their desires, finding validation for their thoughts and beliefs.
- 1.2 Engage with like-minded individuals, exchanging ideas and gaining confidence in their path.
- 1.3 Establish foundational clarity and readiness for subsequent learning in every training centers.

2. During the 10-day practical training at the training centers

Participants chose joining at the training centers based on their interests, setting goals since the training at Pannar Center. They acquired broad knowledge and started defining expectations from the homes. This phase resulted in:

- 2.1 Demonstrating theories learned at Pannar Center through practical application, enhancing practical skills and personal development.
- 2.2 Experiencing rural agriculture and lifestyle firsthand, learning local arts and culture from each region's training centers.
- 2.3 Spending ten days in the teachers' homes allowed for mutual learning, fostering solidarity among participants who trained together and planned activities to give back to the teachers' homes and communities.
- 2.4 Confidence grew in participants due to the practical knowledge gained, seeing their teachers as guides who demonstrated and encouraged real-world application.

This process equipped participants with practical skills and a deeper understanding of applying theoretical knowledge in real-life situations, benefiting both themselves and the communities they live in.

3. After Training and Practical Application

After completing the training, most self-reliant individuals immediately put their newly acquired skills into practice. They had already been trained and had hands-on experience at the mentor's home. Some groups of self-reliant individuals had even planned projects in advance to implement in their own areas. They had also clarified any doubts with the mentor during the training. Furthermore, upon returning from the training, the worsening COVID-19 situation prompted these individuals to use the skills they had learned to sustain themselves and assist others in real-life situations, as detailed below:

1. Self-reliant individuals aimed to apply what they had learned, practiced, and observed in their work and daily lives. Those already engaged in agriculture implemented the new knowledge and skills on their land immediately, without hesitation, and with confidence in the mentor's teachings. They were supported by the mentor, fellow self-reliant individuals, and various networks through activities like "eating together" or visits from the mentor.

2. Most self-reliant individuals returned to adjust their agricultural practices according to new theories and applied the practical skills acquired at the mentor's home to their own land. They adopted integrated farming, abandoning monoculture, and grew crops that met the needs of themselves, their families, and communities, sharing the surplus with others. Some were able to expand their practices into successful business ventures, achieving their set goals.

3. Those not previously involved in agriculture turned to farming, creating food reserves for themselves, their families, communities, and neighbors. Even small spaces in condominiums were utilized to grow vegetables, providing benefits to residents and passersby. This was especially useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing urban residents to access fresh vegetables and medicinal herbs.

4. Individuals with land immediately began transforming their areas in a step-by-step manner as taught by the mentor. This included designing the layout, setting up water systems, improving soil quality, selecting suitable plant varieties, raising fish and poultry, and producing compost and fermented fertilizers for their agricultural and household needs.

5. Many full-time workers changed their approach to work, focusing not only on personal income but also on social contribution. They aimed to share happiness with those around them through their skills, whether it was music, cooking, organizing community events, or designing living spaces in line with the self-reliant philosophy.

6. The impact of the training was clearly visible across all areas. Each location became more prosperous, with sufficient resources for sustenance and use, reducing the need for external purchases. Even in the Thung Kula region, one of the driest areas in Thailand, self-reliant individuals were able to revitalize the land, creating lush and fertile conditions within just three years of applying their training and putting their knowledge into practice.

4.3 Personal Transformation

Self-reliant individuals who have completed the training experience a noticeable transformation. Initially, many may not fully understand what has changed within them, but they have faith in the teachings received during the hands-on training and activities. Over time, they develop understanding, awareness, and a sense of happiness in their actions, which they feel compelled to share with others. These individuals have learned how to drive societal change during the training and are ready to lead their communities in the right direction, as they believe. The specific changes observed in self-reliant individuals after training include:

1. Self-Discovery

1.1 Many self-reliant individuals discover themselves during the training, whether at the Pannar Center or the fieldwork training center. They describe it as the first time they had the opportunity to reflect deeply on their lives, guided by the mentor's teaching methods. They could directly ask the respected mentors any questions and exchange experiences and viewpoints with like-minded peers.

1.2 They find new meaning in life and happiness in living, which contrasts with their previous way of life.

2. Having a Life Goal

2.1 After training, self-reliant individuals return home with clear goals about what they should do next, how to do it, and why.

2.2 Most of these goals were already in their hearts; they just hadn't seen a way to achieve them.

2.3 The training equipped them with the knowledge and skills needed to systematically plan and achieve these goals.

3. Courage to Step Outside Long-Held Boundaries

3.1 A significant outcome is the courage to act on their beliefs once they are confident that their desired actions are correct. Some quit their jobs, some drastically changed their lifestyles, and some dedicated themselves entirely to social work without expecting anything in return.

3.2 A phrase that vividly illustrates this change is *"leaving the office and running through the tunnel for life"*, used by a self-reliant individual who left the traditional system to live according to their beliefs and found true fulfillment.

4. A Desire to Give, Share, and Drive Societal Change

4.1 Most self-reliant individuals did not face severe economic or health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, even those significantly affected still felt compassion for others in more challenging situations, inspiring them to work for the community and share what they had. Most importantly, they wanted others to experience the same happiness they found through the Self-reliance for the nation program.

4.2 The desire to work for the community and help others, which had always been present in these individuals, became even more pronounced after the training. They felt ready to act immediately. One self-reliant individual expressed these sentiments as follows:

"We are small individuals receiving the grace of what the King has done, especially Self-reliance for the nation, which is the warmth in our journey. Alone, we are like worker ants, each with different family and social contexts. We take what we've learned from this program to share, demonstrate, or exchange knowledge with others. It's an indescribable feeling of fulfillment."

4.4 Impact on Surroundings, Family, Parents, Siblings, Community, and Society

The changes in self-reliant individuals often elicit similar reactions from those around them, including family, parents, siblings, the community, and society. Initially, there is a general lack of understanding and skepticism about what these individuals are trying to achieve. Some even perceive them as acting irrationally or differently from the norm, with reactions ranging from confusion to outright disbelief.

1. Negative Reactions from Family, Community, and Society

1.1 Most people continue to practice monoculture, growing crops for sale and using chemical fertilizers, and are resistant to change. For example, those who traditionally grow rice believe that lowland areas should be reserved solely for rice cultivation and oppose the idea of creating ponds or raised beds, fearing it would render the land unsuitable for rice farming.

1.2 There is skepticism about the ability of individuals without prior experience to teach established farmers new methods, particularly when these new practices deviate significantly from traditional ones.

1.3 In some families, these differing views have led to significant conflicts, with family members arguing over whether chemical-based or organic farming methods yield better results.

2. Challenges in Influencing Others

2.1 Upon returning to their communities, self-reliant individuals faced the challenge of implementing their plans amidst the growing severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected everyone's daily lives, including those of their family and community members.

2.2 The tangible results of their efforts, such as the establishment of food reserves based on new agricultural theories, gradually demonstrated the benefits to their families and communities.

2.3 Initiatives like communal work projects led by self-reliant groups began to change perceptions. People became curious about what these individuals were doing, how they were achieving it, and the potential benefits, leading to a greater understanding of an agreement with the self-reliant philosophy.

3. Acceptance and Broader Impact

As family members and the community began to understand and support the self-reliant individuals' methods, the movement gained momentum. With the individuals' preparedness, knowledge, and support networks, the changes accelerated, leading to significant transformations in many areas. Successful

models often started with the integration of key community institutions-households, temples, and schools-ensuring practical, sustainable, and visible changes throughout the community.

4.5 Key Features of the Self-reliance Model for the Nation

1. Distinctiveness in Themes and Content

The Self-reliance for the Nation project's training content is distinguished by the diversity of its participants. This diversity stems from the project's inception during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected urban populations, including salaried workers, business owners, and merchants, while rural agricultural communities were less impacted. Consequently, the project targeted urban individuals, categorizing them into three primary groups:

1.1 Participants with an agricultural background but not currently engaged in farming.

1.2 Participants actively involved in agriculture.

1.3 Participants with no agricultural background. Interviews with these groups revealed that most participants were urban dwellers with familial ties to rural areas engaged in monoculture agriculture. This demographic, representing a significant portion of the urban workforce, often has a rural family background in agriculture but lacks direct farming experience. These individuals joined the project hoping to apply new knowledge to their family lands, viewing the agricultural courses as potentially irrelevant but seeing value in the Self-reliance focus, especially given the impacts of COVID-19. Many applied multiple times before being accepted.

2. Distinctiveness in Training Processes

The training process for self-reliant individuals stands out for its emphasis on practical experience in real-world settings, unlike traditional training that focuses on theoretical knowledge without hands-on practice. Trainees are supported by trainers in all aspects, with the diverse professional backgrounds of participants fostering mutual learning and support. The program includes various activities beyond agriculture, promoting collaboration among participants from different fields.

The training begins with a foundational day where participants decide whether to continue, enhancing their commitment to the program. During the five-day training at the Pannar Center, participants experience personal growth, self-discovery, and strong peer connections, preparing them for further training at teacher homes. The 10-day teacher home training involves practical, hands-on learning under the guidance of skilled trainers, leading to significant transformations in participants' understanding and skills. This approach equips them to apply their knowledge effectively upon returning to their communities.

3. Distinctiveness in Project Expansion

The training aims for clear outcomes, encouraging participants to apply the nine-step ladder theory: starting with self-development and expanding to community and societal levels. Participants envision transforming their communities and society, driven by the skills and knowledge gained from the Self-reliance for the Nation project. The ultimate goal is to create a self-reliant, sharing society.

Participants plan to implement their unique skills and knowledge, supported by a network of fellow participants and teacher homes. This expansion may include activities like music, sports, cooking, arts, and crafts, demonstrating the creative and unique approaches of self-reliant individuals. Examples include initiatives like "Food Security from the Back" and "Invite Friends to Move the World," showing the project's continuous evolution and broad impact through collaborative efforts.

4. Direction of the Model

Post-training, participants share a unified vision aligned with the project's goals. The Self-reliance for the Nation project, initiated during a crisis, aims to prepare individuals for current and future challenges. The project's conceptual framework fosters a group of diverse yet like-minded individuals, ready to face any situation and support the broader community. Researchers note that participants are progressing from problem-solving approaches to proactive strategies, preparing society for future challenges.

Observations and Recommendations

1. Key Success Factors: Effective training, follow-up processes, and network-building are crucial for the project's sustainability and continuity. Activities like visits, community meals, and collaboration in various events (e.g., tree planting, youth camps) help foster a collective social movement.

2. Real Impact: The transformations in participants and surrounding communities demonstrate the project's potential to foster a genuinely self-reliant, sharing society. The nine-step ladder framework guides sustainable social development, affecting both physical and attitudinal changes in society.

3. Expansion and Integration: The spread of self-reliant individuals' initiatives, supported by connections with other networks, facilitates the creation of a self-reliant, sharing society. The project's approach, characterized by innovative and diverse initiatives, ensures that no one is left behind in these efforts.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Self-reliant individuals share a common goal of driving social change through various methods. Many start with small-scale projects around themselves, aiming to eventually impact the wider society. Those with the capacity to effect meaningful change have successfully implemented models that promote self-reliant and sharing communities based on the philosophy of a sufficiency economy. The shared goals of these self-reliant individuals can be categorized as follows:

1. Starting Small and Expanding to the Wider Community

Some self-reliant individuals wish to begin with small, personal projects that bring them joy and then share these with others, recognizing the potential for broader positive impacts [7]. Self-reliance can begin at the individual level where the individual evaluates his or her own resources and abilities. before promoting others. Their specific goals include:

1.1.

Providing nutritious breakfast to children from low-income families who lack parental care, ensuring that these children have access to healthy food that supports their physical and mental development.

1.2. Expanding community sports areas, they have developed, therefore other communities in Bangkok can also benefit from sports facilities suitable for all genders and ages, promoting overall community health.

1.3. Advocating for safe agriculture practices to protect both farmers and consumers from harmful chemicals.

1.4. Helping to alleviate community debt by encouraging the adoption of new agricultural theories to reduce expenses and increase income, thus addressing financial burdens.

2. Establishing Learning Centers

Self-reliant individuals with the readiness and potential to expand their projects aim to establish learning centers in their areas. These centers are envisioned to engage surrounding communities, including households, temples, and schools. Activities organized at these centers will invite local community members, religious leaders, teachers, and students to participate, fostering understanding and interest. This engagement aims to build community involvement from the outset and promote collective learning and action. Its evident result is consistent with the work of [6] stating that acting together within communities can contribute to the longevity of the engagement.

3. Demonstrating Successful Practices

Those self-reliant individuals who focus on working their own land aim to serve as examples for their surrounding communities. They seek to demonstrate how the training and practices they have adopted positively transform their land and lives. Their goal is to encourage others to adopt similar practices, thereby building a safe and sustainable food supply for every household [8]. Self-sustaining communities are designed to be resilient in the face of external crises and disruptions. By producing their own food, generating renewable energy, and implementing water management systems, these communities are better prepared to handle emergencies and adapt to changing circumstances.

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