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# Integration of community forest management and development activities: Lessons learned from Ubon Ratchathani province

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## ABSTRACT

Community forest is expected to be a tool for improving the quality of life of people living in the forest. However, the integration of community forest with the development activities for sustainability has not been investigated. This study analyzed the integration between community forest and community development toward sustainability using a case study involving Ban Donmu and Ban Chard, Ubon Ratchathani province. This qualitative research used observation and in-depth interviews with 22 key informants consisting of 2 forest officers, 4 community leaders, 6 forest community committee, 3 non-government organization workers, 2 scientists, and 5 forest community users. Snowball sampling was used to select persons for interviewing, followed by content analysis and synthesis. The results showed that the communities performed strongly in forest management, based on community tradition and culture, and a kinship system integrated with academic knowledge and local wisdom. A learning process through community-based research contributed to the integration of holistic community development activities fitting to the community's way-of-life and needs. Learning centers were established for sharing knowledge. Grouping and participation were developed based on community democracy. A conservation concept was implanted in youths through activities, and leaders acted as good role models on how to live. The communities received support from outside agencies, screened by the community forum. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Buddhist doctrines have been followed in development and lifestyle activities, resulting in changing practices and ways of thinking to those that agreed and balanced with the social and cultural context.

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## Introduction

Forest is a renewable natural resource and can be a common resource. [Ostrom \(1990\)](#) concluded that the resource users can commonly look after and manage and use the common resource efficiently under proper

regulations for sustainable land use. The factors underlining the successful common use of community resource from studies in many countries identified by [Poteete and Ostrom \(2004\)](#) were receiving common benefits and relying on the natural resource for community livelihood. This could occur through the community itself or with support from an outside agency.

In Thailand, community forest is legally defined as forest or other forms of land use under the Community Forest

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Projects approved by the Royal Forestry Department according to the designated guidelines, with management by community participation under the relevant Forest Acts, for conservation and sustainable benefit of the community (Office of Community Forest Management and Royal Forestry Department, 2011). Community forest covers 3,993,341 rai (1 ha = 6.25 rai) and the Northeastern region has the highest number of community forest projects with 4,070 projects involving 4,546 villages. Community forest is a form of forest management that allows local people participation in management together with the Royal Forestry Department, focusing on land use with sustainable forest resource management. However, such issues as “forest for society”, “forest community’s role in the quality of life of the people using the forest” and “forest management that is human management” have not been adequately discussed (Ramitanan, 1985). This involves mind elevation and changing behavior from looking at one’s own benefit to cooperating in conserving resource for the common interest. The regulations controlling the behavior of people and the incentives offered have not been effective enough to control and guarantee the sustainability of community forest land use.

Community forest management as a tool for improving people’s quality of life to be capable of living together with the forest on an interdependent basis, by applying the approach of sustainability and the Sufficiency Economy as a conceptual framework have been set down in National Economic and Social Plans—from the 8th plan (1987–2001) to the present 11th plan (2012–2016). However, the application of the Sufficiency Economy has been mostly limited to the agricultural sector. There has been an attempt by an academic group to design indices for the application of the Sufficiency Economy in natural resource and environmental management at the community level to further extend the ideas and practices.

Ban Donmu and Ban Chard in Ubon Ratchathani Province are communities practicing strong community forest management that were selected by the government agency as learning centers of community development under the Sufficiency Economy and natural resource conservation. The communities are well known and widely accepted at both the provincial and national levels. This study aimed to explore successful community forest management that had been linked and integrated with other aspects of community development in order to elaborate and document the lessons learned and to apply the knowledge to other communities.

The objectives of the study were to investigate the existing integration process of community forest management with community development and to analyze the integration process of community forest management towards sustainability.

## Methodology

The method used in this study was qualitative research based on a case study of the two communities of Ban Don Mu, tambon Kampaia, Trakarnpuetpol district and Ban Chard, tambon Namtaeng, Srimuangmai district, both in Ubon Ratchathani province. The data were collected from

relevant documents, observations, and in-depth interviewing of the 22 key informants consisting of 2 forestry officers, 4 community leaders, 6 members of forest community committees, 3 non-government organization workers, 2 social scientists working at the study sites, and 5 community members using the community forest. Snowball sampling-purposive sampling was used, linking from one person to another. The research was carried out over 18 months from November 2011 to April 2013. The data were analyzed using content analysis and accuracy checks were made with relevant people until a common conclusion was achieved, followed by synthesis by describing the contextual relationship linkages.

The study sites were selected based on the following criteria: 1) each community was legally approved, and 2) each community had experience with situations or operations that had required solving natural resource deterioration by organizing a group to look after and regenerate the natural resource based on the research assumption that the community had potential in development and for changes at the individual level—development from the inside to the outside.

## Results

### *Community Context*

Ban Chard, tambon Namtaeng, Srimuangmai district, Ubon Ratchathani province is an over-100-year-old agricultural community, covering 6,446 rai, of which 3,000 rai is agricultural land and consisting of 161 households with a population of 844. Ban Don Mu, tambon Kampaia, Trakarnpuetpol district, Ubon Ratchathani province dates back over 200 years, occupying 3,540 rai, of which 2903 rai is agricultural land and is also an agricultural community of 835 people in 166 households.

Both communities were old communities, possessing strong traditions and culture with a kinship system, following the E-sarn (Northeastern) rural society simple way of life, but having also modernization from its industrial economy.

### *Community Forest Management Context*

The Ban Chard community forest is located 3 km from the village and covers 2,408 rai of deciduous dipterocarp forest type, which is currently under rehabilitation. The villagers cooperate in caring for the community forest which is used both directly and indirectly. Ban Chard community forest management is unique due to the role of females and its being the learning center for other communities regarding sustainable forest use and family forest tree planting along farm bunds or boundaries to reduce the pressure on using natural forest.

The Ban Donmu community forest is also a deciduous dipterocarp forest that is being rehabilitated with the cooperation of community forest care. The forest occupies three parcels totaling 626 rai. The Donmu community involvement in forests includes establishing a community forest committee to control the community members who must follow the regulations commonly designated for

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