

Sufficiency Economy: A Pathway to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Globalization and economic integration are giving more consumers access to more products and services. Local and national boundaries are breaking down in the setting of social standards and aspirations in consumption. Also, Rapid urbanization, population explosion and increase in income and consumption inevitably lead to mass generation of waste. Traditional environment management pursues reactive policies with monitoring, legal regimes to reduce pollution, which is not sustainable. In order to achieve sustainable development, a paradigm shift is needed from reactive policies towards more preventive policies. In this paper we have addressed the Philosophy of "Sufficiency Economy" which takes a middle path approach towards sustainable development and is based on the foundations of moderation, reasonableness and resilience. The philosophy is underpinned by knowledge and morality.

Keywords

Sustainable Development, Sufficiency Economy.

I. Introduction

Advances in science and technology have made the world smaller through rapid communication, faster and accurate information flows, and reliable knowledge exchanges, among others. Over the past decade, the world has witnessed rapid economic growth. This growth has put enormous pressure on the environment in the form of water shortage, air and water pollution, depletion of natural resources, biodiversity loss, and land degradation [5]. World population is projected to reach 9 billion by 2050, driven largely by growth in developing countries and countries with lower per-capita incomes. Recent studies show that we are already exceeding the Earth's ability to support our lifestyles, and have been doing so for approximately twenty years [6].

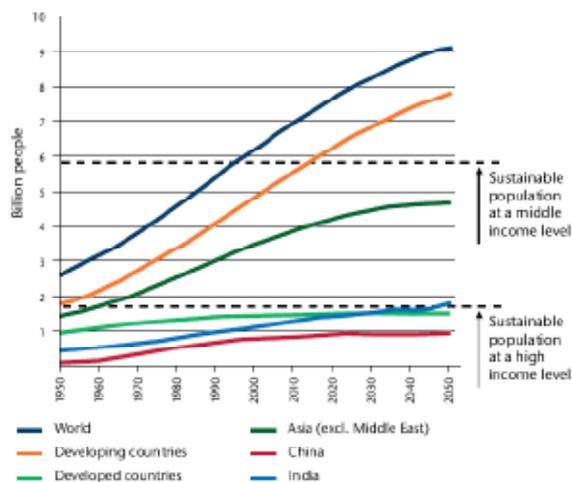


Fig. 1: World population is projected to reach 9 billion by 2050; unsustainable at a middle income level (global average). Source: World Resources Institute (WRI)/Earthtrends, 2008.

Action is needed to enhance innovative partnerships between governments and civil society including the private sector. Action is also needed to build capacity to mainstream environment in the decision-making processes to sustain adequate supply of ecosystem services from local, national to global levels. More should be done to promote regional cooperation to collectively address common and trans-boundary challenges. Given the population and the growth rate present a linear growth model of "grow now and clean up later", which is not sustainable [5]. According to World Business Council of Sustainable Development (WBCSD) Current global consumption patterns are unsustainable. Efficiency gains and technological advances alone will not be sufficient to bring global consumption to a sustainable level; changes will also be required to consumer lifestyles, including the ways in which consumers choose and use products and services [6]. In order to achieve sustainable development, a paradigm shift is needed from reactive policies towards more preventive policies, which should integrate ecological principles into development. There are numerous practices and examples of policy responses around the globe but "Sufficiency Economy" in Thailand is a stupendous success of them all, which leads the way to sustainable development [5].

II. Sustainable Development

Sustainable development encompasses economic, social, and environment perspectives of conservation and change and may be defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [7]. Sustainable development is designed to serve the needs of all peoples, enough and forever [5]. Sustainable development does not preclude the use of exhaustible natural resources but requires that any use be appropriately offset [9]. There has been a growing recognition of three essential aspects of sustainable development (see Fig. 2) [12]:

A. Economic

An economically sustainable system must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, to maintain manageable levels of government and external debt, and to avoid extreme sectoral imbalances which damage agricultural or industrial production.

B. Environmental

An environmentally sustainable system must maintain a stable resource base, avoiding over-exploitation of renewable resource systems or environmental sink functions, and depleting nonrenewable resources only to the extent that investment is made in adequate substitutes. This includes maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric stability, and other ecosystem functions not ordinarily classed as economic resources.

C. Social

A socially sustainable system must achieve fairness in distribution and opportunity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity, and political accountability and participation.



Fig. 2: Sustainable Development [13]

Technically, sustainable development can be defined as a development path along which the maximisation of human well-being for today's generations does not lead to declines in future well-being. Attaining this path requires eliminating those negative externalities that are responsible for natural resource depletion and environmental degradation. It also requires securing those public goods that are essential for economic development to last, a healthy environment and a cohesive society. Sustainable development also stresses the importance of retaining the flexibility to respond to future shocks, even when their probability, and the size and location of their effects, cannot be assessed with certainty. Sustainable development also emphasizes the importance of taking a longer-term perspective about the consequences of today's activities, and of global co-operation among countries to reach viable solutions [11].

III. Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

The philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy guides the people to a balanced way of life and to be the main sustainable development theory for the future. The theory is based upon a Middle Path between society at the local level and the market in the global context. By highlighting a balanced approach, the philosophy allows the nation to modernize without resisting globalization, but provides a means to counteract negative outcomes from rapid economic and cultural transitions. The Sufficiency Economy became critical during the economic crisis in 1997, in which Thailand needed to maintain stability to persist on self-reliance and develop important policies to recover. By creating a self-supporting economy, Thai citizens will have what they need to survive but not excess, which would turn into waste [2]. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy proposed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej to the people of Thailand, can be applied to the individual level, the community level and the national level. According to his Majesty the King, Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the people at all levels. This applies conduct starting from the family, community, as well as national level in development and administration so as to modernize in line with forces of globalization. "Sufficiency" means moderation, reasonableness, and the need for self-immunity for sufficient protection from impact arising from internal and external changes. To achieve this, an application of knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential. At the same time, it is important to strengthen the moral fiber of the nation, so that everyone, particularly public officials,

academicians, businessmen at all levels, adheres first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. In addition, a way of life based on patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom and prudence to create balance and be able to cope appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural changes in the world [3]. The philosophy of the sufficiency economy comprises three pillars: moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity (as illustrated in the fig. 3), and requires two conditions for the philosophy to work: knowledge or wisdom and ethics i.e. hard work and honesty [3, 5, 10].



Fig. 3: Three pillars of sufficiency economy

A. Moderation or the middle path

The Thai term for sufficiency (pho phiang), just like the English, has the dual meaning of both not too much and not too little. The right course avoids extremes of both extravagance and excessive economy.

B. Reasonableness

It is the sense of being aware of both the causes and consequences of any planned action.

C. Self-immunity or Resilience

It is the ability to deal with unexpected shocks.

D. Knowledge or Wisdom

The knowledge condition requires thorough study of all available information and experience in order to make prudent decisions.

E. Ethics or Morality

The morality condition stresses integrity, trustworthiness, honesty and the hard-work of individuals.

IV. Conclusion

The world has witnessed rapid economic growth over the past decade. This growth has put enormous pressure on the environment in the form of water shortage, air and water pollution, depletion of natural resources, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. Traditional environment management pursues reactive policies with monitoring, legal regimes to reduce pollution, which is not sustainable. In order to achieve sustainable development, a paradigm shift is needed from reactive policies towards more preventive policies. Sustainable development means attaining a balance between environmental protection and human economic development and between the present and future needs. It requires an integration of economic, social and environmental approaches towards development. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, discussed

in this paper, takes a middle path approach towards sustainable development and is based on the foundations of moderation, reasonableness and resilience. The philosophy is underpinned by knowledge and morality. Thus, by practicing Sufficiency Economy, people would live in harmony and with security in a sustainable society and environment; and they would be able to tolerate and cope with all kinds of malign impacts of globalization.

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