

Quality of Life according to the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy Among Agricultural Cooperative Members in Lower Northeast Thailand

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore the quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency economy among agricultural cooperative members in lower northeast Thailand, which is the population of the study. Quota sampling was done, and 600 samples were acquired.

Results: The quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency economy among agricultural cooperative members in lower northeast Thailand, when classified by the Sufficiency economy philosophy variables, was of Moderate level in the overall. When examined by individual aspects; Moderation, Reasonableness, and Immunity: the evaluated levels were High, Moderate, and High, respectively.

Keyword: Quality of life, philosophy of Sufficiency economies, agricultural cooperative members

Introduction

From the royal speech of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, which advised the Thai people to utilize Sufficiency Economy to sustain and develop themselves; an official self-sufficiency movement has been initiated among the Thai communities in the form of New Theory Agriculture in 2008. The goal of this movement was to develop the people to be able to attain a lifestyle based on the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy: Reasonableness, Moderation, and Immunity. Reasonableness is the ability to live with prudence, determination, non-biasness, and thorough consideration of all factors; as to achieve effective and positive results that bring happiness and benefit to the society without harming oneself or others. Moderation is the appropriateness of the work which should suit one's ability and surrounding conditions, and also the pace of the work that should not be too fast or too slow, but approached firmly step by step. Immunity is the design of life that can withstand negative effects from internal or external changes. (Yodpreutikan, 2007) The

philosophy of Sufficiency Economy guides the people toward a proper lifestyle based on the old ways of the Thai society, but also possesses a dynamic of constant adaptation to the contemporary, in that it systemically observes the state of flux in the world and aims for its students to survive perilous changes and crises, and maintain the stability and sustainability of development (Chaipattana Foundation, 1999).

The qualities of Sufficiency Economy can be applied to every level of life, with the emphasis on Buddha's Middle Path, and step-by-step development.

Definition of Sufficiency consists of three qualities:

1. Moderation: the appropriateness of work: not too much, not too little, not harming oneself and others, e.g. appropriate level of production and consumption.

2. Reasonableness: the prudence of decision, with thorough consideration of all related factors and effects.

3. Immunity: the preparedness to deal with changes, with regard to the probability of each situation that might happen in both short and long term.

Conditions required to achieve Sufficiency are based on the basis of both knowledge and morality.

1. Knowledge conditions: horizontally knowledgeable in related disciplines, and able to prudently apply such knowledge in planning and practice.

2. Moral conditions: conscientious, honest, determined, patient, diligent, and wise in the way of life.

The expected outcome from the application of the philosophy is a sustainable development that is ready for changes in every aspect including economics, social, environmental, and knowledge.

To achieve this sustainability in the community level, a cascading communication of these principles to the people must be done via related officials and organizations. Agricultural Cooperative is one of such organizations involved in passing on the philosophy to the people. The cooperatives were organized by groups of farmers in the form of multi-service venture: accepting deposit, lending, merchandizing, buying agricultural produces, processing materials, and servicing and promoting agricultural activities (Cooperative Auditing Department, 2009). All such cooperatives in Thailand were organized for the purpose of improving the members' lives in the aspects of economy, finance, administration, and social, which matched the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. Thus, if the cooperative members could conduct the cooperative activities properly according to such purposes, it could be assumed that those members can live their lives according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, which would bring a better quality of life.

One of the primary missions of the Cooperative Promotion Department is to promote the socioeconomic quality of life of the cooperative members through the cooperative processes. A cooperative is a juristic entity organized by a group of people in the same organization, same career or similar location. Each type of cooperative is operated in a different way according to its local condition and career demographics, with the purpose of promoting the socioeconomic benefit of the members through self-help and peer support according to the principle of cooperative (Cooperative Auditing Department, 2009).

At the present, problems still exist regarding the ability to define the indices of quality of life. Governmental organizations and interested academics were putting forth efforts to develop such indices at the provincial, community, and individual level, and to explore the indices of quality of life among specific demographics, such as the elderly, manual laborers, women, farmers, rural households, households with labor working abroad, etc. However, these indices still suffered from issues of reliability. Some of the government's indices used in the setting of the guidelines of local development policy, such as Basic Minimum Needs Indicators (BMN) or the study of the past quality of life; represented the success of local development or reflect the result of the development of certain projects. Other indices regarded the quality of life as the goal of the projects or activities themselves. (Ayuwatn, 2005)

As quality of life was being regarded as the goal of development, three measurement methods were developed to evaluate the extent of improvement that a development activity could bring to the people: 1. measurement of the quality of life developed by the framework of a primary official organization, 2. measurement developed for specific group of individuals, and three measurement developed by experts.

Furthermore, studies have suggested that the quality of life of farmers that practice integrated farming in northeast Thailand, which corresponds with Sufficiency Economy, was better than that of other village farmers. For this reason, we decided to conduct a study on the quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy among agricultural cooperative members in the lower northeast Thailand, a study which could lead to the improvement of the quality of life of the very population it studied.

Research Objective

To study the quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy among agricultural cooperative members in the lower northeast Thailand.

Conceptual framework

Conceptual framework of Quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was reported in Figure 1:

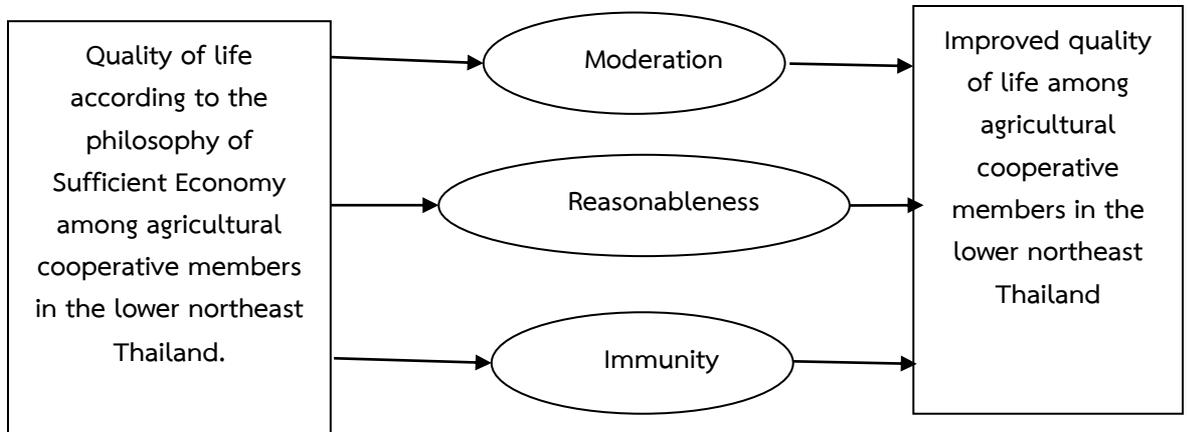


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

The framework can be described as followed: the quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy among agricultural cooperative members in the lower northeast Thailand comprises of three important factors: moderation, reasonableness, and immunity. These same qualities could improve the quality of life among all others agricultural cooperative members of the same region.

Research Method

This study was a quantitative research conducted through the survey of the quality of life among the samples. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the samples. The research instrument was a 5-level rating scale based on Likert's scale:

Agreement level	Score
Most strong	5
Strong	4
Moderate	3
Weak	2
Most weak	1

Mean and standard deviation of the scores were calculated by application software and were compared with Best's criteria (1997):

Interpretation criteria for the means

Mean score of 4.50-5.00	Most strong
Mean score of 3.50-4.49	Strong
Mean score of 2.50-3.49	Moderate
Mean score of 1.50-2.49	Weak
Mean score of 1.00-1.49	Most weak

The researchers have created the instrument for each component of the variables on the theoretical basis of the reviewed literatures. The questions were completely constructed under the supervision of the mentors to cover all the essential components. The researchers have brought the questionnaires to five expert academics and researchers of the field, for them to evaluate their structural validity through the use of Index of Item-Object Congruence (IOC) (Sodcharee, 2008).

Afterward, the reliability of the instrument was evaluated with 50 subjects from a simple sampling, using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. Each component must achieve the Alpha Coefficient of .84 (Nunnally, 1978) for them to be used in the actual data collection. The descriptive analysis: percentage, mean, and standard deviation, was calculated with an application software.

Results

Quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was reported in table 1 and 2:

Table 1 Mean and Standard deviation of each component of the quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy among agricultural cooperative members in the lower northeast Thailand.

Quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy		Level of Agreement		
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpretation
Moderation				
1.	Your income covers your daily expenses.	2.94	.74	Moderate
2.	You are not careless in your spending, and consequently get in debt.	2.82	.96	Moderate
3.	You contribute to the community's social work.	3.57	.80	Strong
4.	You participate in parties, birthdays, weddings, funerals, merit makings, and ordinations.	3.63	.81	Strong
5.	You are literate enough to effectively communicate with other people or organizations.	3.49	.83	Moderate
6.	You are knowledgeable in Sufficiency Economy.	3.23	.80	Moderate
7.	You have the time to happily live with your family.	3.82	.79	Strong
8.	You feel that your community is safe.	3.65	.72	Strong
9.	You are healthy.	3.62	.75	Strong
10.	You can conveniently access public healthcare.	3.36	.81	Moderate
Reasonableness				
11.	Your spending is value-conscious and reasonable.	3.50	.78	Strong
12.	You grow vegetables for your household consumption.	3.12	1.04	Moderate
13.	You follow the laws and rules of the society.	3.68	.76	Strong
14.	You adhere to the principle of democracy in your social life.	3.74	.80	Strong
15.	You have been taught vocational knowledge and skills.	3.18	.84	Moderate
16.	You keep up with the global and domestic news and events.	3.30	.83	Moderate
17.	You have time for your family, exercise, friends, merit making, and leisure.	3.37	.91	Moderate

Quality of life according to the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy		Level of Agreement		
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpretation
18.	Your family member spend time together on activities such as merit making, dining, and watching TV.	3.49	.86	Moderate
19.	You know how to use household medications properly.	3.25	.82	Moderate
20.	You eat healthily and hygienically.	3.35	.74	Moderate
Immunity				
21.	You spare an amount of money for emergency use.	2.83	.89	Moderate
22.	You are able to conveniently loan from the community	3.22	.93	Moderate
23.	You are a member of clubs or groups that convene on a regular basis, e.g. elderly club, weaving club, funeral club, or volunteer group.	3.28	.95	Moderate
24.	You constantly interact with community members.	3.58	.83	Strong
25.	You are knowledgeable and apply your knowledge for the good of the society.	3.21	.83	Moderate
26.	You have the opportunity to join in conferences and training sessions.	3.05	1.03	Moderate
27.	You family members love and care for each other.	3.76	.74	Strong
28.	You family members assist each other in times of trouble.	3.80	.77	Strong
29.	You are well-prepared for an emergency situation, e.g., you have a household medicine cabinet, and emergency phone numbers ready.	3.03	.92	Moderate
30.	You have life insurance or health insurance other than that provided by the government for free.	3.09	.96	Moderate

Table 1 Mean and Standard deviation of the quality of moderation, reasonableness, and immunity

Topic of questions	Level of Agreement		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpretation
Moderation	3.34	.46	Moderate
Reasonableness	3.45	.58	Moderate
Immunity	3.37	.59	Moderate
Overall	3.39	.51	Moderate

From Table 1, the mean quality of life of each component can be summarized as followed:

1. On moderation, the first three topics with the highest level of agreement are spending time with family, community safety, and participation in social events.
2. On reasonableness, the first three topics with the highest level of agreement are adherence to democratic principles in social settings, compliance to laws and rules, and reasonable spending.
3. On immunity, the first three topics with the highest level of agreement are helping family members in times of trouble, loving family members, and community interaction.

Discussion

Overall quality of life in the aspect of Moderation of the cooperative members was on the Moderate level. The subjects primarily agreed that they have adequate time with their families, indicating that family is the representative of Moderation among the cooperative members in the region. This agreed with the suggestion made by Boonaree (2005) on the concept of family moderation: in the modern world of capitalism, money is essential to the living and families need their members to be employed in a profitable vocation. Aside from the income, a family also has to be concerned about their spending, and have savings for emergencies. Moderation; therefore, should not mean being stingy on important matters, but being on the Buddha's Middle Path. Each month's spending consisted of various accounts that need to be well-planned and managed without causing overbearing debt and enough money must be set aside as the immunity for oneself and the whole family. This also agreed with the suggestion made by Gherman, Dincu, Milin, & Brad, (2016). The most important task of agricultural cooperatives from Japan is meeting the

consumption needs of its members. Integrated leadership of Japanese cooperatives of farmers act at all levels, primary, at prefecture level and at national level. Contractual relationships play a decisive role in the integration of Japanese farmers. In Japan there are about 840 agricultural cooperatives very well organized with a balanced planning and efficiently conducted, agricultural cooperative being the most developed, mainly focused on the production of mandarins. In Japan there are three large distribution centers of agricultural products, 29 distribution markets controlled by the prefecture and 1,000 local markets. Organization of cooperatives is the pyramid system on three levels: local, prefecture and national. Filippi, M. (2014) examined in what respect the localization of French agricultural cooperatives could be used as an economic and governance tool. We distinguish between three strategies: enhancing the value of local resources; creating links between members in order to reinforce member loyalty; and building interdependencies with consumers in supply chains. We show that the French cooperatives' strategies transform their localization constraint into territorial advantages, suggesting a tool that might usefully be adapted by cooperatives of other countries.

Overall quality of life in the aspect of Reasonableness of the cooperative members was on the Moderate level. The subjects primarily value the adherence to the principle of democracy in social life. This indicated that the cooperative members of the region hold on to democracy as the fundament of social ruling and decision-making, in line with the suggestion (Na-Bangchang, 2010) which defined reasonableness as the wisdom to realistically cope with different events on the basis of academic knowledge and the assessment of actual situations. Overall quality of life in the aspect of Reasonableness of the cooperative members was on the Moderate level, with emphasis on the helpfulness of the family members in times of trouble. This demonstrated that family is the primary anchor of security among the cooperative members. In this region of Thailand, whenever trouble happens to a farmer, it is common that his family would rush to assist him, with whatever means possible. This matched a suggestion by Pongpit (2007), which defined social immunity as a sustainably integrative system of mutual collaboration in individual lives, the community, and the economy. More over Gijssels, & Bussels (2014) found that the membership rates of agricultural co-operatives vary widely across member states of the European Union. Inspired by various strands of literature. They investigated historical and social determinants of those differences. They found that social capital and the legacy of communism are significantly correlated with the attractiveness of the co-operative sector for farmers, while the Hofstede indicators, measuring deeply rooted cultural values that otherwise are so robust and have correlations with many entrepreneurial and organizational aspects, are not. This also agreed with the

suggestion made by Snider, Kraus, Sibelet, Bosselmann, & Faure (2016) that certifications induce cooperatives to offer new services to support farmers. Cooperatives form collaborations with new stakeholders or reconfigure existing collaborations to provide advisory services to their members. These services have helped to shape farmers' attitudes about sustainable farming practices, though farm-level changes may be small. The main change at the cooperative level is adding new topics for group training, and certification issues are directly linked with practices such as maintaining a farm record book or wearing a mask when applying pesticides. Practices which compete with productivity are unlikely to change.

Suggestions

1. The cooperative members' quality of life on the aspect of Moderation was still in the Moderate level, thus there is still room for improvement, especially by educating the cooperative members about their trades: this includes marketing promotion, product development, and quality improvement by utilizing value-added technology. Sufficiency Economy should also be used as the primary guideline for implementation, with the focus on income/expense management and public healthcare accessibility. The cooperatives should create and distribute documentation on the availability of such healthcare service to its members or coordinate with public healthcare organization to organize field healthcare service as see fit.

2. The quality of life on Reasonableness was also on the Moderate level. This should urge the cooperatives to educate their members on growing vegetable gardens for household consumption and on other ways to increase the household incomes and reduce expenses. Information documents on household medication usages should be distributed among the members.

3. The quality of life on Immunity was on the Moderate level. Therefore, the cooperatives should arrange conferences and training sessions that would strengthen the community. Information document on the preparations for emergency situations should be distributed among the members.

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