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A Keynote Speech

on

**King Rama IX's Philosophy:  
Interdisciplinary Thinking beneath Sustainable Development**

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His Majesty's [King Rama IX] far-sighted Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, and its contribution to economic and social change today, not only in Thailand but globally... He advocated a holistic vision of human development to empower the most disadvantaged, to achieve greater social equity by challenging classic growth patterns. This philosophical guidance resonates deeply with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in 2015, which sets an ambitious and bold blueprint to advance human dignity and protect our planet.

Irina Bokova

*Director-General of UNESCO*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

As the coronavirus pandemic escalates and disruptions to business-as-usual continue, everyone is grappling with the unknown future. People and researchers are asking what will be our world after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event in modern history. Future uncertainty triggers fear. People are freaking out and wondering what does this mean for their business, lifestyle, and their future as a whole. The global pandemic even forced us to rethink about the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Originally, for sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three interconnected core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The recent devastating effect on health outcome raises questions on Sustainable Development Goal 3: 'ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.' Nowhere in the targets of the SDGs 3 on good health and well-being mentions the global pandemic on such a scale as we are facing at the moment. Earlier no one would think the human world would face the Covid-19 pandemic whereas the damage created by Covid-19 is worse than what we expected from any of the economic, social, and environmental declines. Suddenly, human security from health became our priorities of survival. The SDGs targets need to expand priorities on health and wealth because the Covid-19 pandemic left us with a dilemma of health or wealth. Approaching human health and wealth is the subject of a multidisciplinary approach to our future.

In this paper on 'King Rama IX's Philosophy: Interdisciplinary Thinking Beneath Sustainable Development,' I provide an alternative approach and interpretation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Bokova, Irina (2017) Inaugural Address of the conference on 'Creating Sustainable Society of Peace – A legacy of King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand,' UNESCO (26 September 2017)

Sufficiency Economy as a means of a sound approaching future that guarantees the sustainable development from interdisciplinary thinking.

**Keywords:** sufficiency economy, sustainable development, SDGs, King Rama IX.

## 1. Introduction

What is King Rama IX's philosophy? The late King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand referred to in this paper as King Rama IX, developed what is now known as the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), which is one way of achieving the global agenda of sustainable development. Yet, the SEP has introduced a way ahead of the United Nations' global agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although King Rama IX has been promoting self-reliant or sustainable farming since the 1950s, it is generally accepted that the idea of the Sufficiency Economy had been brought up only in the 1970s. On the contrary, the SDGs were only announced at the end of 2015. To put it simply, the concept of the SEP was introduced by King Rama IX about four decades ahead of the UN's 2030 agenda for SDGs.

Explaining what is SEP, Avery and Bergsteiner<sup>2</sup> write 'the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, which is a set of social, economic, environmental, and cultural guidelines for moving the nation towards a healthier, more prosperous, more sustainable and happier future.' The Chaipattana Foundation<sup>3</sup>, King Rama IX's foundation for application of the SEP, on its website defines, 'Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy based on the fundamental principle of Thai culture. It is a method of development based on moderation, prudence, and social immunity, one that uses knowledge and virtue as guidelines in living. Significantly, there must be intelligence and perseverance which will lead to real happiness in leading one's life.'

Here I would argue that it is doubtful to state King Rama IX's 'Sufficiency Economy' as a philosophy although it is widely used and already took for granted by many. But I haven't found any evidence in royal speeches where King Rama IX referred his concept as a philosophy.

Quite literally, the term 'philosophy' means, 'love of wisdom.' In a broad sense, philosophy is an activity people undertake when they seek to understand fundamental truths about themselves, the world in which they live, and their relationships to the world and each other. As an academic discipline philosophy is much the same. Those who study philosophy are perpetually engaged in asking, answering, and arguing for their answers to life's most basic questions. Sticking to this meaning of philosophy, Sufficiency Economy is nowhere near to the philosophy. King Rama IX's concept of the sufficiency economy does not indicate any aspect of proper philosophy but it is a multidisciplinary approach to future development.

To clarify my statement of denying King Rama IX's Sufficiency Economy as a philosophy I would recall a conversation I once had with H.E. Wissanu Krea-ngam, a deputy Prime Minister of Thailand. When I asked him about the correctness of labelling the concept of the 'Sufficiency Economy' as a philosophy, he told me that he had the

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<sup>2</sup> Avery, Gayle C. and Bergsteiner, Hearld (2016) *Sufficiency Thinking* Sydney: Allen & Unwin p. xv

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.chaipat.or.th/eng/concepts-theories/sufficiency-economy-new-theory.html>

same question. Accordingly, on one occasion he had a chance to ask King Rama IX about it and the King clarified that he had never referred his concept of Sufficiency Economy as a philosophy, however, if someone persists on using philosophy it should be ‘Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy’ instead. The difference here is that it is not ‘the philosophy’ but one can study it as ‘a philosophy of.’ The Sufficiency Economy is, in fact, interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development.

Despite any proper reference, it has widely been referred to as Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP). Therefore, it is important to understand that philosophy here doesn’t use in its proper sense of philosophy but it is used in a broader sense as *‘a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs.’*

The SEP is a model of development that counts people and planet matters. So, whatever we do, we must always make sure that we are not stealing from future generations. Oceans of words have been written to explain what sustainable development is. But it boils down to these simple principles – putting people and planet first, not profit maximization. They happen to be the very same principles of SEP. The SEP is Thailand’s development thinking which has been adopted as the country’s development framework and national policy for past decades and it works.

King Rama IX’s philosophy works because it is not a one-size-fits-all policy recipe or technique. Rather, it is rational decision-making that is practical, simple to implement, and flexible to different challenges from a multidisciplinary approach.

The ‘Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy’ and global agenda for ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDGs) are developing models of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While Sufficiency Economy is wisdom initiated by King Rama IX of Thailand, sustainable development is the global agenda that the United Nations Organization announced to meet its goal by 2030. Although the background of these two theories is very different from its nature and inception the goal is the same i.e. a holistic and integrated development of people and planet.

Analysing both Sufficiency Economy and sustainable development, one can see that the Sufficiency Economy can be considered as interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development. This is attested by Irina Bokova<sup>4</sup>, former Director-General of UNESCO in her address:

The late King put into practice a vision that gives us the keys to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and, in this spirit. His Majesty’s far-sighted Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, and its contribution to economic and social change today, not only in Thailand but globally.

His Majesty marked the history of the twentieth century – but this vision – and I would say wisdom – will mark the 21st century as well. He advocated a holistic vision of human development to empower the most disadvantaged, to achieve greater social equity by challenging classic growth patterns.

This philosophical guidance resonates deeply with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in 2015, which sets an ambitious and bold blueprint to advance human dignity and protect our planet.

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<sup>4</sup> Bokova, Irina (2017) Inaugural Address of the conference on ‘Creating Sustainable Society of Peace – A legacy of King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand,’ UNESCO (26 September 2017)

Based on Madam Bokova's remark, it is clear that both the Sufficiency Economy and the SDGs are the same in its ideologies with different ways of presenting it. While the SEP is the foundation for interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development the SDGs are a roadmap to achieve sustainable development itself.

## **2. Rethorising Sufficiency Economy Philosophy**

In Thailand, many wrongly refer to the Sufficiency Economy as a new theory for sustainable agriculture. Although it may work well with the concept of sustainable agriculture King Rama IX did not propose his Sufficiency Economy as a tool for sustainable agriculture.

King Rama IX first states about sufficiency economy back in 1974, however, it was developed to be a complete concept only in 1997 with the 'tom yam kung' financial crisis as its background. Back in 1997, the Tom Yam Kung financial crisis was the worst economic crisis Thailand had ever seen, and the effects were felt far and wide. the Tom Yum Kung Crisis brought the Thai economy to pieces before developing into one of Asia's biggest financial crises. King Rama IX fully introduced his Sufficiency Economy as the middle path to gain recovery from that worst financial crisis. From that year onward, he kept speaking about it again and again on many occasions for people to get it right and able to recover from the crisis to sustainability.

The application of the sufficiency economy is more of the style of 'how-to' tools. Sufficiency Economy is a tool to gain human happiness while able to uphold reasonable interdisciplinary development. Often the term 'sufficiency' equates with the term 'contentment,' 'satisfaction', and use wrongly as in a sense of unproductive, isolation, self-reliance, cut off from the outside world, etc.

Therefore, in his birthday speech of December 1998, King Rama IX clarified that 'sufficiency' did not, in his lexicon, mean cut off from the outside world explaining that:

I may add that full sufficiency is impossible. If a family or even a village wants to employ a full sufficiency economy, it would be like returning to the Stone Age... This sufficiency means having enough to live on. Sufficiency means to lead a reasonably comfortable life, without excess, or overindulgence in luxury, but enough. Some things may seem to be extravagant, but if it brings happiness, it is permissible as long as it is within the means of the individual... Some people translate 'sufficiency' from the English as; stand on one's own feet. This means standing on our own two legs planted on the ground, so we can remain without falling over, and without asking others to lend us their legs to stand on...<sup>5</sup>

From King Rama IX's own words, the importance of sufficiency is not frugality but lies on a balance leading to a happy life. Therefore, happiness is the ultimate goal of the Sufficiency Economy. Unfortunately, many misunderstood King Rama IX and limited his concept as just a philosophy. Worst is that most national policymakers referred to SEP as foundations of their policies but referred it as a proper philosophy,

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<sup>5</sup> Royal address given at Chitralada Villa, 4 December 1998.

not as a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs. Therefore, in a real practical level people are not able to understand the essence of the SEP.

On another note, in Pali, the language of Buddhism, sufficiency, or *santutthi* is a synonym for happiness (*sukha*). Considering this cross-linguistic perspective, it would not be wrong to claim that the Sufficiency Economy is, in fact, the Economy of Happiness. Therefore, King Rama IX's Sufficiency Economy is not only interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development but its ultimate goal is to create the economy of happiness.

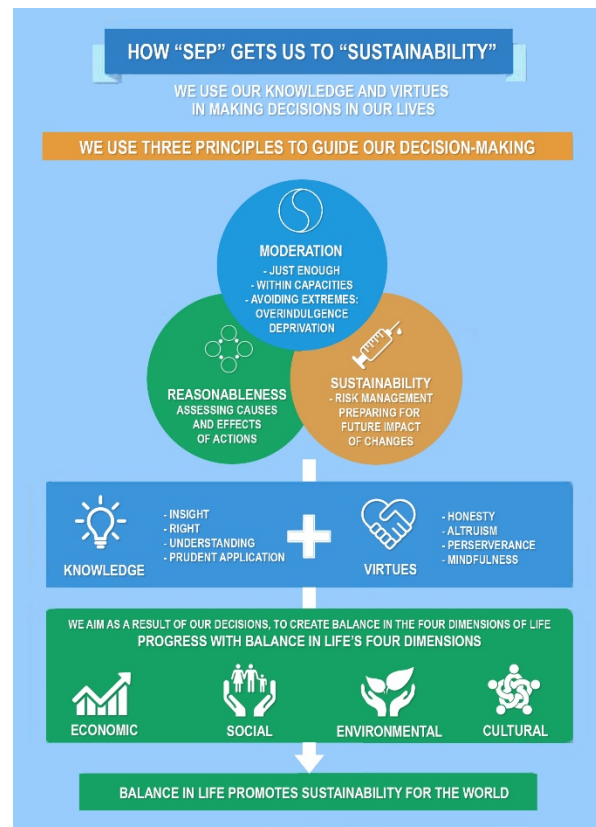
The Royal Thai government officially adopted the 'Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy' (NOT Sufficiency Economy Philosophy) bestowed by King Rama IX as the guiding principle of national development and management only in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006). The philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, based on adherence to the middle path, is advocated (a) overcome the current economic crisis that was brought about by unexpected change under conditions of rapid globalization and disruption, and (b) achieve sustainable development. This clearly shows that the SEP is not just a philosophy but interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development.

Working from notes of all the King Rama IX's speeches on the economic issue as well as other documentation, yet another clarification of the Sufficiency Economy by explaining the three legs of Sufficiency Economy can be drawn into attention as follows:

1. Moderation – i.e., enough in the sense of neither too much nor too little. Moderation in this sense is close to the Buddhist ideal of the Middle Path between wanting and craving that inspires both frugality and self-reliance.

2. Sustainability – or built-in resilience to be able to withstand unforeseen changes in economic forces or other unpredictable events, meeting the future with self-reliance and self-discipline.

3. Reasonableness – A true Sufficiency Economy will require a level of universal awareness when it comes to economic decisions, with the entire process, from initial proposal to final impact on the individual, the society, and the environment thought through for long-term consequences. To accomplish this, of course, means applying wisdom, foresight, knowledge, analytical reasoning, compassion, and empathy.



Expressed in this fashion, it is clear that the Sufficiency Economy is not just about economics and economic theory but it is a guide to living on both an individual and a national level. While this places the King Rama IX's concept at odds with the rapacious winner-take-all, short-term thinking of global capitalism at its worst. King Rama IX has pointed out time and again, the Sufficiency Economy is not anti-capitalist; it merely seeks to place the goals of production and profitability within the larger framework of harmonious, self-reliant society. In other words, to take productivity and profit and turn them from an end in themselves into the means – and just one of the means – of a peaceful and prosperous society for all.



The conventional economic theory proposes that human happiness derives from individuals' pursuing their self-interest; the assumption is that the drive to enhance one's benefits and increase consumption is rooted in reason at both the individual and market levels, with the market sorting out any inequities that might arise in the allocation of wealth and other resources.

Such a philosophy flies in the face of Buddhism, one of whose fundamental precepts is the interconnectedness or, actually interdependency of all life forms on earth, whether human or non-human. The path to happiness, in this worldview, is not via the pursuit of self-interest, whether rational or not but through compassion, empathy, and cooperation. No evidence increased wealth, consumption, or power leads to contentment; indeed, studies reveal exactly the opposite: that these things increase anxiety and conflict between individuals and different segments of society, while also destroying the finite resources – the ecosystem – upon which civilized societies depends for their existence. An approach to the economic sector of human life that makes sufficiency rather than endless increase its objective is far more likely to generate individual peace and national harmony.

In other words, the Sufficiency Economy is a way of curbing desire within the context of reality and the Dharma. It does not mean denying oneself, not indulging oneself. It is the middle path. It is an overall approach to human and social development. It is a

transferable concept applicable to countries with either emerging or fully developed economic systems.

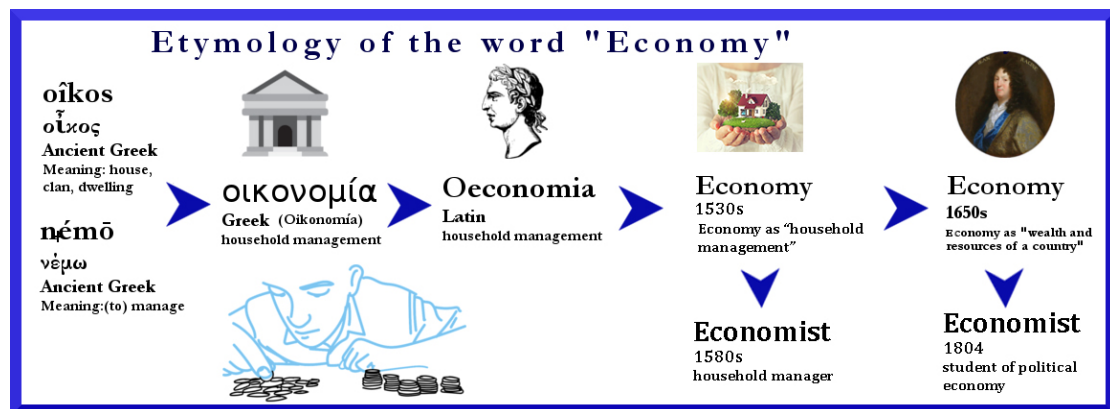
King Rama IX made clear that by ‘Sufficiency Economy,’ he was not advocating some kind of hopeless ideal of achieving an austere and self-punitive autarky – complete self-sufficiency – but a middle path, very much in the Buddhist tradition, striking a balance between craving too much and having too little.

The whole idea of the Sufficiency Economy is to address the root cause of suffering, which is craving, and to promote contentment. Contentment is key to the Sufficiency Economy, but of course, contentment is contextual. If you have 100 Baht and that is enough, you are content. But if a cup of coffee costs 200 Baht and you want that coffee, then you are not content. Buddhism is not inimical to capitalism – it is not about curbing productivity, but about mastering desire.

### 3. *Sethakit Porphiang*: Sufficiency is a Noble Action

On a different note, the neologism ‘Sufficiency Economy’ can be easily understood as an oxymoron. Economics, in general, is all about gratifying human greed. The essence of human life is the gratification of greed itself. One without greed wouldn’t be a human in a general sense. If there is a man without greed, he would be a saint or enlightened person!<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the economy is always against sufficiency by nature. That is why the economy is also popularly known as a ‘dismal science’ in many ways.

Then, why King Rama IX used an oxymoron to impart his wisdom? The problem lies in the term ‘economy’ in a Western sense. When talking of economy or anything related to economics, we use a Western vocabulary and we think within the conceptual framework of modern Western economic theory. It is difficult to avoid these constraints when we deal with King Rama IX’s ‘Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.’



Why do I argue against this popular use? Unexpected to general uses, the etymological meaning of economy (in the 1530s) is ‘household management’ from *oikonomia* in Greek. Accordingly, an economist (in 1580s) means a ‘household manager’ and economise (in 1640s) means ‘to govern a household.’ Of course, the term is derived

<sup>6</sup> According to Buddhism, a human is nurtured by greed. The very term in Pali for a layman is *Puthujana* which means ‘a person who has heavy desire’ or ‘*Gharavasa*’ ‘householder’ which means ‘a person who lives by sensual pleasures.’



from Latin and Greek backgrounds indicating the act of household management. This is different from modern uses of the economy which means ‘an entire network of producers, distributors, and consumers of goods and services in a local, regional, or national community.’

Therefore, to get the right view on the SEP we need to bring back ourselves to the original meaning of economy not modern meaning. A good example of misuse of the term economics also exists in the Thai language. In Thai language economics is called ‘*setthakit*.’ If you asked any Thai what do you mean by ‘*setthakit*’ they will immediately answer that it means ‘economics.’ When the late King Rama IX introduced the concept of ‘Sufficiency Economy’ or ‘*Setthakit Porphiang*’ in 1997 most Thais understood it under the shade of modern meaning of economy.

The modern economy uses economic growth as the main focus to ensure the growth of the nation and wealth creation. Essentially economics became the study of how to obtain personal gain and national wealth creation. With this in mind, if we scrutinize the term ‘Sufficiency Economy’ it is indeed an oxymoron because it would be insane to say enough to economy or wealth creation. Certainly, there could not be any economic system that asked to stop or say enough to the growth of personal and national wealth creation.

#### 4. Sufficiency Economy: A Buddhist Perspective

The background of the idea of ‘Sufficiency Economy’ is the Buddha’s own word i.e. ‘*Santutthi param dhanam*’ which means ‘*sufficiency is a noble wealth.*’ Here, the Buddha uses the term ‘*dhanam*’ or wealth but it is nothing near to the modern uses of wealth as we understood but it is the noble wealth, well-being, or virtue instead.



This is again not a surprising use in Buddhist terminology if we know how the term wealth in English came about. It is said that wealth was formed as an analogy with health. While health indicates physical well-being and happiness, wealth indicates mental well-being and happiness. For example, the commonwealth had the general sense of

the well-being of the community before it developed into a special but related sense of a kind of social order.

Therefore, King Rama IX used term *setthakit* or economics in its original meaning i.e. noble actions. *Settha* or *Srestha* in Pali and Sanskrit means noble, supreme, or ultra. *Kit* is derived from a Pali word ‘*kicca*’ which means activities or actions. Accordingly, the coinage of the term *setthakit* means ‘supreme actions’ in its literal sense. This is far from the modern understanding of economics. The term ‘*setthakit*’ in Thai is the replacement of the term ‘*bhogakit*’ in the past which means ‘consuming activities.’

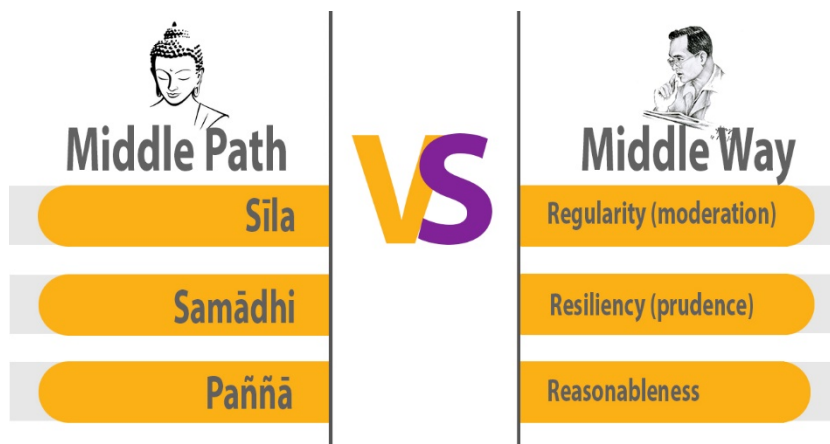
If we look at the late King’s idea on ‘Sufficiency Economy’ from the etymological background, then we find that his idea was fully grounded on Buddhist teaching and it is sound. King Rama IX personalized Buddha’s phrase of ‘*sufficiency is a noble wealth*’

to more action orientation by coining neologism: Sufficiency Economy which literally means ‘Sufficiency is a noble action.’

It clearly shows that the economy in Buddhist sense goes perfectly well with its original derivation in English i.e. management of household activities or even wider sense of management of life. Therefore, when we use the term ‘Sufficiency Economy’ we have to keep Buddhist values in mind i.e. the quality or virtue of the noble livelihood, not money-making business alone!

King Rama IX’s philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, therefore, is an instrument about how to become happier and how can we change our world to be a sustainable one. Considering the Sufficiency Economy from a Buddhist background, it is no other than the heart of Buddhism itself. The Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism are crucial aspects of Buddhist philosophy and key teachings of the Buddha. The Four Noble Truths is a Buddhist model of sustainable development. The goal of Buddhism is simply to put an end to suffering. When the Buddha, after many years of searching, discovered the way to do just that, he taught the cure for suffering in the form of the four-point medical report used by the physicians of his culture. The First Noble Truth describes the symptom (the problem): Suffering exists. The Second Noble Truth gives the diagnosis (the cause of the problem): Craving causes suffering. The Third Noble Truth is the prognosis (the possible outcome): The ending of suffering is possible. The Fourth Noble Truth is the prescription (what is needed to cure the problem): Following the Noble Eightfold Path will end suffering. The eight steps of the Path are right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The eight steps are often grouped into three aspirations: Regularity (moderation or *sīla*), Resiliency (prudence or *samādhi*), and reasonableness (wisdom or *paññā*).

King Rama IX’s philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy is a simple mantra of Buddhist economics to create global happiness and a simple key to achieve the SDGs put forward by the United Nations. In other words, the late king replaced the heart of Buddhist teachings i.e. the Noble Eightfold Path or the Middle Path to the Sufficiency Economy (the Middle Way) or ‘sufficiency is supreme actions’ by presenting in 3R as its factors.



### 5. Dhammaraja – the ‘King of Sustainability’

On the part of sustainable development, I would like to draw attention to using the term ‘sustainable development’ under a shadow of modern economics. Sustainable

development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report:

Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

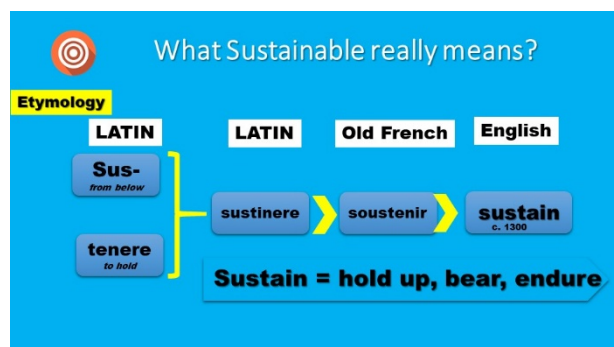
Sustainability is the foundation for today’s leading global framework for international cooperation – the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Simply, sustainable development is a development that has a balance as its foundation and has no negative by-product on society, economics, and environments as we have been facing with most developments. However, looking at the term ‘sustain’ etymologically it can understand the spirit of sustainable development even deeper than what we have understood so far.

Generally speaking, sustainable development is an oxymoron just like ‘Sufficiency Economy.’ It is a contradiction in terms. Therefore, the modern mantra of sustainable development needs deeper scrutiny.

To ‘sustain’ etymologically means ‘holding all activities with a firm foundation from below.’ It is derived from a Latin word *sub* as a prefix which means ‘from below’ and the root word *tenere* which means to ‘hold.’ Therefore, *sustinere* in Latin means “hold up, hold upright; uphold; furnish with means of support; bear, undergo, endure” etc.

In a similar vein, the Buddhist term Dhamma or Dharma is also derived from the same root i.e. *Dhr* which again means ‘to uphold’ according to its nature. It is so amazing to learn that etymologically the Latin root of *tenere* and Sanskrit root of *Dhr* are the same and have the same meaning, therefore, Dharma means sustainability.



Under the etymological light, when we contemplate King Rama IX’s version of the Sufficiency Economy with sustainable development, we then find that it is nothing other than ‘upholding the natural truth.’

When dharma means sustaining then we can say that the Buddha’s dharma means the Buddha’s teachings on

sustainability. In other words, Buddhism is all about guidance on sustainable development. For example, the Buddha’s first sermon, *Dhamma-cakka-pavattana*, which is widely translated as the discourse on turning the wheel of dhamma. It literally means a discourse on the application of ‘sustainable development in action.’ In elaboration, dharma means sustainable, *cakka* means moving forward with firm grounding, and *pavattana* means behaviour or put into action. Therefore, *Dhamma-cakka-pavattana*, the first sermon of the Buddha, can be translated as the discourse on ‘sustainable development in action.’

Buddhism puts in the first sermon as the very essence of the Buddha’s Enlightenment. That Buddhism is ‘the Middle Way’ became its Leitmotiv. The term has been variously applied. For example, making Buddhism the middle way between affirmation and denial of existence. Or the Middle Way between indulgence and asceticism. The Middle

Way is explained as the Noble Eightfold Path which can be presented in the form of Threefold training system: to train oneself physically not to disturb social and environmental surrounding (*sīla*), to train one's mindful awareness (*samādhi*) and to train one's intellectual capabilities (*paññā*).

Drawing from this theory, we could claim that the Buddha was the first man on earth who talked about 'sustainable development' before two millennia in a very creative way. As I have put forward my argument based on etymology that the true essence of the first sermon of the Buddha is a discourse on how one can lead one's life within the framework of sustainable development. Put it differently, it would not be wrong to say that the heart of Buddhist teachings is the 'sustainable development' itself.

Moreover, King Rama IX's Sufficiency Economy which is comprised of three circles: regularity (or moderation), resiliency (or risk management), and reasonableness is a way of presenting the very core of Buddhist teaching in secular terms namely: regularity or *sīla*, resiliency or *samādhi*, and reasonableness or *paññā*.

In Buddhism, Dhammaraja is a term denotes a king or ruler who governs his subject and country with virtue. Accordingly, King Rama IX is also referred to as the Dhammaraja. But based on the meaning of dhammaraja etymologically makes King Rama IX the 'King of Sustainability.' It is not merely that his legacies were the core of sustainable development alone but the title of Dhammaraja itself means King of Sustainability etymologically. As I have shown above that the term Dhamma means 'sustainable development' and when it combines with Raja, the king, the late King becomes King of Sustainability.

King Rama IX's whole life proved to be the life of practicing sustainability and inspired others to follow his legacy under his guidance of the Sufficiency Economy. His theory on sustainability is the pristine outcome of his decades of laboratory hard work before presenting it to the public. It is not just a simple theory or philosophy but something tangible and pragmatic drew out from his lifelong experience of creativity and innovation. Accordingly, he was true Dhammaraja – the King of Sustainability both by theory and action, the perfect model for global sustainable movement.

## **6. Sufficiency Economy as a Prescription for Sustainable Living**

King Rama IX's Sufficiency Economy can be construed as a prescription for sustainable living, as a practical guide for conducting social life that maintains harmony among the five critical dimensions of people, prosperity, planet, partnership, and peace which is the foundation of the global agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

As abovementioned, the Sufficiency Economy under Buddhist background is exactly the heart of Buddhist doctrines of the Middle Way. This Middle Way or the Noble Eightfold Path can be divided into two complementary sets, each with four factors. To be more specific, the four factors of right view, right thought, right aspiration, and right mindfulness form one set, and the four factors of right speech, right conduct, right effort, and right livelihood form the other set.

Koizumi<sup>7</sup> interprets this division as complementary sets of mental and physical activities.

As a group, the four factors in the first set all refer to mental states. They can be interpreted as corresponding to four types of mental activities: understanding, thinking, aspiring, and being mindful. These four factors as a group can therefore be interpreted as stating the importance of maintaining the right frame of mind. On the other hand, the four factors in the second set all refer to physical activities – speaking, acting, exerting, and earning (one’s livelihood) – and can, therefore, be interpreted as stating the importance of observing the right use of the body.

The Middle Way or the Noble Eightfold Path or King Rama IX’s new neologism as Sufficiency Economy, as a practical guide for conducting one’s life, thus draws our attention to the importance of keeping a proper balance between mind and body, between mental and physical activities. To put it simply, the Sufficiency Economy is a prescription for Sustainable Living.

## **7. Sufficiency Economy as a State of Systemic Balance**

The central idea behind the King Rama IX’s Middle Way of Sufficiency Economy is, of course, the idea of balance between two extremes of austerity and indulgence. King Rama IX was talking primarily about the importance of maintaining balance for the individual who seeks sustainable living. But the individual human being is a system that exists amidst a bigger space of all systems called the universe. Thus, the Middle Way as Sufficiency Economy meaning a state of balance for the individual human being as an open system in the universe. That state of balance applies, at the micro-level, to the individual human beings as well as, at the macro level, to the universe as a whole.

At the micro-level, the Sufficiency Economy can be interpreted as a state of ‘systemic balance’ in the individual human being as a composite system of mental and physical activities. At the macro level, the Sufficiency Economy can be interpreted as a state of systemic balance between people and the planet.

The environment influences humans in many ways: light, gravity, physical stress such as temperature and noise, and psychological stress such as fear, tension, and uncertainty. In turn, humans influence the natural environment through the consumption of food and other materials and the production of goods and services with the use of raw materials. A human can cause ‘stress’ on the natural environment in the form of pollution, ozone depletion, and other types of environmental degradation. Because of such mutual influence between humans and the natural environment, it is clear that the Sufficiency Economy as the Middle Path, the path that maintains the health of the individual human being, is also the path that maintains the health of the planet, wealth. Indeed, the idea of maintaining the health and wealth implied by the Sufficiency Economy, which calls for a systemic balance between people and the planet.

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<sup>7</sup> Koizumi, *The Noble Eightfold Path as a Prescription for Sustainable Living*, 137

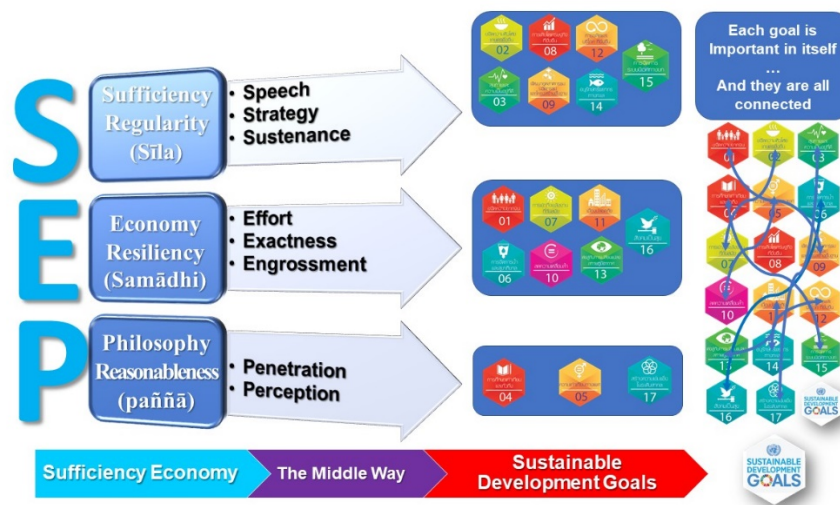
## 8. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the term ‘sustainable development’ has come to mean forms of development that minimize negative effects on the environment and natural resources, but the Sufficiency Economy, while certainly including those two vital factors, goes beyond to concern itself with a development that also preserves – and nourishes – cultural heritage, social capital, individual opportunity, and more.

Understanding correctly King Rama IX’s Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is indeed interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development. In the application of the core Buddhist doctrines, sufficiency stands for the life of moderation, not too much and not too little i.e., *sīla*. Economy stands for excellence action i.e. mindfulness practice in every field of our life i.e., *samādhi*. Philosophy stands for penetration or mental acuteness to our mindset of the world i.e., *paññā*.

Through the Sufficiency Economy, it triggers the human way of life covering eight directions (i.e. the Noble Eightfold Path): Speech, Strategy, Sustenance, Effort, Exactness, Engrossment, Penetration, and Perception.

Analysing ‘Sufficiency Economy Philosophy’ as interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development I would like to present it here how the three factors of the ‘Sufficiency Economy’ can achieve the UN’s global agenda for SDGs. I creatively use the acronym SEP which popularly stands for ‘Sufficiency Economy Philosophy’ as the three factors of it as well.



1. **Sufficiency** stands here for the first factor of Sufficiency Economy i.e. moderation or *sīla* from a Buddhist perspective. The *sīla* or moderation comprises speech (right speech), strategy (right conduct), and sustenance (right livelihood). When this first factor is fulfilled the outcome will assist to achieve the 7 goals of the SDGs. They are the SDGs no 2,3,8,9,12,14 and 15.
2. **Economy** stands here for the second factor of Sufficiency Economy i.e. resiliency or *samādhi* from a Buddhist perspective. The *samādhi* or resiliency comprises of effort (right effort), exactness (right mindfulness), and engrossment (right concentration). When this second factor is fulfilled the

outcome will assist to achieve another the 7 goals of the SDGs. They are the SDGs 1,6,7,10,11,13, and 16.

3. **Philosophy** stands here for the third factor of Sufficiency Economy i.e. reasonableness or *paññā* from a Buddhist perspective. The *paññā* or reasonableness comprises of Penetration (right view) and Perception (right resolve). When this third factor is fulfilled the outcome will assist to achieve the rest of the 3 goals of the SDGs. They are the SDGs no 4, 5, and 17.

Last but not the least, according to economic theory, when one is sufficient with the system of production, distribution, and consumption the economy surely collapses. The graph of the economy always has to rise up and up. Only then we regard it as a good economy. As we are witnessing the Covid-19 pandemic, the whole world claims the status of the world economy this year would be lowest in recent history. Unexpectedly, the Covid-19 forces us to stay put at home and keep social (or physical) distancing which forced the world to stop with all economic generated activities. Suddenly, the rate of unemployment rose high and poverty has stroked as never before. True with an economic downturn people are living in hardship but not at the level of destruction. Because the human race partly survives with the spirit of Sufficiency Economy which urges people to live with the idea of ‘enough’ or ‘adequate’ or ‘sufficient.’ This also urges people to live out of compassion and sharing. In front of life-threatening the Covid-19 pandemic, people stopped thinking about profit maximization for a while and the capable one tries to help unable one in society. Accordingly, we are seeing the free distribution of food and ration everywhere. We are seeing the instalment of ‘sharing pantries’ for destitute everywhere. Buddhist monasteries have turned their roles to become a public kitchen where people can get their free meals. All these activities during the Covid-19 pandemic are not profit generated economic activities but most importantly it has taught society to live by the principle of sufficiency or Sufficiency Economy instead. Therefore, King Rama IX’s philosophy of Sufficiency Economy indeed is interdisciplinary thinking beneath sustainable development. It is the way of approaching the future of the unknown with sustainability.

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