The Role of Agricultural Extension Workers in Facilitating The Learning of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy For Farmers in Thailand’s Phitsanulok Province

Sirin Simarak¹,

Surapol Sreshthaputra²,

Abstract

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), as proposed in a speech by His Majesty the King was believed to be a guideline for solving Thailand’s economic problems since 1997. It was also used as a framework in developing the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan as well as the current plan. There was also a substantial application of SEP in agricultural sector known, as “The New Agricultural Theory” and all government organizations involved with agriculture should be responsible in extending the SEP to farmers. The objective of this research was to study the role of agricultural extension workers who were the supporters of in-formal education for farmers, focusing on the learning of SEP by the farmers in Thailand’s Phitsanulok Province. By exploring the adults learning model theory and focus group discussion of 15 SEP extension organizations, it was found that the farmers’ learning was dynamics self - learning occurred from direct working experiences or diversity of activities. Thus, the role of agricultural extension workers should begin with changing the attitude from knowledge extension and the concept of data transfer

¹ Ph.D degree candidate, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand and Faculty of Sciences and Agricultural Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Phitsanulok 65000, Thailand

² Associate Professor, Faculty of Agriculture, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

Corresponding author: e-mail address <ssirin_m@yahoo.com>
to corporate learning between farmers and the agricultural extension workers by selecting the model farmer to disseminate the knowledge and direct experiences as a SEP learning center. The supporting organizations provide knowledge about SEP activity and cooperate with farmers to learn about SEP such as training, study tour, practicing and continual knowledge exchange about the SEP practice among the farmers. Moreover, the continual SEP policy of the government as change in government policies also had an obviously affected the role of agricultural extension workers in supporting the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

Keyword(s): Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, Learning, Farmers, Agricultural Extension Workers

Introduction

Punpientrat (2006) presented an overall picture of agriculture in Thailand as being primarily an agriculture country for more than 100 years and the great majority of the population of Thailand worked in the agriculture sector. They have lived a self-sufficient lifestyle. Thailand’s economy then slowly changed it course and grew after the advent of trading. In 1957 the country plunged into the so-called “Accelerated Development Era”. In 1961, Thailand began to bring into effect the country’s first National Developing Plan into practice as the guideline for national development strategies. The plan promoted an accelerated development policy through investment expansion and economic fundamentals creation, especially in infrastructures such as road and dam building in order to extend agriculture areas, were underlined. Meanwhile, the international agriculture markets also rapidly expanded due to the government capitalist policies. These developments increased the average income to the populations at a great rate. However, the average income in the agriculture section grew at a slower rate and thus the farmers’ income became lower than that of any other occupations. Jarupong, Atipanan, & staff (2000) stated that such
development had led to the cause of poverty and indebtedness of farmers because the income did not match with their expenditures for the living and production.

During the past ten years, His Majesty King Bhumibol has given information to the Thai people to help overcome the problems as mentioned, the so-called ‘sufficiency economy philosophy’ (SEP). It was first included in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) as a guiding principle for national development. His Majesty the King’s SEP was one of many choices that could be used as guideline for developing the country. The sufficiency economy was a philosophy that encouraged people from every walk of life to live following the middle path and that was balancing their lifestyle in areas such as food sufficiency and no debt. The Office of the National Economic and Social Department Board of Thailand also had included the SEP in the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011) with the aim to overcome the problems faced in all sectors throughout the country. As a result, the agricultural sector was to follow this policy framework as well. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy was implemented extensively in agriculture sector called “The New Theory Agriculture” (Puntasen, 2006)

Moreover, there is an application example in agriculture area but this theory does not mean that every farmer who applies SEP must implement the new theory agricultural. The degree of sufficiency of each people is different. Farmers should apply the principles of SEP to their personal needs.

Thus, agricultural extension workers play an important role in supporting and providing knowledge for farmer in learning SEP in order for the farmers to apply the principle in agriculture. The aim of this research was to describe the role of the agricultural extension workers in supporting the learning of SEP by the farmers in Thailand’s Phitsanulok Province. It was conducted on the basis of the adults learning theory under the content of the first steps of the New Agricultural Theory from the departments of agricultural extension, the ministry of agriculture and cooperatives.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to study the role of agricultural extension workers who were the supporters of in-formal education for farmers, focusing on the learning of SEP by the farmers in Thailand's Phitsanulok Province. This study also described the selected characteristics of agricultural extension workers that were able to disseminate the SEP learning model to farmers in the Phitsanulok Province, Thailand.

Methodology

This was a qualitative research study on the role of the agricultural extension workers in supporting the learning of SEP by farmers. The research steps were as follows:

1. Theoretical approach was the study of a model or guideline in supporting the learning process acquired from fundamental concepts, documents and research in the development of the SEP learning process which was divided into three parts as follows: 1) Adult education or Adult learning 2) The extension and support of learning by farmers and 3) SEP in the agricultural sector.

2. The field study for qualitative data study was carried out by using the focus group discussion technique in small groups utilizing officers from the 15 agricultural extensions organizations in Phitsanulok.

3. The data collecting methods of the focus group discussion were carried out by informing the group of the objective of the meeting and to ask for permission to record their comments by a voice recorder. The group discussion were managed in an atmosphere of soliciting their opinions in supporting the needs of farmers in learning SEP which emphasized content issue, the extension methods, the activity project of organizations and the obstacle in supporting extension activities. The discussions were divided into two groups as follows.
3.1 The first group was representatives of the agricultural extension agencies that were responsible for supporting farmers in implementing SEP in their productions.

3.2 The second group was representatives of the institute of academic and mass media communication that were also driving the SEP policy in Phitsanulok area.

4. The data was analyzed from the data collection from the focus groups, by data classification in transcribing, data presenting in descriptive narration and data summarization to determine the appropriate characteristics of agricultural extension workers in SEP.

Result

Representatives from all sectors involved in helping Thailand developing looked for an appropriate learning model for disseminating the sufficiency economy philosophy (SEP) to help farmers in Phitsanulok province of Thailand. They also wanted to understand how the farmers’ learned so as to enable them to transfer knowledge and information in order for farmers to improve their quality of life. Thus, the perceived role of Agricultural extension workers was essential to help farmers learn SEP so the farmers could apply the principles to their occupation.

The Meaning of The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in The Agricultural Sector

His Majesty the King’s sufficiency economy philosophy is one of the choices as a guideline in the further development of Thailand just as the philosophy was used in the guideline in developing the 9th Nation Economic and Social Development plan as well as the current plan 10th Nation Economic and Social Development plan. Wibulswasdi, Piboolsravut, & Pootrakool (2010) wrote about his Majesty the King’s sufficiency economy philosophy and that the SEP was the guideline for the way the Thai people lived during the 25 years before the economic crisis in 1997 and afterwards His Majesty has emphasized the guideline in solving the Thai national problem in surviving and capable of living in a secure and
According to Board (1999) a definition of sufficiency economy philosophy from His King Majesty is as follow:

“Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the populace at all levels. This applies to conduct starting from the level of the families, communities, as well as the level of nation in development and administration so as to modernize in line with the forces of globalization. “Sufficiency” means moderation, reasonableness, and the need of self-immunity mechanism for sufficient protection from impact arising from internal and external changes. To achieve this, an application of knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential. In particular, great care is needed in the utilization of theories and methodologies for planning and implementation in every step. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the moral fibre of the nation, so that everyone, particularly public officials, academia, businessmen at all levels, adhere first and foremost to the principle of honesty and integrity. In addition, a way of life based on patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom and prudence is indispensable to create balance and be able to cope appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural changes in the world.”

From the stated meaning of SEP, Wibulswasdi, Piboolsravut, & Pootrakool (2010) also stated that the principle and concept of SEP are the developments based on the basis of middle way and precaution by considering the moderation, reasonableness, self-immunity including by using knowledge, deliberation and moral in combination with the planning, decision making and execution.

Therefore, in order to be balanced and prompt against rapid and widely changes in social and economics, His Majesty suggested the implemented guideline of SEP which was called “New Theory Agriculture” for the farmers to be self-supporting, live without difficulty, sufficiently living and be modest according to one’s economic capacity, abstemious, behave appropriately and self-supporting. The farm administration extension group, agricultural business extension units, Department of Agricultural extension (2000) has brought “New Theory of Agriculture” (First phase) as a production base in the rural area through self-reliance and having biodiversity of farming and farming harmony, using family
labor, reducing cost of production, increasing additional income as well as diversified farming. Formerly, farmer cultivated for consuming by employing surrounding natural and crop diversity and mixture of plant including vegetable, fruit, tree, herbal and living plants in agro forestry type. These plants are ecology relationship that need differently and appropriate environments to grow such as sunlight, temperature, humidity and soil. For example, small bush plants do not need much light under big bush plants, a destruction of insect diseases occur to restrict the amount of some plants to be properly placed in the plant ecology system and mixed or a variety of plants have the ability to inhibit the infection of disease and other insects which bring the balance of living capability.

The way of life in SEP for farmer level is the economy for agricultural emphasis on self-sufficiency of farmers in applying knowledge in managing land especially water resources and agricultural activity by adopting the first level of new theory which applied sufficiency production base in farmland and mostly utilized natural resources in order to diversify the agricultural activity in farmland to be supportively activity, increase earning activity, fully utilized family labor, reduce cost of production and also integrated cropping, livestock and fish raising in farmland to create maximum benefit.

Therefore the SEP application of his majesty for adoption as a guideline for implementing agricultural activity of farmers could be done reasonably and supportively balanced without relying on irrelevant factors which result in - immunity and self-sufficient. The new living employing SEP could be done as follows:

1. Mixed farming is the beginning of SEP.
2. Vegetable cultivation for reducing the expense of food for the home.
3. Using organic along with some appropriate chemical fertilizers for reducing the fertilizer expense and for soil improvement.
4. Growing mushrooms on rice straw and scrap materials in rice field.
5. Growing fruits and trees in the backyard.
6. Growing herbs for improving health and sanitation.
7. Fish raising in garden plots, rice fields and ponds for protein food and increase additional income.

8. Feeding native chickens and egg chickens around 10 -15 for food in family by using paddy and rice bran from rice land. Grow corn for feeding animals from agricultural plants and scrap vegetable from vegetable cultivation.

9. Biogas from feces of cow or pig dung for making fuel for household use.

10. Extracted bio - chemicals from vegetable scrap and herbs for use in farmland.

Therefore, SEP in agricultural could be applied in daily life of farmers as appropriate since SEP is the principle in middle way lifestyle that carries out an activities in moderation, appropriation and reasonableness of actions. By using this philosophy, each farmers could apply variety of agricultural methods depending on the geographical location and experience of farmer by emphasizing moderate living, enough production for home consumption and then sharing or distributing goods including the building self-immunity by living and operating a diversity of activities in agriculture for natural balanced and sustainability.

**Agricultural extension in Relation to Adult Learning Theory**

Agricultural extension work is an adult learning process or adult teaching – learning process that focus on disseminating knowledge, innovation and latest technology to the targeted farmers and their families in order for them to learn the techniques, methods or concepts in agricultural endeavors to be capable of problem solving or improve their occupational endeavors. Agricultural extension workers are responsible to motivate the participation of farmers. Thus, the agricultural extension workers should accept the role of facilitator more than teacher. Agricultural extension workers are to expedite the learning environment.

Farmers’ learning is an adults learning which is learning by using experience that have clear learning objectives. Adult learners are different from children learning in school
because children have an expectation in the future. The adults learning theory was developed from the Andragogy concepts of Knowles (1974) that was known as Adult Education. In adult education, Knowles (1974) pays attention on the need for process management in order to develop the learning and lessen environment in teaching such as learning by case study, self-practice and self-assessment that teachers should accept as the roll of facilitator more than teacher.

Moreover, Knowles (1953) stated that adults learning has clear learning objectives in mind and the first step in leading to learning is motivate the learners to learn. The next step is to demonstrate the visualization of the learning subject by emphasis on activities that supported learning such as a demonstration field. The last step is to develop the satisfaction of experience that is learned by the adult. In addition, Watanawong (1981) stated that an important element in adult learning is the experience which has valuable to the adult and he or she utilized this valuable experience in the learning process. Cross (1981) stated that the characteristic of adults to learn consisted of self-independent and status.

Therefore, the development of an appropriate understanding of SEP content, as it applies to an application, needs to have an intensive learning experience and a learning process that can have an affect must be carry out in appropriate steps and with appropriate learning methods. This learning process can be the mechanism in transforming the perspectives, paradigm and culture in production methods, thinking methods and way of living for Thai farmers.

Agricultural Extension Process on SEP in Phitsanulok Province

This study found that the SEP learning of farmer in Phitsanulok are learned from self-reliance activities according to level 1 of the new agricultural theory. These learning activities are the utilization of knowledge in managing land and water resources for agricultural activities, utilizing natural resources, having a variety of agricultural activities on the land, having supportive activities, having extra earning activities, utilizing a family
workforce, reducing production cost and mixing activities utilizing plant, livestock, and fish raising in a fully utilization of land. Moreover, the learning activities include developing the family accounting to understand the problems of the farmer to reduce costs and reasonably manage the expenditure and also the field management by reducing the reliance on the external factor by using available natural resource in agricultural such as using organic fertilizer instead of chemical fertilizer and using wood vinegar instead of pesticide.

The activities mentioned above helped the farmers in Phitsanulok to learn the content of SEP in the aspect of self-understanding and self-reliance. This learning was experience-focus learning by directing the learning for farmers who were adults with a lot of experiences to be respected. In order to change their behavior, it was necessary for farmers to learn by practicing to gain experience and developing new knowledge relating it to their farmer knowledge. This learning was the process of self-learning by using experience which farmers who are dynamic learners as the model of Kob (as cited in M. McMullan, et al., 2003)

The SEP learning of farmer was driven by government organizations, private agencies, basic education commission, regional higher education and mass media communication. These organizations supported and extended SEP knowledge to farmers by selecting a model farmer to transfer knowledge and experience as a SEP learning center. The role of supported organizations contributed in the dissemination of production technology, and general knowledge in agricultural areas. Small groups of farmers learned through training, study tour, trial practice and instruction and experience exchange in SEP by emphasis on exchange knowledge among themselves.

The SEP extension for farmers is cooperation learning between the extension workers and farmers and among farmers. Worth (2006) stated that the learned farmer has changed from knowledge receiver to self-learning by cooperate learning with the help of the officer and other enabler. This learning consisted of three important components that are always self-investigation to continue adding to the knowledge base in order to truly
understand the practical, the assimilation of knowledge by applying the knowledge in order to understanding the activity, and knowledge sharing in order to develop skills and promote sustainable self-learning and group-learning which demonstrates the cooperation by sharing knowledge among farmers, extension officers and policy makers. Thus, supporting organization of farmers has setup “SEP Learning Center” in order to provide a learning resource, training center and field practice of farmers.

Moreover, the organizations that support the learning, along with the basic education commission, educated and trained the student in school is initiated to the SEP concept at the SEP learning center in school. This learning center educates the student in money saving activity and family accounting in order for the student, whom their parent is a farmer, could implement these activities together. The objectives of these activities were to create an awareness of expenditure between the student and their parent and to disseminate the SEP concept through these students.

The Role of Agricultural Extension Workers in Facilitating the Learning of The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

The SEP learning of farmers in Phitsanulok was adults learning by using experience, self-learning with dynamics. The learning of farmers was based upon direct experiences and diversity of activities. Thus, the role of agricultural extension workers in managing SEP learning for farmers should be started by helping them in changing their attitude from knowledge extension to corporate learning between farmers and the agricultural extension workers. The agricultural extension workers are to manage the learning process of farmers by selecting a model farmer for disseminating the knowledge and direct experiences as a SEP learning center. The supporting organizations also provided knowledge about SEP activities and cooperated with small groups of farmers to learn about SEP activities by training, study tour, practicing and continual knowledge exchanges about the SEP practices among farmers.
Therefore the role and responsibility of the agriculture extension workers in disseminating the SEP content to farmers were as follows:

1. The awareness of SEP is a policy from the government and is including in the National Economic and Social Development Plan that is a guideline to follow in national development.

2. A clearly understanding of the concept and content of SEP.

3. Development of a SEP learning center to facilitate learning while utilizing learning resources between the farmers and the extension workers and among the farmers themselves.

4. Extension workers are to be facilitators in the learning process. And hence the build network of SEP is organized.

5. An analysis of farmers’ need should be based on the locality as it relates to the SEP concept.

6. A plan is needed for knowledge dissemination in order to increase the production potential for farmers.

7. Lead farmers to participate in the SEP learning activities in order for them to exchange knowledge among themselves.

8. Select teaching methods and activities that will lead to effective learning.

9. Monitor and evaluation extension activities based on previous behavioral objectives.

10. Publicize the names of successful farmers and give credit for their achievements that will give them self-esteem and they are then apt to be ready to serve as model farmers and they can then help disseminate the SEP for other farmers.

11. Seek the cooperation of mass media communication including radio, television, and newspaper to focus on presenting the SEP news.
Discussion

The dissemination of SEP knowledge was the process that focused on the introduction to farmers to learn about the SEP philosophy through activities in order to achieve a desirable change in farmers that consisted of knowledge, attitude and skills. The role of agricultural extension workers was to organize participative learning. This corresponded with the research conducted by Worth (2006) in the aspect that there should be an exchange of idea that facilitate learning between farmers and agricultural extension workers, policy makers, and among farmers themselves. Moreover, the SEP dissemination should be focused on experience transfer since it increases interest and learning efficiency. The agriculture extension workers had the responsibility to create self - satisfaction especially when the farmers have the feeling that they can make progress from learning and when faced with problems, everyone kept on progressing because of previous achievement, the farmers were willing to learn more. Normally, the achievement of something motivates people to do more. Therefore, between the roads to success, the reinforcement was necessary, such as giving compliments or rewards.

Aside from the role of Agriculture extension workers to drive the SEP philosophy, it was found that another important factor to facilitate the farmers to accept SEP was the continual SEP policy by the Thai government that it also supports with a sufficient and continual budget. The government should be aware, however, that SEP has already been included in the National Economic and Social Development Plan and not in the plan of the political party. Normally, the change in political parties effects the accomplishment of the agricultural extension workers in SEP dissemination. This was supported by Sirichoti (2002) which stated that the government policy has usually changed along with insecure politics that will affect the transfer of technology because all of the extension workers are government officials. To create the continuity and success of SEP, the National Economic and Social Development Plan should include the SEP for the “Sufficiency Economy Philosophy” is appropriate not only for the benefit of Thai farmers but also the entire citizenry of the country.
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References


