

# SUFFICIENT WAY-METHOD OF LIFE BASED ON THE SUFFICIENCY ECONOMY PHILOSOPHY OF ASEAN PEOPLE: VIENTIANE, LAO PDR

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**Abstract** - This research aims to investigate the understanding and sufficient living conditions of people. It also analyzes human behaviors and evaluates the application of sufficiency economy philosophy at individual and household levels. The guideline for living based on the sufficiency economy philosophy of people in Vientiane, Laos, was also assessed. The researcher collected data by using questionnaires to survey 400 samples alongside with interviewing 30 people who were village chiefs, teenagers, public servants, private employees, youths, and general citizens. In this research, the researcher found that most people who lived in Vientiane, Laos were Buddhist. However, their hometowns were mostly located in other districts. Most of the public employees in Vientiane were the members of some specific social groups, particularly the men's party and the women's union. Regarding the level of understanding of sufficiency economy philosophy on expenses, the local people had to consider the needs for their living and avoid high expenditure. When engaging in community or social activities, they could not exploit other people and their colleagues. Moreover, their everyday life had to be economical or sufficient. For example, most of them had three full meals on a daily basis. Every piece of work was always based on self-reliance, mutual generosity, and mutual support. The research results show that sufficient living was rated at high level as well as the environmental and natural resources conservation and usages. The factors affecting the activity practice at individual and household levels based on the sufficiency economy philosophy consisted of age, occupation, length of residency in Vientiane, educational level, income and expenses per month, participation in sufficiency economy philosophy training, and membership in a social group. The application of sufficiency economy philosophy was also rated at high level, especially in terms of their mindset and practice based on the word "enough" which refers to self-improvement, non-oppression, and satisfaction on sufficient living.

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**Keywords** - Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Application, Urban Way of Life, Vientiane

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The way of life of ASEAN people involves high socio-economic diversities; economically, the local people were classified into poor, moderate, rich, and super-rich; or in terms of their social statuses, they were divided into lower class (employees, farmers, and agriculturists; people who did not earn enough income for living), middle class (merchants, entrepreneurs, and government officers; people who earned moderate income or owned self-employed businesses and could support their families), and upper class (high-society people such as royal family members, soldiers, police, high-rank government officers, and businessmen; people who had power or great influence on most people in the country). Due to the big gap of economic statuses between lower class and upper class, there was the comparison between them. The wealthy people clustered in the urban area (few population), while poor people lived across the country (large number of population); this resulted into the increase of inequality. As there was the spread of capitalism and globalization in ASEAN economic community (AEC)[1], people gave more importance to economics and their survival. They became greedy and struggled, competed for natural resources, and took advantage of others. The living difficulties caused the higher number of social problems such as

starvation, crimes, robbery, larceny, homelessness, beggars, drugs, and prostitution. Therefore, this research used the concept of sufficiency economy philosophy, the doctrine that Thai people applied to their way of lives, to evaluate the level of self-sufficiency among the local people, their families, the community, and their workplaces; this can be applied to every occupation, gender, age, and social status.

Most people thought that the sufficiency economy philosophy revolves only farming, gardening, and raising domesticated animals. However, this is a "misunderstanding" because the sufficiency economy philosophy was developed for solving the national problems that affected the majority. Hence, to truly benefit from sufficiency economy philosophy, we should start from the change within ourselves by evaluating our occupations, social statuses, potential, and our actions as well as our roles. Moreover, we should understand and aware of the "three pillars, two conditions." For example, to conform to the concept of 'self-reliance', the state leaders should implement the policies that would not negatively impact the country. They should be reasonable and constantly assess the national potential as well as studying the contemporary trends in order to build self-immunity. All of these are the early stage of the "right path". Additionally,

according to Kom Chad Luek newspaper (30 May 2015), Shamshad Akhtar, the deputy secretary-general of the United Nations and the secretary-general of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), had mentioned "sufficiency economy" in the 71st session in Bangkok, Thailand. She praised the "sufficiency economy" attributing to the King Bhumipol Adulyadej as a worthwhile instrument for sustainable global society development for the present and the future; she said "...Sufficiency economy philosophy gives importance to the balance development and also enhances people's potential at the same time. Therefore, it is a valuable guideline for sustainable development... It highly regards the development with a balance between economic, social, and environment dimensions, in line with the direction towards the world's sustainable development..." (Kom Chad Luek Newspaper, 2015: 12 as cited in Phukamchanoad, 2015)[2]. The core of sufficiency economy philosophy is to build the stable foundation for people and the society. It starts from the individuals, then families, communities, societies, and the nation, respectively. This principle can be internationally used by every person in this world regardless the differences in social classes, races, religions, occupations, genders, ages, and social statuses. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2007)[3] had officially defined the concept of sufficiency economy philosophy based on the speech given by the King Bhumipol Adulyadej (2009)[4] about "sufficiency economy philosophy" on 29 November, 1999 as presented below.

"...Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the populace at all levels. This applies to conduct starting from the level of families to communities and to the nation in terms of development and administration, so as to modernize in line with the forces of globalization. 'Sufficiency' means moderation, reasonableness, and the need for self-immunity to protect from impacts arising from internal and external change.

To achieve sufficiency, an application of knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential. In particular, great care is needed in the utilization of theories and methodologies for planning and implementation in every step. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the moral fiber of the nation, so that everyone, particularly public officials, academics, and business people at all levels, adhere first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. In addition, a way of life based on patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom and prudence is indispensable in creating balance and in coping appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural changes in the world..."

Considering the application of sufficiency economy

philosophy, the researcher found out that the majority of the global citizens can make use of this philosophy everywhere they live. At the end of 2015, Thailand and other nine countries unified their societies, culture, politics, and economics under the name of ASEAN. In this first research, the application of sufficiency economy philosophy was investigated among the samples in a capital city of ASEAN country which was Vientiane, Laos. On 24 November 2014, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University had cooperated with the National University of Laos for a research collaboration. The research results showed that they had not had a research collaboration related to economics yet. Moreover, there had been no researches investigating the sufficiency level of ASEAN people's way of lives by that time. (The Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, National University of Laos, 2015)[5] This study can contribute to the implementation of the policies that develop and raise the awareness of sufficient lifestyle as well as the balance of sustainable national development in the future.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research has two Objectives is First, to explore the understanding of the lifestyle based on the sufficiency economy philosophy (economization and moderation).

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative and quantitative research. The population and samples as well as the research settings are listed as follows:

Group 1: The population was 700,000 people who lived in Vientiane, Laos. The samples size was 400 people based on the Yamane Taro's formula (Yamane, 1973).[6]

Group 2: 30 samples consisted of government officers who had the regular salary same as most people who worked in the urban areas (most of the important government institutions were located in Vientiane), village chiefs, men's party and women's union members, public and private employees, general citizens, and teenagers, interviewed by structured interviews.

The researcher collected data by using questionnaires and interviews, then analyzed the data by estimating the frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation to describe the general information of the samples. In addition, the researcher used descriptive analysis to analyze the interview data based on the specific data structure. Moreover, there are evaluations of the application and practices according to the sufficiency economy activities at individual and household levels; the scores are divided

into five levels as follows: 4.21- 5.00 (Highest), 3.41- 4.20 (High), 2.61- 3.40 (Medium), 1.81- 2.60 (Low), and 1.00- 1.80 (Lowest) (Silpcharu, 2006)[7]

#### IV. RESULTS

People who lived in Vientiane, Laos mostly were Buddhists (98.50 percent). Most of them had graduated from high school at most (93.50 percent). There were students (51.25 percent) and public and private employees such as teachers, policemen, soldiers, and ministry leaders (29.25 percent). Most people had lived in Vientiane for not more than ten years (47.00 percent) and their hometowns were other districts (54.75 percent). The income per month of the majority was around 5,001- 10,000 baht (37.75 percent). Most people, especially the government officers in Vientiane, were members of some social groups (84.00 percent). The social groups that the public usually joined were the men’s party (79.50 percent), women’s union (42.50 percent), labor unions (36.00 percent), and political parties (6.25 percent). Moreover, the majority of the Vientiane people understood sixteen clauses of the sufficiency economy principles (economization and moderation) at the highest level. Nevertheless, the most interesting clauses were “consider the needs for their living and avoid high expenditure” (98.00 percent), “participate in the community or social activities without exploiting others” (97.00 percent), “carefully research and plan for business or investment” (95.75 percent), “self-stimulation for regularly studying and finding new knowledge about the way of life and one’s own occupation” (93.75 percent), and “Economization is the important notion of sufficiency (93.50 percent)”. In addition, the daily routines of the local people were also evaluated by the 1-10 scale. “Our family have three full meals daily” received the highest score which is 10 points. Second, “every piece of work should be always based on self-reliance” received 9 points which is a very high score. Third, “lifestyle” which refers to the fact that the local people always unplugged every electrical appliance such as televisions, video players, computers, laptops, and printers after usage, received 8 points. The sufficient lifestyle also involves “having expense plan as well as buying only necessary things for themselves and their family on a daily basis”, “always donate or give food offerings to the monks”, “turn off the lights and unplug electronic appliance before going out”, “daily take care their bedroom, kitchen, and restroom”, “always eat together and stay together when their families have problems or conflicts”, “help one another as well as give suggestion and solve problem together”, and “be aware of daily money saving, economize, and buy only necessary things.”

In terms of the activities practiced at both individual and household levels based on sufficiency economy philosophy (economization and moderation) among

the people in Vientiane, Laos, the overall image was rated at medium level (3.35). When the researcher considered each part specifically, there were three parts rated at high level and other three parts rated at medium. The details are described as follows:

Activities Practiced at Individual and Household Levels	Mean	S.D.	Level
expense reduction	3.27	0.72	Medium
income expansion	3.08	0.88	Medium
money saving	3.13	0.87	Medium
lifestyle	3.56	0.70	High
environmental and natural resources conservation and usages	3.50	0.71	High
mutual generosity and helpfulness	3.56	0.73	High
Total	3.35	0.60	Medium

**Table 1. The Overall Image of Activities Practiced at Individual and Household Levels Based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy**

This shows that most local people living in Vientiane, who were government officers and students, had income not more than 10,000 baht and had the length of residency in Vientiane not over ten years. Because of their low income, the income expansion activities practiced at personal and household levels based on the sufficiency economy philosophy among the people in Vientiane was rated at the lowest.

In regards to the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy (economization and moderation) at individual and household levels, the overall image was rated at high level (3.71). When the researcher considered specifically, there were a part of the application rated at the highest level and other five parts at high level. The details are described as follows:

the Application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (Economization and Moderation)	Mean	S.D.	Level
mindset	4.22	0.73	Highest
economics	3.66	0.79	High
society	3.56	0.78	High
technology	3.53	0.76	High
natural resources and environment	3.90	0.75	High
Total	3.71	0.58	High

**Table 2. The Overall Image of the Application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (Economization and Moderation) at Individual and Household Levels**

This shows that from the majority’s point of view, the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy should begin with our minds. Second, the majority valued the word “enough” as a basis for their self-improvement, non-oppression, and sufficient

living satisfaction, respectively. However, they also gave importance to the national economy and the society.

The researcher found out that there were five possible guidelines or Way-Methods for instructing people in Vientiane to make use of the sufficiency economy philosophy (economization and moderation) according to the philosophy of King Bhumipol Adulyadej as follows:

Guideline 1: Family leaders and breadwinners should stop hanging out or partying after work because that is a waste of money. On the other hand, they should not buy alcohol in order to save money for their families' future.

Guideline 2: Before any family member spends money, each of them should be aware of and understand the needs for living. They should be economical since that is the fundamental principle of sufficiency. Moreover, they should encourage themselves to regularly study and find new knowledge about the appropriate lifestyle and one's own occupational. They also have to carefully research and plan for doing business or investment.

Guideline 3: Each family member should be self-reliant on a daily basis, especially in terms of working. Moreover, when they participate in community or social activities, they should not exploit their colleagues. The most important thing is that everyone have to eat every meal together.

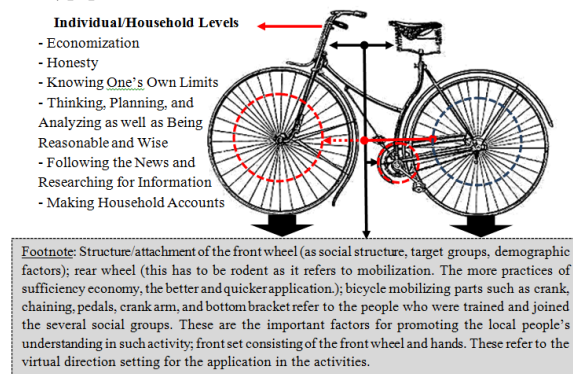
Guideline 4: Everyone should help one another because the families in urban areas mostly are extended family. They have to earn both direct and indirect income on a daily basis in order to lighten the load of family major expenses.

Guideline 5: The government institutions should raise the awareness among the people who live in Vientiane in terms of natural resources/environmental conservation. This is to sustain the environment for the community, the society, and the country.

## V. CONCLUSION

The urban community in Vientiane was more developed than other urban areas in Laos. Due to the fact that most people were Buddhists, so merit-making in Buddhism was the important parts for their lives. Most people who lived in urban areas had their hometowns in other districts. They emigrated to urban areas for trading, doing self-employed business, studying, and working as private/public employees: teachers, policemen, soldiers, and ministry leaders. However, their lengths of residency were not over ten years. In addition, they acknowledged, studied, and had opportunities to apply the sufficiency economy philosophy (economization and moderation) to their

livelihood, but there was still little participation in the sufficiency economy training; the government institutions had to arrange the training for the local people. Moreover, most people, especially the government officers in Vientiane, were members of diverse social groups. The social groups they had joined the most were the men's party, women's union, labor unions, and political parties, respectively. People comprehended, practiced, and applied the sufficiency economy philosophy to their living. They thought that what they had done was conformed to "sufficiency" which means to have enough for survival. Therefore, they had to be economical and earn more money for living if they had a high cost of living. This caused most people to have at least two occupations, for example, the government officers would have part-time jobs such as tutoring, entrepreneurs worked as musicians at night, or swineherds would have a vegetable garden. To achieve the mobilization of the sufficiency economy philosophy at individual and household levels, the researcher used the bicycle model in which "everyone has to learn to do by themselves" to find the right direction. This concept is called "Sufficiency Economy Bicycle Model". The model is illustrated as below: (Phukamchanoad, 2015)[8]



**Fig.1 The Model of the Application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy at Individual and Household Levels (This model is framed in the same way as cycling, so it is called 'Sufficiency Economy Bicycle Model').**

## VII. DISCUSSION

The overall image of the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy (Economization and Moderation) at personal and household levels among the local people in Vientiane, Laos, was rated at high level, especially in terms of their mindset, as well as the practice based on the word "sufficiency" which refers to self-improvement, non-oppression, and sufficient living satisfaction, respectively. The application of the sufficiency economy philosophy at individual and household levels among the urban people in Dusit District, Bangkok also fell into the same direction. In terms of their mindset, they agreed to have honest occupations, even though families were poor and in trouble. They also behaved in 'sufficient' way which means self-improvement, non-oppression, and

sufficient living satisfaction, especially in terms of having honest occupations. These also included the righteousness and anti-violation against the laws. Moreover, they had to follow their religious philosophies. People in Dusit District, Bangkok, thought that once they were satisfied with their lives at present, that would be the sufficient point of their lives (Phukamchanoad, 2012)[9]. However, people in urban community could control themselves better regarding their spendings at household level because they had higher responsibility due to the high cost of living, for example, food fees, electricity and water bills, and children's tuition fees. According to "Entrepreneurs Living in Urban Areas Under the Informal Economy: A Case Study of Dindaeng District" (Nirathorn, et al., 2007)[10] there had been adequate economic mobilization, but there was not any group or organization having titles or objectives in the name of sufficiency economy. The in-depth research found that people who lived based on this philosophy were satisfied with their own lives.

### VIII. SUGGESTIONS

People should be aware of and understand the urban social context, financial status, family status, and self-potential. They should change their behaviors resulted from urbanization, for example, moving away from materialism, high competition in occupations, exploitation, greed, consumerism, technology modernization, social problems, selfishness, and luxury. They should decrease the times of having parties with their friends, and rather save more money and plan their expenses ahead. They also should record the household accounts or expense accounts to remind themselves about their spending.

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