

Young Thai Volunteer Pursuing Royal Aspirations of King Rama 9 to Improve Quality of Life of Hill Tribe Villagers



Natural disasters are the direct cause of deforestation and destruction of upstream areas, resulting in a dramatic decrease of natural water resources. Undoubtedly, many distant areas are facing the scarcity of water for consumption and farming. Concordantly, drought has been common and its severity has intensified each year. These problems have severely affected people's ways of life. Hence, the problems should be considered the first priority to be included in the national agenda, in which all sectors are required to work together to seriously solve such problems. In particular, the encroachment on forest reserves has become a crucial and complicated problem, which remains unsolved for ages.

Mr. Chawin Asavasaetakul, 17, a student from Bangkok Patana School, has recognized the importance of currently existing issues. He stresses that the New Path Hill-Tribe Initiative has been launched to improve the well-being of people of Baan Mae Jon in Chiang Mai's Chiang Dao district. In addition to fostering a better quality of life, the project also aims to raise ethnic minorities' awareness towards the conservation of forests, while being capable of preserving local cultures and traditions handed down by their ancestors.

This inspirational project is classified into three major sections, consisting of 1) Building a dam for water storage, consumption, and cultivation during the dry season, 2) Forest restoration collaborated by officials of Si Lanna National Park and local villagers, highlighted by the plantation of perennials such as teak, makha-tae, iron wood, and rosewood, and 3) Income maximization and quality of life development for people of Baan Mae Jon.

Chawin added that the project was implemented to build a dam for water storage, with main

objective to provide villagers with sufficient water consumption during the dry season. The construction called for collaborative actions among local dwellers, making them realize the importance of being the inventor and owner of their own resources. In addition of the dam construction, the focus has extended to the reforestation, restocking of existing forests that have been depleted through deforestation. Thanks to the collaboration of government agencies and local people, the Hill tribe villagers are also offered a career development program starting with the cultivation of *sacha inchi*, also known as the Inca peanut, a nut-like seed with a variety of medicinal properties and nutritional benefits. This useful plant creates lucrative incomes for agriculturists in several areas. Aside from cultivation, people are also offered sufficient knowledge on how to roast *sacha inchi* seeds for distribution as well as packaging and logo design for their brand. This collaborative project also helps local villagers connect with new markets and distribution channels.

Chawin is a urban person and has no personal gain or loss with anyone in the village at all. However, he is sincere to help the villagers to make this project achievable, ranging from construction-related works to practices of knowledge dissemination. At the same time, this project has fostered unity and harmony among local people since they are part of the success. Recently, certain villagers have been selected to perform some volunteer works, for instance, grass cutting and water drainage in the rainy season. They take turns to be responsible for those duties. The villagers are encouraged to protect and cherish their own valuable properties and be proud of being together.