



## Participatory Development with Sufficiency Economy in Thailand

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**Abstract:** *The study was designed to examine a participatory communication process inherent in the application of His Majesty the King's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy at local communities in Thailand. The Philosophy addresses the way of living and practice of the general public in development and management of the country towards the middle path especially in developing the economy to keep up with the world in the era of globalization. In view of changing globalization and local cultural contexts, it is desirable to plan a long-term integrated multi-media campaign utilizing all media resources at national, regional, local and community levels to strengthen sufficiency economy practices, based on empirical data and existing natural, socio-cultural capitals.*

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Communities, Economy, Globalization.

### **Introduction:**

This panel will provide examples of how three regional universities in Thailand: Chiang Mai University (CMU) in the North, Ubon Rajathane University (URU) in the Lower Northeast, and Walailak University in the South, have adopted King Bhumipol Adulyadej's Sufficiency Economy philosophy in their regular academic activities. Apart from aiming at academic excellence, these universities are also aiming to foster regional development that reflects the local geo-sociological characteristics. As Sufficiency Economy philosophy aims to achieve sustainable development with peace and tranquillity, each regional university seeks to implement the philosophy using their capacity and expertise and based on existing local conditions. For example, CMU has set up a research institute that focuses on the work related to Sufficiency Economy. It has also started a PhD programme based on Sufficiency Economy philosophy. URU has started

accumulating knowledge related to the Sufficiency Economy philosophy and begun training staff members to become familiar with the concept. URU has a graduate programme that emphasizes topics related to development that apply the Sufficiency Economy philosophy. Last year, it initiated a B.A. programme in Management with special emphasis on Sufficiency Economy. This programme aims to study how members of a community can live their lives according to the Sufficiency Economy philosophy. Walailak University has many participatory development programmes in co-operation with communities near the campus and in the surrounding region. The University has embraced Sufficiency Economy philosophy and seeks to integrate this philosophy into its participatory development programmes. With their forward-thinking approaches, it is anticipated that these universities will set an example for other higher education institutions in the country.

### **Objective of the study**

“Participation” is the key concept in the application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy at all levels in Thailand. How did the Thai people “communicate and participate” in the Sufficiency Economy-based development projects is the focus of the present study. The term “participatory communication” might be little known in Thailand or even have not consciously been used in the Sufficiency Economy application. However, participatory communication activities have actually taken place, naturally, haphazard, randomly or unplanned. All these deserve careful analysis.

To analyze and describe the process of participatory communication as it has taken place, explicitly or implicitly, in the application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in Thailand.

To draw analytical conclusions about patterned relationships between various elements in the participatory communication process as it was described.

### **Methodology**

This case study is descriptive and investigative in nature. The research methodology used here is primarily the qualitative-inductive approach that is generally used in other case studies.

Another characteristic of the methodology of this case study is the use of the “grounded theory” approach (GTA). GTA was particularly useful when the researcher approached the case problem without a clearly structured picture in mind. When he undertook this case study, he was preoccupied with securing a theoretical framework and sought empirical data to fit into such as framework.

At a later stage in the research, a hypothetical-deductive research model known as the “general system theory” (GST) was also used. GTA and GST were chosen and tended to interact throughout the course of the study (see Supadiloke, 1983). The two approaches functioned well together in this analysis. They frequently complemented each other and illuminated the case problem.

### **Sufficiency Economy Philosophy**

Although conceived in 1974, the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy has become widely publicized only after the year 1997 when the world community encountered a severe financial crisis and Thailand had to devalue its currency and obtained loans from the International Monetary

Fund (IMF). His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej mentioned a remedial process in his address on the eve of his birthday anniversary on December 4, 1997: “Recently, so many projects have been implemented, so many factories have been built, and that it was thought Thailand would become a little tiger and then a big tiger. People were crazy about becoming a tiger.

Being a tiger is not important. The important thing for us is to have a sufficient economy. A sufficient economy means to have enough to support ourselves. A careful step backward must be taken. A return to less sophisticated methods must be made with less advanced instruments.

However, it is a step backward in order to make further progress.” (As cited in Government Public Relations Department, 2007, pp. 101-102). “This ‘sufficiency’ means a ‘sufficiency economy.’ It is satisfactory if each individual has enough to live on, but it is even better if the entire country has enough to live on. We in Thailand used to be sufficient. Now, it is free to be insufficient.

Therefore, it is a policy to adopt a sufficiency economy so that everyone has enough to live on. Sufficiency means to lead a reasonably comfortable life, without excess or overindulgence in luxury but having enough.” (As cited in Government Public Relations Department, 2007, p. 102).

“Self-sufficiency means producing enough for one’s own need, without having to borrow anything from others, or as they say, standing on one’s own feet. But the Sufficiency Economy concept is much broader than that. Sufficiency is moderation. If one is moderate in one’s desires, one will take less advantage of others. If all nations hold this concept, without being extreme or insatiable in one’s desires, the world will be a happier place.’

Being moderate does not mean to be too strictly frugal: luxurious items are permissible, but one should not take advantage of others in the fulfillment of one’s desires. Moderation, in other words, living within one’s means, should dictate all actions. Act in moderation, speak in moderation that is, be moderate in all activities. Therefore, sufficiency means moderation and reasonableness.” (As cited in Government Public Relations Department, 2007, pp. 102 - 103).

The Office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its Thailand Human Development Report 2007 hailed the Sufficiency Economy as a valid approach to development because it offers a way to avoid “growth that is jobless, ruthless, voiceless, rootless and futureless” as well as “mindless growth - where the path of growth adds nothing to the mental and spiritual capabilities of people.” The report concludes: “The Sufficiency Economy offers a way to avoid mindless growth through application of a set of principles which can seem disarmingly simple, but which are rooted in observation of the real world,

and underwritten by humanist theory. The appeal of the approach is that the principles are easy to grasp, but the daunting fact is that the application demands high standards of commitment and integrity. But then, if development were easy -”(as cited in Government Public Relations Department, 2007, p. 103). Finally, His Majesty spelled out the clear meaning of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in 1999 as follows:

“Sufficiency Economy is the Philosophy that addresses the way of living and practice of the public in general from the family unit and the community, to the national level, in development and management of the country towards the middle path especially in developing the economy to keep up with the world in the era of globalization. The word “Sufficiency” means moderation and reasonableness including the need to have self immunity to be ready against any internal and external shocks. In addition, the application of theories in planning and implementation requires great care and good judgment at every stage. At the same time, all members of the nation, especially officials, intellectuals, and business people, need to develop their commitment to the importance of knowledge, ethical, integrity, and honesty to conduct their lives with perseverance, toleration, Sati and Pane, and precaution so that the country has the strength and balance to respond to rapid and widespread changes materialistically, socially, environmentally, and culturally from the outside world.” (As cited in NESAC, 2007, p.5).

### **Overview of Participatory Communication**

The concept of participatory communication has been associated with the emerging field of “development communication” or communication for development and social change in which communication has been conceived as an integral

part of the development process. Much debate about the role of communication in social change had been triggered by the publication of the book "The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East" in 1958 by Daniel Lerner.

In this classic study of modernization, Lerner (1958) found a key concept, empathy, defined by him as the capacity to place oneself in the roles of others, as the most important "psychic mobility" caused by mass media exposure that had a great characterological transformation in modern history.

Based primarily on Lerner's conceptual model, Rogers (1969, 1976, 1983, 1986) had undertaken a number of empirical studies on communication and modernization in the Third World countries in which his popular theory of Diffusion of Innovations had been widely applied.

Both Lerner and Rogers have been highly credited for their pioneer studies that made a significant contribution to the understanding of the role of communication in development process. However, the Western model of development communication was subject to harsh criticism by communication scholars from developing countries. One major shortcoming lies in the fact that the model portrays the top-down linear communication process from senders to receivers.

This can be illustrated by Lasswell's (1954) classic formula, "who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?" and also by Berlo's (1960) S-M-C-R (source-message-channelreceiver) model. Similarly, Roger's Diffusion of Innovations and some other communication theories such as the two-step flow, the hypodermic needle and the extension approaches were criticized for being congruent with the elitist, vertical or top-down orientation.

According to the diffusion model, modernization is conceived as a process of diffusion and adoption of innovations whereby individuals move from a traditional way of life to a different, more technically developed and more rapidly changing way of life. This has proved to be a limited view of development communication. (Servaes, ed. 2006)

This multiplicity approach emphasizes the importance of cultural identity of local communities and of democratization and participation at all levels - international, national, local and individual.

It points to a strategy, not merely inclusive of, but largely emanating from, the traditional "receivers". Apparently, Servaes made a reference to the emerging model of "participatory communication." Earlier, Paulo Freire (1983) was credited for championing this concept, commonly known as "conscientization" in his popular book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." Freire refers to it as the right of all people to individually and collectively speak their word: 'This is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every (wo)man. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone - nor can he say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words.' (as cited in Servaes, 2003, p.11).

In parallel efforts, the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by the late Sean McBride, stressed the importance of public participation in a decisionmaking process for development. As they argue: 'This calls for a new attitude for overcoming stereotypical thinking and to promote more understanding of diversity and plurality, with full respect for the dignity and equality of people living in a different condition and acting in different ways' (MacBride, 1980, p. 254).

The participatory communication model has been closely related to the Right to Communicate (RTC) movement which has emerged from the debate on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As stated by the late Harms (1976), communication is a “two-way, interactive and participatory process.” He has managed to come up with a formulation of RTC which reflects a variety of its elements and visions including: (a) a right to assemble, a right to discuss, a right to participate and related association rights, (b) a right to inquire, a right to be informed, a right to inform, and related information rights, and (c) a right to culture, a right to choose, a right to privacy, and related human development rights. (For details, see Supadhiloke, 2006).

In Thailand, the concept “participatory communication” has been differently defined and often misunderstood for the use of communication media for development. There has been some attempt to synthesize all research findings on the subject but, again, there remains disagreement among scholars on the concept and practice of this emerging field. For example, Kaewthep et. al. (2000) has extensively reviewed all existing studies on “media for community development” which reflected a wide range of interests and applications of the participatory communication.

On the subject of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy itself, despite its wide application throughout Thailand, there appeared no direct reference to the concept and practice of the term “participatory communication” in all the studies under review. For example, in the collection of more than 100 studies and cases on Sufficiency Economy by the Office of Research Support Fund (2006) and Pongpis (2007), no reference has been made to the term “participatory communication.”

## Conclusions and Discussions

This study is designed to examine a participatory communication process inherent in the application of His Majesty the King’s Sufficiency Economy Philosophy at local communities in Thailand. The word “sufficiency” means moderation and reasonableness including the need to have self-immunity to be ready against any internal and external shocks. The Philosophy addresses the way of living and practice of the general public in development and management of the country towards the middle path especially in developing the economy to keep up with the world in the era of globalization. This has been consistent with Buddhism’s doctrine named the Eightfold Noble Path which provides a middle way to the cessation of all human suffering or “perpetual happiness.”

Within the conceptual framework of system analysis, the above processes require the inputs of such human and social capitals as knowledge, wisdom, ethical integrity, honesty, perseverance so that the country has achieved the output of balance and stability leading to the outcome of happiness or mental growth at all levels. In other words, the process model seeks to reach a balance between ethical and cognitive inputs and the outcome of mental growth, i.e. happiness, not material growth.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been widely applied in various communities throughout Thailand since the 1997 financial crisis. In communities with strong indigenous folk culture, the applications were found quite successful. The two communities under this study are such good examples. People’s participation was essential for the success of the application.

However, the concept of “participatory communication” was relatively little known in Thailand.

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