

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impacts and development strategies for promoting livelihoods under the ageing society in highland areas. The objectives were: (1) to examine the effects of the ageing society on the occupations of older persons and replacement labour in Highland Development Project Using Royal Project System, and (2) to formulate and develop policy recommendations for promoting both agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. A mixed-methods approach integrating social science research methods was employed. Data were collected from 12 Highland Development Project Using Royal Project System areas that have fully entered the ageing society, focusing on residents who were willing to provide information.

The findings revealed that the four main basin areas Nan, Ping, Salawin, and Upper Mekong are all experiencing a continuous demographic shift toward ageing populations. The proportion of older persons has been increasing, while the working-age population has declined due to outmigration. Agriculture remains the main source of livelihood; however, communities have been adapting toward high-value economic crops such as coffee, tea and temperate fruits, along with supplementary occupations including local product processing, handicrafts and cultural tourism.

The analysis identified five key dimensions influencing the occupational potential of older persons and replacement labour: health, community participation, economic security, environmental support and technological innovation. Major constraints include chronic health problems, limited access to healthcare services, weak group organization, unstable agricultural income and environmental challenges such as haze, drought and water shortages.

Appropriate livelihood development and promotion strategies for highland populations in the ageing society should focus on occupations that align with the physical capacities of older persons such as intensive agriculture, handicrafts and local food processing. These should be complemented by the adoption of small-scale agricultural tools, proactive healthcare integration, enterprise strengthening, local and online market networking, digital skill development, online trading and diversified occupations such as cultural tourism, homestays and bio-agriculture. Support mechanisms should include revolving funds, income insurance schemes and improvements in environmental and digital infrastructure to enhance economic stability and reduce dependency on government allowances.

Case studies from two pilot areas (1) Wawee Highland Development Project Using Royal Project System in Mae Phrik Subdistrict, which includes Ban Pang Klang, Ban Pang Anakhot and Ban Pang Ton Phueng and (2) Huai Pao Highland Development Project Using Royal Project System demonstrated that occupational development

through experiential learning such as mushroom cultivation, effectively enhanced existing skills, increased income and improved the quality of life of older persons. This led to the formation of “creative ageing communities” capable of self-reliance and sustainable community development.

Keywords: Elderly, Aging society, Highland areas, Replacement labor, Sustainable development

