

Redressing the (Unspoken) Dignity Gap - Thailand's 'Phook-Pinto-Khao' Project, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, and How to Slingshot to SDG#16 via SDG#2, et al.

Nacaskul, Poomjai

Sustainable Development Strategist, Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation, Thailand, Poomjai.Nacaskul@scb.co.th

It has been astutely observed that the remarkable aspect of post-2015 development agenda lies not so much in the expansion in scope and ambition vis-ö-vis the Millennium Development Goals, but in the conceptual leap from as-usual 'North-South Aid/Assistance' modality towards genuine 'Global Responsibility' conviction. The affluent, techno-industrialised North has just as much future survival at stake, economic growth paradigm to rethink, and burden to self-discipline as the hitherto-impoverished, subsistence-agriculture South. Aid-recipient countries of the South are imbued with renewed sense of dignity knowing that at the very least they are not the ones consuming more than their fair shares of natural resources, and in many cases are the ones making positive contribution in terms of carbon sequestration and climate stabilisation.

In Thailand, as with any other transition economies, an analogous 'North-South' division manifests itself locally as the 'Urban-Rural' gap in terms of wealth, economic opportunity, and standard of living, but also (and in our view more importantly) in terms of social status and a sense of dignity. This paper describes Thailand's 'PookPintoKao' project, which whilst professedly enlists the participation of Bangkok urbanites to help improve the livelihood of rural rice farmers---addressing SDG#1, SDG#2, SDG#3, SDG#8, SDG#10, SDG#12, and SDG#15 along the way---was conceived from the very beginning to redress what we call the 'Dignity Gap' that exists between rice-consuming urbanites and rice-producing country folks, thereby promoting just, peaceful, and above all inclusive societies (SDG#16). This is particularly pertinent given the country's past experiences with social-political unrests, perhaps borne out of years of rural farmers feeling indignant at being treated as second-class citizens.

The name 'PookPintoKao' derives from traditional practice whereby urban households---especially middle-income earners with neither time/inclination to cook daily meals themselves nor able/willing to eat out on a daily basis---subscribe to neighbourhood kitchens on long-term contracts to provide daily meals in Pintos (Thai tiffin boxes). Invoking this convenient arrangement, in the 'PookPintoKao' project urban households (the "brides") would pay upfront for organic, high-quality, even exotic-variety, rice directly to growers (the "grooms"), both parties having been vetted by Facebook-based 'PookPintoKao' project volunteers (the "matchmakers").

Section 1 describes the social-economic-political background as well as our personal inspiration for this project, reflecting Thailand's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, itself inspired and promulgated by H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand as the paradigm for pursuit of sustainable development w.r.t. all spheres of our social/cultural, political/economic, and ecological/environmental lives. Section 2 describes key aspects of the 'PookPintoKao'

programmes, the mechanisms by which they promote improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture, sustainable employment and decent work, whilst at the same time halting/reversing land degradation. Section 3 describes what is meant by reducing 'Dignity Gap', with rice-consuming urbanites feeling indebted to, rather than economically burdened by, rice-producing fellow countrymen. Section 4 describes how the 'PookPintoKao' model had been successfully emulated/franchised by other Thai activists, capitalising on revitalised private-public partnership. Section 5 concludes by discussing the relevance/applicability of the 'PookPintoKao' model in any other sustainable development context, not just for Bangkok urbanites and Thai rice farmers.