

## Sustainable help finally arrives after 2011 floods

Phumpetch Roumjit The Nation

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OF ALL THE relief and support projects that came in the wake of the 2011 flood crisis, Baan Khao Samorkhon found one sustainable initiative that has gradually changed locals' lives for the better.

Initiated by major firm Banpu, the Baan Khao Samorkhon Sustainable Development Project has extended both financial support and knowledge about farming to people living in Baan Khao Samorkhon in Lop Buri's Tha Wung district.

The project first sprang into operation to ease the flood woes of locals. But even after all the wreckage was cleared up and houses repaired, Banpu continued to reach out and help the community.

"The primary objectives of the Baan Khao Samorkhon Sustainable Development Project are not only to support a community rehabilitating from flood damage, but also build a strong and sustainable community," said Udomlux Olarn, Banpu's head of corporate affairs.

After helping people clean and repair their houses, Banpu set up a fertiliser fund worth Bt1.8 million with the aim of reducing costs and local farmers' debts.

Paiboon Srisawad, head of the fund, said that the members could borrow fertiliser without paying any interest, so they didn't have to face rising fertiliser prices, while each member pays Bt1,200 per year to fund the group.

Banpu is also working with the Rice Science Centre at Kasetsart University's Kamphaeng Saen campus to provide knowledge about low-sugar Thai breed, Sinlek rice and organic farming.

Five households have started to grow the products in the Khao Samorkhon area under organic cultivation. **Sinlek rice is also suitable for diabetics and people with high blood pressure.**

Sanong Sa-ardeim, one of the Sinlek rice growers, explained why he switched from using chemical substances to organic farming.

"Using chemical fertilisers and insecticides are dangerous for both farmers and consumers. The cost is higher compared to the organic ways," he said. **"By using organic farming, Sinlek rice could be sold for Bt25,000 per tonne."**

He said that by doing these projects with Banpu he would be able to convince other farmers in the community to change to the healthier way.

Banpu is now encouraging locals to grow Senegalia Pennata, known in Thai as Cha-om, and off-season limes to provide them with additional income.

These plants are also cultivated organically using bio-fertilisers from one of Banpu's projects. The production of Cha-om will usually be shared among the community and then sold at market.

Udomlux, Banpu's head of corporate affairs, said that growing the plants not only provided an additional income but also taught farmers a new skill.

"We want to make sure that if Banpu has to leave, the community will be strong and continue to do all these projects, she said.

Sucheela Ponsai, a registered nurse at Khao Smorkhon Tambom Health Promoting Hospital, said that since the flood in 2011 many companies had helped the community but Banpu was the only one that continued to provide support.

She said there were many projects launched by Banpu such as flood evacuation drills and teaching English to build harmony and unity among the community.

People knew what Banpu had contributed to the community and were willingly to participate in the projects.

However, Sucheela voiced concern about the changes in society. She said that most teenagers in the community choose not to work in agriculture. Once they graduate from high school, most work in factories or moved to work in the city.