

THE CENTER FOR THE UPLIFT OF THE HILLTRIBES (CUHT) - SILOAM KAREN BAPTIST LIFE DEVELOPMENT CENTER, THAILAND

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MEAS Case Study # 4 on Small Farm Resource Centers in Asia, October 2013

1. Project Background

Small farm resource centers (SFRCs) have played a strong role in strengthening the relevance and role of their sponsoring organizations (e.g., missions' organizations, development organizations) and were popular as an outreach and development tool from 1920 to 1980. In the late 1980s, the advent of participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) and farmer field schools (Van den Berg, 2004) emphasized the importance of farmer-led extension, causing many extension and development experts to question the role of traditional agricultural centers. Though many SFRCs are still in existence, the benefit and efficacy of SFRCs on local livelihoods have never been measured or evaluated comprehensively, perhaps because of their multifarious foci, differences in extension techniques, their secondary role to other institutional priorities, lack of understanding or interest in extension best practices, and lack of institutional vision or sustainability.

There is a need to document, evaluate and empower these existing SFRCs as a useful research-extension tool in South and Southeast Asia operating outside the formal government/ academic extension model. It is our perception that SFRCs have a continued role to reach neglected segments of populations, particularly communities on the margins. To justify their continued existence, however, important questions about their efficacy need to be answered, such as: what is their capability to engage a particular focus group on the basis of that group's felt needs; what is their extension strategy and its ability to catalyze documentable and felt changes related to sustained improved livelihood and food security; how adaptable to change are they in a rapidly developing Asia; and what can the SFRC do to amplify its extension impact?

The purpose of this research was to explore a suite of SFRCs in Southeast Asia to illustrate and classify the concept of the SFRC, evaluate their outreach efficacy and provide recommendations to amplify their extension services. Seven SFRCs were utilized to answer our set of research questions and determine if the concept of the SFRC is antiquated or

adaptable, and if the SFRC can remain relevant as a development tool (Table 1; Figure 1).

2. Methodology

The data was collected by a combination of questionnaires, surveys and PRAs. Initial data collection was conducted via questionnaires emailed to SFRC directors in December 2012. The questionnaire consisted of 47 questions on topics including the history and mission of the center, staffing, institutional affiliations, demographics of stakeholders and beneficiaries served, budget and financing mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation procedures, on-center and extension work, and long-term/exit strategies. This background information was intended to help identify and classify each SFRC's approach to extension and livelihoods improvement.

Once preliminary questionnaires were distributed and returned, we conducted a one-day assessment, including a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, brief interviews, and organizational / systems modeling with the SFRC directors and staff members. This assessment took place from January to March 2013 to understand the perceived operation and services of the SFRCs. This daylong process identified how extension happens, the form extension takes, and who is involved in extension activities on and off center.

In addition, a one- or two-day assessment was conducted with stakeholders -- which we defined as anyone who had a vested interest in the success and functioning of the center and its work (Businessdictionary.com 2012) -- to understand perceived extension effectiveness and its impact on farmers / livelihoods / food security. These assessments utilized SWOT analysis, visits, brief interviews and systems modeling of perceived extension practices.

All data was entered into Excel worksheets during and upon return from the field. Where necessary, data was coded to calculate percentages and ratios. Abram Bicksler of ECHO

Asia Impact Center analyzed and interpreted the data using a combination of Excel functions and Excel macros.



ECHO's assessment with CUHT at the center and in the villages

3. Findings

Background of Center

In Thailand, the Karen ethnic minority currently numbers approximately 300,000 people. Largely residing in upland regions of the north and west of the country, most Karen are engaged in agricultural livelihoods. In Thailand, the economic and social situation of the Karen is representative of most hilltribe populations in the country. The Asian Development Bank describes these groups as having poorer housing and living conditions, less access to roads and markets, and lower levels of school achievement and poorer health than the majority lowland populations (ADB, 2001).

Since the first convert in Myanmar almost 200 years ago, it is estimated that approximately 30 percent of the Karen across Myanmar and Thailand are Christian (i.e. Baptist, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist), with most others following traditional beliefs and/or Buddhism.

The origins of the Siloam Karen Baptist Life Development Center date back to 1957, when leaders of the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC) (Thailand) decided to establish training facilities to develop church leadership. In 1958, the original facility, constructed out of bamboo, was located in Baw Kaew, a community in the remote mountain district of Samoeng, Chiang Mai province. The inaugural class of 1958 had 41 students. Courses included handicrafts, carpentry,

weaving, agriculture, various types of Christian education and Karen language literacy.

In 1959, however, because of government restrictions related to religious training at the time, the Baw Kaew center was required to close. It was soon decided to establish a new center closer to the city of Chiang Mai that would offer a broad range of instruction with a major focus on agriculture. Funding assistance was sought from abroad. In 1960, a Karen Baptist association in Burma contributed 20,000 baht (1960 Thai baht = \$.05 US [Wikipedia, 2013]), and American Baptist churches donated another 50,000 baht to purchase 23 rai (approximately 9.1 acres or 3.7 ha) of land located at the foot of Doi Suthep in the Chang Khian section on the outskirts of Chiang Mai. This property was placed under the ownership of the Christian Service Foundation (Baptists). After the land was cleared, temporary bamboo structures were erected to host the students.

The new site was called the Center for the Uplift of the Hilltribes (CUHT). The name of the center did not include specific mention of the Karen because it was intended to extend instruction and other services to additional groups of Baptist hilltribes, particularly the Lahu, who were beginning to migrate to Thailand in large numbers from Burma because of political instability.



CUHT facilities.



The objectives of the Siloam Karen Baptist Life Development Center/CUHT were:

- Developing good future leaders.
- Developing good future (church) workers.
- Developing persons who would help and work together with others.
- Being a place of short-term training for all Christians as appropriate.

In 1961, permanent buildings were constructed and basic agricultural courses taught along with some Bible instruction. Over the subsequent years, Bible and religious training

increased, along with additional courses related to basic accounting, handicrafts and health.

In 1962, just two years after CUHT's establishment, the Rural Development Project (RDP), an agricultural extension wing of the KBC, was established and based at CUHT. Agricultural staff members at that time included Mr. Boonsong, Mr. Sawit, Rupert Nelson (an American Baptist missionary who worked primarily with RDP) and Dick Mann (an American Baptist missionary who helped establish CUHT and later worked with the United Nations Crops Replacement Project).

During the following years, CUHT maintained crop production plots for training and demonstration purposes as well as cattle, swine, sheep, poultry and fish. The goal was to offer a curriculum of both theory and practice at CUHT along with community development outreach into the Karen communities.

The agricultural facilities attracted numerous local visitors, including students and faculty members from the nearby Chiang Mai University, as well as Prince Bhisadej Rajani, president of Thailand's Royal Project established by King Bhumibol Adulyadej to enable upland people to substitute cash crops for opium production (Mann, 2012).

During the period that the CUHT center was being developed and agriculture was being taught and promoted from the location, the expansion of the facilities included the construction of:

- Dorms for men and women.
- Educational buildings.
- Handicrafts building.
- Gardener's house.
- Cafeteria.
- Chapel.
- Office for the Rural Development Project and RDP staff housing.
- Administration building.
- Rice mill.
- Livestock housing and fishponds.

In 1993, the institution discontinued formal instruction related to agriculture because of the retirement and death of various instructors. Two years later, the KBC formally began to partner with the Church of Christ of Thailand (CCT), an ecumenical Protestant denomination. Although the CCT sponsored Siloam as one of its religious training institutions, the role of the agriculture school was not recognized.

However, the center continued to host the RDP office and provide housing for its extension staff. The KBC Women's Department was established in 1958 and was also based at Siloam/CUHT. Its Tabitha Handicrafts project offers outreach to women in KBC communities, including the promotion of livelihood activities such as handicrafts. Plantings and a

nursery for crops that yield natural dyes (e.g., indigo) for textiles woven by Karen women were also established at the center by Tabitha Handicrafts.

In 2000, the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) began efforts related to organic coffee production and fair trade coffee marketing in dozens of KBC and other hilltribe communities. The ITDP project also began to use the facilities at Siloam to store and process its coffee.



Coffee drying facilities, staff/student gardens, and the handicraft store on the CUHT campus.

Center Efficacy

The discussion among stakeholders at the Siloam Karen Baptist Life Development Center involved current representatives from the center's Bible school, RDP, Tabitha Handicrafts and ITDP, but none of the surviving founders of the facility were present. In the view of current center stakeholders, these aspects of the facility have worked well: The center has been and continues to be beneficial for

learning and training; there is a focus on local and organic products at the center (e.g., coffee and handicrafts); various livelihood innovations have originated at the center (e.g., natural dyes for handicrafts); and the center has been a meeting point for various stakeholders, even if they do not work closely together.

In response to the query about what might be done differently if the KBC were to start the center today, stakeholders said: in view of extension efforts away from the center, special attention should be paid to connecting farm production and marketing activities; for the benefit of

stakeholder communities, there should be better market focus than before -- i.e., promote only products that the market wants/needs; there should be more focus on organic farming approaches; sustainable agriculture approaches must be integrated into the center's work; there should be balance between locally marketed products (e.g., betel) and exportable products (e.g., coffee); more focus on local, traditional and organic products is needed, especially handicrafts; there should be more coordination between the various Siloam stakeholders to increase overall effectiveness; and there should be more international partnerships, such as with overseas Karen.



RDP's agricultural extension work and the villages it works with: For example Huay Hawm, a village in Mae La Noi, with CUHT outreach through ITDP and RDP. The village's agroforestry plots include a productive coffee-growing project. Villagers also raise sheep for wool for their woven products.

The group of stakeholders also stated that the strengths of the center and its operation include: membership of KBC churches and their commitment; center's location; excellent buildings and facilities; shared faith; commonality of Karen language and culture; long and lively history of the institution; excellent reciprocity of the stakeholder communities toward the center -- e.g., church members provide rice and financial contributions for the center; moral principles that are promoted by the Bible school; the Bible school's curriculum; a caring and helpful staff; strong international relations and connections; and modern communications, such as cell phones, are now available that facilitate contact with remote community-based partners to help them solve farm production problems (Table 2).

Expressed weaknesses of the center were: the KBC's denominational structure can hinder cooperation among various stakeholders at the center; the "business as development/mission" approach used by some of the center stakeholders can detract from potential cooperation and collaboration with other development agencies with similar activities; although previously rural, the current location of the center is increasingly crowded by the city; various emphases at the center have ebbed and flowed over time; the diminished profile of the CUHT agricultural component -- the facilities were previously on par with those of local agricultural universities; except for the Women's Department, overall the leadership/staff development and capacity-building opportunities have decreased because of decreased support from long-term church missions partners;

many of the institution's agricultural educational services have become irrelevant because increasing numbers of alternative educational services (e.g., universities and vocational schools) have become locally available; because the center is under the Christian Service Foundation, the stakeholders at the center lack full ownership and self-determination; transition from traditional relief efforts -- distribution of rice, etc. -- to development work has been difficult and not very smooth; there is no long-range plan or strategy for the center and stakeholders; and funding is inadequate, especially for agricultural development and women's programs.

Extension Efficacy

Three of the Siloam/CUHT center stakeholders – RDP, ITDP and Tabitha Handicrafts – offer extension programs that benefit KBC communities. RDP estimates that it has extended agriculture and community development work into 80 percent of the communities where roughly 200 KBC churches are located and reached an estimated 15,000 people through the years. ITDP's coffee-related work extends into 50 communities and reaches approximately 2,000 people (many of whom reside in KBC communities). Tabitha Handicraft's activities take place among approximately 50 families or 500 people.

To gather feedback on the extension efficacy of RDP's community-based efforts, stakeholders in two focus communities were interviewed in the Mae Sariang district of Mae Hong Son province. The impact of ITDP's work in one of these communities was also referenced.

The first community surveyed was Mae Hawh where ten people participated in the exercise. RDP activities began there in 1997, with ITDP also engaging in the promotion of coffee since 2002. Approximately 15 km away, the second community surveyed was Huai Gung, with five males and two females involved in the exercise. RDP began involvement there in 1999.

Identification and Ranking of Key Extension Activities

The most beneficial components of agricultural and community development activities extending from Siloam/CUHT (RDP efforts as well as ITDP) identified by representatives at Mae Hawh are:

- RDP's organization of the community cooperative. Participants stated that, "being a cooperative group enables us to better negotiate prices and set our own prices for commodities." In addition, besides not needing middlemen to sell their commodities, the cooperative's marketing leverage benefits all farmers in the community, whether they are members or not. The Mae Hawh residents also said that, through RDP's cooperative-related efforts, they have gained marketing knowledge and skills. Finally, they are grateful to have credit so as to access more money for community agricultural investments.

- ITDP's promotion of coffee production and marketing. Beneficiaries expressed that they have gained useful knowledge about processing their milled coffee beans, which results in a better price.
- RDP's pig production program.
- RDP's household biogas assistance.
- RDP's rice mill fund.
- RDP's hand tractor fund.
- RDP's cattle fund.

At Huai Gung, RDP's community-based efforts to assist the community in establishing and maintaining its local cooperative were also ranked as very important. Specifically, key benefits included: rice milling services at the cooperative mill -- milling services are free to families who make rice bran available for the cooperative to sell to pig farmers; cooperative purchase of fertilizer for crops -- the bulk purchase of fertilizer lowers the cost for member farmers; gasoline sales at the community cooperative -- gasoline is conveniently available for use in farm equipment (enabling labor reduction) and transportation; loans to buy cows and pigs result in income generation opportunities; cooperative purchase of PVC pipe for irrigation decreases the cost of pipe.



CUHT outreach through ITDP and RDP helped to build a biogas digester in Huay Hawm.

4. Summary

Background of Center

- The training center, established on the outskirts of Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 1960, serves approximately 200 communities associated with the Karen Baptist Convention (Thailand) related to agriculture, religious education and other areas of instruction.

- Until 1993, agriculture education was a major educational component at Siloam/CUHT, along with religious training, an emphasis on Karen culture (including literacy), and other life skills such as accounting, handicrafts and health.
- During the first two decades of CUHT's existence, the agricultural component at Siloam/CUHT served as a showcase for agriculture, attracting many visitors, including those in national leadership.

Center Efficacy

- With formal agricultural training discontinued in 1993 and with denominational priorities becoming more focused on religious training, an active agricultural and community development presence at Siloam/CUHT is much diminished from its institutional heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally, urbanization has meant that the property surroundings are no longer as isolated and rural as during past decades.
- Siloam/CUHT stakeholders report that there are no long-range plans for the development and use of the center facility.
- Despite discontinued agricultural training, the center provides facilities to one non-KBC organization (ITDP) and two KBC departments (RDP and Tabitha Handicrafts) that offer agricultural/community development and/or village livelihood development activities.
- Agricultural features such as farm buildings, fruit trees and fish ponds, as well as staff/student gardens and limited numbers of livestock (cattle, pigs and chickens), remain in use (many used by students and staff members to produce food for their consumption).
- Stakeholder communities continue to engage with the center and its varied services, with members of affiliated KBC churches providing rice and financial contributions for the facility.
- After more than 50 years of service, the center remains a recognizable and valued institution for KBC stakeholders.
- The KBC and other Siloam/CUHT-based stakeholders have maintained long-term relationships with various international partners, who have offered various types of support and service exchanges.
- Allowing ITDP to make use of the Siloam/CUHT facilities for its coffee processing is a good example of cooperation among agencies that makes good use of the facilities and property.
- Extension Efficacy
- Together, RDP, ITDP and Tabitha Handicrafts provide a current combined impact among scores of upland communities and hundreds of families related to village cooperatives in support of various farm/rural livelihood

activities, organic coffee production/marketing and women's handicrafts-related income generation.

- Community members in the Mae Hawh and Haui Gung communities indicated a high regard for RDP's efforts related to village-based cooperatives that offer credit toward family farm enterprises (i.e. pigs, cows, and hand tractors), enabling farmers to leverage better crop prices, and offer valuable community services such as the sale of dry goods, fuel and rice milling.
- Extension efforts from Siloam/CUHT-based organizations promote and enable marketing of various types of local and natural products (e.g., naturally dyed cloth, organic coffee).

5. Recommendations and Future Directions

- So that accomplishments and results can be better monitored and reported among stakeholders (such as supporters), KBC outreach organizations (RDP and Tabitha Handicrafts) are encouraged to keep detailed records, including indicators measuring impact related to focus community-based activities. Such information will also help to identify and troubleshoot programming challenges as well as to maintain and build the confidence of stakeholders and supporters.
- The KBC, RDP, Tabitha Handicrafts and other stakeholders should develop integrated long-range plans for the development of Siloam/CUHT, including possible center-based agricultural components and activities that would benefit all stakeholders, current and future.
- For additional income for the maintenance of the Siloam/CUHT property and for continued good stewardship of the land and facility resources, additional agriculture and community development organizations, especially those with goals that are compatible with KBC's core values (similar to ITDP), are encouraged to be allowed to make use of the property.
- To generate center-based income and equip community development partners, RDP and Tabitha might offer and/or host affordable and frequent trainings and seminars at CUHT for members and personnel from partner churches and organizations. Such offerings could be related to natural farming approaches for sustainable crop, fish and livestock production, particularly focusing on approaches that are appropriate to livelihood and environmental needs of contemporary Karen as well as other hilltribe groups.
- Investment in developing/redeveloping and maintaining appropriate agricultural components at Siloam/CUHT may lead to increased interest in educational offerings provided by RDP and Tabitha Handicrafts and increase income-generating opportunities from such trainings for center-based stakeholders.

- RDP and Tabitha Handicrafts might identify products, such as select types of seedlings, to augment training events (e.g., coffee seedlings, seedlings of plants that produce natural dyes) and generate supplemental income for the projects.
- Siloam/CUHT students and faculty members could be encouraged and trained to produce assigned plots of vegetable crops and fruit trees on currently vacant land for their own use and to sell to the institution, allowing for affordable access to quality organic vegetables and thereby reducing the institution's food costs.
- RDP, Tabitha Handicrafts and other KBC agencies based at Siloam/CUHT should take the opportunity to connect with individuals, congregations and other groups associated with the Global Karen Baptist Fellowship, which meets annually at the Siloam/CUHT, to highlight their ministry activities and services to garner additional support for work based at the center and in their focus communities.
- In consultation with the KBC, RDP and Tabitha Handicrafts might initiate special church-based fund-raising events (e.g., missions' offerings for agriculture and community development and the women's ministry) for increased grass-roots support of their work that benefits the poorest and most vulnerable within KBC communities.
- To encourage holistic ministry that focuses not only on spiritual emphases, the theology school at Siloam/CUHT might consider expanding opportunities for students to participate in short-term training and immersion at the center and elsewhere related to agriculture and community development. These opportunities would ideally enable future church leaders to better identify environmental, livelihood and social challenges in and around KBC church communities. With the involvement

of RDP, Tabitha Handicrafts and other partners with necessary expertise, church leaders and congregations would better be able to engage their communities with development initiatives (e.g., agriculture and handicraft activities), as well as other income-generation approaches required for sustainable communities.

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7. Tables and Figures

Table 1. The seven small farm resource centers (SFRCs) assessed as part of this MEAS case study series.

SFRC Name	Location	Director/Contact
Ntok Ntee	Mondulkiri, Cambodia	Ken Thompson
Farm Center Indochina, FCI	Indochina	Contact Authors
Sustainable Agriculture Training Center (SATC)	Hmawbi, Myanmar	Saw Hei Moo
Aloha House	Puerto Princessa, Philippines	Keith Mikkelsen
Center for the Uplift of Hilltribes (CUHT)	Chiang Mai, Thailand	Suwan Jantarayut
Thai Lahu Christian Churches (TLCC) Center	Doi Saket, Thailand	Marting Chaisuriya
Upland Holistic Development Project (UHDP)	Mae Ai, Thailand	Bunsak Thongdi



Figure 1. Locations of six of the small farm resource centers surveyed around Southeast Asia. The location of the Farm Center Indochina (FCI) is not disclosed.

Table 2. SWOT analysis for CUHT/SILOAM Center. Answers in regular type were given by the interviewees; answers in bold are the opinions of the evaluators.

Strengths (Present)	Opportunities (Future)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Membership of KBC churches and their commitment – Location of the center – Excellent buildings and facilities – Shared faith – Commonality of Karen language and culture – Moral principles that are promoted by the Bible school – The Bible school's curriculum – A caring and helpful staff – Modern communications, such as cell phones, that facilitate contact with remote community-based partners to help them solve farm production problems – Long and lively history of the institution – Excellent reciprocity of the stakeholder communities toward the center -- e.g., church members provide rice and financial contributions for center – Strong international relations and connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Networking for continued and expanding work – Greater decentralized approach – Improving communications with once remote KBC focus communities – Improved access (e.g., better roads, communication) to communities allows for more localized, community-based, small-scale centers of service – Growing community-based micro-finance incomes may allow for greater local development such as local savings and loan cooperatives – Great location of the CUHT/Siloam center – still has the potential to be a model facility
Weaknesses (Present)	Threats (Future)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The KBC's denominational structure can hinder cooperation among various stakeholders at the center. – The diminished profile of the CUHT agricultural component – the facilities were previously on par with those of local agricultural universities. – Except for the Women's Department, overall there are decreased leadership/staff development and capacity-building opportunities because of decreased support from long-term church missions partners. – Many of the institution's educational services have become irrelevant as increasing numbers of alternative educational services (e.g., universities and vocational schools) have become locally available. – Because the center is under the Christian Service Foundation, the stakeholders at the center lack full ownership and self-determination. – Transition from traditional relief efforts -- distribution of rice, etc. -- to development work has been difficult and not very smooth. – There is no long-range plan or strategy for the center and stakeholders. – Funding is inadequate, especially for agricultural development and the women's programs. – The "business as development/mission" approach used by some of the center stakeholders can detract from potential cooperation and collaboration with other development agencies with similar activities. – Although previously rural, the current location of the center is increasingly crowded by the city. – Various emphases at the center have ebbed and flowed over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Karen people are not too interested in saving money. – Divisions due to funding issues. – Some of the CUHT/Siloam-trained pastors are getting into politics. – A decline in the economy could result in a decline in church giving and support. – Churches are negatively affected by both Thai and church politics. – Continued diminished agricultural focus. – Continued limitations from an unclear/complicated KBC denominational structure. – Commodity crop prices drop (e.g. coffee). – CCT could pull funding for CUHT/Siloam efforts and other funding uncertainties.

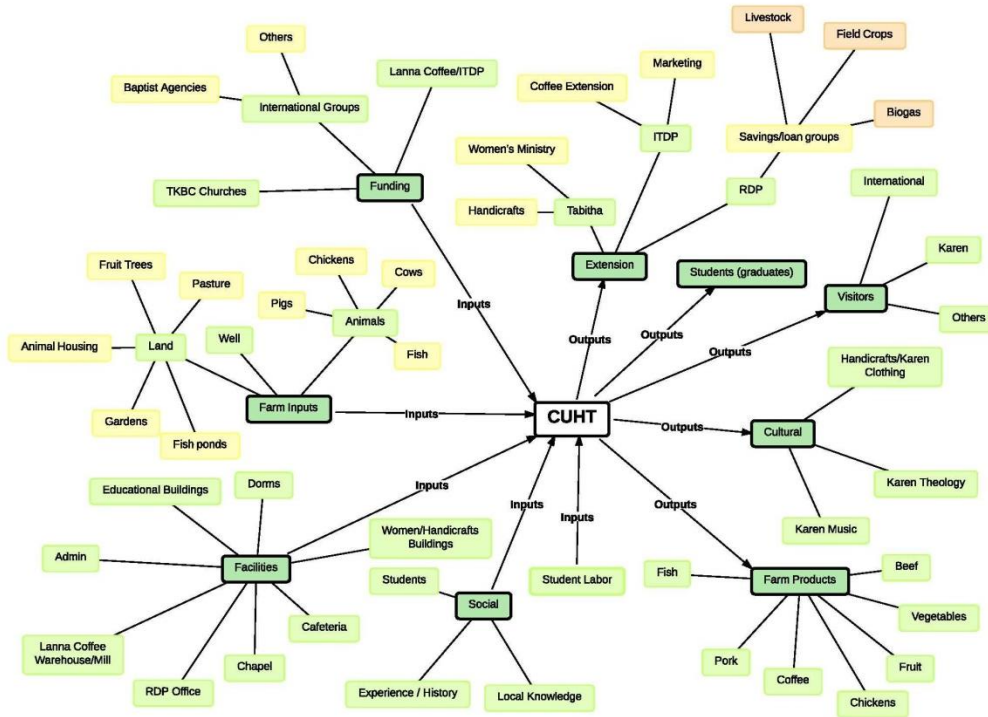


Figure 2. A sample of inputs and outputs of CUHT in both center and outreach activities.

Disclaimer

This Case Study was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development, USAID. The contents are the responsibility of the MEAS Consortium and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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October 2013