

Community Potential Development for Sustainable Agro-tourism in Thailand

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Abstract

This study aimed to: 1) Develop community potential for sustainable agro-tourism by community involvement. 2) Develop training manual for community potential development. The population of this study were farmers, farmers' housewives and community people in Phuket and Chonburi provinces and Thai tourists who used to visit these two provinces. Data was collected through the interview, survey, observation and inquiry. The study showed that the community needed to be trained about food processing from products in the communities which were in accordance with the tourists' requirements about visiting and tasting of agricultural products, products processing and products distribution. The implementation of training on food processing and tourism service for community people were conducted and developed training manual for community potential development. It can be concluded that developing sustainable agro-tourism should emphasized on economic growth together with conservation of local culture and environment. The important is community participation and benefit sharing fairly.

Key words: community potential development, agro-tourism, sustainable tourism.

1. Introduction

In developing countries, most of people in agriculture sector are much poorer than those in other sectors of the economy. Agriculture is very important for our live but the climate change and global food-price crises affect farmers' income. As in many countries, Thailand try to find the alternative ways to enhance agriculture. Regard to having a great amount of income from tourism so the government have set up the idea of farms on being agro-tourism which is a kind of ecotourism that tourists can learn the way of life and culture of people who live in the communities. In addition, farmers can sell their products without the middle man and can earn more income from tourism service. The study conducted by Nartsuda Chemnasiri (2010) was about the development of organic farms for sustainable tourism in Chiangmai, Phuket, Ubon Ratchathani, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, and Chonburi showed that there were organic farms in Phuket and Chonburi which were developed to be agro-tourism tourist attractions and learning centers but the community members lacked of knowledge in tourism services and management. In additions, there were several local products to distribute to tourists that help people earn more income but the people didn't know how to improve the quality and develop the new ones to serve tourists requirement. Therefore, the further study on community potential development for sustainable agro-tourism should be implemented.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 *To develop community potential for sustainable agro-tourism by community participation*

2.2 *To develop a training manual for community potential development.*

3. Literature Review

3.1 Agro-tourism

Nartsuda Chemnasiri (2012: 63-64) concluded that agro-tourism is an alternative tourism which tourists can visit farms and participate in various activities provided by the people in the community. It can derive fair income including environmental and cultural heritage preservation. In Thailand, agro-tourism can be classified into five categories, these are agro-tourism farm, agro-tourism village, agro-tourism park, agro-tourism government project and King's agricultural project. (Pawinee, 2000: 14-15) Most of agro-tourism are in the communities where people can get involve and gain benefit from agro-tourism activities which serve tourists' requirement.

3.2 community tourism

Pimrawee (2010) concluded that the important factors of community tourism comprise of four factors as follow : 1) potential of people : the people in the community should know their potential in order to prepare themselves for tourism implementation; 2) potential of the area to be attraction: including natural resource, culture, local wisdom; 3) management by community participation of the people by discussion among community members

and organization from outside; and 4) preparation for the impacts that might be happened even positive or negative aspects. In agricultural countries, agro-tourism can be operated in the communities so it is also a kind of community tourism.

3.3 sustainable tourism

Tourism will be fruitful to the communities if it is long lasting or it can be called sustainable tourism which makes a low impact on the environment and local culture. It helps to generate income and employment for local people so the aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development is a positive experience for local people; tourism companies; and tourists themselves. (Wikipedia. online. 2009) Moreover, Jamieson, Walter and Alix Noble (2000) concluded that some of the most important principles of sustainable tourism development include: 1) tourism should be initiated with the help of broad-based community-inputs and the community should maintain control of tourism development,

2) tourism should provide quality employment to its community residents and a linkage between the local businesses and tourism should be established, 3) a code of practice should be established for tourism at all levels - national, regional, and local - based on internationally accepted standards. Guidelines for tourism operations, impact assessment, monitoring of cumulative impacts, and limits to acceptable change should be established, and 4) education and training programs to improve and manage heritage and natural resources should be established.

3.4 community potential development

Community development (CD) is the process of helping a community strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential. (SIL International. online. 2013) Hence, community potential development is a possibility of a community to improve or growth as much as it can be.

From literature review which mentioned above, agro-tourism can be operated in the communities and will be sustainable if the people in the communities have a chance in participating and can gain benefit from tourism activities. Moreover, strengthening of the community potential is also important for sustainable agro-tourism.

4. Research Methodology

This study was a mixed method research which utilized quantitative and qualitative research methodology.

It included:

4.1 Participants

4.1.1 Groups of farmers, farmers' housewives and community people in Thalang district, Phuket province; and Panthong district, Chonburi province

4.1.2 Thai tourists

4.1.3 Community leaders and community members

4.2 Instruments

The researcher constructed one semi-structured interview and three questionnaires. A semi-structured interview was designed to elicit farmers and farmers' housewives requirements for agro-tourism management in the community. The first questionnaire aimed to obtain tourists' opinions about their interests, behaviors and requirements in agro-tourism. The second was an evaluating form for farmers and farmers' housewives to evaluate training activities which aimed to develop farmers and farmers' housewives for agro-tourism management in the community. The last was a satisfaction questionnaire for tourists to evaluate tourism service after practicing. A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agreed, agreed, were uncertain, disagreed and strongly disagreed was used to measure tourist's opinion, to evaluate training activities and to evaluate tourists satisfaction.

4.3 Data Collection

The following steps were carried out in collecting the data.

1) Thirty farmers and farmers' housewives were interviewed to explored their requirements for agro-tourism management in the community in Thalang, and Panthong district.

2) A total of four hundred Thai tourists who used to visit Phuket and Chonburi were asked to indicate their opinions about their interests, behaviors and requirements in agro-tourism in the community through the questionnaires.

3) Sixty community people or thirty community people in each district including farmers and farmers' housewives were trained on food processing from agricultural products together with tourism service.

4) One community leader and four community members in each district including a researcher discussed together as focus groups to develop a training manual for community potential development and exchanged opinion on sustainable agro-tourism.

4.4 Data analysis

As for qualitative data, the analysis was carried out to answer the first research objective.

So, the qualitative data were grouped under these headings:

- 1) General information of the respondents.
- 2) Community information about agricultural products and the readiness to be sustainable agro-tourism.
- 3) Farmers and farmers' housewives requirements for agro-tourism management in the communities.

Moreover, the quantitative data about Thai tourists' opinions on their interests, behaviors and requirements in agro-tourism, the training activities evaluation and satisfaction evaluation were analyzed by computer program to determine the mean and standard deviation. Farmers and farmers' housewives requirements and tourists' opinions were determined to set activities for development of community potential.

Concerning the second objective, community leaders and researcher discussed together to develop a training manual for community potential development. So the qualitative data were grouped into four parts as follows: 1) History of the community 2) General information of the community

3) The requirements for community potential development for sustainable agro-tourism and 4) Steps of implementation.

5. Reserach Findings

5.1 Concerning the developing community potential for sustainable agro-tourism by community participation, farmers, farmers'housewives and community people were interviewed to explored their requirements for agro-tourism management in the community in two districts. The study showed that the two communities in these three districts had good and enough infrastructure that had already developed from the previous research. The community in Thalang, the respondents said that they want to learn about herb juice because there were many flowers and herbs in the learning center of agricultural sufficiency in the community and most of people at present care about their health. In Panthong, farmers and farmers' housewives were interested in gaining knowledge and practicing on food processing. Since there were many mushroom plantations and this district was in Chonburi Province near by the sea so they wanted to make preserved food to distribute to tourists as souvenirs.

More over, the owners of the two agro-tourism areas which were developed from the previous research gave some details of each area. In Thalang district, Phuket province, there was a learning center of agricultural sufficiency where organic cutting flowers were planted such as heliconia, torch ginger, crap ginger ,etc. This plantation was an agro-tourism area which serve as a learning center followed the King's philosophy of sufficiency economy. This philosophy was developed to guide Thai people towards a balanced way of life. It's considered the key to sustainable development. In this concept, sufficiency means moderation, reasonableness, and having an adequate of immune system to protect each level against impacts caused by both external and internal changes. Hence, Mr.Somchai Sakolchit who is the owner of the cutting flower orchard, grew plants by using organic water fertilizer which was produced in his farm and didn't apply chemical substance to his plants.

Since he changed from conventional agriculture to organic farming, he got better health and earn more income because he didn't have to buy chemical fertilizer and pesticide from outside. His life didn't relied on other people. Another agro-tourism area was in Panthong district, Chonuri Province, there was also a learning center of the King's New Theory. The owner was Mr. Sombat Kanchana. His farm was integrated farming . He said that he managed his farm by follow the King's New Theory concept. Previously, farmers encountered the poverty and always be indebt because they could harvest their yield especially from rice field only once or twice a year. His Majesty King Bhumibol developed a new theory on land and water management to improve the living standards of farmers or the rural people. He aimed to help small landholders to increase farm income and food production through the appropriate division and utilization of land. This theory was based on the division of the agricultural land of each rural household, which averages 10 to 15 rai (1 hectares equal to 6.25 rai). Each land was divided into four parts in the proportion of 30-30-30-10. Part 1 was 30 percent of the land which was used for a reservoir since water supply was very important for agriculture. Apart from providing water for the crops, it can also be used to raise fish and aquatic plants to add more the household income.

Part 2 was 30 percent which devoted to rice cultivation which produced enough rice for the household needs before selling the rest. Part 3 was another 30 percent of the land which could be used for growing fruit trees or horticultural crops which in accordance with the market demand or seasoning. Part 4 was 10 per cent of land. It was used for building a house, growing household vegetables or herbs and raising livestock. The farmers always had something to eat such as eggs from the chickens, vegetable, and fish including rice from their own land. Moreover, they could sell them everyday and their children or the members in the family had a chance to join agricultural activities in the land that brought about good relationship in the family. The New Theory will help farmers achieve self-sufficiency at a frugal level. The main agriculture products from the learning center of

agricultural sufficiency in Phuket were heliconia and other flowers. While the main agriculture products in the learning center of the King's New Theory and in the community in Panthong district, Chonburi were bamboo shoot, organic vegetable and mushroom. There were many mushroom plantations in the community.

About the tourists' behaviors and requirements, the results from Thai tourists who used to visit Phuket and Chonburi showed their positive interest in agro-tourism. ($\bar{X}=3.69$). They were interested in visiting orchard ($\bar{X}=3.94$). During their visit, they wanted to have a chance in participating in cooking and tasting of agricultural products ($\bar{X}=4.00$) and product distributions ($\bar{X}=3.87$). They preferred to buy fruit juice, fruit and agricultural products from agro-tourism area ($\bar{X}=3.94$, 3.92 and 3.85 respectively). Their expectation in visiting was convenient in access to agro-tourism area ($\bar{X}=4.43$). Moreover, they agreed that the best media of tourism public relations was internet ($\bar{X}=4.14$).

From the results as mentioned above, farmers, farmers' housewives and community people want to learn about food processing to make other agricultural products to distribute to tourists. It was in accordance with tourists requirements which preferred to participate in cooking and tasting of agricultural products and wanted to buy agricultural products of the farm or agro-tourism areas. In addition, the agricultural products in each agro-tourism area were considered. Thus the implementation of a one day training on making herb juice was conducted in Thalang, Phuket and a training on mushroom chili dried sauce with shrimp was conducted in Panthong, Chonburi. The trainer of herb juice was from Kratoon district in Phuket. She was a chief of farmers' group which preserved garcinia fruit in to many kinds of garcinia products and these products were accepted to be community products by the government. The trainer of mushroom chili dried sauce with shrimp was from Faculty of Agriculture and Life Science, Chandrakasem Rajabhat University in Bangkok who was an expert in food preservation. The evaluation of the training programs showed that the participants satisfied the training activities and agreed that they gained knowledge from training program and could utilize it in community agro-tourism at a high level. After training, the participants practiced how to serve ten tourists in each agro-tourism area in the two districts. The evaluation of satisfaction reported that they satisfied at the high level.

5.2 Concerning the development of a training manual for community potential development. Two community leaders, eight community members and a researcher discussed together to develop a training manual for community potential development. A training manual for community potential development comprised of four parts, 1) history of the community 2) general information of the community 3) the requirements for community potential development for sustainable agro-tourism, and 4) steps of implementation. For sustainable agro-tourism, community leaders and community people expressed their opinions that the people who involved with agro-tourism activities in the community should earn income fairly.

6. Conclusions

From the implementation in this study, the farmers, the farmers' housewives and community members can be trained to manage agro-tourism and can earn more income besides their main career. They can also sell their agricultural products to the tourists which lead to be small business tourism in the community. Hence they will be self-reliant and can stay with happiness in their place with out transfer to find jobs in the city. For sustainable agro-tourism, this study implied that it should be economic growth together with conservation of local culture and environment which will conduce the people in the community especially the young group cherish their own community. The most important for small business sustainable tourism in the community is community participation and benefit sharing fairly. In addition, the training manual for community potential development can be utilized to develop new agro-tourism areas and community potential to fulfill sustainable agro-tourism development. It is congruent with the philosophy of "Sufficiency Economy" which His Majesty King Bhumibol, the great king of Thailand has developed to guide Thai people towards a balanced way of life. This concept is considered the key to sustainable development. "Sufficiency means moderation, reasonableness, and having an adequate "immune system" to protect each level against impacts caused by both external and internal changes. Thus the people will be happy with a small agro-tourism business in their community.

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