

The Analysis of Component Factors Affecting the Enhancement of Potential and Sustainability of Agricultural Women's Groups in Chiang Mai Province

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the problems, obstacles, and factors influencing the empowerment and sustainability of women's agricultural groups in Chiang Mai Province. A quantitative research methodology was employed, collecting data from 371 members of agricultural women's groups in the province through questionnaires. The data were analyzed using statistical methods, including percentage, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that: (1) the agricultural women's groups face multiple critical challenges, with the most severe issues being marketing and distribution, as well as adaptation to change. In contrast, member participation was found to have a lower impact. Additionally, significant problems were identified in areas such as group management, financial and resource management, product development and production, and skill enhancement, all of which were assessed as having a high level of severity. (2) The analysis of key components influencing group development identified two main categories: internal and external factors. Internal factors (mean = 3.83), particularly community engagement and effective group management, play a critical role in driving the group's success, although capital management and product organization may still require further improvement. External factors (mean = 3.93), such as economic conditions and technological advancement, were found to be key drivers of group development. The study highlights that addressing internal challenges while systematically leveraging external opportunities can effectively enhance the strength and sustainability of agricultural women's groups in Chiang Mai.

Keywords : Agricultural women's group, Component factors, Sustainability

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Introduction

Thailand has long been recognized as an agricultural country, with its economy fundamentally dependent on the agricultural sector. The lives of rural people are deeply intertwined with the land, water, and natural resources, which not only serve as sources of income but also form the foundation of local lifestyles and cultural traditions passed down through generations. Amidst the socio-economic changes of recent decades, the role of “women farmer groups” has become increasingly prominent as a key mechanism driving the rural economy and society (Moonnanut, 2024). These groups are no longer confined to the traditional roles of household caretakers and subsistence food producers; they also play a crucial role in processing and marketing agricultural products, thereby adding value and generating income for their communities. Women farmer groups serve as a quiet but significant force that strengthens grassroots economic stability and enhances resilience at both the family and community levels. This is particularly evident in Chiang Mai, a province rich in agricultural resources and distinctive cultural heritage, where women farmer groups act as a bridge linking traditional agriculture to community economic development processes (Wetchaninnart, 2022).

However, behind the success of women farmer groups lie persistent challenges, including the need to develop skills, improve management capacity, secure access to financial resources, and adapt to global economic and environmental changes. Issues such as insufficient member participation, limited access to modern agricultural technology, inadequate product development to meet market demands, and weak collaborative networks with local and national stakeholders continue to pose obstacles. Studying the factors that influence the empowerment and sustainability of women farmer groups is, therefore, both critical and necessary. Understanding these enabling and constraining factors can guide the formulation of strategic development initiatives tailored to the groups' needs, thereby enhancing the resilience of grassroots economies and fostering long-term community development.

This research focuses on analyzing the key factors affecting the strength and sustainability of women farmer groups in Chiang Mai. Its objective is to identify development pathways and support mechanisms that will enable these groups to effectively adapt to

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changing circumstances and overcome challenges, ultimately positioning them as a driving force for Thailand's socio-economic advancement.

Research Objectives

- 1) To study the problems and obstacles in the operations of women farmers' groups in Chiang Mai Province.
- 2) To analyze the structural factors influencing the empowerment and sustainability of women farmers' groups in Chiang Mai Province.

Literature Review

1. Theories and Concepts on Women's Empowerment in Agriculture, The development of women in agriculture is vital for both economic and social progress. Empowerment, as a key principle, has been emphasized in numerous studies showing that women who have access to education, training, and resources can become more influential in economic and social decision-making (Hill, M. A., & King, E., 1995). For agricultural women, empowerment not only involves acquiring agricultural knowledge and skills but also gaining access to resources such as markets, decision-making processes, and social support, which are critical to sustainable agricultural practices (Adnan, N., et al., 2018). In the case of agricultural women in Chiang Mai, it is evident that the capacity to access such resources, along with participation in decision-making, is a crucial factor in fostering their long-term sustainability and economic independence

2. Internal Factors within Women's Agricultural Groups, Internal factors within agricultural women's groups, such as knowledge, management skills, leadership, and member participation, are essential for their sustainability. In Chiang Mai, the formation of community enterprises or agricultural women's groups has been key to strengthening their role in the local economy (Maguirre, M. V., et al. 2016). Research by Mulema, A., et al. (2019). highlights that strong agricultural women's groups often result from members possessing quality agricultural skills and engaging in collective learning processes. Moreover, leadership within these groups is vital for steering the group towards sustainable development and expansion of their activities (Dreier, L., et al. 2019). A crucial factor that enhances group strength is the active participation of members in decision-making, which fosters a sense of

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ownership and responsibility for community development. This strengthens the group's social and economic resilience and ensures that the group's development activities are both inclusive and empowering. Therefore, agricultural women's groups that establish effective internal cooperation and management structures are more likely to achieve long-term sustainability and effectively address emerging challenges.

3. External Factors Affecting Sustainability, while internal factors within the group are important, external factors such as government support and access to external resources also play a significant role in the development and sustainability of agricultural women's groups in Chiang Mai. Government support in the form of education, training, financial assistance, and policies that promote gender equality in agriculture can substantially enhance the capacity of women's groups (Sexsmith, K., et al. 2022). Research by Florini, A., & Pauli, M. (2018) found that when government and private sector entities collaborate to provide infrastructure and resources in rural areas, agricultural development and sustainability are greatly improved. Additionally, linking these groups to modern markets is another critical factor for long-term sustainability. Gaining access to larger, modern markets allows agricultural women's groups to expand their sales opportunities and increase income generation. Understanding and utilizing marketing strategies, along with access to technologies, are pivotal in enhancing their economic sustainability. Particularly in Chiang Mai, where there is a strong connection to local and tourism markets, supporting marketing strategies and creating sales networks are essential elements that contribute to the sustainability of agricultural women's groups in the long run.

4. Role of Culture and Local Wisdom, an important factor influencing the sustainability of agricultural women's groups in Chiang Mai is the utilization of local wisdom and the preservation of cultural identity. Traditional agricultural knowledge passed down through generations is invaluable in promoting sustainable practices such as organic farming, effective resource management, and biodiversity preservation. These practices not only ensure agricultural sustainability but also help in maintaining the community's cultural identity (Adefila, A. O., et al. 2024). The integration of local wisdom into agricultural practices strengthens the group's connection to the land and enhances community solidarity, which is essential for the group's long-term economic and social sustainability. Moreover, maintaining cultural values within the group fosters a sense of pride and identity, which

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contributes to the resilience of these groups against external challenges. Cultural preservation alongside economic development can thus be a powerful tool in ensuring the continuity and success of agricultural women's groups in Chiang Mai.

Research Methods

This study is participatory action research (PAR) driven by an Action Learning process that emphasizes learning through collaborative practice. It combines both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to obtain comprehensive and well-rounded data. The research process was conducted as follows:

1. Population and Sample, target population of this study consists of members of agricultural women's groups in Chiang Mai Province, comprising 302 groups with a total of 4,970 members. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling method, and the sample size was calculated using Taro Yamane's (1973) formula with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$. The calculation yielded a sample size of 371 participants, representing 7.47% of the total population, which is sufficient to ensure accuracy and reliability in reflecting the data for this study.

2. Research Instrument, The research instrument used in this study is a questionnaire designed to address the research objectives. It is divided into five sections: 1) General Information: Collects demographic data, including gender, age, marital status, education, membership duration, position in the group, and reasons for joining. 2) Operational Status: Evaluates the group's operations, including planning, personnel, and budget, using both closed-ended and open-ended questions with a five-point Likert scale. 3) Factors Affecting Operations: Internal factors (capital management, product management, members' roles) and external factors (government policies, economic conditions, market dynamics, technological advancements) are assessed with Likert-scale questions. 4) Group Potential and Sustainability: Assesses the group's sustainability using both closed-ended and open-ended questions. 5) Problems and Suggestions: Allows members to provide insights on challenges faced by the group and offer recommendations for improvement.

3. Data Collection, data collection for this research was conducted through two primary methods. First, secondary data were gathered from relevant documents, textbooks, and the Farmer Organization Database (3K), which was utilized to complement the study.

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Second, primary data were collected using questionnaires. The agricultural extension officers played a crucial role in assisting with the explanation of the research objectives and clarifying the questionnaire items before distributing the questionnaires to members of each group. This process continued until the targeted number of responses was achieved.

4. Data Analysis, In this research, the data analysis was divided into five main sections to comprehensively cover all aspects of the operational framework of the women farmers' groups. These sections include: (1) general information of the members, (2) operational conditions of the women farmers' groups, (3) factors influencing group operations, (4) opinions on the group's capacity and sustainability, and (5) operational challenges. The data analysis utilized various statistical methods, including frequency, percentage, mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation (S.D.), to ensure the clarity of the evaluation and to provide a comprehensive reflection of the overall status and performance of the women farmers' groups.

Research Results

The researcher conducted a study on the analysis of the factors influencing the empowerment and sustainability of agricultural housewife groups in Chiang Mai Province. The researcher can summarize the findings based on the objectives as follows:

Section 1: Analysis of General Data, Gender: The majority of members are female (77.9%), Marital Status: The majority of members are married (77.1%), Age: The majority of members are aged between 51-60 years (30.2%), Education Level: Most members have completed primary school education (47.2%), Membership Duration: The majority of members have been part of the group for more than 5 years (63.0%), Position in the Group: The majority of members hold general membership (73.6%), Reason for Participation: The main reasons for participation are to utilize free time productively (33.3%) and to acquire knowledge (30.6%), Group Status: The majority of groups are operating effectively (67.4%).

Section 2: Analysis of Problems and Obstacles in the Operations of the Agricultural Housewives Groups in Chiang Mai Province, The issues and obstacles in the operations of the agricultural housewives groups in Chiang Mai province span various areas, such as group management, finance and resources, production and product development, marketing and distribution, member participation, knowledge and skill development, adaptation to

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changes, and external support. The analysis of the data reveals that, overall, the agricultural housewives groups face significant challenges in several areas. The main problems identified include inefficient management, a lack of sufficient funding and resources, production that does not meet market demand, and a lack of effective external support. The details of the problems identified in each area can be summarized in the table below:

Table 1: The Issues in the Operations of the Agricultural Housewives Group

The Issues in the Operations of the Agricultural Housewives Group	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
Group Management	3.37	0.825	Moderate	6
Finance and Resources	3.24	0.836	Moderate	7
Production and Product Development	3.75	0.812	High	5
Marketing and Distribution	4.46	0.809	Very High	1
Member Participation	2.55	0.803	Low	8
Knowledge and Skill Development	4.16	0.873	High	3
Adaptation to Change	4.36	0.783	Very High	2
External Support	3.90	0.834	High	4
Total	3.72	0.822	High	

Section 3: Analysis of the Factors Affecting the Empowerment and Sustainability of Agricultural Housewives Groups in Chiang Mai Province

In analyzing the factors influencing the development and sustainability of agricultural housewives groups in Chiang Mai Province, it was found that the key factors can be divided into two categories: internal factors and external factors. Each of these factors plays an important role in strengthening the capacity and sustainability of the agricultural housewives groups. The details of these two categories of factors are as follows:

From the analysis of data regarding internal factors affecting the operations of the agricultural groups, it was found that, overall, all internal factors were considered to be of high importance. This reflects the strength and readiness of the group to drive activities in

various aspects. The details of the internal factors in each aspect are summarized in the table below.

Table 2: Analysis of Internal Factors Important to the Operations of the Agricultural Housewives Group

Internal Factors	\bar{X}	S.D.	Interpre tation	Rank
Group management	3.95	0.647	High	2
Fund and resource management	3.69	1.133	High	5
Product management	3.74	0.859	High	4
Roles and participation of members in the institution	3.94	0.787	High	3
Member benefits	3.69	0.793	High	5
Emphasis on the community	3.97	0.973	High	1
Total	3.83	0.865	High	

The findings of this study indicate that farmers place significant importance on the social dimension and organizational management, particularly their participation in the community and group management. These aspects are fundamental to the sustainable development of agriculture. However, in terms of resource and capital management, as well as the distribution of benefits among members, while these factors are at a high level, they have a lower average compared to other dimensions, with a relatively high standard deviation. This suggests a divergence of opinions on these issues, which may require further development and improvement to enhance the efficiency of farmer groups in the future. Therefore, the development of a resource management system and equitable distribution of benefits should be a priority to strengthen the sustainability of farmer groups.

For the analysis of external factors affecting the operations of the agricultural housewife groups, it demonstrates a high level of significance, serving as a key driving force in the development of the groups. The details of each factor can be summarized in the table below.

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Table 3: Results of the Analysis of External Factors Important to the Operations of the Agricultural Housewives Group

ปัจจัยภายนอก	\bar{x}	S.D.	แปลผล	ลำดับ
Government Policy	3.69	0.945	High	4
Economic Conditions	4.21	0.79	Very High	1
Market Changes	3.77	1.348	High	3
Technology and Innovation	4.07	0.827	High	2
Total	3.93	0.977	High	

The results of this study indicate that all external factors are of significant importance to the group's operations, particularly the economic conditions and technology. The group should prioritize monitoring the economic situation and adapting to technological changes to cope with emerging shifts. Additionally, it is essential to prepare for fluctuations in the market, which can be highly volatile.

Research Discussion

The research findings on the analysis of the factors affecting the empowerment and sustainability of farmer women's groups in Chiang Mai Province reveal several points for discussion, as follows:

1. The study found that, overall, the challenges faced by the farmer women's groups were significant (mean score of 3.72), particularly in the areas of marketing and distribution, which had the highest mean score (4.46). The next most critical areas were adapting to change (4.36) and developing knowledge and skills (4.16). These results reflect the main issues currently faced by the farmer women's groups, especially the challenges of adapting to technological and modern marketing changes, as well as the need to develop skills essential for increasing competitiveness in a rapidly changing market. In terms of member participation, the study found minimal problems (2.55), which may indicate a lack of motivation or avenues to encourage members' active involvement in driving the group forward. The financial and resource management was found to be at a moderate level (3.24), which requires improvement to increase operational efficiency. The study also revealed that

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although the farmer women's groups had strengths in member participation, they still encountered significant issues in marketing and distribution. These problems likely stem from limited access to modern marketing channels and a lack of knowledge in online marketing, which is a key element in expanding markets today. Additionally, the significant challenges in adapting to change reflect the difficulties in coping with changes in the business environment and technology, which are driven by market shifts that require continuous development and adaptation. These findings are consistent with the research of Ruccattiwong, N., Wongyos, N., and Sangsupho, S. (2024), which identified marketing and distribution problems as the main issue, along with the lack of knowledge in online marketing, which is a significant barrier to the development of community enterprises in northern Thailand. The findings also align with the study by Areerob, A., Kumhom, T., Naenthaisong, S., and Kaewtai, O. (2024), which found that in Nakhon Pathom Province, the primary issue was marketing, particularly the shift to online marketing and packaging development. Additionally, Sapsanguanboon, W. (2024) suggested that developing digital marketing skills and creating marketing networks are key strategies to expand distribution channels. In conclusion, the findings emphasize the importance of developing and improving marketing knowledge and skills, as well as adapting to technological changes, to enhance the competitive potential of farmer women's groups in the future.

2. Analysis of Factors Influencing the Strength and Sustainability of Agricultural Homemaker Groups in Chiang Mai, The analysis of factors influencing the strength and sustainability of agricultural homemaker groups in Chiang Mai reveals an interesting and challenging overall picture for the development of these groups. Key factors can be categorized into two major groups:

2.1 Internal Factors: The emphasis on the community has been identified as the core foundation of the group, which demonstrates a strong base for creating sustainability. When there is systematic group management and active member participation, the group has better opportunities for growth and to tackle challenges effectively. However, the analysis also revealed differences in perspectives regarding resource management (standard deviation of 1.133) and product management (mean of 3.74). This suggests that improvements in product management systems are necessary to enhance competitive capabilities and economic stability for the members. This finding is consistent with the

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research by Khongnawung, K. (2024), which emphasizes the importance of community focus and group management, while highlighting that resource management and product management remain areas requiring particular attention.

2.2 External Factors: At the same time, external factors have been identified as significant drivers that impact the group's operations. The economic situation has been recognized as the most influential factor (mean of 4.21), supported by consistent opinions from members and a low standard deviation. This aligns with studies by several researchers who have pointed out that economic and technological factors play vital roles in adapting and developing the group. Furthermore, market changes, although showing a high standard deviation (1.348), which indicates variability in experiences and challenges across different product groups, act as a warning for the group to prepare for rapid changes in the economic environment. This finding is in agreement with the research of Nuengsri, K., Krivart, K., & Chinnasan, A. (2020), which confirms the significant impact of the economy and technology on agricultural homemaker groups. Even though government policies have a notable effect, they rank somewhat lower in impact (average of around 3.69), revealing the necessity for groups to strengthen internal management while preparing to address external uncertainties.

The analysis indicates that strengthening and sustaining agricultural homemaker groups in Chiang Mai requires a combination of strong internal management, particularly focusing on community and member participation, along with the systematic utilization of external factors. Additionally, addressing weaknesses in resource management and product management will be key to enhancing competitiveness and ensuring economic stability in the future. This study not only highlights the strengths as the foundation of the group but also reveals pathways for development that need improvement in order for agricultural homemaker groups to thrive and adapt effectively to the evolving economic and technological changes of the present day.

New Knowledge

Based on the study of the compositional factors affecting the empowerment and sustainability of agricultural housewife groups in Chiang Mai province, the following new knowledge can be summarized: The development of agricultural housewife groups to enhance their potential and sustainability requires consideration of both internal and

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external factors. Key internal factors include efficient group management, adequate resource management, equitable distribution of benefits, and the creation of active participation roles for members. These factors contribute to strengthening the group from within, enabling the group to drive various activities continuously and effectively.

Furthermore, external factors such as government policies, support for technology and innovation, and adaptation to economic conditions and market changes play a crucial role in pushing the group to adapt and develop in line with the evolving context. Connecting with external organizations, offering skill training, and promoting marketing knowledge are essential strategies to help the group increase its potential, generate stable income, and operate sustainably in the long term. The study emphasizes that achieving a balance between internal development and responsiveness to external factors is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of agricultural housewife groups.

Research Suggestions

Based on the findings, the researcher offers policy recommendations, practical suggestions, and recommendations for future research:

1. Policy Recommendations

1.1 The government should provide support to strengthen agricultural housewife groups by allocating sufficient budgets and resources to develop infrastructure, promote training on group management, and enhance sustainable product development and marketing.

1.2 There should be encouragement for linking agricultural housewife groups with external agencies such as banks or organizations supporting financial development to increase access to working capital.

1.3 Developing and promoting policies that incorporate technology in product development and marketing should be implemented to help agricultural housewife groups respond effectively to market demands.

2. Practical Recommendations

2.1 Agricultural housewife groups should enhance member participation at every stage of operations, such as in planning meetings, task delegation, and decision-making, to increase responsibility and engagement.

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2.2 Training programs should be organized to develop skills in various areas, including resource management, product development, and creating marketing strategies that meet customer demands.

2.3 An effective group management plan should be developed, creating clear mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating operations and addressing any deficiencies in work processes.

3. Recommendations for Future Research

3.1 Future research should conduct in-depth studies on the impact of external factors, such as changes in the economic environment and technological advancements, on the long-term operations of agricultural housewife groups.

3.2 Future studies can expand to agricultural housewife groups in other provinces to compare problems and factors affecting their development and sustainability.

3.3 The impact of applying new technologies in product development and marketing should be studied, including the evaluation of the effectiveness of technology in enhancing the group's capabilities.

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