

The Creation of Distribution Channel, Marketing Activities, and Partnership Networks for Community Enterprises in Thailand

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Abstract. This research aimed to study the creation of distribution channels, marketing activities, and partnership network of community enterprises case studies in Thailand. The qualitative research and participatory action research were used for this study. Data was collected by in-depth interviews, observation, and participatory research from 12 groups of community enterprises which produced agricultural products with traditional technology and knowledge. The results demonstrated as follows: 1) Creation of distribution channels, it was found that the community enterprises should sell their products through exhibitions/booths, direct sales or network marketing, and modern channels such as convenience stores and supermarkets; 2) Creation of marketing activities, it was found that the enterprises should create awareness of their agricultural products through trade shows, seminars, conferences, and social media; 3) Creation of partnership network, it was found that the enterprises should apply the contractual agreement alliance, joint venture alliance, and equity alliance for building more partnership networks. Recommendation from the research results, the community enterprises must keep ongoing activities to exchange trade negotiations with trading partners. Simultaneously, the government agencies should help the community enterprises by raising income generation with a policy to support low-interest funding sources and find sustainable markets both inside and outside the country.

Keywords: Distribution channel, Marketing activities, Partnership network, Agricultural products, Community enterprise

1 Introduction

As the consumer's health concern continues to rise, the demand for safe, non-toxic food has increased, resulting in the agricultural industry adapting to meet organic consumers' needs [24] [14]. Consumers' acceptance of organic production methods makes food safe and environmentally friendly that non-toxic residues like conventional agricultural practices [1], [7], [30]. According to FiBL & IFOAM – Organic International found that in 2018 the global organic farming area was 69.8 million hectares, accounting for 1.40 percent of the world's agricultural land. Most of the productive areas are in Oceania with 47% followed by Europe with 23%, Latin America 12%, Asia 9%, North America 6%, and Africa 3% that had market creates a value of approximately 2.8 trillion baht [32]. In Thailand, the organic farm area seventh

in Asia has a continuous expansion from 10,524 rai in 2000 and has increased to 570,409 rai in 2017 (16% increase per year). Most of them were organic rice production 59%, farm crops 15%, and mixed vegetables/fruits 13%, which can generate value from organic agricultural exports of 1,817 million baht/year [19].

However, even though the global organic market is likely to grow steadily, organic farmland grows lower than the market demand [23]. Since most farmers are smallholders, there are restrictions on organic farming, which requires more difficult agricultural processes to achieve certification [13]. Moreover, small farmers lack knowledge and understanding of organic farming, lack incentives to turn to organic farming, including obstacles caused by climate, environment, and various disasters [4]. As a result, small farmers still decided to do traditional agriculture using chemicals [19]. Smallholder farmers' problem is not successful in organic farming, causing the government sector to have the policy to promote a group of farmers in the form "Community Enterprises."

The community enterprise will help organic farming members exchange knowledge, technology, experience in organic farming, and process products to add value to organic food. Community enterprises have the potential will make them more accessible to the market to produce products made from the local community, farmers can exchange knowledge, technology, and folk wisdom incorporated into the production process in order to increase productivity and reduce costs. The community enterprises have adopted market-leading principles, which will produce according to market demand that makes the product sold to organizations or consumers both within the country and abroad. Thailand has 91,791 community enterprises and found that only 6,317 can manage and succeed in operating [5].

Therefore, community enterprises that can increase competitiveness will affect their success, and small-scale farmers who are members will also be successful. The enterprise has a commercial advantage and needs to expand its distribution base abroad that should not overlook distribution channels to move product rights from manufacturers to consumers. In this process, marketing intermediaries link between producer and consumer to make efficient distribution products [22]. One of the distribution channels is marketing activities, which use special events to generate interest brand and target consumers [33]. Marketing activities are unique in support plans or strategies to achieve the goals organization [28]. Besides, business partners essential to a collaborative management process strategy critical to an organization's success, which businesses manage their existing resources to competitive advantage over competitors [6],[21].

The problems mentioned above generate additional income for the prototype community enterprise of organic agriculture to provide a good marketing opportunity to organize marketing activities and build business partners. Therefore, it leads to event marketing research and building a network of trade alliances for the model community enterprise's organic products. The challenge is to know what activities are to create a potential for community enterprises, which activities are less valuable and do not perform well, and how those less valuable activities should be improved. This research focuses above problems and found ways to generate income for the prototype community enterprise of organic products by creating distribution channels, marketing activities, and partnership networks.

2 Literature review

This research is interested in strengthening community enterprise, a small organization gathering of small farmers who lack knowledge, experience, and marketing skills. The problem

of finding the right distribution channels to reach the target consumer, marketing communication, and marketing activities to create awareness and attract consumers to purchase organic products is essential to help them sell products and be profitable to the enterprise. There are three critical areas of operational sustainability, which the researcher sees as the urgent issue of skills training for community enterprises: distribution channel, marketing activities, and partnership networks of community enterprises.

2.1 Appropriate distribution channel influence to enterprise success

The distribution channel is essential to organizations that marketing executives can use to communicating until they can sell their products and deliver to consumers. Distribution channels like a network of businesses or intermediaries through products/services reach the end consumer, including wholesalers, retailers, distributors, and even the internet channel [25]. Therefore, distribution channel management needs to focus on products and consumers' characteristics. The selection of appropriate distribution channels resulted in a well-managed and low-cost operation that makes a competitive advantage led to consumers' satisfaction resulting in good sales and profits [11],[27].

2.1.1 Factors affect the determination of distribution channels

Market factors by considering types of customers, resulting in different distribution channels that looking at characteristics purchasing decision process and size of customers' orders; If high-volume orders, a shorter distribution channel preferred than low-volume orders. The number and spreading of target customers to consider the distribution channels that are convenient and quick to purchase [26].

Product factors including service before and after the sale that key factors are product type, technical characteristics, values per unit, and product expiration. The distribution channel has to consider in accordance with the characteristic product so that does not adversely affect in terms of quality and product life [17].

Middlemen factors link between the producer and the buyer that responsibilities differ depending on the ability and policy of selecting a middleman of the manufacturer. A choosing the middleman depends on interested persons' service capabilities, mediator's attitude towards the policy of the manufacturer. Choosing the right intermediary as a distribution channel will help increase the efficiency in creating awareness and delivering products to consumers [20].

Manufacture's company factor in terms of companies available that influence intermediary and distribution channel selection. A manufacturer with substantial corporate resources and personnel with knowledge, abilities, and high working capital. As a result, manufacturers have a high potential to select their distribution channels, have negotiation power and control [3].

2.1.2 Flows of distribution channels in marketing consist of activities

First, physical possession, where the product owns the members in the marketing channel since manufacture, wholesaler, retailer, and consumer respectively that may or may not have ownership of the product [12]. Second, ownership is the right to sell, distribute, transfer the product that may or may not be in possession; usually, the wholesalers and retailers will buy and sell them independently, which does not depend on policy's manufacturer by keeping itself or leaving the product in the public warehouse.

Third, promotion, the manufacturer, will promote sales through wholesalers, merchants, and retailers that, in some cases, the manufacturer may be discount coupons directly to consumers [18]. Fourth, negotiation usually, people can be two-way that different parties negotiate with each other in terms of nature and type of products, prices, and discounts for promotion. Fifth, Financing, product holders who are investors will have the cost that inventory also has many costs. Product holding cost is an investment in goods obsolete product cost depreciation, stolen goods, cost of damage over time, warehouse cost, and various insurance premiums [15].

Sixth, risk-Taking is aligned with the burden of funding who owns funds or owner product. Seventh, ordering usually comes from customers/consumers, whether they are made-to-order or produced for waiting for sales. Eighth, payment order and payment activities are seen as activities that move in the same direction.

2.2 Appropriate marketing activities influence to enterprise success

Marketing activities are events as a medium for generating interest, an opportunity to see, and linking the brand with the target consumers [29]. Marketing activities support organization strategy to achieve goals that can be summarized as follows: able to bring brands or organizations to more closely related to target group; help connect brand, organization, activities, and lifestyle of target customers; able to reach the target audience well, strengthen awareness the brand and corporate; various elements are unique to the organization and brands as a symbol, logo and product characteristics; get brand or organization involved part of the event, conference, seminar [16].

Regardless of the product, reaching the target audience is most important to allow customers to try out the products and be confident in their properties. Marketing activities are an indispensable option for entrepreneurs because promoting products/services also stimulate sales or creates a flow to occur during a specific period, causing the products to be of interest and be mention with target customers [8]. Event Marketing is the most prominent marketing tool, allowing target customers to have the opportunity to experience the product more closely.

The format of events spans from small to large events with thousands of people attending the event, such as awards fairs, trade fairs, or live events [10]. There are many events that some are large and specific groups; some can organize frequently; some events are suitable for once a year that can apply for each type are different such as:

- The exhibition event is the organization of marketing activities to present information, pictures, and sound with a scheduled principle, rationale, objective and responsible agency;
- A product launching event aims to create a brand known to generate maximum sales that significant to the purpose of the customer;
- Trade shows are presenting products or ideas to the general public so that prospective customers can see and make a purchased product, also the cultivation of values or creating uniqueness to the store.
- Catering event is catering with different objectives and formats of events, including receptions, leisure parties.

For the success of marketing activity, the organizer needs to learn essential activities to set goals and objectives of events, what have expected results to budget for essential expenses (location and furnishings, food and beverage fees, display fees, team fees, marketing fees), set a clear work plan, date, and efficiency in team management.

2.3 Appropriate partnership networks influence to enterprise success

A partnership network is a close cooperative relationship between two or more organizations that aim to achieve common business objectives due to the difficulty, which either party cannot achieve goals alone [31]. Type of partnership networks:

- A loose market relationship is a business partnership that informal relationships, often due to the favorable business environment and does not last long known as a "Network."
- A contractual relationship is a business partner based on a formal relationship resulting from the merger of two or more business entities, so this partner type is prevalent today, such as subcontracting, licensing, and franchising.
- Formalized Ownership/Relationship this type of business partner is joint Ventures that is more formal than the two types mentioned above due to the proportion of business owners involved.
- A formal integration is a business partner's, which the most traditional form, resulting from which two or more business entities are fully integrating that call mergers & acquisitions.

The current business situation has to admit that there is high competition, and there are many competitors both directly and indirectly with the development of technology and communication, making it easier to entrance business [2]. As a result, the barrier of entry has increased as well, creating a competitive advantage and innovative products and services, may not be sustained. Innovation that competitors could copy in the longer term, novelty may not be sustainable enough to maintain a business advantage [9]. For this reason, maintaining a competitive advantage that will create a sustainable advantage is a business partner.

Also, the organization should analyze or evaluate partners being consistent that will have a greater chance of success together such as; 1) Strategic fit, both core objectives, and long-term objectives that strategy should be in the same direction and expectations of each party. 2) Resource fit, the partners must have knowledge, abilities, and resources to create synergy. 3) Cultural fit, a matter of perception and understanding of culture each party can communicate and work together. 4) Organizational fit, both parties should have a critical management system, such as a decision-making system and control mechanism to communicate with each other to ensure to be undertaken together have a chance of success.

3 Method

This study was qualitative research by participatory action research, which collected data as follows:

- An in-depth interview talks about necessary information of community enterprises, financial management, agricultural products, marketing management, marketing strategy, and communication technology in marketing.
- Observation is a method of collecting by observation reaction, gesture, event, or phenomenon at a particular moment and recording it without interviewing community enterprise members.
- Cooperative research by organizing activities that shows available products and business matching by presenting community products to similar businesses.

With time constraints and limited data acquisition, the researcher has collected in the Northeast of Thailand that selected from the total number of community enterprises 4,001 [5].

The 12-community enterprise chosen by purposive sampling was relevant to processed organic products and could improve marketing knowledge and skill to lead the community enterprise to be successful in the operation. Moreover, the researcher has selected experts from government agencies in the area who are familiar with community enterprise to get data to sufficient analysis, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Determining sample size for research

Community Enterprise	in-depth interview	Observation	Cooperative research
1. Community enterprise of organic fertilizer BanDongrueng T.Nongmeg A.Nonghan UdonThani Province	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	30 samples	7 samples
2. Community enterprise of organic vegetables BanNadee T.Pangchu A.Nonghan Udon Thani	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	20 samples	7 samples
3. Community enterprise of process peanuts T.Maungphae A.Gudchap Udon Thani	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	23 samples	7 samples
4. Community enterprise of process fermented fish BanHauyboong T.Nonmaung A.Nonsaeng Udon Thani	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	20 samples	8 samples
5. Community enterprise of process bananas BanHauySaiy T.Nongbua A.Maung Nongbua Lamphu	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	13 samples	6 samples
6. Community enterprise of Agriculture development T.Dongmaphai A.Maung Sakon Nakorn	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	35 samples	7 samples
7. Community enterprise of process juice BanNonHauChang T.SarngKhor A.Phuparn Sakon Nakorn	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	37 samples	7 samples
8. Community enterprise of organic rice BanLadpattana T.Ladpattana A.Maung Sakon Nakorn	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	20 samples	7 samples
9. Community enterprise of organic agriculture model T.Nakhar A.Wapi Pathum Maha Sarakham	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	36 samples	7 samples
10. Community enterprise of organic rice BanNonghaySaengsong T.Lerngtai A.KhosumPisai Maha Sarakham	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	25 samples	7 samples
11. Community enterprise of organic vegetables T.Phupor A.Maung Kalasin	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	20 samples	5 samples
12. Community enterprise of rubber manufacture T.Nako A.Kuchinarai Kalasin	Group president 1 Group members 4 Government agencie 1	35 samples	6 samples

***Duration of collected data of 1 year from October 2018 to September 2019

4 Results and Discussion

Analyze data from an in-depth interview, observation, and cooperative of community enterprise; the researcher would like to summarize research results as follows:

4.1 Distribution channel

An interview with the community enterprise groups found that proper distribution channels and reaching more customers will increase the opportunity to sell products and generate income to be profitable, which the group has presented the distribution channels for the group's organic products.

- Allow the group to exhibit products through exhibitions/booths according to OTOP events and Exhibition shows at the national, regional, and provincial levels.
- Increase distribution channels through direct sales or social network marketing such as Facebook and group pages.
- Increase product distribution channels through large and small stores that reach the most consumers, such as convenience stores, 7-Eleven, Lotus Express, supermarkets, and large department stores such as Central, The Mall, Big. C, Lotus, and Makro.

4.2 Marketing activities

The problem of knowledge, classification, and organization of the sample group's marketing activities was one of the factors that were still lacking product presentations to attract the group's interest. The research team has presented the following forms of marketing activities that the community enterprise should be aware as follows:

- Trade shows are essential for community enterprises to present their products to the target audience, as the group does not have the budget to advertise products through popular and accessible to consumers such as TV media. Exhibitions from the district to provincial level events, if participating, will help the community enterprise gain more customer base, which the group has to adjust the expo format each time to make the product outstanding, looks good, appealing to consumers.
- Participating in various seminars is another platform where community enterprises can exchange knowledge and experience in group management and product processing. The groups should send representatives to attend events consistently both the private or public sector is the operator, which is an excellent opportunity to expand the network.
- The conference is part of community enterprise activities regularly organized to present and exchange information about members' problems. Also, the meeting with external organizations that share solutions to members' problems makes members more committed to the organization and regularly cooperates in group activities.

4.3 Partnership networks

Established a trade network for community enterprises, a small organization that will rise empower them in increasing distribution channels, organizing marketing activities, and creating awareness in consumer products. Besides, a partnership network reduces distribution costs, and supports technology and knowledge in manufacturing, creates a competitive advantage. The

opinion of the sample groups as the ideal partnership network for community enterprises such as;

- A contractual agreement alliance is a formal contractual commitment of a network of partners, ensuring and securing the income to be received. The cooperation between them is beneficial to the community enterprise that once the group has fulfilled the contract, increase groups operation and income.
- A joint venture alliance is a consistent context of community enterprises that lack operation capital, where joint venture partners will increase the liquidity of the enterprise to create innovation, product processing, increase distribution channels, and organize marketing activities to reach and attract consumers to purchase products, leading to higher profitability of the enterprise.
- An equity alliance is a joint venture in which assets or cash invest as a jointly owned partner rather than an exchange of interests. The venture will benefits community enterprises with the potential to mass products that suitable for stepping into commercial. The companies wherewith sufficient funding sources and seeing the potential of groups and have equity together to operate their businesses to be profitable and worth the investment.

5 Recommendation

Suggestion for community enterprise found that the organic groups should take action to increase the potential of their operations as follows:

- There are ongoing activities to develop and transfer knowledge to train expertise and transfer activities to community enterprise members to have knowledge and expertise increased potential to increase organization revenue.
- In carrying out various activities, emphasize that group members express their opinions and express themselves to exchange knowledge and be a part of the community enterprise.
- Express members of the community enterprise to learn and experiment on sales and negotiations with business partners. Moreover, enterprise groups should follow-up member's results on training that they will know problems and revise.
- Businessmen outside the area who are interested in and feedback to the community enterprise should follow up, which is an excellent opportunity to build a good customer base and trading alliance.

Suggestion for government agencies that found that the organic groups should take action to increase the potential of their operations as follows:

- The community enterprise's problems are the lack of capital and low income that result in discouragement and unwillingness to join the activities. Therefore, government agencies should have policies to support community enterprises in accessing low-interest funding sources and supporting distribution channels that can add more income to the groups and members.
- The problems in finding markets to support products that government agencies should have policies to find domestic marketing channels for enterprises that can distribute products and reach more consumers, such as leading department stores, large hypermarkets, Lotus, Big C, Makro. Including promoting international distribution channels in order to provide opportunities for distributing the group's product.

- The problems of exchanging knowledge with business people in Mukdahan Province and Lao People's Democratic Republic, which government agencies should organize activities on an ongoing basis for exchanging knowledge in border areas to increase communication opportunities establish trade alliances with neighboring countries.

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