

Economic Development of Pak Dome Community in the Lower Mun River Basin for Good Life Quality in Northeastern Thailand

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Abstract: This qualitative research was carried out of the Pak Dome community, Mu 1 Tambon Posai, Amphoe Phibun Mang sahan, Ubon Ratchathani. The 15 samples went through learning process by raising plants and animals. The field data were collected using interviews and participant observations. The data were analyzed descriptively and the results were as follows the people who settled at the Pak Dome community migrated from Taphai Pha Aw and Sao thong villages. The community was located near the area where the Pak Dome creek met the Mun River. The area was and still is plentiful of fish and edible plants. The Pak Dome community experienced change due to external and internal factors as early as 1855 when Thailand signed the Bowring Treaty with the United Kingdom and the Government railway reached Nakhon Ratchasima in 1900. Such events opened up free trade among major towns and large communities located along the Mun River basin. The Kukrit Promoter's government policy of putting the money or budget back to the countryside for improvement of infrastructure and/or employment in 1990. The change taught the Pak Dome people to readjust their subsistence economy to market economy. To a large extent, the people some people went back to growing food crops and raised animals using home or community made fertilizer. The new experience helped the people to reduce their risk from market economy, improve soil fertility and free of chemical deposits. The impact of the newly selected project was immense. Economically, the people almost doubled their annual income from 15,000 baht to about 24,000 baht per family. Their quality of life improved due to improved environment, food consumption, self-help or subsistence economy and improved learning experience initiated or brought by resource persons from within and outside of the community and reduced cost and increased farm produce.

Key words: Pak Dome economic development, the Lower Mun River basin, Good quality of life

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1900, the Thai community economy was generally subsistent. The people Supported themselves and depended upon immediate surroundings as a saying There are fish in the water and rice in the field; if one wants mushrooms goes to a woods nearby, fish goes to a pond. ⁽¹⁾ Rivers and woods or forests were looked upon or treated as community supermarkets. The people did not actually fight for food and basic necessities for survival or fierced tried to accumulate wealth. Their immediate environment provided them enough basic necessities. The Isan people were and still are close to and aware of environment indicated by beliefs, rituals providing needed equilibrium, unity, happiness and self-support. ⁽²⁾ Factors assisted social, economic and cultural change at the Pak Dome community The change brought from outside Most of the change brought from outside factors were the government's

railroad and services from Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, the migration of the Chinese people from mainland china and the Bowring Treaty.

The government's railroad connecting Nakhon Ratchasima and Bangkok in 1900 boosted the economies of the communities located in the lower Mun River basin. Money and goods were circulated in the area. More Isan laborers migrated for employment in Bangkok and related areas. More people depended upon market economy. ⁽³⁾ The Chinese immigrants to Thailand eased the labor shortages in the country at that time. Many of them acted as the middlemen bringing goods to and from towns to the people in rural areas. At the same time, they were merchants bringing money and markets closer to the people. ⁽³⁾ The Bowring Treaty pared way for Thailand to open up for more market connection between Thailand and foreign countries and among towns in the country itself. The outside influence replaced the ethical or moral values

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with money and commercial values. Inside factors that brought change. The government financial policy of giving back the money to the people in the rural areas. The people at the Pak Dome, so did the people in rural areas elsewhere, receive their day-labor payment of canal or road building or other infrastructure projects in their village. (Sommai Nandee, 2008: An interview).

The construction of the Pak Mun Dam, by the Thailand Electricity Authority, took 4 years to complete. The Dam provided electricity for Isan people, Clearing the land for the dam construction covered a large land area previously owned by the villagers. The Authority, therefore, had to use the public land, know as, "Kok Kham Kaen Koon Forest" and divided it up and gave 15 rai to each concerned family. Turning the public land into village settlement areas, such as, Thin Samran, Sap Chareon and Don Khammee, also took away the villagers' once natural supermarket. The villagers had to depend upon the markets nearby or mobile-truck food sellers. Putting all 3 factors together, the people at Pak Dome community were forced to change. On the one hand, the market system replaced traditional subsistence economy; crops, labor and land were used or treated as sources of family income. On the other hand, the natural resources were used wastefully abolishing the food chain needed for the people. The economic development of the Pak Dome community for a good quality of life once the subsistence economy had shifted to market-based economy, the people had to have some income to live with. The majority of people ran into more debt. The ways of solving problems were as follows: A selection of project learning experience of food crop growing and animal raising. The researcher and his team chose 15 farmers with various backgrounds to participate the project learning center. As a working group, members gained enough experience in selecting plants and animal grains, such as, the Meisan hogs, local chickens and fish suitable for compact containers. They also learned how to make fertilizer with local materials.

The project participants at the learning center had re-adjusted as well as improved soil fertility using home-made fertilizer. By such a doing, earth worms came back; organic and minerals enabled food plant growing. The people at the Pak Dome community once again realized practical self-help and natural conservation.

ECONOMY

The improvement of environment for a good quality of life at the Pak Dome community could be elaborated using 4 indicators.

- Uncontaminated food. The Pak Dome project participants spent their time growing food plants and animals for own consumption using home-made fertilizer, insecticide and animal food. In return the, people there had uncontaminated food and good health
- Self-help. The 15 person-project participants and Pak Dome people established self-help in 3 areas, namely, local construction materials, fertilizer and animal food
- The local construction materials came from donation of the project participants and the Pak Dome people. They built hog and chicken houses, fertilizer-making shops and the roofs of the fish ponds. The materials needed for fertilizer making were rice chaffs, discarded vegetables, fruits and tree leaves. The animal food were made from raw materials collected with the Pak Dome community, such as, vegetables and plant foods
- The people helped people. The participants of the Pak Dome learning center often gave away food or other farm produce to the needy people at Pak Dome community, nearby villages and schools
- Good environment. The 15 project participants improved soil fertility of the 9 rai-land of the learning center using home-made fertilizer. Once the soil was improved, the earth worms came back, vegetables and all food plants grew very well

CONCLUSION

In the past, immediate environment was important for community; people collected necessities from nearby forests and caught fish from village ponds or creeks. After their environments were gone, the people had difficulty maintaining their normal life. Many went to towns or cities for jobs. Sixty young people (88.24%) from 68 families at Pak Dome community left their village for outside employment. The children sent their wage earnings to their parents. They came back home only to plant rice or participate festivals. Those who didn't leave home for outside jobs often found odd jobs to do for some money, such as, charcoal making. To live the way their parents, grand-parents had done before could only be possible for Pak Dome people today by raising food crops and animals for household consumption. By achieving that, 4 indicators showed up- good environment, safety, self-help and community-based support.

SUGGESTIONS

The package of learning experience at Pak Dome community came about was because of work plan dealing with soil preparation, growing vegetables and raising animals. Based on an evaluation, their quality of life' such as, good food, self-help or helping one another may be very helpful for them in formulating or setting up co-operation of people of diverse background for economic development the people mostly needed.

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