

Network of Social Capital: Lesson Learned from Groups of Small Organic farmers' Self Reliance

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Abstract

The paper is a documentary research on network of social capital in the groups of small organic farmers. The objective is to analysis how the social capital factor sustains the small organic farmers' self reliance under the competitive economical globalization, comparing today's small chemical farmers. The result showed that networking was embedded in Thai rural communities, enabled horizontal and vertical relationship value among people, groups and organizations, with shared values, trust-based culture, and mutual benefits. Social capital is from civic virtue, reciprocity principle, reducing relation gap among people, being as cultural resource and enhancing efficiency. The more using the social capital, the more quality and quantity it has. The collective actions of Sanam Chai Khet and Chorrakae Samphan farmers in Chachoengsao and Suphanburi provinces accumulated core value, social capital, having made groups' self reliance more than 10 years. Starting savings groups, universal social welfare, learning center and organic production respectively, two groups could utilize and broaden their interpersonal networks for the well-beings of all in the community to secure the basic living requirements. At present, their market channels are extended both domestic and export. The products consisting of organic rice and vegetable is sold on the domestic market for both local and urban consumers without the middleman process; conversely, only organic rice is sold through groups' economical networks on the export. The lesson indicated the ability to create and maintain the community's dual economy, local and global, be realistic by the being of

social capital with its studied factors of trust and reciprocity norms, networking, continuous learning and relying on knowledge, and leadership.

Keywords: Network; Social Capital; Organic Farmers; Self Reliance

Introduction

After the Green Revolution¹, the former ecology-friendly agriculture having diverse productions, and respecting the local wisdom based on the subsistence philosophy has been shifted to monoculture or having only one type of crop or only type of animal produced in the farm for a large quantity. Since, then, agriculture became the tasks requiring specialized technology with high costs. Genetic development, soils enhancement resulted by the use of fertilizers, the use of pesticide and the machinery application has become the “cost” of agricultural commodities, which affects the production patterns and the lifestyles of the farmers. Such a problem is intensified among a large number of the small-scale farmers². The problems were interrelated with several dimensions; social and economic dimension, health dimension as well as ecological dimension. Food security, price fluctuation in agricultural supply chain, higher competition, chronic poverty, and malnutrition becomes prevalent challenges for farmers.

This article is to present the case study of the small-scale organic farmer groups who have settled a learning group in order that they can rely on themselves. Based on the awareness of collectivity and the human capital, this farmer group has overcome the economic hardship by establishing the financial organization within their community. The economic network is covering their local community, the market in the city and the overseas market for organic rice exportation. Their success is witnessed by the creation of work and income in the community. For the past 10 years, these farmers, which this study aims to illustrate, has proven that the self-determination of the community can retrieve the production mode, former livelihood, identity, and the pride of farmers, which should be upheld equally to that of other professionals.

¹The shifting of agricultural production mode by using the scientific knowledge to be applied on the new agricultural trend to increase productivity and reduce time.

²Farmers who own the land not exceeding 20 rais.

Social Capital Network Dimension : A successful lesson of the self-reliance among farmers of the Sanam Chaiket farmer group, and Chorrakae Samphan farmer group

Network is essential organization in establishing the social capital in rural community in Thailand (Kaewthep, 1995). Shared values and network culture exist among the villages in the local community. The social interaction is based on trust and the principle of reciprocity and communalism. These social actors mobilize its network through the business innovation from both horizontal and vertical relationships.

The establishment of the organic farmer group at Sanam Chaiket district, Chacheongsao province and the Chorrakae Samphan organic farmer group at U-thong district, Suphanburi province has started in year 2002 and 2003. The Sanam Chaiket group was firstly initiated by the development organization, while the Chorrakae Samphan group was formed by the community leader who is interested in agriculture knowledge in farmer school. In the first stage, there are 20-25 members in each group. The background of the members is either friends or relatives who share bonding, especially at the Sanam Chaiket, whose ancestors were immigrants from the north-eastern region. Previously, almost all families encountered the debt issues ranging from 300,000-1,200,000 baht. Most farmers have their own land of 15-40 rais (equivalent to 6-16 acres). Both groups grow cash crop, which has been encouraged from the local authorities. The selection of the crop depends mainly on the price factor.

There are factors contributing the network's success. First of all, the co-operative for development was established after the brainstorming meetings at Sanam Chaiket district. The benefit of this financial organization of this community is to provide loan interests for conducting profession and business. The profits gain from the loan is returned back to the community as the lifetime welfare such as the assistance allowance for childbirth delivery, the assistance for patients, and the assistance for funerals. Its members, in 2012, rose by 48. At Chorrakae Samphan, the public fund is also established. The benefits of the fund, moreover, are given to temple, financially challenged students and patients in the hospitals.

Moreover, these 2 farmer groups transfer the knowledge on organic farming and local wisdom to other farmers. In short, they become the school or the source unit to produce the commercial organic rice. The existence of their demonstration rice fields ensures that their concepts can be translated into reality. The farmer groups also have the annual meeting where they can exchange knowledge, seeds, plants or information. A social gathering was organized to build trust. The role of givers and receivers is interchangeably friendly.

The network's commitment to the economic innovation is another crucial factor to overcome their social and economic burdens. They help each other for marketing and product distribution. An attempt to create the alternative market shows that the farmers want to determine the price of their own products. In order to achieve this, they improve the quality of their products, which also helps them in term of competitiveness. The Sanam Chaiket has partnered up with both local and urban consumers; for example, the community hospital, the local business, schools, the green weekend market, healthy food vendors, and Green Net Cooperative to consume and distribute their products. As of now, more than 100 kinds of organic vegetable filled in the boxes by the Sanam Chaiket group is very popular. The product of vegetables can also be collected on a weekly basis at the service points located in Bangkok. This partnership, with the awareness of the inter-dependence between rural community and the city, is beneficial for both parties. There is no need for the middlemen in the business value-chain. For Chorrakae Samphan group, at the beginning, the group was set up only 5 members. In their first stage, they successfully created the organic rice fields, where no chemicals are utilized. Having been financially supported by the local business network for training, their fields are received the agricultural quality standard award within 2 years. They, later, became one of the local business suppliers for the raw materials. The number of their members rose to 26 members. Apart from cash-flow in the community, they received the assistance from its alternative agricultural partner in Yasothon province to produce the package of organic rice with the brand of “Visahakit Chumchon Thungthong Yanyun”, literally means “Substainable Golden Rice Field Community Corporate”.

Green Net Cooperatives is the last partner of both farmer groups. This organization is the private development organization who conducts the marketing for the organic rice for the overseas market. The main strategy of this organization is to promote fair trade, and to minimize farmers' risks. The aims of the cooperatives is to negotiate the power for the farmers. Both farmer groups have spent 2 full years to pass the agriculture quality standard inspection from the organic standard bureau. During this time, both farmer groups have been supported in terms of encouragement, guidance, knowledge gained from the field trip, financial support (the inspection fee for the quality assurance from the organic bureau) from Green Net Cooperatives, as well as from the private development organization (The case study of the Sanam Chaiket). Until Now, these helps have mobilized both groups from the farmer-work styles to the entrepreneur working style, enabling them to stand out together in the community.

Conclusion

The social practices by forming the network is the strategy to use the social capital as a working tool based on the former Thai rural culture. This network is built on trust, interdependence, and collective benefits in both vertical and horizontal scale empowered by the knowledge base or the wisdom power, which develops the human capital from the cultural dimensions. This practice resulted in both economic and participatory political benefits. The practicality of the learning center and the diverse markets is proven not to be just "an abstract market". The Sanam Chaiket and Chorrakae Samphan groups have embarked towards the new learning culture, which values "the maintenance" of the community relationship whereas their situations permit.

Clear goal and sincerity are their shared positive values. The groups achieve in terms of quantity and quality. The coverage of the network responds the needs of the members which can create substantial and sustainable impacts. This case study of manageable working network aiming to the self-reliance is resulted from its flexibility, and the ability to adapt to the dynamic globalization. Arising from the knowledge transfer and the critical thinking, the new pattern of the quality farmers is created. The successful phenomenon

and lessons from Sanam Chaiket and the Chorrakae Samphan groups do not reflect solely on the development of individual work, but also the collective works as a network which becomes the valuable community capital which is not the just an individual step, but it is the starting point of the sustainable development of the whole community.

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