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Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development (SALD)—is the Mae Fah Luang Foundation’s development approach with an end vision of providing people with sustainable and licit livelihoods. It was first developed in 1988 through the work of the Doi Tung Development Project in Chiang Rai following the initiatives of HM King Bhumibol and HRH the Princess Mother to tackle poverty and lack of opportunity, the actual root causes of social illnesses such as drug addiction, environmental degradation, and weak social structure. The Princess Mother emphasized that development assistance must be people-centric, sensitive to socio-geographical contexts, and fully integrated in order to effectively solve complex development issues of health, livelihood, and education as follows:

Health

Basic health needs must be addressed first and foremost because sick people cannot work; and parents with sick children have to worry about their children’s well-being. Having good health allows people to progress to livelihood development schemes. This stage encompasses improving the well-being of the people—or in some cases that of livestock depending on geo-social reality of the area. These activities are called “Quick Hit” to provide tangible results done within the first 10-150 days to win the trust of local people.

Livelihood

Once the people are in good health and able to work, the next priority is providing wage-earning activities for all members of the community. We train them on-the-job in activities appropriate to the geo-social context of the area such as coffee plantation and handicrafts. Then we gradually diversify into the value-adding phase, offering higher income-generating opportunities. Every viable livelihood option aligns with our principles to preserve their culture, local wisdom, and to live in harmony with nature.

Education

When each family can earn sufficient income, education becomes the main focus as the key to unlock opportunities for the next generations. Education includes both formal education in school and vocational trainings to prepare the locals to be committed, resourceful leaders of the Doi Tung community; so they can continue the process of development on their own after we have transferred the project in 2017. In Doi Tung, formal education fosters both academic excellence and extra-curricular activities to increase the schoolchildren's confidence and creativity. There are also informal education schemes which encourage learning by doing, and provide on-the-job skills training in areas like farming and husbandry.

The key to SALD is ownership, driving the local people to see the benefits of the project and take on the ownership.. It is essential for the staff and beneficiaries to plan steps of development together and for local communities to be active participants from the start, taking part in the planning and assuming responsibilities in all activities.

Through several decades of work, this development approach by the Mae Fah Luang Foundation has evolved and has been implemented in the Doi Tung Development Project and several domestic and international extension projects. The domestic projects in Thailand are in Puna and Pang Mahan in Chiang Rai Province, Nan Province, and most recently Udonthani Province. Internationally, we have done projects in Shan State in Myanmar (Doi Tung II), Balhk Province in Afghanistan (Doi Tung III), Aceh in Indonesia (Doi Tung IV), and Yen-an Chaung in Myanmar. Along with the outreach projects, the Foundation also promotes the practical experiences through the "Living University" where individuals and organizations from various sectors visit our campuses to learn about our development approach and apply to their problems and locations.
