

## **Key factors for achieving Social Engagement in Community Development of Highland Villages: Case Studies of Mon Ngor, Mueang Kai, Kai Noi and Thung Luang Villages of Chiang. Mai, Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

This article is an investigation on the ongoing social engagement projects that research team (of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL) and King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) Collaborative Center for Royal Project Foundation and Activities) has worked for over 4 years. The research team began to engage with the villages of Mon Ngor, Mueang Kai and Kai Noi in Mae Taeng District for developing local produce and services for tourism business in 2014. Most of the highland villages in the area were struggling with aging therefore short of labor force and instable income from agricultural work. Their oversupply produces in agriculture became waste and their offspring left villages for higher education and professional work in urban area. The researcher assisted local community for developing new products from leftover produces, designing package and running small enterprises within the area. The research team applied 7-step method for engaging with community as followed; 1.) conducting intensive field work with community, 2.) identifying natural leaders or change agents in community, 3.) analyzing capacity of change agents and communities, 4.) identifying advantage of the areas, 5.) developing and transferring knowledge to other generations and different occupations in the area, and 7.) conducting self-development thus regenerating new ideas and methods.

After 2 years, the villagers at Mon Ngor could develop small businesses completely processing local Arabica coffee from fresh beans in their plantation to roasted coffee and serving tourists local cuisine from fresh produces of their backyard garden. As a major tourist destination in the neighborhood, the tea plantation worked with group of housewives in Mueang Kai Village developed complete package of tea and snacks processed from local produces. The weaving group at Kai Noi Village could expand weaving skills for new materials, modernize their basketry products and participate in modern art exhibitions both in national and international levels. The crafts master of Koi Noi became resource person in locality to develop skill of craftsmanship for other villagers and in the northern region. The villagers of Thung Luang in Mae Wang District were introduced to the research team in 2017. They were supported by the Royal Project Foundation for growing wheat for dry florist but generating leftover wheat. Within a year, the villagers develop skill for baking cake, pumpkins pies and puff using all ingredient within the vicinity of the village therefore increasing their revenue ten folds while also reducing expense, providing social security, saving and gaining opportunities for more business outside the area. Similar development projects had been introduced to highland communities in the region by other agencies in both private and public sectors but failed to create long-term solution for communities. The farmers of 4 villages that Researchers of RMUTL-KMUTT have involved, although have common problem of aging causing labor shortage, are in different social, cultural and economic contexts. As a result, they are facing different everyday life tasks, shortage of specific necessities for continuing their

lives and developing their particular skills. This paper aim to analyze and evaluate the process of engagements and communication strategies that researchers applied into each community and its natural leader(s) or change agent(s). Moreover, by comparing these 4 highland communities, this paper also reveals key factors in each engaging process that contribute to the accomplishment of community and research team in developing oversupply produces and local materials into unique products that generate new jobs in neighborhood and supplementary income to community.

**Keywords**

Social Engagement, Highland Community, Change Agent, Supplementary Income, Weaving Crafts master