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Strategies in Empowering the Upper Northern Communities by Using Community – Based Economy

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Abstract

This study aims to study factors related to empowering the upper northern communities and to create strategies in empowering the upper northern communities by using community – based economy. This research employed the mixed-method design. The research target group consisted of the group of the leaders and the members of community's economy, the group of 40 local leaders including both formal and informal, and people from 317 families belonging to the target strong communities. This research instruments were Community Potential Survey, a questionnaire and an Interview. To analyze the data, SPSS was used for the quantitative data, while the content analysis causal analysis was used for the qualitative data. The results shows that (1) the factors relating to the empowering the upper northern communities consisted of the community leader factors, concerning community participation, physical factors, social and cultural and supportive from the development network and (2) strategies that empowered the upper northern community by using community-based economy was "*Community Learning to Empowering*" or "*LEARN*".

Introduction

Since the National Economic and Social Development Plan (1961), it was found that the top-down management strategy was no efficient for developing Thailand. Therefore, it was replaced by the bottom-up management strategy which included the collaboration between the government and the Thai citizen, followed by the new alternative for improving the country-- community empowerment—which has been widely acknowledged as the main target for developing the country. Nonetheless, many communities are not able to empower themselves because they have imprecise knowledge about community empowerment. This study, therefore, would explore and explain the process of developing community empowerment, identify relevant factors, and provide guidelines for communities to implement community empowerment practice in the future.

Objective

This study aims (1) to study factors related to strengthening the upper northern communities; (2) to create strategies in strengthening the upper northern communities by using community –based economy; and (3) to explain the contexts of community empowerment of the upper northern communities.

Methodology

This research was a quantitative study that employed mixed-method design. The research target group consisted of the group of the leaders and the members of community's economy, the group of 40 local leaders including both formal and informal, and people from 317 families belonging to the target strong communities. The data was collected by different sources and approaches including primary data, secondary data, documentary study, in-depth interview, and focus-group interview.

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Result

The results are as follows:

1. The factors relating to the strengthening the upper northern communities consisted of the Community leader factors, concerning community participation, physical factors, social and cultural and supportive from the development network.
2. Strategies that strengthened the upper northern community by using community-based economy was "*Community Learning to Strengthen*" or "*LEARN*". It includes strategies for finding and developing leaders (L: Leader), strategies for education for development communities (E: Educated), strategies to create a shared ownership attitude (A: Attitude), strategies for natural resource and environmental development of communities (R: Resource) and network development strategies (N: Network)
3. Community empowerment is connected to society and its culture in which houses, temples, and schools are keys. All of which are situated in every community. Also, community empowerment mostly consists of economic and social collaboration that stimulates the improvement of the community.

Conclusion

In order to empower a community, the key to success is participation among the people in the community. By using their resources existing in their environment, society, and cultures, as well as self-improvement, the community will progress further. Thus, the government units should take role to support empowering community by promoting all factors involving community empowerment. They are community leader, attitudes and knowledge of community members, environments, and the connection between people inside and outside community.