



From left, ThaiNamthip chairman Pornwut Sarasin, Phetchabun farmer Sruangkanok Sirisom, Somsak Jantararongtong of the Ministry of Industry, Kenan Institute Asia president Piyabutr Cholvijarn and Dr Nutthapol Asadathorn of the Thai Roong Ruang Sugar Group, hail progress made in the agricultural initiative.

Coca-Cola-led project lifts Thai women's skills in finance, agriculture

SCHEME AIMS TO MAKE SUGARCANE FARMING A SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD FOR NEW GENERATION

THE NATION 5B

RUNGWAMA Mongkolchareon, 25, from Phetchabun's Wichian Buri district decided to follow in her parents' footsteps and farm sugarcane after college graduation to give her family a brighter future.

Over the past four years, she has learned much about the difficulties of finance and gaining a steady income. Her training resulted from a course called "Sustainable business with Coca-Cola: Female sugarcane growers empowerment" in 2014.

"I have gained useful and relevant skills in financial planning and increased knowledge in financial literacy, resulting in more income saving," Rungwara explained.

"In addition, I have been sharing the knowledge on social media with other sugarcane growers, with the expectation of the leveraging knowledge I hope the project will ultimately lift the quality of life among Thai sugarcane growers as a whole," she said.

In 2014, the Coca-Cola system in Thailand -Coca-Cola (Thailand), ThaiNamthip and Haad Thip- partnered with Thai Roong Ruang Sugar (TRR) Group and The Kenan Institute Asia.

They expanded the "female sugarcane growers empowerment", by boosting the economic performance of 600 Thai female sugarcane growers, with the support of the Office of the Cane and Sugar Board, within the Ministry of Industry.

Since initiating the project, Coca-Cola



From left, Rampun Srinuan, 55, Sruangkanok Sirisom, 37, and Rungwara Mongkolchareon, 25, all grow sugarcane in Phetchabun's Wichian Buri district.

has invested an additional Bt4 million for the training of female sugarcane growers in Phetchabun's Sri Thep district and Uthai Thani's Ban Rai district. This course of financial literacy and sustainable agriculture training kicked off on August 1 and will run until July 31 next year.

The objective will be to share the results of the pilot project with other female sugarcane growers and partners that manufacture sugar from raw materials to improve their livelihood in the form of shared value creation and sustainable growth.

Pornwut Sarasin, chairman of ThaiNamthip said that after the "Sustainable Business with Coca-Cola Project" launch in 2014, more than 10,000 female owners of retail shops had participated in this project nationwide.

This year, the Coca-Cola system has developed the project to help female sugarcane growers to partner with Thai Roong Ruang Sugar (TRR) Group and The Kenan Institute Asia in designing training focused on two topics: financial literacy and sustainable agriculture, which stemmed from an evaluation of female sugarcane farmer's needs.

Female sugarcane growers play a major role in taking care of their family and have the power to make financial decisions, but

often lack financial literacy and planning skills. Ultimately, this project responds to Coca-Cola's sustainable sourcing commitment.

The "Sustainable Business with Coca-Cola Project" is a part of the "5x20" global initiative aimed at enabling economic empowerment for 5 million women across the company's chain around the world by 2020. This includes retail shops, suppliers, producers, waste collectors who collect the packaging for recycling, and the craftswomen who utilise raw materials from Coca-Cola products.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), women control US\$20 trillion of worldwide spending and do 66 per cent of the world's work, but earn only 10 per cent of the world's income, of which 90 per cent is spent on the well-being of their family and community. Therefore, the benefits of helping further empower these women to maximise their income sources will statistically have a greater positive impact on our community as a whole. Currently, the 5x20 initiative has fostered and empowered the ability of more than 1.2 million women around the world.

Piyabutr Cholvijarn, president and vice chairman of Kenan Institute Asia, said the training for female growers in this

project is particularly to augment their quality of life through accounting, household financial management and sustainable agricultural development.

"We started with the needs assessment for targeted female sugarcane growers and utilised the collected information to create a "financial literacy curriculum" custom-made to these requirements. At this stage, over 200 female sugarcane growers have already received this training.

Evaluation and support for these growers will be conducted for the entirety of the project period, in order to make sure it aligns with their necessities that may evolve over time. "We expect that they will have at least 30 per cent increase in the recognition of the importance of financial management," he said.

Somsak Jantararoungtong, secretary-general of the Ministry of Industry's Office of the Cane and Sugar Board, said the sugar and sugarcane industry played an important role in the development of Thailand's economy through the employment of more than 600,000 growers and generated revenue from both domestic consumption and export worth Bt150 billion per year, representing 1.6 per cent of Thailand's GDP.

Thailand is the world's second-largest sugar exporter, following Brazil, and the largest sugar exporter in Asia. The sugar business also contributes to the food, energy and biochemical products industries. The Office of the Cane and Sugar Board's mission is to develop the performance excellence of the sugar and sugarcane industry.

"We will take part in promoting and raising awareness of the empowerment of female sugarcane growers in the 'Sustainable business with Coca-Cola project' to enhance the competitiveness and help the growers effectively adjust to the increasingly fast-paced global environment," Somsak said.