

Communal Life of Love and Unity of the Mountain People

Introduction



Mountain people learn, live, love and unite for life – to awaken and search for the treasure within the mountain. By combining our wisdom, we can co-exist and develop to our fullest potential, working towards holistic dignity and sustainability. This initiative involves 1,144 families, mainly concentrated in Mae Win, Mae Wang District, Chiang Mai Province in Thailand.

The small villages are scattered all over the mountains and the mountain people keep a rich and long tradition of symbiosis with our environment. As we have long been living in remote places, today the young people face problems to access formal education (high school), requiring them to move nearer to towns. This process is leading to the loss of our traditional culture.

Figure 1. Mountain people

Description of the Agroecology system

As farmers, our families and communities live in Nature; therefore, our way of life is centred on agriculture. Our mutual relationship with nature forms a symbiotic and ecological life. Hence, we fully live and practise Agroecology: we cultivate plants in our land and mountains that are covered with a luxuriant rainforest.

We process coffee from a variety of species grown at different locations. Beginning with selecting coffee cherries, through the entire coffee process, including roasting and marketing. We select the right species of coffee for the right locations, and complete the whole cycle of organic production, including searching for the appropriate micro-organism. Our coffee growing process aims to return rich and prosperous resources back to nature. Good coffee grows well under big trees. To grow coffee is to re-forest. Under our plan, forests will be strong enough to multiply prosperity. And humanity upstream and downwards will co-exist happily with nature.



then



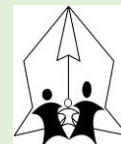
later



now

Figure 2. Re-forested mountain plantation

As our project at Mae-win, Mae-Wang, Chiang Mai has witnessed, our mountain plantation has re-forested and re-modeled the relationships between humans and nature to ensure a happy life. Our network members successfully planted coffee and the forest.



To promote an efficient and organized value chain we work in a three level approach:

1. To be more effective, our communities formed an Agricultural Group to take care of the *primary* stage of our operations: planting, growing and harvesting.
2. From those raw products, we needed to organize ourselves around processing, to know how to master the *secondary* step of our value chain. For that reason, we started a Community Enterprise.
3. From this point, we felt we needed to establish a business company, to learn about marketing and put this into practice.

With this three level approach we ensure that we turn a short-life product (cherries) into a long-life one (green beans) or a high-value one (roasted beans). To achieve this we organize ourselves in a kind of cooperative, in which we aim to lower production and logistic costs. Through this cooperative (we call it community enterprise) we can control and manage the whole value chain (translated into a premium of around 20%, compared with market prices, to the small farmers). This company gives poor people a stronger negotiating power, thanks to direct marketing and brand creation.

Currently, our distribution channel is mainly to local coffee shops. However, the local way of consumption does not provide a market for the specialty coffee growing process that we use. Therefore, we are currently targeting Thai 5-stars hotels to make our brand known and hence to be able to sell it at a higher and fairer price. To do this, we need more and more good cherries. Consequently, we are encouraging, by means of financial incentives, our farmers to deliver better quality.



Figure 3. Coffee trees

Political space

This project was built without any kind of official support or government funding. Through our approaches, efforts and lifestyle, we have witnessed the wonders of education. Through the project, our members enhanced their happiness and self-esteem, awakening the treasure from within, resulting in attaining the international recognition of organic quality standards.

They applied their new learnings and systematic way of thinking, to manage their local knowledge and wisdom, bringing forth their leadership skills, and offering new alternative practices for their own mountainous home base.

Outcomes of the practices

After learning new methods of harvesting and coffee processing for three years, the members introduced systematic practices of reforesting the land through coffee plantations, harvesting, and the overall coffee growing process from farm to cup. These new methods allowed us to increase the production from 3 Thai Bhat (TBH) per kg in 2014, to 5 TBH in 2015, to 8 TBH in 2016. Meanwhile, there were also non-financial benefits from returning prosperity to 25 hectares of otherwise barren highlands.



Table 1. CLUMP increment to network members

Year	Cherry cost/kg			Increment
	At plantation	Market price	CLUMP	%
2015	15	20	25	25.0
2014	10	15	17	13.3
2013	10	14	17	21.4
2012	Second year trial			
2011	Beginning			

*On average, 6 kg of cherries make 1 kg of green beans

It is also important to highlight the non-economic benefits we are getting from this project:

Short-term:

- *Preserving the existing rainforest.*
- *Strengthen community bonds.*
- *Improving knowledge of other cultures.*
- *Providing proper formal and non-formal education to young people.*
- *Cutting down the price of healthcare, previously increased by use of chemicals.*
- *Awakening the sense of belonging to nature and the need to symbiotically co-exist with it.*

Long-term:

- *Re-foresting the barren lands.*
- *Developing a local pride to be Karen.*
- *Turning cultural non-holistic behaviours into sustainable ones within the communities.*
- *Offering more living possibilities to poor people.*
- *Improving access to healthier food and healthier practices.*
- *Raising the awareness of what it means to be human.*

These successful testimonies can be found in the areas of 1,144 families, mainly concentrated in Mae Win, Mae Wang, Chiang Mai Province. The model has now been replicated at Pang Hin Fon, Mae Cheam, Chiang Mai Province. We hope to see an increase in fertility in this land by 2020.



Figure 4. Coffee process



In retrospect, through our simple lifestyle of respecting ourselves, others, nature, technology and the contextual development of the world, we are educated in our daily pace of life. Somehow, our empowerment approach not only awakens the treasure within but also develops the *physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual* and *social* dimensions of our being.

One important point of our model is the easiness of reproducibility in other areas, as it is all a matter of common sense. Naturally, the way to do that is to ensure that no individual will try to take advantage of it. We found that the 3 levels were a key factor to ensure success. Like always, it is first a kind of spiritual revolution, and once this is in progress, everything else will surely follow. Often this happens at its own pace, sometimes in ways that have not been foreseen.

Through the project, we have enhanced the growth of all the mutual elements connected to us. We have learned that we need to sustain the dignity of all creatures, to allow the life of symbiotic existence. Thus, we share the holistic nature of lively and happy living. Concerning our immediate future, through this operational concept, taking our highland development as the model, we are planning to establish a cacao plantation in connection with chocolate production of the lowlanders. For both land levels, we are preparing pepper as a herb to stimulate the revival of many other local herbs in the land.

Message from farmer to farmers

*“As long as we **live**, we **learn**, every day and everywhere, formally or informally. We live in families...in communities...in nature. And the interactions among these interconnected relations in each context naturally give birth to culture, which springs forth from the underlying faith.”*

— Brother Anurak