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THESIS/DISSEMINATION ABSTRACT

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THESIS: PEASANT MODIFICATION IN MANAGING A FARMERS' ASSOCIATION: A CASE STUDY
OF THE NORTHEAST THAI PEASANTRY

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Statement of the Problem

Main Problem: In the implementation of rural development projects, a gap usually exists between what has been planned and proposed, especially the government plans, and what has been actually implemented and perceived by the people. In the case of farmers' associations (FAs), it is very important to understand the peasants' actual behavior in managing an FA in an empirical setting. Given the FA which was initiated by the government to help peasants and was later transformed by the peasants, it is necessary to understand the patterns of transformation that had occurred and the reasons for such patterns.

Subproblem: (1) How do the members of an FA modify the association's structure, rules, goals, and activities which were originally formulated by the government? (2) Why do these modifications occur? Who benefits from these modifications?

Procedure

The research used the descriptive approach in understanding how and why the peasants modified the government-mandated structure, goals, rules, and activities of an FA in Northeast Thailand. The Sainawang farmers' association (SFA) of Kalasin province was purposely selected as a unit of analysis. The researcher employed the semistructured interview, observation, and secondary data review as the data-gathering techniques. Fifty respondents were involved in the study.

Treatment of Data

Data were analyzed in response to the research question: how and why have the peasants modified the government-given FA? In doing this, the conceptual framework, dealing with the organization and the relational peasant, was very useful in organizing the data. The peasant members of a given FA were understood by analyzing their relation with the Thai government, and their behavior in running the FA was interpreted as the outcome of their investments which the peasants had made for the welfare of their families.

Findings

The peasants in Northeast Thailand had been involved with the Thai state since the time of King Chulalongkorn's administrative reforms during the 1890s. Despite of several resistances, e.g., peasant rebellion in 1901, rise of political leaders in the 1950s, the Royal Thai government (RTG) implemented rural development programs to upgrade the living standard of the people in this region. The formation of FAs, a nationwide program implemented in 1972, was the government's attempt to extend agricultural inputs to the poor peasants. Through this program, the government also aimed to organize the peasants against the communist movement in this region.

However, the SFA experience indicates that the peasants had modified the government-given features of the FA, namely, structure, goals, rules, and activities. This modification was brought by the fact that the peasants in the Sai-nawang area had formed their own self-help group even before it registered with the government as an FA. The modification was likewise influenced by (1) peasant's rationality concerning the cost-benefit calculation, family insurance, and kinship ties, (2) ecological factors, and (3) government and nongovernment organizations (NGOs).

Conclusions

(1) Although the Northeast Thai peasants had long been under the control of the Thai government, they reacted to the government intervention by modifying the government-given FA.

(2) The peasants had made several investments in order to achieve their life goals, which aimed at the well-being of their households. Joining SFA was only one of these investments.

(3) Because the peasants were rational actors, they weighed their investments based on their cost-benefit calculation.

(4) The survival of their households, rather than the survival of the whole community, was the most important goal of the peasants. Hence, they balanced their investments in a way that they could maintain good relations with the government and could continue their participation in SFA.

(5) NGOs had a very important role in helping the peasants solve their problems, as well as in dealing with the government and with the capital market.

Recommendations

From the research findings, the recommendations drawn were (1) involvement of NGOs, (2) empowerment of peasants with the use of the community, participative approach, (3) promotion of the network of FAs, and (4) formation of more accurate policies for the FA. These might help improve the performance of FAs in Thailand.