

# WOMEN'S ROLE TOWARDS THE PARTICIPATION ON PHILOSOPHY OF THE SUFFICIENCY ECONOMY

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## ABSTRACT

*The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include 1) the role of women toward the participation on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, 2) the opinions and suggestions of stakeholders involving in the participation of women, and 3) practical guidelines for promoting women's role in participating on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The multistage random sampling was employed in the sampling process by recruiting 450-woman participants from each region for the total of 2,250 participants in the study. A questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and standard deviation. Another set of 30 informants was also recruited from stakeholders of the sub-district administrative organization. An in-depth interview and a focus group were conducted for the data collection in this part.*

*The results revealed that the majority of women play a role in the participation by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in all aspects studied. Women play the most significant part and greatest involvement in the perception of information, which is the first and essential step of the participation process. The mechanism of information awareness was found through publicity and community membership. Then the understanding of information led them to play a role in accessing their rights and duties. Even though this process could bring more opportunities in activity participation.*

**Keywords:** Sufficiency Economy, Women, Participation, Stakeholder, Philosophy.

## INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

The core of government administration policy in Thailand since the National Economic and Social Development Plan Issue 9 (2002-2006 or BE2545-2549) has brought the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into consideration. According to the royal initiative of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great (Rama IX) of Thailand, the concept provides a guiding philosophy in the development and administration of the country. “*Sufficiency Economy*” is a philosophy pointing to a practical guideline of livings and conduct for people at all levels, covering from the family unit, community unit, to the national level (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020). The philosophy has been grounded on the Thai culture and bestowed for more than 30 years as in 2020. It is a development approach on the basis of moderate practice, and precaution through the integration of modesty, rationality, self-preparation, as well as applying knowledge and virtue as the basis for livings. Most importantly, there must be “*consciousness, wisdom, and determination*” that will lead to true “*happiness*” in life (Chaipattana Foundation, 2020). The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a way of livings that was based on the traditional way of Thai society, so it meets timeless application. The concept points to viewing the world as a changeable system, focusing on surviving a crisis, and maintaining a stable and sustainable development. The characteristics of the Sufficiency Economy can be

brought into practice by emphasizing on the neutral and step-by-step development according to the definition. Sufficiency must consist of three attributes at the same time: modesty, rationality, and self-preparation. Modesty means avoidance of extremes that fits without persecution of self and others. Rationality refers to making decisions about the level of self-sufficiency by logical considering the related factors as well as taking the expected consequences of the action into account. The last attribute is self-preparation referring to being prepared to crises and changes in all areas by taking the possibility of upcoming situations in the near and distant future into account.

Role and status of Thai women since the political system change from the absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1932, when the first constitution of Thailand was issued. It has decreed that women and men have equal rights to exercise voting and the first female member of parliament (MP) was elected in 1949. The first female judge was appointed in 1965. In 1979, the first long-term women's development plan (1982-2001 or BE2525-2544) was drafted by the subcommittees on the development of women's activities and roles. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council and the cabinet resolution approved 1992 as the "*Year of Thai Women*" to commemorate and celebrate the occasion of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother's 60th birthday anniversary (National Statistical Office, 2020a). The current status of Thai women has been recognized in more areas. In the past two decades, women's education has been improved considerably (National Statistical Office, 2020b). Women gradually play more roles in society and become a major force in driving the philosophy into practice. The implementation can start from a family to the community and society. This philosophy also guides people on the change in consumption habits that contribute to the benefits of country development. Tongkaimook (2010) is a key person who applies this guideline for improving the living conditions of the population in different areas across the country. He came up with a successful model, whose several communities could also be applied. However, some communities still face the intangible execution, lack of continuity, lack of proper internal management within the community. In some areas, the problem of selling land and renting it back from the capitalists has kept the livings of that community far from the basis of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The overall picture of people in rural areas is a major problem in the development of quality of life and the improvement of their livelihoods. It is a challenge to the government and related agencies in development planning. In addition to that, land management for the utmost benefits and organizing activities of a Sufficiency Economy learning center may lead to the process of cooperation from the community in making a living on the concept of the Sufficiency Economy. This process can promote the people in that community to have better livings (Yodprudtikan, 2007).

For those reasons, the researcher conducted this research project on the role of women in Sufficiency Economy Philosophy activities to find out how women play a role and play a part in driving the sufficiency economy concept. The study examined possibilities of promoting, supporting, or encouraging women in all regions to implement the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as a foundation of their family's daily life. The investigation included the appropriateness of the guideline implementation, indicating through a wise living that can survive a competitive condition or the change of global trend. This foundation could bring in a strong community that is self-contained. It will become a community that is full of balance, stability, and sustainability, which is a crucial foundation for national development in the future.

## Objectives

1. To understand the role of women toward the participation on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy
2. To investigate the opinions and suggestions of stakeholders involving in the participation of women
3. To acquire practical guidelines for promoting women's role in participating on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

## METHODOLOGY

The study consisted of three sources of data: 1) data from document analysis, 2) data from questionnaires, and 3) data from in-depth interviews through a focus group.

### Population and Sampling

Population of this research included women in the sub-district administrative organization and stakeholders involving with all sub-district administrative organizations in Thailand

Samples of this research were classified as follows:

#### Women in the sub-district administrative organization

This group of samples was selected using a multi-stage sampling random method as the following procedures:

1. Stage One: a simple random sampling was carried out by random drawing one province out of each of all five regions. All of the five drew provinces were Nakhon Pathom (Central Region), Phuket (Southern Region), Khon Kaen (Northeastern Region), Chiang Mai (Northern Region), and Chonburi (Eastern Region).
2. Stage Two: a stratified random sampling was carried out by dividing the sub-district administrative organizations (SAO, hereafter) in each province into three groups, including a small-size, a medium-size, and a large-size. A total of 2,250 samples were subsequently recruited through a simple random sampling, consisting of 450 samples in each of the five provinces by a selection of 150 participants from a small-sized SAO, 120 participants from a medium-sized SAO, and 150 participants from a large-sized SAO.

#### Stakeholders involving with the sub-district administrative organizations across Thailand

This group of samples was invited to participate in an in-depth interview through a focus group by purposive sampling. The 155 samples consisted of 31 samples of the chief administrators of the SAO and officials in each of the five regions: Central Region (Nakhon Pathom), Southern Region (Phuket), Northeast Region. (Khon Kaen), Northern Region (Chiang Mai), and Eastern Region (Chon Buri).

### Research Tools

This research employed questionnaires as a key tool for data collection. The questionnaires were developed through a process of studying related concepts and theories and consulting experts. The questionnaires were defined into two sets as follows:

#### The first set of the questionnaires was used with the woman samples

It was developed to answer the first objective of the study: To understand the role of women toward the participation on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, through two parts:

1. Part 1: Basic information of respondents
2. Part 2: Role of women toward the participation on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in aspects of perception of news and information, understanding of rights and duties, the possibility of participation, and independence of participation.

### **The second set of the questionnaires was for the stakeholder samples**

It comprised of three parts, which were:

1. Part 1: Basic information of respondents
2. Part 2: Opinions and suggestions on the participation of women in relation to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy
3. Part 3: Guidelines for encouraging women to initiate a role in participating in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy activities

### **Instrument Testing**

The validity and reliability of the developed questionnaires were tested as follows:

#### **Validity**

Content validity and accuracy of the questionnaire questions were verified by three experts, in relation to the objectives of the study. The questionnaires were consequently revised, according to the expert comments, further data collection.

#### **Reliability**

The revised questionnaires were tried out with 15 cases of population homogeneous to the samples. Cronbach's alpha was employed as a statistical analysis to verify the consistency and confidence of the questionnaires.

### **Data Analysis**

The research data were processed with statistical software package SPSS for Windows using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and mean and standard deviation. The analysis of qualitative data included opinions, suggestions, as well as guidelines for promoting women's role in participating in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy activities.

## **RESULTS**

This research aimed to study the women's role in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy activities in four aspects: perception of information, understanding of rights and duties, an opportunity of activity participation, and independence of involvement. The study may contribute to the planning guideline on promoting women to play a role in the participation of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy activities. The results of this research are presented with the overview of the country and by regions as follows:

### **Overview of the Country**

The sample group was female with an average age of 45 years old, age range 41-50 years old (29.29%). The majority of the samples graduated from primary school to secondary

school (40.69%). Most of them were married and worked as general workers and agricultural workers, 28.67% and 26.23%, respectively. The income was less than 10,000 baht per month on average. Over half of samples (67.65%) held membership of the existing community groups within their sub-district. Most of them joined a housewife group community enterprise. Most of the women played a role and participated in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy activities in all aspects studied. The greatest role and participation were found in the perception of information (44.52%). When considering regular participation and frequency, it pointed out that the most frequent participation by the women understood of the rights and duties (66.96%), followed by the perception of information (68.35%), opportunity of activity participation (66.11%), and independence of involvement (65.11%), respectively.

## RESULTS BY REGION

### Central Region

The majority of women in the Central Region were between 51-60 years of age. Most of them had primary to secondary education and were married. General employment was found to be a prominent career for women in this area with less than 10,000 baht of an income per month. They registered as members of various groups in the sub-district with the greatest memberships in housewife groups. Most of the Central Region women played a role in the participation of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in all areas studied. The greatest role and participation were found on understanding the rights and duties (30.42), followed by the independence of participation (29.57%). The women had several opportunities of participating freely in terms of expressing generosity to each other. It is an opportunity to join freely with the community with the perception of loyalty and unity.

In promoting knowledge in the application of sufficiency economy philosophy to fulfil a living, each of the women had a different level of ability in execution. Therefore, relevant knowledge and concept must be introduced to the women in villages within each sub-district for them to be able to keep their household accounting. The women will be aware of income and expenses. The saving by growing home organic vegetables should be also introduced as well as the establishment of a community professional group such as a sun-dried tilapia group, a gac juice group, and a gac soap group. Other alternatives of encouraging their participation included participating in public relations in the community for promoting the understanding of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, growing on-fence vegetables for household and merchandizing, fish and chicken farming, raising larvae for sale within a sub-district, participating in fostering a women group in taking part in their extra occupation to increase income and reduce family expenses.

### Northern Region

The majority of women were aged between 51-60 years of age with primary to secondary education. Most of them were married and worked as a general worker with less than 10,000 baht of income per month. They registered as a member in various community groups within their sub-district and a housewife group was prominent. Most Northern women played a role in all aspects of participation in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy activities. The greatest role and participation were found in the perception of information (15.74%). Women in the North frequently perceived information that could lead to an understanding of the living on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

A woman plays an integral role in every society and plays a vital role in a range of organizations, from small to large. Each of the women gets involved in various social

activities in the community. In this area, the establishment of a housewife group, as well as each village, aimed at cooperating in learning about growing vegetables, contributing to better environmental quality, and assisting women and children who have been subjected to various acts e.g. oppression, sexual assault, and sexual abuse, etc. The control of these incidents must be promoted by the government to strengthen the ethical restriction and law-abidingness. Government support was required in encouraging the community leaders to patrol and provide some advice on establishing a women group. This support will lead to a better self-independence and a family problem-solving. More meetings and discussions in a group were required for the members to exchange knowledge and help deal with issues of each other.

### **Southern Region**

Most of the Southern women aged between 41-60 years old. Almost half of them had a bachelor's degree with a single status. The majority of occupation was government officials, and employees with an income of less than 10,000 baht per month. They hold membership of different community groups in their sub-district, but the savings group was the most popular. Most of the southern women played a role in all aspects of participation on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The most role and participation was in the perception of information (23.95%). Women in the South had a great awareness of information related to reducing their expenses. They often perceived degeneracy-free information and took part in the perception of information about taking care of all members for having good moral behaviours.

Southern women involved with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy on both roles as a mother and a wife as well as a community member. The role of motherhood was to raise children to know how to save, to be extravagant, to pursue sufficient knowledge on the profession and manage economic self-sufficiency, to avoid gambling, to spending reasonably, and pursuing additional knowledge that could be an extra career such as baking and cooking for more income into the household. The role of a community member was to participate in a campaign for women in the community to have awareness and recognize the importance of activities related to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. This participation can truly benefit oneself, family and community. In addition, women community leaders required the sub-district authorities to organize a women community group for occupational training. The members should be offered an opportunity to have professional training until becoming skilled in particular merchandise and being able to sell the merchandises for an additional income of individual and community. A concept of saving resolution or “Saccha Savings” from 1 baht a day at minimum. The conditions depend on the agreement of the women in that group. Apart from those, the need for support on the distribution of OTOP (One Tambon One Product) that utilizes the community resources and wisdom has been raised.

### **Northeastern Region**

The majority of women in the Northeast were aged between 51-60 years of age and had primary education. Most of them were married and worked as an agricultural worker with less than 10,000 baht of income per month. They were a member of various groups in the sub-district, but a housewife group had the greatest numbers of members. Most northern women played a role in all aspects of participation on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The greatest roles and participation were found in the perception of information (29.95%). The women in the Northeast had a frequent perception about reducing expenses as well as the

perception of news information about using disposed pots or containers in growing vegetables for household consumption.

Women in the Northeast have played a continuous role in driving the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The proofs of good examples of women leaders who live on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy were reflected through the way they reduced household expenses and having an extra career. In terms of being a good community member that help strengthen a community, they participated in the community development planning, which is self-reliant activity. Initiating an occupational activity for an extra income was proposed. Vegetable growing in the home garden and activities promoting loyalty and unity should be arranged to strengthen the community and exchange supports between members. The cultivation of awareness in work sacrifice and voluntary was recommended. Generating a network across sub-districts and districts of each occupational activity to provide women with an opportunity in applying their knowledge to strengthen their groups.

### **Eastern Region**

The majority of the Eastern women aged between 41-60 years of age and had primary to secondary education. They were married and worked as agricultural workers with less than 10,000 baht of income per month. They were a member of various groups in a sub-district, but most of them registered as a Village Health Volunteer (VHV). Most women in the East had a role and participation in all aspects on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The most participation was found in the perception of information (21.84%). The Eastern women participated in information about reducing expenses. They often perceived degeneracy-free information.

The Eastern women currently are more active in driving the activities of various departments, participating in different forums, and becoming more accepted. In a leadership role, they encourage people in a close circle, either in the family or in a workplace, to perceive the principle of self-sufficiency. They also facilitated persons who expertise in the principle to convey knowledge in a village or community meetings. The women promoted a saving in schools for youth to gain understanding at an early age. Youth would consequently have some idea to reduce expenses and increase income. Women also played an important role in caring for families as they need to raise children. Women had vitals roles in many aspects, both for society and for family. Sufficiency economy is a new concept that helps families increase income, reduce expenses, make a living, and live a happy life. People could share the exceeding and sell the rest after sharing. Women should be provided with up-to-date training of new knowledge from government agencies so that they can be adapted according to the local way of life. The activities should include encouraging farmer corporations such as growing home vegetables, doing household accounting, organizing sufficiency economy training, arranging community-support activities and training, setting up a relevant center, demonstrating the new theory of agriculture, marketing training, and training youth with saving technique. Planting trees and vegetables in the household can be an efficient alternative for savings. Organizing a free-alcohol day or a campaign on giving up on alcohol, drug, and gambling would help reduce several issues, including health problems, economic problem, and social problems.

## **DISCUSSION**

The research results reveal that the majority of women groups played a role in participation on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy of all aspects studied, namely,

perception of information, understanding of rights and duties, an opportunity of activity participation, and independence of involvement. When considering each aspect, it shows that women had the greatest role and participation in the perception of information, followed by understanding rights and duties, the opportunity of activity participation, and independence of involvement, respectively. This result informs that the majority of women across the country are informed with the news information which was an essential first step in getting involved. The information was received from public relations through various media or from participating as a member of social groups, thus allowing them to receive more information. When information was perceived, it led the women to access their own rights and duties. It also allowed a greater opportunity to participate in relevant activities. However, the women played a lower role in participation in terms of independence of participation than in other aspects. This lower rate of participation was directly resulted from their working age and being general workers with a low monthly income of less than 10,000 baht. They thus had to spend the most time on occupation and had less independent of participation than the other roles of participation. Key findings illustrate the involvement of the women in learning, dealing with problems in the village, participating in analyzing and prioritizing the village problems, taking part in planning the village development, participating in the village development operations, and participating in the monitoring and evaluation of the village development. This scenario is directly in line with the concepts and theories of Cohen & Uphoff (1980), which divided participation into four types: decision making, implementation, benefit, and evaluation. A similar pattern of results was obtained in the study of Kongmak (2007) that studied factors influencing the farmers in the adoption of activity patterns within the Sufficiency Economy Settlement in Wang Nam Khiao District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The study confirmed that participation in activities of learning development was one of the factors affecting the farmers' acceptance process of activity pattern adoption. It was clear that participation was an important factor that had an impact on the success of community development.

The result of this present study is also consistent with the work by Jaisue (2016) that studied the factors associated with the success of a sufficiency economy village. In her study, the factors in eight aspects, including technology, economy, natural resources, psychology, society and culture, participation, the village leader, and the government support, were associated with success of promoting a sufficiency economy village with statistically significant at 0.05. In Kerdkhum's (2009) study of success in driving the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in Mae Hong Son, the results informed that the enhancement of the community drive on Sufficiency Economy Philosophy could be possible. It can be continuously used at all levels and in a wide range of implementation (Rakhimova et al., 2021). The study of Pansawang et al. (2009) focusing on the factors that affect the success of the policy implementation in a sufficiency-economy-based village, confirmed the same patterns of results. It found that factors affecting the success in the policy implementation of a village involved leadership of the village leaders, an understanding of the policy, the participation of the community members, the cooperation of the relevant agencies, the acceptance of the policy, and the implementation of the policy. Overall these findings are in accordance with findings reported by Tamsuan (2009) showing that the learning process for the concept of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy was grounded from the exiting problems within a community. It led to the process of thinking and analyzing through community forums. These processes would bring in a solution that emphasized a local and sustainable development in accordance with the mechanism of Sufficiency Economy.



## Suggestions for Further Study

1. Organizing a seminar or training on the concept of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy will leverage knowledge and improve understanding that may encourage the enhancement on the role of Thai women in participating in the related activities to the Philosophy. It may result in active drive of the women leaders on relevant activities in all sectors. Assigning women to a leading role in every village should be taken into consideration as women can involve in all activities and good at passing on knowledge. This appointment shall be another method to support women with opportunities in leading a wide range of both individual work and community-related activities.
2. The women's cooperative groups that aim at career enhancement should encourage each community to produce a unique product. This is to prevent the supply of redundant products that may exceed the market demand.
3. A women volunteer counseling group should be established for advising on matters related to women. It can begin with a forming of women group to assist with complaints. With this activity, people with disabilities can be encouraged to promote their self-independence and contribute to society according to their ability.
4. Women with outstanding performance should be praised in public for encouraging their self-esteem. This campaign should cover at all levels, either at sub-district, district, provincial, and national levels. The honorary activity may include a presentation of a certificate of honor to a dedicated woman leader who is a good example in bringing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into practice. The selection may base on the outstanding practice from empirical recognition and evidence that benefits the community, society, and the nation.
5. The establishment of women's cooperative groups for saving should be promoted. It can begin from a small group and then expand to a wider society.

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