The 6th Thailand Human Development Report

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: Empowerment of People and Communities to Achieve the SDGs and Human Development 2024

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Preface

Thirty years ago, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced a groundbreaking concept: the true measure of development lies not in economic growth alone, but in empowering people to lead lives they value and deserve. This human development approach placed individuals at the centre of progress, framing development as a journey towards freedom and fulfillment.

In parallel, during Thailand's most severe economic crisis in 1997, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej offered a simple approach for surviving the crisis and building a more resilient economy and society in the future: practice moderation; reasonableness, in the sense of thinking carefully about the consequences of decisions and actions. These ideas were elaborated into the approach known as the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP).

Although the human development approach and SEP have distinct origins, they share a deep alignment in purpose. Both prioritize people as the driving force of development, advocate empowerment as a critical means, and uphold sustainability as the ultimate goal.

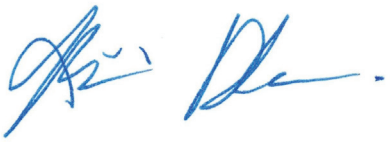
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and UNDP are pleased to present the latest edition of the Thailand Human Development Report under the theme ***"Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: Empowerment of People and Communities to Achieve the SDGs and Human Development"***. This edition revisits the Sufficiency Econonomy Philosophy (SEP) and the role it plays in the development process in Thailand. The report builds upon the 2007 edition of the Thailand Human Development Report on Sufficiency Economy and Human Development, and explores how the SEP's core values can empower individuals and communities to drive human development and achieve the SDGs in Thailand.

The SEP has long been Thailand's locally-driven people-centered development approach and a pathway towards the achievement of the SDGs. Its three pillars of moderation, reasonableness and resilience, coupled with the twin conditions of virtue and knowledge, provide a broad theoretical framework that can be adapted to different circumstances in the pursuit of sustainable development. The SEP promotes a human-centred approach to development that emphasises a balance between economic growth and environmental conservation. These are values that are in need more than ever.

The report underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in addressing the complex challenges of development. It highlights how the SEP can be a tool for strengthening local resilience, reducing inequalities, and ensuring no one is left behind. By fostering partnerships and empowerment, we are not only advancing socio-economic growth but also promoting inclusivity and sustainability across all sectors of society.

We hope this report will serve as a key resource for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders, inspiring dialogue and actions to tackle the pressing challenges of our time. Beyond Thailand, the SEP serves as a practical guide towards sustainability and a roadmap to build resilience against future shocks.

Our collective challenges are daunting, from climate change and pandemic threats to disruptive technologies and persistent inequalities. By placing people at the heart of development and prioritizing sustainability, we believe that the principles of the SEP offer a pathway to create a future where development is truly people-centred and sustainability is a lived reality for all.



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Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCG	Bio-Circular-Green model
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPP	Gross Provincial Product
HAI	Human Achievement Index
HDI	Human Development Index
IHDI	Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index
LGBTI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MERS	Middle East respiratory syndrome
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NESDC	National Economic and Social Development Council
NGO	non-government organization
NSO	National Statistical Office
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORDPB	Office of the Royal Development Project Board
PAO	Provincial Administrative Organization
PHDI	Planetary-pressures adjusted Human Development Index
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SAO	Subdistrict Administrative Organization
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TDRI	Thailand Development Research Institute
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Executive Summary

Thirty years ago, UNDP proposed that the goal of development is not economic growth, but the ability of people to live the lives they want, value, and deserve. In a resonant phrase, the architects of the human development approach described *development as freedom*. In 1998 as his country slid into its worst-ever economic crisis, Thailand's reigning monarch cautioned that the country had become too obsessed with growth and offered a simple approach for surviving the crisis and building a more resilient future. These ideas were elaborated into the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy are different in origin but allied in intent. Both place people at the centre of development, emphasize empowerment as a principal means, and sustainability as a goal. The 2007 report on *Sufficiency Economy and Human Development* explored the synergy between these approaches. Here we return to the theme in a new era.

Thailand has committed to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) using the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as its guide. In the early assessments of its progress, Thailand has fared rather well. However, certain goals promise to be more difficult to achieve. In addition, Thailand and other countries face several new challenges including the threat of pandemic diseases, the impact of disruptive technologies, and the multiple consequences of climate change. This report examines how the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can contribute to progress in human development to achieve the SDGs in face of these new challenges.

Chapter 1 on "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Human Development"

explains the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, re-examines its synergy with the concept of human development, and identifies the areas where Thailand will face more difficulty in achieving the SDGs.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy came to prominence when His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej offered advice on responding to the devastating impact of the Asian financial crisis of 1997/98. This advice was based on His Majesty's experience in development work over four decades implementing over 30,000 projects in the areas of agriculture, water management, forestry, medicine, and disaster relief. These learnings were codified into three principles of *moderation*, *reasonableness* and *resilience* and two background conditions of *knowledge* and *integrity*. The first official version of the principles explained that the approach was a tool for decision-making that was versatile and widely applicable:

> "The Sufficiency Economy is an approach to life and conduct which is applicable at every level from the individual through the family and community to the management and development of the nation. It promotes a middle path, especially in developing the economy to keep up with the world in the era of globalization."

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy was immediately and enthusiastically adopted, contributing to Thailand's relatively rapid recovery from the financial crisis, and has served as the guiding principle for Thailand's economic planning ever since. The learnings from His Majesty's development work were synthesized in 27 Royal Development Principles. Some of the most popular of these were "Explosion from Within", "Using Nature to Cure Nature", and "Planting Forests in People's Hearts".

When presenting a Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award to His Majesty in 2006, the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: "The philosophy's 'middle way' approach strongly reinforces the United Nations' own advocacy of a people-centred and sustainable path toward human development. His Majesty's development agenda and visionary thinking are an inspiration to his subjects, and to people everywhere."

His Majesty passed away on 13 October 2016. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is recognized as one of his most outstanding legacies to his country and to the world. His successor, His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn, has pledged to continue his father's work.

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and human development

Human development is the approach guiding the work of the UNDP. Under this approach, economic growth is not the end but only the means to achieve real and meaningful improvement in people's lives. Human development focuses on expanding people's capabilities and freedoms to live the lives they want and deserve. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a natural ally of human development. It places humanity at the centre, focuses on well-being rather than wealth, and makes sustainability the very core of the thinking. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is not only compatible with human development but complementary to it. It is not a programme but a guide to conducting life and taking decisions that can be applied to an individual, household, community, project, business, or nation. There are three places where the intersection between the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and human development is most powerful. These are *empowerment, resilience,* and sensitivity to the *human-nature balance*.

Empowerment means enabling people and communities to participate in making the decisions that affect their own lives. It also means breaking down the structures, rules, monopolies, and forms of discrimination that *dis*empower people, that deny them access to opportunities, and that result in inequalities of all kinds.

Resilience means building the capacity of people, communities and institutions to prevent and mitigate risks. In the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the Thai term translated as resilience means creating an inbuilt immunity against shock, similar to a body's immunity to disease.

Sensitivity to the human-nature balance draws attention to the fact that all human actions have an impact on the natural world, both now and in the future.

Thailand and the SDGs

In September 2015 the 193 UN member states adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a final target year of 2030. Thailand has fulsomely embraced this challenge, and adopted the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as its guide.

In the early assessments of progress on the SDGs in 2019 and 2020, Thailand's performance was well above average. However, the assessment identified 4 of the 17 goals where there are challenges ahead. These are: 4. Quality Education; 14. Life Below Water; 15. Life On Land; and 16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. There are two other goals where Thailand's progress is promising, but their intrinsic importance demands that they are prioritized: 10. Reduce Inequality and 13. Climate Action.

Along with other countries adopting these goals, Thailand has also pledged to ensure "no one will be left behind".

Chapter 2 on "Thailand's Human Development and 'Leaving No-One Behind'"

examines Thailand's past record on advancing human development and the challenges of the future. Who are most at risk of being left behind?

Thailand's progress on human development

On the Human Development Index, a composite of income, health and education, Thailand continued to improve at a modest rate from 0.652 in 2000 to 0.804 in 2019. The score dipped to 0.800 in 2021/22, less than most countries, reflecting the relatively successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thailand ranks 66th among 191 countries, and this ranking has improved in recent years. The Human Achievement Index, a multi-component index measuring human development at the provincial level, shows that progress over 2015 to 2019 has been minimal in the areas of health, education, employment, income, and family and community, while there has been advances in housing and environment and transportation and communication, but a decline in participation.

Inequality in incomes has fallen over the 2010s, but Thailand still has higher inequality than many neighbouring countries and many countries at a similar level of per capita income. Inequality in wealth is not clearly measured but is undoubtedly severe.

On the main measures of human development, there is little difference between men and women,

and Thailand is among the few countries that show near parity on the Gender Development Index. Women are ahead on many measures, including education, but are far behind on political participation.

Thailand's severe spatial inequality has moderated, but only slightly. The gap between urban and rural has improved over the 2010s, but regional variations on income and on the measures of human achievement remain stubbornly unchanged.

Poverty has fallen sharply since the millennium. The proportion remaining below the poverty line declined to 7.1 percent in 2015, but edged upwards in 2016 and again in 2018, largely as a consequence of slowing growth, but fell in 2019 because of subsidies for 14.5 million holders of the Welfare Card. The South is now the region with the largest proportion below the poverty line.

While human development has continued to improve, some people are still being left behind despite policies to close gaps and address inequalities. We identify eight groups, without any claim that the list is exhaustive. These groups will need targeted attention to achieve the goal of Leave No One Behind:

- The Bottom Ten, the lowest tenth of the income distribution, mostly rural households with an older household head, large family size, and low levels of education;
- Older persons with low education who risk being left behind by the rapid transition to an ageing society;
- Informal workers not covered by social protection;
- Over a million migrant workers with only partial access to social protection;
- Almost half a million stateless persons;
- Vulnerable children;
- Persons with disabilities;
- LGBTI persons who face discrimination in employment and other problems.

New challenges that impact human development

New technologies are proving disruptive in the labour market. There is an urgent need to empower people to acquire new skills, particularly older people who often have limited access to retraining.

Thailand is among the countries that will be severely impacted by climate change, particularly through more severe weather events and rises in the sea level. Those most affected will be marginal households in the agricultural economy, who are likely to react by migrating to the cities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a global economic and humanitarian crisis. Thailand managed the first wave of the pandemic well because of its excellent public health system, but is reeling from the economic impact. The virus has highlighted new challenges for the future.

In sum, the call to "Leave No One Behind" is a massive challenge. Thailand can be proud of its progress already achieved on human development, yet it bears the legacy of high inequality in the recent past, spatially imbalanced growth, and damage to the natural environment. Some groups have been marginalized by old and new attitudes and structures. On top, there are now new challenges from disruptive technology, climate change and pandemics.

Chapter 3 on "Applications of Human-Centred Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in Thailand"

examines Thailand's experience in applying the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in different contexts. What aspects of the human-centred Sufficiency Economy Philosophy have been adopted by individuals, communities, private firms and public institutions? How can the learnings from this practical experience contribute to further improvement in human development and achievement of the SDGs in the future in Thailand and elsewhere?

Individuals

Several individuals have related their personal experience in adopting the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Some are people under stress who faced a crisis in their lives. A farmer facing bankruptcy drew on the principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience to switch to a more self-reliant form of farming, and to reform his lifestyle. He not only survived his personal crisis but became a guide for others in his community. Others are people making a life-shaping decision at a critical point in their career. A housewife found the inspiration to start a

community enterprise that drew on the underutilized skills and cultural capital of the locality. Some are young people near the start of their adult life. A new graduate, who wished to return from the capital to her provincial hometown, trusted the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to guide her untutored foray into farming, and again not only found personal success but became a teacher of others.

These adopters drew on the core principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy—moderation, reasonableness and resilience—as a guide for taking big decisions. Among the practical learnings from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the most useful was the advice to work in stages, starting small and building a foundation of self-reliance before becoming more ambitious.

A large-scale survey conducted by the Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation and associates in 2018 showed that households practicing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy achieved a better development outcome. The principles which correlated positively with all the measures of well-being were resilience, perseverance, explosion-from-within, and concern for the natural environment.

Communities

For communities, the most powerful application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been the three-stage (3S) model of development. This model began from His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's plan for a self-reliant small-scale farm, and was refined in practical application at the Doi Tung development project of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation and at projects under the Royal Initiative Discovery Foundation. The three stages are survival, sufficiency, and sustainability. The core idea of the 3S model is that progress has to be achieved by stages to ensure self-reliance, and that the driving force for development has to come from within, based on accumulation of knowledge.

An outstanding example of this model is a coffee project among a minority group in a remote part of the northern hills. At the survival stage, the village of some 30 households formed into a social enterprise to bypass middlemen and adopted more efficient cultivation practices. At the sufficiency stage they acquired the knowledge and resources to install superior technology and began to develop the identity of their single-origin coffee. At the sustainability stage, they extended their marketing to the regional centre at Chiang Mai, to Bangkok, and to Tokyo, and passed on their knowledge to neighbouring communities. The project has resisted the temptation to expand beyond its capabilities. Its goal is not to generate the highest profit but to achieve sustainability for a community-based social enterprise, which improves the villagers' well-being.

Corporates

For the private sector, the major appeal of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been its emphasis on resilience. This has resonated for small and medium firms which often work in conditions of limited resources and high levels of uncertainty. A manufacturer of wooden toys has made sustainability not only the core of its working culture but also a key element in its very successful international brand.

For larger firms, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has guided their projects of corporate social responsibility to focus on long-term community development with the primary goal of sustainability. Starting with a pilot in 2007, one large agro-enterprise has now undertaken 20 sub-district based projects and seen several areas graduate from the programme on achieving a level of self-reliance, resilience and sustainability.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has also served as inspiration for a new wave of social entrepreneurs who see the potential to apply their advanced technical skills for social benefit. Government has recently passed legislation to promote the growth of such social enterprises.

Several academic studies have confirmed that Sufficiency-related practices such as good risk management and a moderate and balanced approach to profit and growth can truly contribute to corporate success and sustainability.

Public institutions

Since 2007, a modest rural municipality located in an area of rubber and oil-palm agriculture in southern Thailand has been explicitly guided by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and especially by a sub-set of the Royal Development Principles,

notably "Explosion from Within". The community participates closely in the work of the municipality through regular meetings and a very sophisticated website. The municipality has developed local self-reliance through community enterprises to manufacture everyday consumer goods from bottled water to snacks. Special efforts are made to reach out to disadvantaged groups including the aged and disabled. The municipality also has a project to reduce its own carbon footprint through the production of bio-diesel and an organic fertiliser plant. This Plai Phraya municipality has been showered with awards. It is far from typical, but demonstrates the potential for marrying the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy with the potential of local government to advance human development.

Beyond Thailand

The Thailand International Cooperation Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation have helped to found sustainable community development projects based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in fifteen countries and Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Centres in ten countries. They have also given guidance in these countries on the use of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for achievement of the SDGs.

In sum at different levels and areas of the society, the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can assist people in taking decisions, designing projects, managing businesses, and delivering public services which enhance the capabilities and opportunities of themselves and others. Across these experiences, the important elements of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy were the emphasis on *empowerment* as a means, the focus on *resilience* as a goal, and the need for sensitivity to the *human-nature balance*.

Chapter 4 on "Strengthening the Path to Achieving Human Development with Sufficiency Economy Philosophy"

examines how the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can guide the planning and implementation of public policies to advance human development and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs with no one left behind.

Since this report was conceived and this question was posed, the path towards the SDGs has become much harder. The starting line has been moved backwards and the gradient has become steeper. Both the approach to human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy need to be adjusted to confront this tougher task.

Human development at the "next frontier"

2020 marked the 30th anniversary of the concept of human development. In light of the "strain on the planet" evident from the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, UNDP devoted the anniversary report in December 2020 to a major overhaul of the concept under the heading "The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene". As we have entered the Anthropocene and admitted that "humans are a dominant force shaping the planet", we must take responsibility and accept custodianship of the planet's resources. We should also recognize that the imbalances in society, especially inequalities, and the imbalances in our relationship to the planet tend to be mutually reinforcing. Improving people's lives by advancing human development and reducing the "planetary pressures" hence become inseparable. The core of the human development approach is still expanding the capabilities, freedoms and choices for people to live the lives they value. More than ever before, that will require ensuring that people have the agency to participate in the decisions and actions that affect their own lives and contribute to a "whole-of-society" response. The goal is "nature-based human development" which retains the focus of human development on capabilities and freedoms but recognizes that humanity and nature are inseparable and must develop together.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in a new world

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy grew out of the practical development work of His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, begun when

Thailand was largely a rural society and fairly isolated from the world. Today, the population is roughly evenly balanced between urban and rural, and the country is deeply embedded in the globalized economy. The shift to urbanization and globalization has increased the importance of public policy for achieving the goals of human development. How can the practical learnings and the *spirit* of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy be applied to public policy in a new world and new context?

The answer is to adapt the key principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into questions which can guide the choice of policy and evaluate the means of implementation. The list of questions here is centred on the three shared principles of human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, namely empowerment, resilience, and the human-nature balance.

- Does this policy take a moderate path, especially in the use of the planet's resources?
- Does it empower, increase agency, remove obstructions to participation?
- Does it build in resilience to be sustainable?
- Is it sensitive to the human-nature balance, does it allay the pressures on the planet?
- Does it promote the public good?
- Is it inclusive and fair, does it reach out to all?
- Does it enhance knowledge?
- Is it economical, neat, productive and practical?

Given the review of Thailand today in Chapter 2 and the challenges of the SDGs noted in Chapter 1, here we suggest nine areas of focus for government action that will advance human development and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

1. Deliver quality education for all

Education is a main pillar and enabler of human development. One SDG which needs attention is "SDG 4, Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." In Thailand, the quantity of education provided has expanded to meet expectations, but the quality has become a persistent problem, and inequalities in access remain.

Around three-quarters of the cohort now have access to pre-schooling, but there are opportunities to improve the reach and the quality. More educational day-care centres are needed in urban areas where both parents are often employed. At primary and secondary level, better accountability is needed to improve the quality. In keeping with the stress on empowerment in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, parents should be given a larger role in monitoring the performance of schools. Remote teaching, as pioneered by His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, should be expanded but will require investments in equipment and training to ensure that increased distance learning does not widen the digital divide. Progress in online learning achieved during the pandemic needs to be maintained and further reinforced. At the tertiary level, it is time to rationalize the number of institutions, make more use of technology to improve the quality of teaching, and reorient resources to more life-long learning.

2. Empower people through local government

One major way people can contribute to human development is through participation in the life of their local communities. Thailand launched a comprehensive structure of decentralized elective local government from the 1990s, with a target of transferring 35 percent of total government budget to local bodies. People enthusiastically welcomed this innovation. Several thousand people participated in the new elective bodies. However, the scheme was subject to several criticisms, and from the mid-2000s power was transferred back from locality to centre and from elected citizens to government officials. That process has now been reversed but not fully.

Elective local bodies respond to the call for "Explosion from Within" by empowering people to improve their own opportunities and capabilities. They allow services to be tailored to local needs. As the Plai Phraya case above demonstrates, they can be very effective in ensuring that vulnerable groups are not ignored and left behind. It is vital to get the project of decentralization back on track, and to overhaul the structure of local bodies to ensure they are effective and efficient.

3. Make society more resilient through better social protection

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy highlights resilience, the ability of an individual, institution, or society to withstand shocks. Thailand has gradually been building a framework of social protection, but there have been difficulties in ensuring all those eligible are covered, particularly the many people working in the informal sector. During the COVID-19 lockdown, government mobilized modern technology to deliver emergency aid to over 30 million people. However, the difficulties encountered exposed the weaknesses in the structure of social protection.

In the global *Human Development Report 2019* UNDP recommends social protection schemes with two pillars: first, comprehensive schemes and second, special policies for excluded groups. Thailand needs to design supplementary schemes for the vulnerable groups identified as at risk of being left behind: the Bottom Ten; those ageing with limited education; informal workers; migrant workers; stateless persons; vulnerable children; persons with disabilities; and LGBTIs.

4. Reverse the decline in the marine environment

Thailand's rapid development has over-exploited the country's stock of natural resources, particularly the sea and the forests. On SDG 14, Life Below Water progress has been stagnant and major challenges remain.

The exploitation of the sea has shown no sense of moderation and is not sustainable. Thailand became a world-leading exporter of fish and seafood products, but the marine catch has plunged because of over-fishing. Aquaculture destroyed areas of coastal mangrove before being undermined by disease. The European Union has called on Thailand to act against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Both the EU and US have raised concerns over trafficking of labour in Thailand's fishing industry. Coastal habitats including coral reefs have been damaged by excessive tourism.

Thailand has launched policies to counter over-fishing, strengthened domestic legislation and regulations to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and promoted regional cooperation on this issue. But more will need to be done to achieve a sustainable balance between the fishing industry and the marine resource base.

The COVID-19 recession in tourism allowed some coastal resources to recover. NGOs, agencies and activists engaged in projects to rehabilitate mangroves, combat coral bleaching, and restore coastal habitats have taken inspiration from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, especially the importance of moderation and resilience. Communities that have suffered from the over-exploitation should be empowered to shape the future course of these industries.

5. Manage the forests for harmony and sustainability

Progress on SDG 15, Life on Land is stagnating and attaining the target presents "significant challenges", in large part because of conflict over the forests.

For over thirty years Thailand has committed to return the forest cover to 40 percent of total area, but the achievement is far short of this target. Efforts have been hobbled by a long-running debate over the issue of allowing people to live in the forests—whether they are destroyers or guardians. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy would suggest the application of moderation and reasonableness to find a compromise between the two sides which accommodates both participation and expertise. The experience of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation at Doi Tung can serve as a guide. Recent experience in community forest management outside the national parks suggest that cooperation between officials and communities at the local level can help to extend the forest cover, largely by limiting forest fires. Hopefully this experience can open the way for a new era of sustainable forest management and successful reforestation.

6. Act urgently on climate change

SDG 13 urges countries to "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts" by integrating climate measures into national policies and plans, raising public awareness, and building the capacity for resilience and adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

Thailand has cooperated in global efforts to address the climate crisis. Thailand was among the first countries to sign the Paris Agreement in 2015 and to submit proposals for reducing emissions in line with the Agreement. In November 2021, Thailand pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2065. This commitment is highly welcome but the task ahead is daunting because of difficulties over data, capacity, and institutional barriers.

Thailand has natural advantages to contribute to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by increasing forest cover and tapping solar energy. Government has reiterated its target of increasing forest coverage to 40 percent of the total land area. Thailand also needs to reduce its material footprint by extracting less and recycling more. The Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model, based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, aims to combine science, technology, and innovation with Thailand's strengths in biological diversity and cultural richness in order to develop new areas of economic growth that are green and sustainable. Thailand is also working on transforming the energy sector toward a greener and cleaner path, developing the electric vehicle industry and promoting sustainable business models which will lead to a low-carbon economy.

Thailand lies in the latitudes close to the Equator that will be most affected by climate change. The government has compiled a *Climate Change Master Plan (2015-2050)*, but the social impact of climate change in Thailand is still under-studied. Greater variability in the climate will undermine marginal farmers and promote a drift to the cities. Thailand should prepare for the social impact of climate change through projects for "greening the cities", drawing on people participating alongside government agencies, and following a 3S model of starting small and building resilience.

7. Secure peace, safety and justice for all

Another SDG which needs attention is "SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

Thailand's ratings on international indices for corruption, rule of law, and rights and freedoms have trended downwards over the past decade. However, there are positive signs. More people seem prepared to speak out against instances of injustice. There has been a resurgence of activists and organisations dedicated to furthering human rights, judicial reform, and protection of the media. In part these trends reflect a generational shift. The Thailand Institute of Justice is promoting reform from within. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy lends support for the empowerment of people and communities to take charge of their own lives, including their own safety and security.

8. Reduce inequalities in income, wealth, power and public goods

SDG 10 calls for a reduction of inequalities of all kinds by boosting incomes of the lower 40 percent, promoting political inclusion, breaking down institutional barriers and discriminatory practices, and providing better social protection.

Reducing inequality has become part of the national agenda since the early 2010s, but more needs to be done. A concerted plan to reduce inequality must include the following tasks: assess the distributional impact of all public policies; adjust the tax system to properly tax high incomes and wealth; allocate more of the state budget to social protection and welfare; combat monopolies in business; devolve power and budget to local government; reduce the quality gaps in education; strengthen the universal health care system; urgently provide for income, health care and other requirements of an ageing society; counter the unevenness in access to technology; and ensure fair access to power through democratic institutions.

9. Engage regionally and globally to promote sustainable development

The SDGs cannot be achieved by any one country or economy alone and that is why SDG 17 emphasises the need for cooperation and partnership. Thailand has been a champion in promoting sustainable development and the attainment of the SDGs at the global and regional levels. Thailand should continue its role as a

moderate, pragmatic champion of sustainable development at the regional and international levels.

Conclusion

Across the world, the pandemic has prompted calls to build forward better, to take this opportunity to correct the failures in the past approach to development, and to make a serious commitment to managing climate change. This report, though far from comprehensive, hopes to contribute to this task through recommendations based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the UNDP's framework of human development. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy came to prominence two decades ago because its principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience had obvious appeal in a time of crisis. His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej advised that "we have to take a careful step backwards" in order to find a foundation of self-reliance from which to move forward again. In the context of such a severe crisis, the call to Leave No One Behind is more difficult than ever, but also more important than ever. That is the great challenge of today.

Follow the path of moderation. Empower. Build resilience. Respect the human-nature balance. Leave No One Behind.

CHAPTER

1

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Human Development

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Human Development

Thirty years ago, UNDP proposed that the goal of development is not economic growth, the expansion of GDP, but the ability of people to live the lives they want, value, and deserve. In a resonant phrase, the architects of this approach described *development as freedom*—freedom from poverty of all kinds, freedom of opportunity, freedom of people to develop the capabilities to live long, healthy and creative lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living and to participate in the life of the community. Over the three decades since its appearance, the idea of human development has been elaborated and applied across the world.

Over twenty years ago in 1997, as his country slid into its worst-ever economic crisis, Thailand's reigning monarch cautioned that the country had become too obsessed with growth ("to be a tiger is not important"[1]) and offered a deceptively simple approach for surviving the crisis and building a more resilient economy and society in the future: practise moderation; be reasonable, in the sense of thinking carefully about the consequences of decisions and actions; and build resilience into every project. These ideas were elaborated into the approach known as the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

The UNDP approach to human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy are different in origin and style. Human development is more about *what*, about the definition of development. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is more about *how*, about principles for taking decisions which will lead to a positive result. Yet the two are organically linked. Both place people at the centre of development. Both emphasize empowerment as a principal means. In 2007, a predecessor to this report, titled *Sufficiency Economy and Human Development*, explored the synergy between these approaches.[2] Here we return to the theme to examine how the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can contribute to progress in human development to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

While this report was being prepared, the world was changing. From January 2020, as the highly infectious COVID-19 virus spread across the world, contact had to be minimized between people, between places, and between countries, precipitating the most severe economic and humanitarian crisis in living memory. The year also witnessed record-breaking wildfires in Australia, California, the Amazon, and even on the Siberian tundra, plus devastating floods in Europe, record numbers of storms in the Atlantic and the South China Seas and unprecedented melting of the Arctic ice-sheets. The impacts of climate change suddenly feel much closer at hand. The COVID-19 pandemic and climate change are both rooted in humanity's unstable relationship with the planet. The pandemic has delivered a sharp reminder of our common humanity. While the virus separates us by physical distancing, masks, personal protective equipment, closed borders and empty airplanes, both pandemics and climate change demand we come together, as the only solutions are global ones.

We are living in the Anthropocene, the age when "human activity is having a dominating presence on multiple aspects of the natural world and the functioning of the Earth system, and that this has consequences for how we view and interact with the natural world—and perceive our place in it".[3] In 2020–21, we have had a dramatic lesson of what this proposition means. The economic disruption of COVID-19 has already had a massive impact on human development, on the ability of people to live full and productive lives. Yet crises are also times of opportunity because they create the fluidity from which changes can emerge. Calls to "build forward better" have been heard around the world.[4] But what does "better" mean? The approach of human development offers a clear

1 Speech on 4 December 1997, UNDP 2007, p. 20.
2 UNDP 2007.
3 Steffen et al. 2015.
4 UNDP 2020b.

answer. People enjoy better lives when they are empowered to develop their capabilities, choices and freedoms to live the lives they have reasons to value. More than ever before, this requires building people's resilience to withstand shocks, now and in the future. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, which was forged in crisis, serves as a guide for individuals, communities, corporates, and institutions in the pursuit of development that is people-centred and resilient.

While Thailand has made significant progress in advancing human development, the task is far from complete. In 2015, the UN drew up a list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". These succeeded the earlier programme of Millennium Development Goals over 2000–2015 and are different in two ways: they are more ambitious and more comprehensive; and they highlight the word "sustainable". The second chapter of this report reviews Thailand's record on human development and the challenge of meeting the SDGs.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not an isolated and extraordinary event. It came on the heels of SARS, MERS, bird flu, Ebola and other outbreaks of new and deadly diseases. Viruses are among the life-forms that have benefited from the hugely improved connectivity of our globalized world. At the same time, pandemics are not the only new challenge. Disruptive technologies are changing the nature of work, the labour market, and people's futures. The impacts of climate change are already significant, and are increasing year by year. The second chapter of this report also reviews the impact of these new challenges on human development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy now has a track record. Individuals, communities and institutions in Thailand and elsewhere have been applying its principles for over two decades. The learnings are substantial, and these are addressed in the third chapter of this report.

This opening chapter re-examines the synergy of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and human development in three parts. The first part explains the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy by recapping its history, summarizing its principles, and reviewing its practical learnings. The second part examines the relations between the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and human development in the context of the SDGs. It reaffirms that the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy enshrines the *values* of human development and offers a *process* for making plans, mapping priorities, and taking decisions in pursuit of human development objectives. It highlights the importance of *enlightened empowerment, resilience* and *sensitivity to the human-nature balance* in tackling the tasks ahead.

The final section of this chapter presents the SDGs and the early appraisal of Thailand's progress, highlighting the goals which will require special attention.

Origins of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

As the people of Thailand approached the millennium, they could look back over an extraordinary transformation. The economy had grown at an annual average of 7.6 percent over 40 years, and had never slipped backwards, even in the oil crises. On average, everyone had a real income three times that of their parents. On key measures of human development, progress had been impressive. The proportion of population below the poverty line had fallen. Many more children were in schools, more young people in universities, and more adults in good jobs.

Forged in crisis

The financial crisis that struck in July 1997 was thus a shock that was difficult to comprehend, let alone manage. Over 18 months, the economy shrank by around 14 percent. Two million people lost their jobs almost immediately, and many more in the informal economy lost their livelihoods. Many returned from the cities to their rural origins. Some 5 percent of households dropped below the poverty line, and tens of thousands of companies went bankrupt.

Five months after the crisis hit, His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej gave his annual birthday speech televised nationwide. He arrived for the event not chauffeured in the usual royal limousine but self-driving a modest old car. The symbolism of this entrance became clear mid-way through the address, when he said:

"Recently, so many projects have been implemented, so many factories have been built, that it was thought Thailand would become a little tiger, and then a big tiger. People were crazy about becoming a tiger…. to be a tiger is not important. The important thing for us is to have a self-supporting economy. A self-supporting economy means to have enough to survive…. [5]"

Although the royal advice always attracted attention, no previous speech had the impact of this one. His Majesty's approach, which was soon captioned as the Sufficiency Economy, was immediately adopted by the government as the watchword for combatting the crisis and became the theme for the five-year economic plan under preparation. Companies, communities and institutions pledged their commitment.

The royal speech struck a chord not only with government agencies and corporate executives struggling to manage the financial crisis, but also with ordinary people. For government and business, the key takeout was that the country had lived beyond its means and been flagrantly imprudent in confronting the dangers of globalization. For many ordinary people, the key message was about the disempowerment they had suffered as the price for economic growth and prosperity—without even noticing until this shock. The 2007 report on *Sufficiency Economy and Human Development* put it this way:

"The technologies and techniques for Thailand's development came from outside in, and from top down…. People were tempted into production systems over which they had little control because they were receivers of the knowledge on which these systems were based. This placed them at risk…. Besides the material vulnerability to risk and fluctuation, there was also a growing mental anxiety of becoming victim of economic and social forces beyond local control…. in the new era, world prices replaced rainfall as the source of insecurity, and market forces supplanted wild animals as the predators. In 1997, the countryside was caught up in an international crisis which was caused by financial flows determined in distant markets and government decisions in the capital. A sense of powerlessness to organize life, production, family, future, and community became a major source of anxiety and discontent.[6]"

Codifying the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

Over the next two years, a team codified the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy by researching the monarch's words and works since the 1950s, resulting in a definition which His Majesty approved.

"The Sufficiency Economy is an approach to life and conduct which is applicable at every level from the individual through the family and community to the management and development of the nation.
It promotes a middle path, especially in developing the economy to keep up with the world in the era of globalization.
Sufficiency has three components: moderation; wisdom or insight; and the need for built-in resilience against the risks which arise from internal or external change. In addition, the application of theories in planning and implementation requires great care and good judgement at every stage.
At the same time, all members of the nation—especially officials, intellectuals, and business people—need to develop their commitment to the importance of knowledge, integrity, and honesty, and to conduct their lives with perseverance, toleration, wisdom, and insight, so that the country has the strength and balance to respond to the rapid and widespread changes in economy, society, environment, and culture in the outside world. [7]"

This definition was further summarized and visualized as three principles and two supporting

5 Royal speech, 4 December 1997, official translation; UNDP 2007, p. 20.

6 UNDP 2007, p. 25.
7 UNDP 2007, pp. 29–30.

Decisions are based on these three principles		
Moderation	**Reasonableness**	**Resilience**
• Just enough • Within capacities • Avoiding extremes like overindulgence and deprivation	• Assessing the causes and effects of one's actions on any and all stakeholders including the environment	• Risk management • Preparing for future impacts of change
Decisions are based on two supporting conditions		
Knowledge		**Integrity**
• Insight • Right understanding • Prudent application		• Honesty • Altruism • Perseverance • Mindfulness

conditions:[8]

Moderation means "just enough," not too little and not too much, a middle way between extremes, between want and extravagance, between backwardness and impossible dreams, between over-indulgence and deprivation.

Reasonableness means both evaluating the reasons for any action and understanding its full consequences—not only on oneself, but on others, the society, and the environment; and not only in the short term, but the long also.

Resilience means having built-in ability to withstand shocks, to manage risks, to adjust to external change, and to cope with events that are unpredictable or uncontrollable. It implies a foundation of self-reliance, as well as self-discipline. The original Thai version used a medical term for "having built-in immunity".

The two background conditions mean that any development project should be based on appropriate knowledge, and should be executed with honesty, good intentions and perseverance. Taken together these two concepts are close to the idea of "wisdom". In 1967, His Majesty said:

> "To achieve desired results that are also beneficial and morally just, you need more than just knowledge. You need honesty, sincerity and justice. Knowledge is like an engine that propels a vehicle. Moral principles are the steering wheel or rudder that lead the vehicle safely in the right direction.[9]"

His Majesty emphasised that the five elements interlock to form a whole. Reasonableness indicates moderation. Moderation builds resilience. Resilience is a requisite for reasonableness. Knowledge and integrity are necessary conditions for the whole.

Set out in this way, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has a simplicity which is its strength. Its principles can be applied in many different contexts and at varying levels of complexity and intensity. Various different groups, interests, and professions took inspiration from these principles in varying ways.

The technocrats managing the national economy took inspiration from the principle of resilience. They revised the approach to managing the national economy in order to build in protection against the risks which had felled the economy in 1997.

The nation's economists, meeting for an annual conference in the wake of the speech, focused on the principle of moderation to propose a better balance between growth and social objectives in the management of the national economy. The planning agency promptly made moderation the framework for future plans.

Communities, NGOs, and activists argued that the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy highlighted the need to pay more attention to inequalities,

8 The translation of the principles and conditions into English has varied over time. Here we prefer "integrity" rather than "virtue" which is ambiguous, and "resilience" rather than "self-immunity" or "prudence".

9 Grossman and Faulder 2011, p. 223.

disempowerment and environmental decline brought about by the pursuit of growth. They drew inspiration from a passage in His Majesty's birthday speech a year later:

> "Sufficiency is moderation. If one is moderate in one's desires, one will have less craving. If one has less craving, one will take less advantage of others. If all nations hold this concept… without being extreme or insatiable in one's desires, the world will be a happier place. Being moderate does not mean to be too strictly frugal; luxurious items are permissible, but one should not take advantage of others in the fulfilment of one's desires. Moderation, in other words, living within one's means, should dictate all actions. Act in moderation, speak in moderation; that is, be moderate in all activities.[10]"

Earlier roots in practical development work

Although the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy emerged on the eve of the millennium, its roots stretched back over the previous five decades. From the early years of his reign, His Majesty began experimental agricultural projects in the grounds of the Chitralada Palace in Bangkok. These included fisheries, new crop varieties, and dairy schemes. The emphasis was on finding technologies and techniques which were appropriate for Thailand's typical smallholder.

His Majesty launched his first local development project in the early 1950s—a simple dam that turned a tidal marsh into a lake useful to the local villagers for fish-raising, irrigation and drinking water. Over the following years, His Majesty travelled constantly around all regions of the country. In his words, "We cannot impose our ideas on the people. We can only suggest. We must go to meet them, find out what their needs are, and then fully explain to them [what can be done].... You must meet the people and like them."[11] By the millennium, there were over 30,000 projects in the areas of agriculture, water management, forestry, medicine, and disaster relief. The Royal Project Foundation was founded in 1969, initially concentrating on replacing opium with cultivation of strawberries, apples, grapes, and many other fruits and vegetables, and later becoming an umbrella organization managing 38 development centres in Northern Thailand.[12] The Chaipattana Foundation, begun in 1988, initially concentrated on agriculture but expanded into projects addressing environmental pollution and the preservation of natural resources.[13]

Between 1979 and 1983, six Royal Development Study Centres were established across Thailand's different regions. Their main purpose is to archive the results of the Royal Projects in their region, and to serve as hubs and training centres for spreading the learnings. The staff conduct research and experimentation, manage demonstration plots, organize training courses, and offer advice to local communities. Each year the Centres provide services to several thousand people and are visited by over a million.[14]

In 1994, His Majesty unveiled a model of a self-reliant family farm that was a microcosm of his thinking and was dubbed the New Theory (described in Chapter 3). His Majesty often talked about the principles and learnings from these projects in occasional speeches, often at university graduation ceremonies or in his annual birthday address. In 1974, His Majesty said:

> "It is especially important to first build a foundation in which people have an occupation and the ability to make a living, as those who have an occupation and a reliable living can then progress upwards to higher levels of prosperity. The promotion of progress must proceed in stages with care, economy, and foresight to prevent mistakes and disasters…. if one focuses only on rapid economic expansion without making sure that such a plan is appropriate for our people and the condition of our country, it will inevitably result in various imbalances and eventually end up as failure or crisis as found in other countries.[15]"

10 Dusit Palace, 4 December 1998.
11 Grossman and Faulder 2011, p. 253.
12 http://www.royalprojectthailand.com.
13 http://www.chaipat.or.th.
14 http://www.rdpb.go.th.
15 Dusit Palace, 4 December 1974.

These talks clarified some additional principles which fleshed out the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in action. Eventually some of the senior figures who worked on the Royal Projects compiled a list which they called the "27 Royal Development Principles".[16] These principles elaborate the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as everyday working maxims.

1. Honesty, Integrity and Sincerity
2. Humbleness
3. Perseverance
4. Knowing, Loving and Uniting
5. Always Giving Without Expecting Anything in Return
6. Happiness in Doing Good Things for Others
7. Systematic Study of Information and Working with Well-rounded Knowledge
8. Explosion from Within
9. Development According to Steps
10. Topographical and Sociological Approach
11. Holistic Approach
12. Economy and Simplicity with Maximum Benefits
13. Our Loss is Our Gain
14. Planting Forests in the People's Hearts
15. Using Nature to Cure Nature
16. Using Vice to Defeat Vice
17. Common Interest
18. Self-supporting
19. Sufficiency Economy
20. Understanding, Gaining Insight and Access, and Engaging in Development
21. Solving Small Problems First: Think Macro, Start Micro
22. Do Not Be Too Dogmatic About Theory While Adhering to Simplicity
23. People Participation
24. Having Enough to Live on and to Live for
25. One-stop Service
26. Cheerfulness, Joyfulness, Eagerness, Liveliness, Activeness, and Energy As Major Factors for Efficient Work
27. Victory of Development

These principles, based on practical experiences, put special emphasis on three areas:

- *Participation and empowerment.* The principle "Explosion from Within" was explained to mean: "Any project must start from those involved, must build the understanding and desire to act from within, not from orders." The principle on planting forests came from His Majesty's words: "Forest officials should plant trees in people's hearts, then people will plant trees in the earth and look after them."
- *Resilience.* Do what is possible and practical. Aim for solutions that are elegant and economical. To minimise risk, work in stages—start small and build a base of self-reliance before expanding to something more ambitious.
- *Human-nature balance.* The classic image of His Majesty in his development work showed him walking through a forest or paddy fields with a camera slung round his neck and a sheaf of maps in his hand. The principles of "Using Nature to Cure Nature" and "Using Vice to Defeat Vice" underlay his experiments with natural methods to accelerate reforestation, guard against soil erosion, and purify water sources.

Recognition

On 26 May 2006, the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan presented a Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award to His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. He said,

"His Majesty's "Sufficiency Economy" philosophy … is of great relevance to communities everywhere during these times of rapid globalization. The philosophy's "middle way" approach strongly reinforces the United Nations' own advocacy of a people-centred and sustainable path toward human development. His Majesty's development agenda and visionary thinking are an inspiration to his subjects, and to people everywhere.[17]"

16 MOE 2018. An earlier list had 23 points, and was sometimes as the King's 23 Working Principles. There are varying translations.

17 UNDP 2007, p. xvi.

The passing and the legacy

His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away on 13 October 2016. The year-long period of mourning and subsequent cremation ceremony evoked an outpouring of grief. Following the cremation, the elaborate structures built for the ceremony were converted into exhibition halls on various aspects of his 66-year reign, visited by three million people in the first six weeks after opening. The large hall, erected for the official guests who came from all over the world for the ceremony, was devoted to an exhibition on His Majesty's life and his development work, featuring photographs, descriptions, and articles from various projects. One long wall of the exhibition hall was devoted to a series of mural paintings, stretching from the floor to the high ceiling, illustrating His Majesty at work on development in settings ranging from paddy-fields to mountain tops in all regions of the country.

This exhibition signalled that a major part of His Majesty's legacy was the many achievements of his development initiatives and also the learnings synthesized in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

His Majesty's son and successor, His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua, pledged to continue his father's work. In his first act as King, delivering the First Royal Command at his coronation ceremony on 4 May 2019, His Majesty uttered the words: "We shall treasure, preserve, and build on our heritage and shall reign in righteousness for the great enduring good of the people."[18] On 5 December 2020, His Majesty recalled his father's development work and his gift of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy by stating: "This provides the people with a firm foundation upon which they can build for further progress and cope with global changes."[19] His Majesty has taken strong interest in projects of healthcare, agriculture and education.

Reading, studying and viewing the concept of "Sufficiency"

Since its foundation, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been explored in a large body of knowledge, ranging from academic studies to how-to books, analyses of His Majesty's development work,[20] the prime minister's presentation on Sufficiency and the SDGs,[21] animated cartoons[22] and videos on YouTube and elsewhere.

One important source includes a collection, entitled Sufficiency Thinking: *Thailand's Gift to an Unsustainable World,*[23] edited by two international academics but written mostly by Thai academics and development specialists who have had practical experience in implementing the thinking in rural projects, community development, corporate social responsibility schemes, environmental management, healthcare, education, and prisoner development. The core theme of the book is sustainability. The editors start from the proposition that "Our troubled world needs to rein in economic profligacy, greed, exploitation and the unprecedented imbalance between rich and poor." They end with "It is now our dream that others around the world will share and pursue this vision. This is Thailand's gift."[24]

In 2010, a former governor of Thailand's central bank, Chaiyawat Wibulswasdi, headed a team expounding the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy largely from an economic perspective.[25] In the same year, the Thai Chamber of Commerce examined the business angle with a book of 100 interviews with business professionals.[26]

In 2019, two researchers summarized the results of 20 studies carried out between 2010 and 2016 on the impact of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy on well-being in Thailand. They concluded that there is "a positive correlation between Sufficiency Economy interventions and well-being across six emerging themes: education, social, economics, agriculture, environment, and health".[27]

18 PRD 2019a.
19 PRD 2020.
20 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ATKC780YVg.
21 http://thaiembdc.org/2018/10/01/from-the-sufficiency-economy-philosophy-to-sustainable-development-goals-september-28-2018/.
22 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vns5eyNEg8.
23 Avery and Bergsteiner 2016.
24 Avery and Bergsteiner 2016, pp. xvii, 265.
25 Wibulswasdi, Piboolsravut and Pootrakool 2010.
26 TCC 2010.
27 Barua and Tejativaddhana 2019.

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Human Development today

What is the relationship between the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and human development?

Human development, coined the first time in the 1990 UNDP *Human Development Report*, means expanding the capabilities and freedoms of people to live full, creative lives, in good health and security, and with freedom and dignity. That means creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential, and providing them with the tools to enhance their own human capabilities—to accumulate knowledge, to gain access to resources, and to participate in the community. Without these capabilities, many choices are simply not available and many opportunities in life remain inaccessible. Economic growth is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve human development. And growth will only do so if it creates jobs, reduces poverty, respects the environment, and generates the necessary resources for essential social services.

The essential policy goals for operationalizing the concept of human development are:[27]

- *Efficiency/productivity*: the optimal use of existing resources through investment in the education, health, aspirations and skills of people.
- *Equity*: distributive justice, and the fair distribution of incomes and assets through equal access to opportunities.
- *Sustainability*: concern for not only present generations but future ones as well.
- *Empowerment/participation*: enabling people to attain a level of individual development that allows them to make choices close to their hearts.

With growing awareness that violence, disease, natural disasters and other shocks can quickly undermine well-being and present risks to the process of development, in 1994 the concept of human security emerged. As explained in the 1994 UNDP *Human Development Report*, human security is about managing the risks and threats which undermine people's opportunities to develop their capabilities and ensuring that they can exercise their choices safely and freely. Put simply, it means making sure that what has been gained today will not be taken away tomorrow. In the 1994 *Human Development* Report, human security was defined as freedom from fear and freedom from want. By 2012, when a General Assembly Resolution was adopted by the United Nations, freedom from indignity was officially added to the two other freedoms to define human security.

Sufficiency and Human Development

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a natural ally of the concept of human development.

Like human development, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy places humanity at the centre, focuses on well-being rather than wealth, makes sustainability the very core of the thinking, understands the need for human security, and concentrates on building people's capabilities to develop their potential.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is not only organically linked with human development but complementary to it. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is not a programme but a guide to conducting life and taking decisions that can be applied to an individual, household, community, project, business, nation or the whole world. Those decisions can include setting priorities for an individual, community or institution. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy suggests *how to take decisions* which will achieve sustainability, health, longevity, learning, empowerment, well-being and happiness.

There are three places where the intersection between the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the principles of human development are especially close. These are: empowerment; resilience; and sensitivity to the human-nature balance. Let us look in more detail at these three.

Empowerment and "Explosion from Within"

Enlightened empowerment is maybe the single most important concept in human development. Empowerment means enabling people and communities to participate in making the decisions that affect their own lives. It also means breaking

27 UNDP 1990; UNDP 2013.

down the structures, rules, monopolies, and forms of discrimination that *dis*empower people, that deny them access to opportunities, and that result in inequalities of all kinds. *Enlightened* empowerment means that power always comes with responsibility.

People can be empowered in many ways. Take the example of Thailand's network of Village Health Volunteers (*O-So-Mo*). The origin of this network goes back to the late 1970s when activists within the medical profession looked for ways to compensate for the public health system's relative lack of funds and personnel. They proposed a system loosely modelled on China's barefoot doctors, designed to bring basic primary health care down to the level of villages, even in remote areas. Over time, as the public health provision improved, the network continued to expand and adjust its role to suit the times. Now there are a million volunteers, roughly 1-in-70 of the population, with specialized units for certain groups such as the migrant workers from neighbouring countries. Around 70 percent are female. During the SARS epidemic in 2002–3 and bird flu in 2004, this network played "a crucial role" according to the World Health Organization. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the volunteers were mobilized to educate people on how to protect themselves, and to track and trace those in contact with the virus. The network is widely credited with playing a crucial role in Thailand's relative success in confronting the virus.[28]

This network represents a form of institutional empowerment with benefits for the human development of individual, community and society.

Empowerment may also be achieved by removing forms of discrimination, prejudice, and structural exclusion, and by breaking down monopolies which obstruct access to opportunities for others. In Thailand, there are still many monopolies and oligopolies in the economy that are protected by law. They are a significant factor in the concentration of wealth. The relaxation or removal would allow more people access to opportunities to earn income. Such monopolies are not restricted to the economy. There are also monopolies of power and privilege which have similar consequences.

Empowerment is also fundamental to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. One of the Royal Development Principles introduced above is the call to "Explosion from Within". As we shall see in Chapter 3, this has been one of the most resonant and motivating calls in the applications of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

Resilience

Resilience is another key element of the concept of human development. Resilience means building the capacity of people, communities and institutions to prevent and mitigate risks.

Resilience is also key to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Although its history reached back earlier, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy came to prominence in the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which was seen as a signal of the hidden perils of globalization. Inspired by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, technocrats and bankers innovated to build resilience into the country's financial systems. Largely as a result, Thailand was little affected by the 2008 financial crisis which began from the "Lehman shock" in the US. Almost none of the Thai banks had bought the toxic bonds which spread the shock around the world, and the strength of the country's foreign reserves guarded against contagion.

But financial instability is not the only peril of globalization. In the last two decades, we have become aware of the vulnerability to pandemic in our closely inter-connected world. In the COVID-19 crisis, we have seen the potential of pandemic to spark an economic crisis that will have an unprecedented impact on human development across the world and across the board. As a result of COVID-19, the UNDP Human Development Index dropped for the first time since it was launched in 1990.[29]

In the original codification of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the Thai term now rendered as resilience meant creating an inbuilt immunity against shock, similar to a body's immunity to disease. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy not only highlights resilience as a fundamental principle, but it also includes techniques for achieving resilience in its working principles. Among the 27 Royal Development Principles is the call for "Development According to Steps", which

28 WHO 2020.

29 UNDP 2020b; UNDP 2020c, p. 7.

refers to building a basis of competence and self-reliance before expanding to a more ambitious scale. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this has been another appealing and effective technique in the practical application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

Sensitivity to the human-nature balance

In the late 20th century, the concept of sustainability grew in prominence with warnings from scientists of the impact of humanity on the planet. The term "Sustainable Development" appeared around 1980 and the two words quickly became inseparable. The promotion of the word to the title of the Sustainable Development Goals reflects a heightened concern. Sustainability has economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects, but the environmental aspect attracts most attention. Sustainability is fundamental to all aspects of human development.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience are a formula for pursuing sustainability. Moderation counsels a middle way. Reasonableness requires careful forethought on the consequences of any decision or action. Resilience needs to be built in. The Royal Development Principles convert these principles into calls for action: "Economy and Simplicity with Maximum Benefits"; "Having Enough to Live on and to Live for"; "Using Nature to Cure Nature"; and "Planting Forests in the People's Hearts".

Since the 1990s, there have been voices calling for Thailand to shift away from the pursuit of economic growth and to give more priority to social goals and the protection of the environment. Although social goals have been given more attention, care for the environment has lagged behind. As the economy has slowed, the attention has further diminished.

The challenge is to build a sensitivity to the natural environment into all policies and projects.

Human development and the SDGs: Thailand's tasks

The concept of human development has guided the work of UNDP for thirty years. The approach aims "to shift the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people-centered policies".[30] In *Our Common Agenda* (2021), the UN Secretary-General called for "new measures to complement GDP" in order to focus better on the wellbeing of people and planet.[31] In recent years, there have been three important innovations in thinking about human development in practice.

Three innovations

The first concerns inequality. While a society may show progress in human development as measured by average readings, if the society has a high level of inequality the average may disguise the true situation for large numbers of people. The awareness of this possibility increased with the significant increase in inequality within societies over recent decades. As a result, in 2010 UNDP introduced the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), defined as a "measure of the average level of human development of people in a society once inequality is taken into account".[32] Thailand was one of many societies which performed lower on this Index compared to the standard HDI (see Chapter 2).

The second innovation was the idea of "enhanced capabilities".[33] This innovation recognized that the capabilities needed for people to live full lives are not static over time. They change with technology, income levels, social values, and other factors. The simplest example is computer capabilities. Only a few years ago these were of limited importance because electronic devices were relatively rare. But now electronic devices are everywhere, competence is necessary for everyday life, and access to this competence has become a factor in social and economic inequality—the digital divide. Capabilities may change not only from

30 Haq 1995.
31 UN 2021, pp. 4, 33–4.
32 UNDP 2011.
33 UNDP 2019a

material circumstances, as in the computing example, but also from people's demands and aspirations.

The third innovation is the raised awareness of the impact of humanity on the planet. The current era has been redefined as the Anthropocene, meaning that humans "are a dominant force shaping the future of the planet".[34] Talk of "environmental impact" has been succeeded by the idea of "planetary boundaries", meaning that there are points where human action may trigger uncontrollable changes in the physical world, including climate change and loss of biodiversity. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic along with multiple signals of the growing impact of climate change made this issue more salient and more urgent. The *Human Development Report 2020* argues that our "stewardship of the planet" has become the "next frontier" of human development. It defines "nature-based human development" as "nesting human development—including social and economic systems—into ecosystems and the biosphere, building on a systemic approach to nature-based solutions that puts people's agency at the core".[35]

These three innovations have shaped change in the goals of development—from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the call to "Leave No One Behind".

MDGs and SDGs

In 2000, the UN drew up a list of eight MDGs covering the key topics of human development. Thailand achieved most of the MDGs, many of them well in advance of the 2015 target.

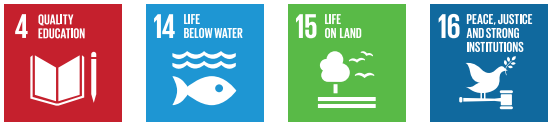
In succession to this scheme, in September 2015 the 193 UN member states adopted 17 SDGs with a final target year of 2030. They have more comprehensive coverage, more ambitious targets and more detailed tracking—17 goals, 169 targets and over 230 indicators. Thailand has fulsomely embraced this challenge, created taskforces for each goal, carried out a voluntary review on implementation in 2017,[36] and served as the ASEAN Coordinator for Sustainable Development. In July 2021 Thailand presented its second Voluntary National Review to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

In the early assessments of progress on the SDGs in 2019 and 2020, Thailand's performance was well above average, indeed, the best in the ASEAN region, but still somewhat mixed. However, UN-ESCAP's review of the Asia-Pacific region has warned that "Despite progress on some goals, business as usual in the region will not be enough to achieve the goals by 2030."[37]

On several of the 17 goals, the achievement appears to be within reach in Thailand and the progress has been positive. These are:

On a handful of the goals, the information is still too partial to make a proper assessment. These are:

In four cases, the goals are challenging, and the progress is modest. These are:



Finally there are two where Thailand's progress is promising, but their intrinsic importance demands that they are prioritized. These are:

Let us look at the six goals which present the biggest and most important challenges.

34 UNDP 2020c, p. 4.
35 UNDP 2020c, pp. 6, 10.
36 MFA 2017.
37 UN-ESCAP 2020, p. 2.

SDG 4, Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

The goal is for all, including those with disabilities, to have access to quality education from early childhood development to tertiary level and adult education.

Thailand has made great advances in the *quantity* of education provided. Both primary and secondary levels are compulsory and free. As numbers in the target age-range are now falling, there is over-provision at the tertiary level. The problems that remain are over the *quality* of the education provided, and *inequalities* in access.

The problem over quality is not new. Thai schoolchildren have performed poorly on the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)[38] tests for many years, with no strong sign of improvement. There have been repeated projects to upgrade the quality of education. In 2002, the Thailand Development Research Institute argued that there were no incentives and disincentives in the schooling system to reward good performance and punish failure. It proposed empowering parents to monitor schools and revising the structure of rewards for teachers and education officials.[39]

The PISA scores also show wide discrepancies by income class and by location. The dropout rates in secondary education, and the chances of gaining entry to tertiary education, show the same biases. The disadvantages of children born to low-income families in remote areas start from the pre-school level and accumulate from then onwards.

SDG 14, Life Below Water: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

The goal is to reduce marine pollution, protect marine and coastal ecosystems, and end overfishing and destructive fishing practices.

Fish is a major item in the local diet, and seafood has become a major export item. Thailand has a large fishing industry that has been poorly regulated in the past. The marine area has been over-fished, resulting in the catch declining by around half from its peak level in the early 1990s. In 2015, the European Union threatened to ban seafood imports from Thailand on grounds of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The government reacted by bringing its regulations up to international standards, improving monitoring, and reducing the size of the marine fishing fleet. In 2019, the fishery industry demanded the government to relax these measures. Though well aware of how these measures affected the fishery industry, government insisted on maintaining them in order to ensure that the situation remained under control.

Beaches and underwater sites are a major attraction for tourists, whose numbers grew exponentially in the 2010s, reaching 40 million arrivals in 2019.[40] This load has resulted in heavy damage, particularly to coral reefs and coastal ecosystems.

In 2020, Thailand was the 10th largest contributor to marine waste, especially plastic which damages coral, kills marine life, and contaminates food. The government has begun a programme to raise public awareness of this issue and phase out plastic waste products. During its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2019, Thailand launched the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris to promote regional and global cooperation on this issue. However, the momentum has been disrupted by the pandemic. It is vital to get this programme back on track.

SDG 15, Life on Land: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

The goal is to protect and restore forests, freshwater sources, biodiversity, and protected species.

Thailand's tropical and subtropical forests are globally important as sites of biodiversity and carbon capture. With population increase in the 20th century, the total level of forest coverage declined from 60 percent to possibly less than 20

38 OECD 2015, 2018.
39 TDRI 2012.
40 http://www.mots.go.th/mots_en/more_news_new.php?cid=330.

percent.[41] Efforts to conserve the remaining forests and promote reforestation have been hampered by conflict over strategy. Some government agencies wish to exclude people from forests, but this leaves the forests vulnerable to spontaneous burning, poaching, and other abuses. Many communities have resided in the forests for a long period and claim the rights to exploit the forests in a sustainable way while acting also as guardians. However, these communities have often been blamed for destroying the forest. There are several local experiments on models for forest management based on cooperation between communities and officials.

SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The goal is reduce violence and corruption, end trafficking, promote the rule of law, provide legal identity for all, ensure public access to information, and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

For Thailand, this may be the most challenging of the SDGs. There have been advances in curbing human trafficking, but the country's performance on international indices of corruption, rule of law, and press freedom has stagnated or declined over recent years.

SDG 10, Reduce inequality within and among countries

Reducing inequality is a goal in itself and a condition for advancing human development across the board. A high level of inequality obstructs the social cohesion needed for collective action, discourages open debate on social goals, and undermines accountability. High inequality tends to be self-sustaining as it becomes cemented into institutions and passed down to future generations.

Thailand has a high level of inequality in income and wealth, as well as inequalities in political influence, access to technology, provision of social goods, and simple human dignity. Awareness of the society's inequality and its costs has risen in recent years, but progress on combatting inequality has been slow.

SDG 13, Climate Action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Coping with climate change is the toughest challenge of the future in Thailand and around the world. This SDG sets out targets for reducing emissions, raising public awareness, and mitigating impacts. Thailand has compiled a long-term plan, integrated the goals into other aspects of planning, and confirmed its commitments under the Paris Agreement of 2015.[42] Delivering on these plans and commitments, however, requires contribution from a number of agencies as well as the cooperation from the general public.

Leave No One Behind

Besides these 17 goals, the SDGs draw special attention to inequality in its many forms. The countries adopting the SDG goals promised to ensure that "no one will be left behind" and to make efforts "to reach the furthest behind first". This promise is summed in a powerful call to action with the slogan "Leave No One Behind."[43]

Yet, challenges remain to realize this promise. People may be left behind in two major ways:

- *Absolute deprivation*, where they live below minimally accepted thresholds or standards of security, income, public services, infrastructure or well-being; and
- *Relative disadvantage*, where they face exclusion, discrimination and/or entrenched inequalities; are less able to gain influence, get an education, survive setbacks, acquire wealth, access job markets or technologies; have shorter, riskier

41 Hirsch 1990, 1993.

42 ONEP 2020.
43 UNSDG 2020.

lives; rank below median in SDG outcomes and opportunities.

The drivers might be unequal opportunities, social values, institutional barriers, discrimination, failures of governance, or vulnerability to shocks. Governments should make efforts to understand why people are left behind, and empower those who are left behind by "ensuring their meaningful participation in decision making and establishing safe and inclusive mechanisms for their civic engagement". [44]

Conclusion

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy came to prominence over 20 years ago in the context of a financial crisis. Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is not an abstract theory but a distillation of learnings from a half-century of practical work in development at the grassroots level. These learnings have been codified into a user-friendly 3-point form, and expanded with a list of 27 practical learnings. Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a natural ally of the project of human development, both compatible with its goals, and complementary as a guide for action. Both approaches pay special attention to empowerment, resilience, and the human-nature balance.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy's principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience have added importance in a world wrestling with the COVID-19 pandemic and facing the imminent consequences of disruptive technology and climate change. Thailand has made a strong commitment to "build forward better" in the future. The aftermath of the pandemic will be a time of transformative change, when old models no longer function and hard decisions have to be taken. Focusing on empowerment, resilience, and sensitivity to the human-nature balance will guide Thailand towards a sustainable model of development and achievement of the SDGs.

It is time now to review Thailand's progress on human development indicators, to examine whether people are living better lives, to identify the groups who are at risk of being left behind, and to examine new challenges to the achievement of human development.

44 UNDP 2018, p. 4.

CHAPTER

2

Thailand's Human Development and "Leaving No-One Behind"

What has to be done to advance human development in Thailand to achieve the SDGs, and give everyone the capabilities and freedoms to live a better and more fulfilled life? What has been Thailand's record on advancing human development in recent years? Where are the gaps and problems? What new challenges loom in the near future? Who are at most risk of being left behind?

This chapter reviews the state of human development today, the progress, the gaps, the goals and the challenges ahead. Over the past decade, the economy has continued to grow but more slowly than before. To some extent the deceleration is to be expected, yet Thailand's growth is significantly less dynamic than many of its neighbours. The main indicators of human development have continued to improve, but again the progress has slowed, many inequalities persist, and there are danger signs that some groups are being left behind.

And there are new challenges. Disruptive technologies are changing labour markets and revising what capabilities are needed for a fulfilling career and social life. The physical impact of climate change is slowly becoming visible and promises to become quickly more apparent, while the social consequences are still not sufficiently taken into account. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the vulnerabilities in the global and national economy and highlighted the need to build new forms of resilience.

The first part of this chapter reviews the state of human development in Thailand today measured by the Human Development Index, the Human Achievement Index calculated at the provincial level as well as other indicators such as poverty and inequality and spatial unevenness. It also presents the first reading on a new and experimental Planetary-pressures adjusted HDI (PHDI), designed to incorporate a measure of "the unprecedented pressures people are imposing on the planet".[1] The second part identifies eight social groups which are at risk of being left behind. The third part discusses the new challenges of disruptive technology, climate change and pandemic disease, and how they will impact progress towards human development in Thailand. The conclusion sums up the challenges that individuals, communities, institutions and policy-makers must overcome in order to advance human development in Thailand in the near future and ensure that no one is left behind.

The state of human development in Thailand to day

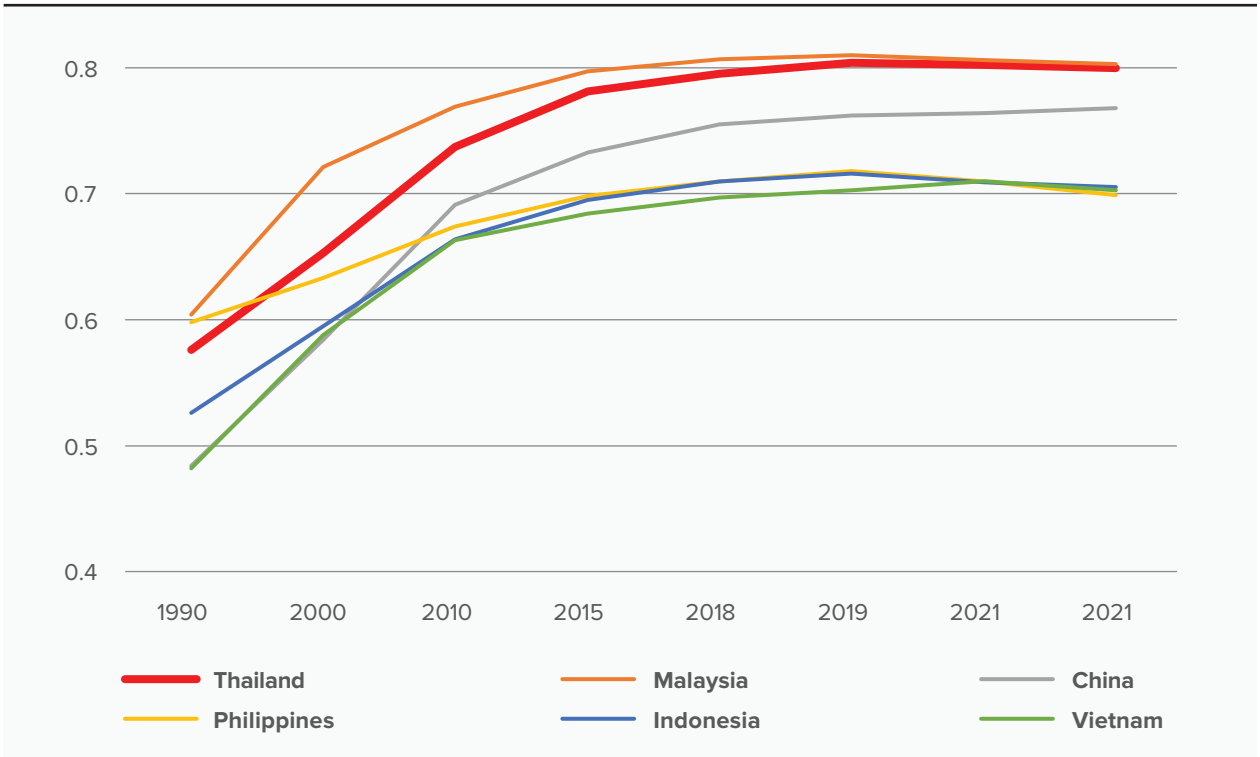
A country's ability to make progress on human development depends to some extent on its ability to expand its economy and generate more surplus for social investments. Thailand's economy grew rapidly from the 1960s to the 1990s. Following the shock of the Asian financial crisis in 1997/98, the economy recovered rather quickly. In 2011, the World Bank classified Thailand as an upper-middle income country. In the last decade of 2010–2019, however, the economy slowed to an average annual growth of 3.6 percent. This has had consequences for the trends in poverty, inequality and human development.

Human Development Index

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite indicator measuring income (GNI per capita), health (life expectancy) and education (mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling). Thailand's score has risen steadily since the first calculations in 1980. Its trajectory is similar to neighbouring countries.

1 UNDP 2020c, p. 233.

Figure 2.1 Human Development Index, Thailand and neighbours, 1990–2021



Source: UNDP 2022.

Thailand's overall score rose from 0.653 in 2000 to 0.804 in 2019. For most countries the scores dipped in the pandemic, but Thailand dipped less than average, reflecting the comparative success of relief measures. Mean years of schooling among adults age 25 and over was low compared to other countries of a similar HDI rank, reflecting the legacy of low access to upper secondary education before the 1990s, but has begun to improve in recent years. Thailand now ranks 66th among 191 countries measured by the Human Development Index, and is among countries with very high human development. This ranking has improved in recent years.

Table 2.1 Thailand on the Human Development Index, 1990–2021

Year	Long and healthy life	Knowledge		A decent standard of living	Human Development Index (HDI)
	Life expectancy at birth	Mean years of schooling	Expected years of schooling	Gross national income per capita	
	(years)	(years)	(years)	(2017 PPP$)	
1990	70.4	4.5	8.4	6,908	0.576
1995	70.9	5.1	9.6	9,824	0.619
2000	72.3	5.7	11.2	9,616	0.653
2005	73.8	7.1	12.7	11,753	0.706
2010	76.1	7.6	13.3	13,796	0.737
2015	77.7	8.2	15.6	15,445	0.781
2016	78.0	8.3	15.4	15,994	0.785
2017	78.4	8.3	15.6	16,642	0.790
2018	78.7	8.4	15.7	17,219	0.795
2019	79.0	8.7	15.9	17,774	0.804
2020	79.3	8.7	15.9	16,804	0.802
2021	78.7	8.7	15.9	17,030	0.800

Source: UNDP 2022., https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/THA.

On the Gender Development Index (GDI), which measures the ratio of female to male HDI values, Thailand scores 1.012. Females have a higher life expectancy at birth, and higher expected years of schooling, but score significantly lower on the income component. On the Gender Inequality Index which measures inequality in achievement between women and men in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market, Thailand scores 0.333 and ranks 79th, lower than the country's HDI rank by 13 spots. The score is depressed by the low proportion of seats in parliament held by women—only 13.94 percent in 2021.[2]

Since 2010, the UNDP global *Human Development Report* has calculated the Inequality-adjusted HDI or IHDI, which adjusts the HDI score according to the inequality in each of the three dimensions, aggregated as a coefficient of human inequality. Thailand's score on the IHDI in the initial year of 2010 was 0.591, significantly below its HDI score (Table 2.2). The coefficient of human inequality was 19.5 , indicating a relatively high level of inequality. Over the next five years, the IHDI score improved very gradually, but has accelerated since 2016 in line with the improvement in income inequality (Figure 2.8).

Table 2.2 Trends in Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, 2010–2021

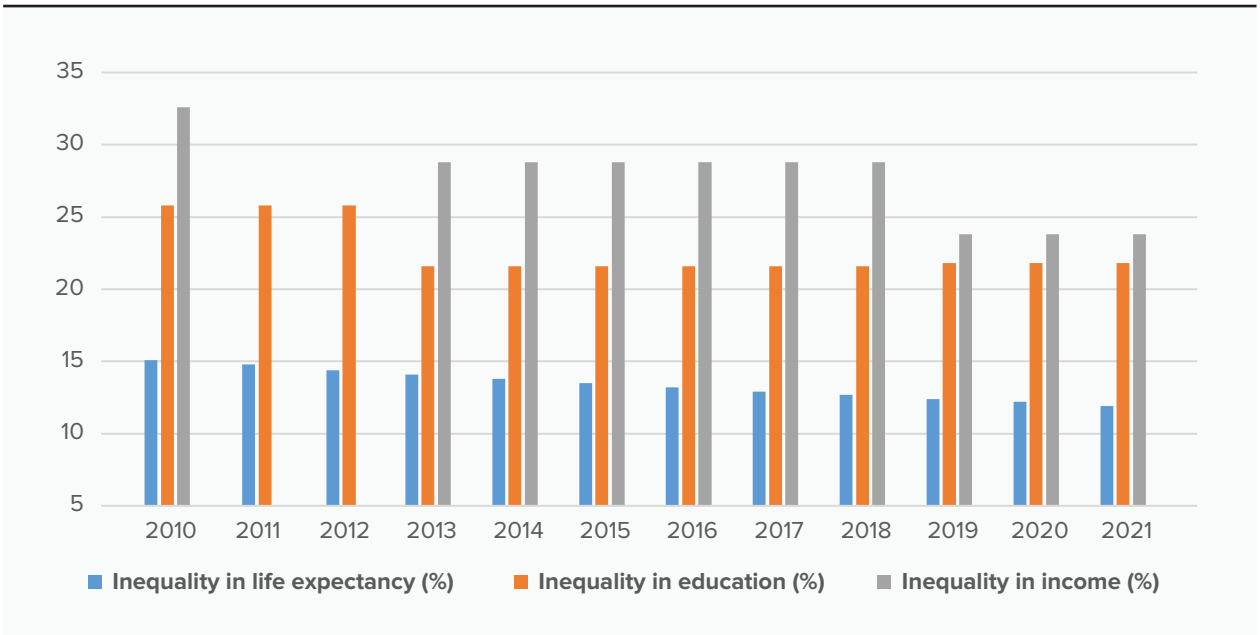
	Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI)	Overall loss in HDI due to inequality (%)	Coefficient of Human Inequality	Inequality in life expect-ancy (%)	Inequality in education (%)	Inequality in income (%)
2010	0.591	19.8	19.5	10.1	20.8	27.6
2011	NA	NA	NA	9.8	20.8	NA
2012	NA	NA	NA	9.4	20.8	NA
2013	0.622	16.7	16.5	9.1	16.6	23.8
2014	0.649	16.6	16.4	8.8	16.6	23.8
2015	0.652	16.5	16.3	8.5	16.6	23.8
2016	0.656	16.4	16.2	8.2	16.6	23.8
2017	0.661	16.3	16.1	7.9	16.6	23.8
2018	0.666	16.2	16.0	7.7	16.6	23.8
2019	0.687	14.6	14.4	7.4	16.8	18.8
2020	0.686	14.5	14.3	7.2	16.8	18.8
2021	0.686	14.3	14.2	6.9	16.8	18.8

Source: UNDP 2022., https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/THA.

Most of the improvement has been contributed by a decline in income inequality. The inequality in education shows no clear trend of improvement (Figure 2.2).

2 https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/THA.

Figure 2.2 Inequality within each dimension of IHDI, 2010–2021



Source: UNDP 2022.,https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/THA.

Planetary-pressures adjusted HDI

For some years, the HDI had been criticized for taking no account of the environmental impact of development. In 2020, UNDP introduced a new and experimental Planetary-pressures adjusted HDI (PHDI) which incorporates the "unprecedented pressures people are imposing on the planet". The HDI is adjusted using two measures: carbon dioxide emissions per capita and material footprint per capita. The new index is designed to be "a signalling device for positive change, encouraging the expansion of capabilities while reducing planetary pressures".[3]

Table 2.3 Trends in Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, 2010–2021

	HDI	PHDI	Difference from HDI value (%)	Difference from HDI rank	Adjustment factor for planetary pressures	CO2 emissions per capita (tonnes)	Material footprint per capita (tonnes)
Thailand	.800	.735	8.1	24	.918	3.7	11.8
Malaysia	.803	.681	15.2	-10	.848	8.4	19.6
China	.768	.648	15.6	-14	.844	7.4	22.0
Indonesia	.705	.672	4.7	21	.953	2.2	6.8
Philippines	.699	.664	5.0	20	.950	1.2	8.8
Vietnam	.703	.662	5.8	17	.941	2.6	8.5

Source: UNDP 2022.

3 UNDP 2020c, p. 233.

The adjustment reduces Thailand's HDI score by a factor of 0.918 (Table 2.3). At present, environmental impact is fairly closely related to per capita income across the world, and this is reflected in Thailand's comparative performance against its neighbours. The PHDI will be important in assessing changes in the future.

Human Achievement Index

In 2003, UNDP developed a Human Achievement Index (HAI) for Thailand covering dimensions of health, education, employment, income, housing and environment, family and community, transportation and communication, and participation. This Index is calculated and updated by Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), with scores for each of the country's 77 provinces. Table 2.4 compares the most recent scores in 2015, 2017 and 2019. Unlike for the HDI, there is no version adjusted for inequality, but here we have calculated Gini coefficients on the provincial scores for each dimension and for the overall Index.

Table 2.4 Human Achievement Index and provincial inequality 2015, 2017, and 2019

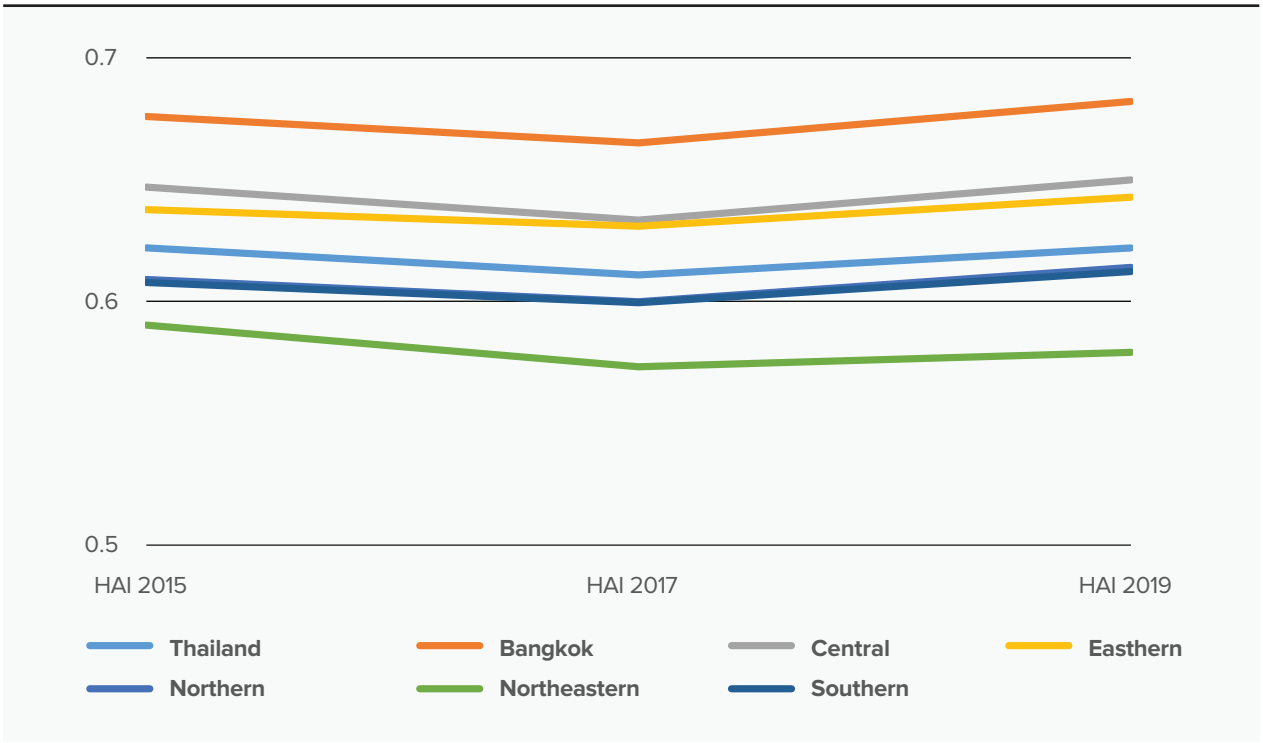
HAI and its sub-indicators	2015		2017		2019	
	Score	Gini	Score	Gini	Score	Gini
HAI – national	0.62	0.041	0.61	0.042	0.62	0.045
HAI – lowest province	0.51		0.48		0.49	
HAI – highest province	0.71		0.68		0.70	
Health	0.61	0.065	0.59	0.076	0.58	0.078
Education	0.47	0.204	0.45	0.221	0.47	0.213
Employment	0.71	0.058	0.71	0.070	0.72	0.070
Income	0.59	0.108	0.58	0.117	0.57	0.120
Housing and environment	0.83	0.067	0.84	0.064	0.86	0.065
Family and community	0.65	0.073	0.63	0.068	0.65	0.062
Transportation and communication	0.57	0.089	0.67	0.067	0.68	0.074
Participation	0.61	0.117	0.51	0.130	0.52	0.119

Source: calculated from HAI reports, 2015, 2017, and 2019

The national HAI score has remained rather constant, but this masks improvement and deterioration in the component dimensions. The scores for housing and environment, as well as for transportation and communication have improved, while the score for participation has notably declined. The disparity between provinces is relatively high and shows a negative trend both for the overall Index and particularly on the scores for health, employment and income. Spatial inequality, as measured by the variation between provinces, is still high and deteriorating on some key dimensions.

The regional variation in the HAI has remained rather constant. Bangkok has the highest score followed in order by Central, Eastern, Northern, Southern and Northeastern. Between 2015 and 2019, the relative positions of the regions scarcely changed (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 Inequality within each dimension of IHDI, 2010–2021

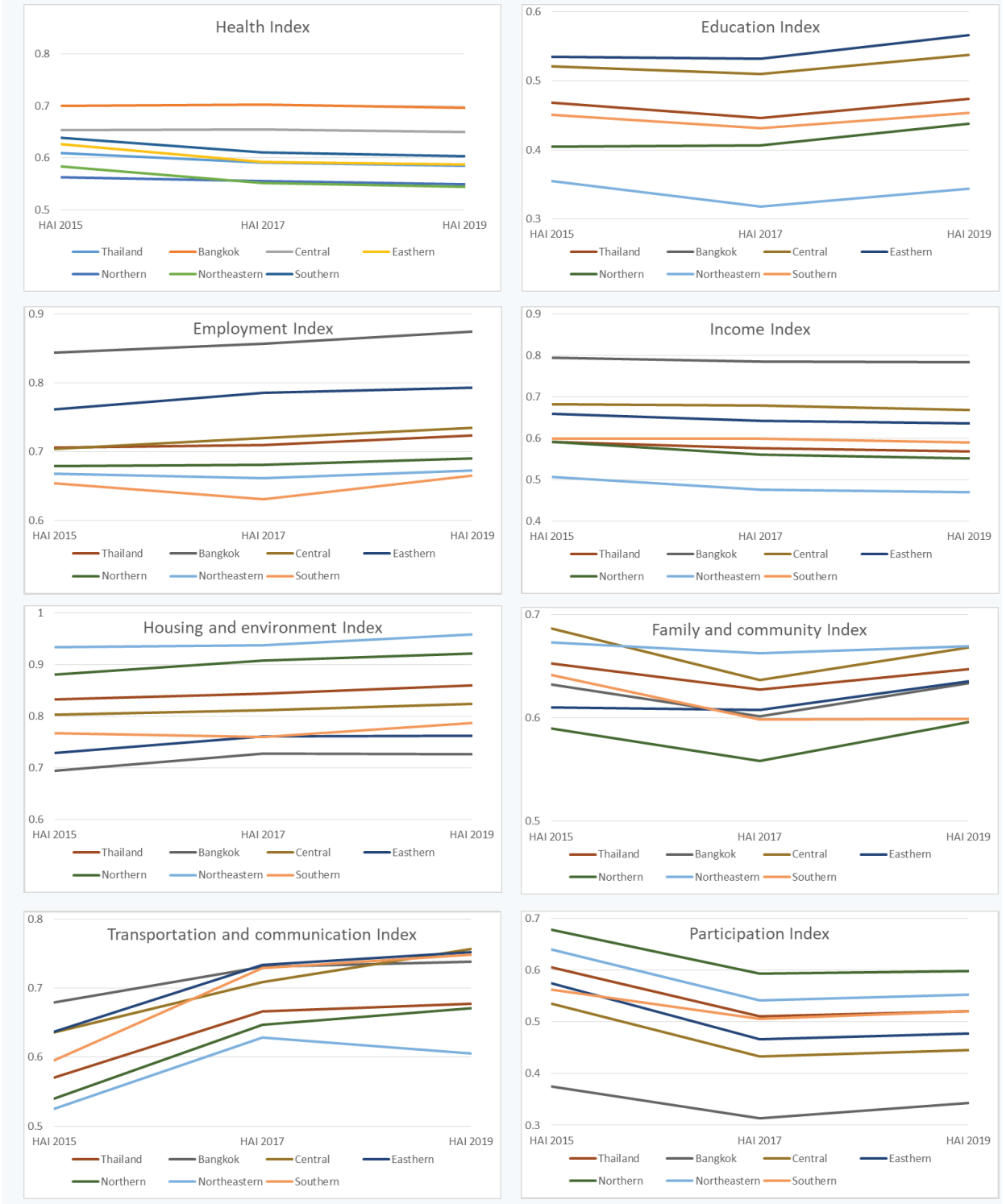


Source: NESDC

The regional variations in the various components of the HAI have also been rather constant (Figure 2.4). The main departure from this trend has been the decline in the family and community component in the Southern region.

In sum, most of the key measures of human development continue to improve in Thailand although old patterns of inequality persist. Inevitably, some groups are more at risk than others.

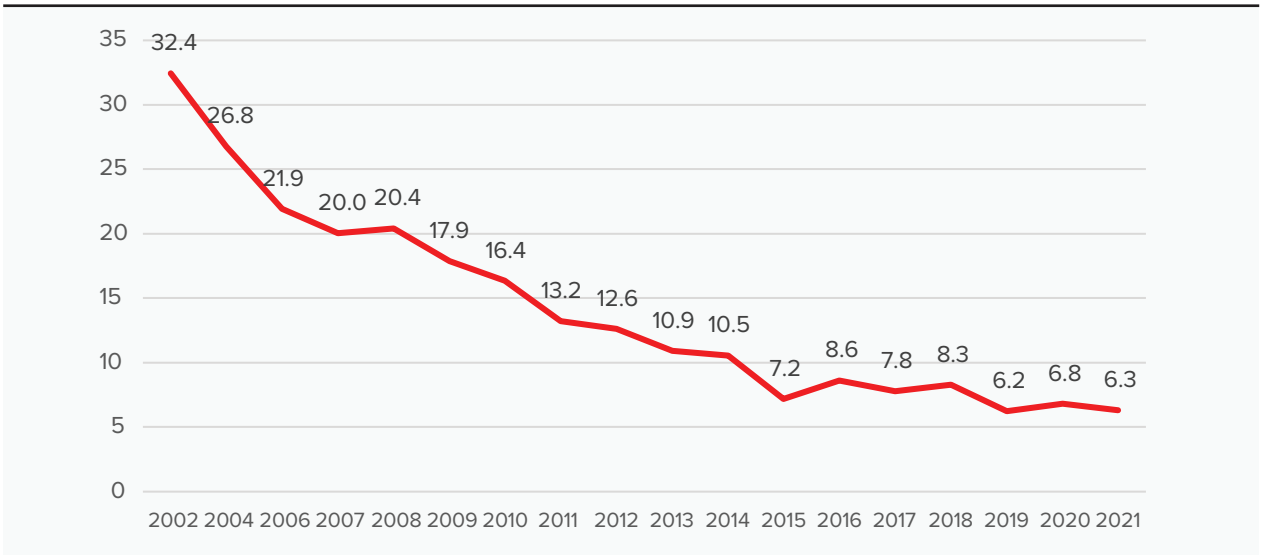
Figure 2.4 **Human Achievement components by region, 2015, 2017, 2019**



Poverty

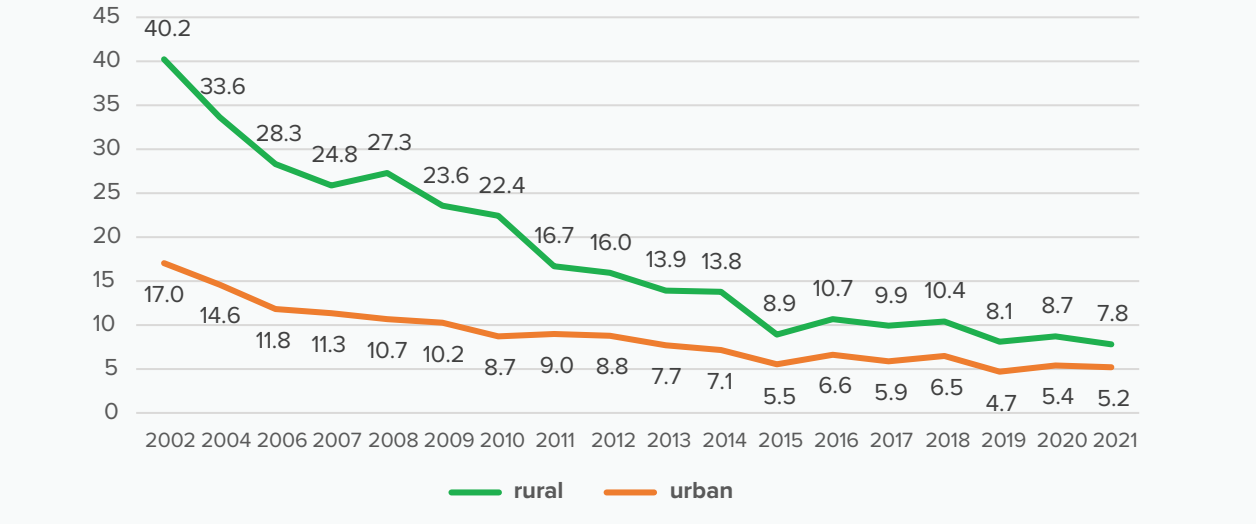
Poverty[4] decreased steadily from 67.3 percent in 1986 to 7.2 percent in 2015, with disruptions only during the Asian financial crisis of 1998–2000 and the global financial crisis of 2008–2009. Extreme poverty has been successfully eliminated, However, since 2015 poverty has tended to increase, shifting upwards in 2016, again in 2018, and again in 2020 before falling slightly to 6.3 percent in 2021 (Figure 2.5). The gap between the rural and urban areas has narrowed significantly (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.5 Poverty rate nationwide, 2002–2021



Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys.

Figure 2.6 Poverty rates in urban and rural areas, 2002–2021



Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys.

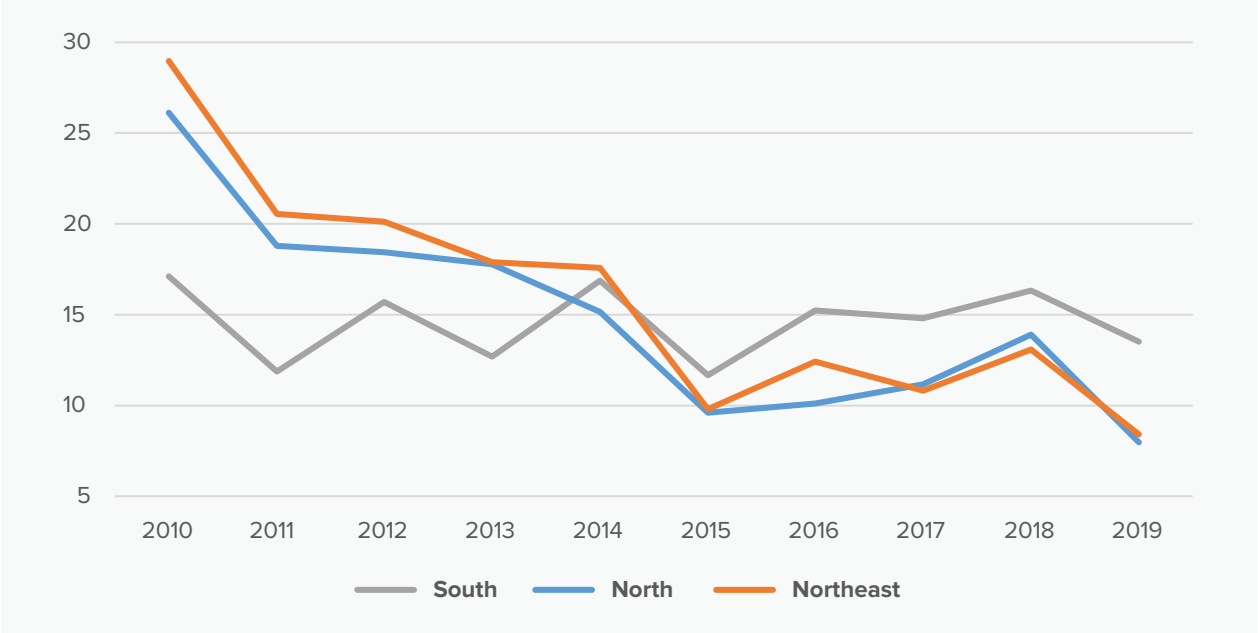
4 The national poverty rate is based on a household consumption aggregate, regularly updated. The methodology is discussed in World Bank 2020a.

The reasons for the upward shifts in 2016 and 2018 are subject to debate. The World Bank initially suggested that the main cause in 2016 was the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather, of flood and particularly of drought. However, as the shift in trend was shared across the urban and rural population, the World Bank subsequently suggested that the relatively low rate of GDP growth may be key. Economic growth has been the major factor in bringing down the poverty rate over the long term, and the growth rate may now be too low to continue that trend in the context of other factors.[5]

The National Economic and Social Development Council of Thailand argues that the sharp downward shift in 2019 was brought about by subsidies for everyday consumption and transport for the 14.5 million holders of the Welfare Card.[6]

In the meantime, the location of rural poverty has shifted. For a long time, the Northeast was the poorest region, followed by the North. But across the 2010s, the South emerged as the region with the largest proportion of its rural population below the poverty line, while the levels in the North and Northeast are now more or less the same (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7 Rural poverty rates in three regions, 2010–2019



Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys

Government has sought to take poverty eradication measures beyond the income dimension, by taking into account other dimensions such as access to social protection, access to essential services, and varying risk factors. Thailand has introduced a national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which covers four dimensions: education, healthy lifestyles, quality of life, and financial security. The index has been used in projects to identify and target vulnerable groups for financial assistance, to expand social protection for groups such as informal workers, and to implement measures to raise the quality of life.

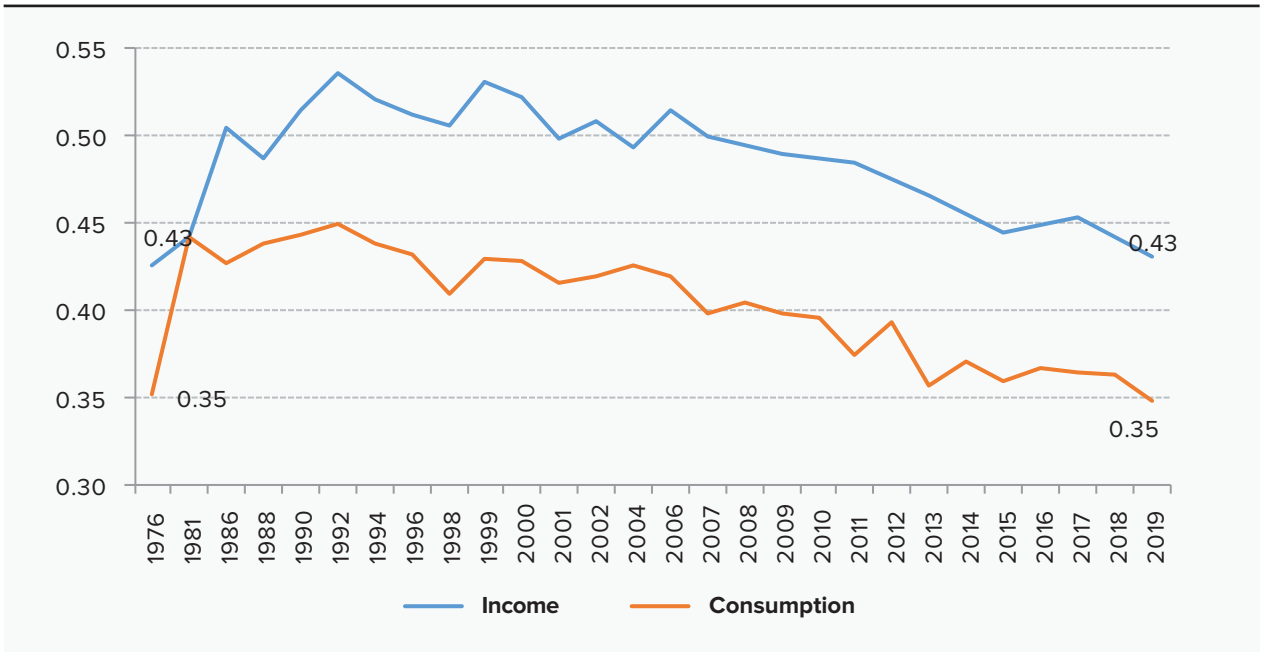
Income inequality

Income inequality rose steeply in Thailand in the late 20th century, but has tended to decline from around 2000 on both the income and consumption measures (Figure 2.8). Over the period 2001–2019, income grew more slowly among wealthy households than among poorer ones (Figure 2.9). The exception to this pattern, however, was found in the lowest decile, the bottom 10 percent of households, which may be stuck in a poverty trap.

5 World Bank 2020a.

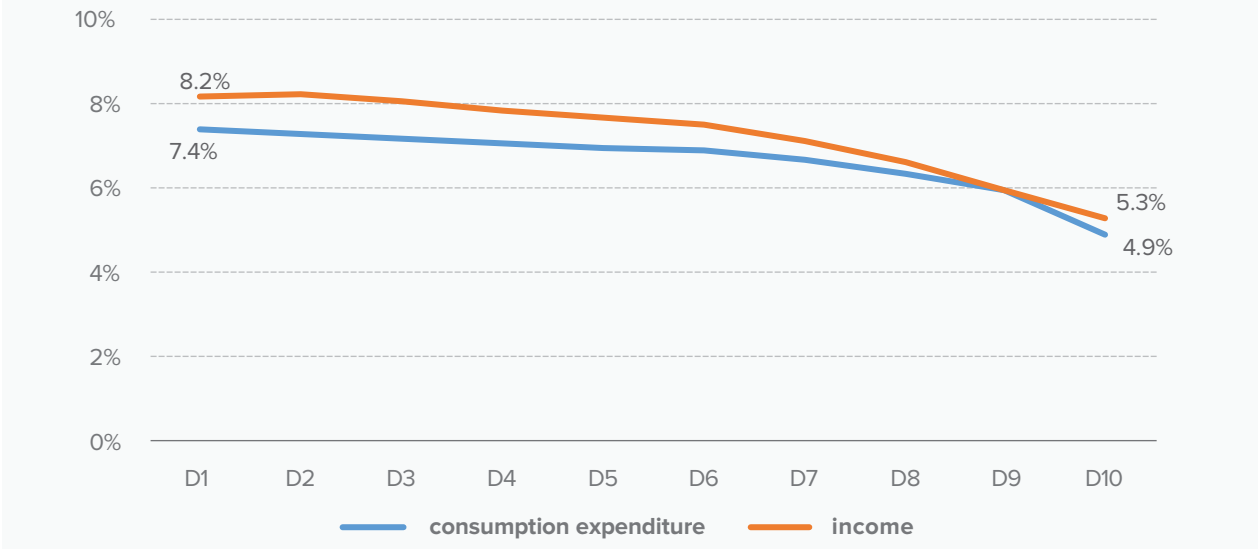
6 NESDC 2020, p. 64.

Figure 2.8 Gini coefficients of income and consumption, 1975–2019



Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys

Figure 2.9 Average annual growth rates of household income and expenditure by decile, 2001-2019



Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys

This improvement in inequality appears to run counter to the international trend of increasing inequality in most countries. Some observers have suggested that the household economic surveys on which these figures are based have become progressively less accurate in measuring income at the upper end of the scale.[7] However, the most likely reason is that inequality was exceptionally high in Thailand in the late 20th century, and has been adjusting downwards to a level similar to countries at a comparable level of development. Inequality in Thailand is still higher than in several neighbouring countries. There is also the possibility that the decline has bottomed out and might be reversed by some of the challenges in the near future, including the rapid ageing of the society, the impact of climate change and disruptive technology, as well as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wealth inequality

Wealth inequality is a subject of controversy. The official calculations from the National Statistical Office's Household Socio-economic Surveys show that the distribution of wealth is much more skewed than income (Table 2.5), but these surveys omit many wealth categories such as stocks and other financial assets, and clearly underestimate the true levels by a significant factor. Several other readings, such as the data on the ownership of land, stocks and bank accounts, and the Forbes estimate of the wealth of top business families,[8] suggest that the level of wealth concentration is high and possibly increasing. In 2018, the World Economic Forum ranked Thailand 6th among 77 emerging economies for the level of wealth concentration.[9] In the official figures, income inequality was little changed between 2019 and 2021, but wealth inequality improved significantly (Table 2.5). This likely reflects the impact of COVID-19 that shed significant amount of wealth from the richer members of Thai society.

Table 2.5 Income and asset share by decile, 2019 and 2021

Decile	Income Share (%)		Asset Share (%)	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
D1	2.1	2.0	0.1	0.2
D2	3.4	3.5	0.5	1.0
D3	4.3	4.4	1.5	2.0
D4	5.3	5.3	2.8	3.0
D5	6.4	6.4	4	4.3
D6	7.8	7.8	5.8	5.8
D7	9.6	9.5	8.1	7.9
D8	12	11.9	11.5	11.0
D9	15.8	15.8	17.7	17.0
D10	33.2	33.4	48	47.9
D10/D1 (times)	15.9	16.4	438.1	210.7

Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys

7 Jenmana 2018.

8 Hewison 2019.

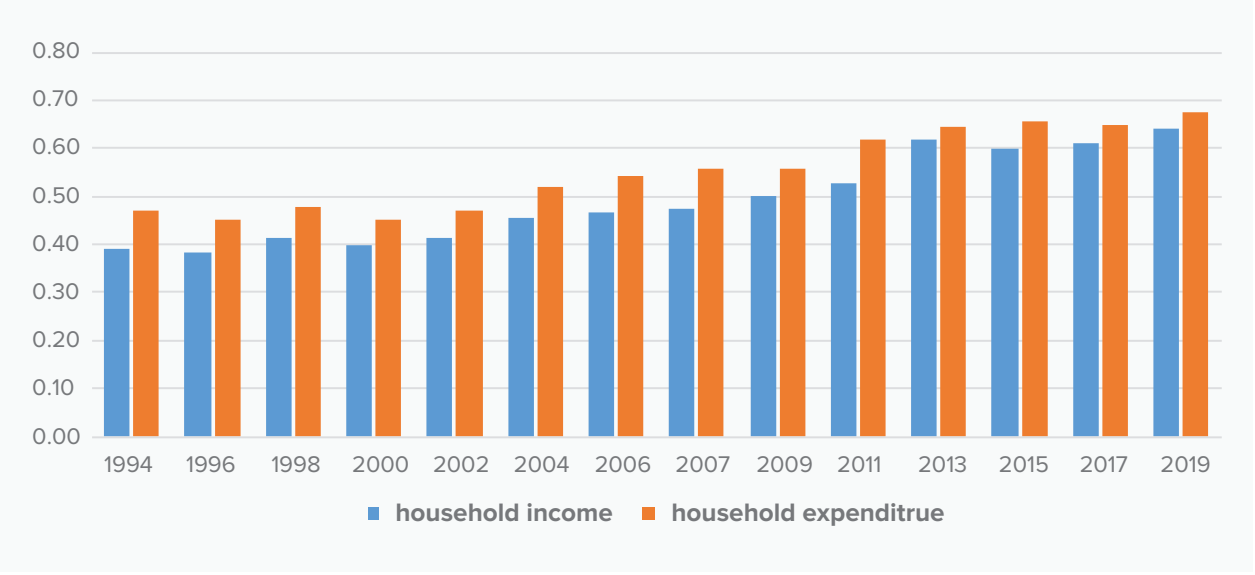
9 World Economic Forum 2018, table 6.

There is a growing consensus that high inequality depresses the rate of long-term economic growth, deters democratic development, and fuels political polarization. Moreover, inequalities of income and wealth tend to coexist with and mutually reinforce inequalities in social status, human dignity and access to power.

Spatially uneven development

In the past, Thailand's development was rightly criticised for being biased to the urban areas, and especially to the capital city of Bangkok. To some extent, the concentration has eased. Better transport and communication have connected even remote areas more closely to the national and global economy. Improvements in public services have transformed rural communities into semi-urban ones. Industry has spread beyond the capital, both to the Eastern Seaboard industrial zone and to major cities in every region. The massive growth in the tourism industry has benefitted many distant provinces. The gap in income and expenditure between urban and rural areas diminished over the 1990s and 2000s and remained stable in the 2010s (Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10 Ratios of rural to urban per capita household income and expenditure, 1994–2019



Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys

Similarly, the gap between provinces with the highest and lowest per capita gross provincial product narrowed during the 2000s and remained stable through the 2010s (Figure 2.11). The spatial unevenness has diminished, but a significant residue remains.

Figure 2.11 Ratios of top to bottom per capita gross provincial products (GPP), 2008–2018

Source: Gross Provincial Product data from the Office of National Economic and Social Development Council

In sum, human development in Thailand continues to improve but at a slower rate than before. While poverty and inequality have improved over the medium term, there are people at the bottom of the income distribution who risk being left behind. There is still significant difference by gender, particularly with respect to income and power. Spatial inequalities are high and possibly increasing. People are still being left behind. Who are they?

Identifying groups at risk of being left behind

According to UNDP, a person may be left behind if he or she is discriminated against on grounds of age, gender, income, ethnicity, caste, indigenous status, or sexual orientation; or because he or she lives in areas disadvantaged in terms of natural resources, poor infrastructure, unfavourable climatic conditions, altitude, and proximity to high-risk areas.[10] Rural residents are less likely to have access to health and other public services. Villagers residing in areas with soil degradation have difficulty in enhancing agricultural productivity, hampering their opportunity to improve their standard of living. People may also be left behind if they are more exposed to external shocks such as violence, conflicts, deteriorating environmental conditions and health emergencies. Those left behind lack opportunities and capabilities to earn an adequate income, to accumulate wealth and to fully and equitably participate in their economy and society.

Based on the indicators identified above, we identify eight groups which appear at risk of being left behind in Thailand today. The process of identifying these groups is largely subjective and not exhaustive, but aims to take account of the multiple factors that can cause people to have fewer opportunities and weaker capabilities.

The Bottom Ten

The Bottom Ten refers to the bottom decile of the income distribution. It also means those who fall below the poverty line, which is just under 10 percent of the population. These households are very clearly being left behind.

What do we know about these households?[11]

10 UNDP 2018.

11 Data from the NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys.

- They are likely to live in the Northeast or North (85 percent in 2009) but increasingly are being found in other regions, most notably in the South and Central (14 percent and 12 percent in 2017 respectively).
- They tend to live in rural areas (90 percent in 2009) but increasingly are found in the urban areas also (31 percent in 2017), though partly this may be a result of the reclassification of areas.
- The heads of these households are more and more likely to be older than 60 years (41 percent in 2009, increasing to 49 percent in 2017). Including all those above 50 years old, the proportion was 72 percent in 2017.
- The household size is larger than average, and while the size is declining over time in line with the national trend, this decline is slower.
- The household has more dependents and fewer working members than the average.
- They have less education. In 2017 in half of these households the most educated members in the household had primary education or lower, and only 10 percent had education above the secondary level.
- They were either economically inactive or working in agriculture (totalling 57 percent) with more economically inactive in 2017 than in 2009.

In summary, the Bottom Ten are likely to be rural households, either economically inactive or engaged in farming, living in the Northeast or North, with large household size, few economically active members and low education. Increasingly they are also found in the other regions and in urban areas.

Rapidly ageing population with low educational attainment

Thailand is facing an unprecedented demographic challenge. According to the UN, Thailand is the world's sixth most rapidly ageing country.[12] The National Economic and Social Development Council estimates that Thailand became a fully-fledged ageing society in 2021, when the number of its senior citizens was estimated to reach 13.1 million or 20 percent of the total population. While other countries have taken up to 115 years to transition from an "ageing" to an "aged" society, Thailand has taken only 20 years, partly because of its successful public health policies. This makes Thailand one of the fastest and earliest developing countries to become an aged society.[13]

And the country is not prepared for this transition. About half of the people aged 30 and above have finished no more than lower secondary education (Table 2.6). They are at risk of being left behind as the economy upgrades, increasing the demand for well-educated workers, and offering fewer opportunities to those with limited schooling. As a result, many people drop out of the labour force at around age 45, and over two-fifths of those who remain shift into the informal sector where earnings are lower. The arrival of new technologies will accentuate this trend. Senior people are often heavily reliant on family members and the government for income.

Table 2.6 Thai population aged 15+ by education attainment and age group, 2019

Age	Primary or less	lower-secondary	upper-secondary	vocational	university
15-19	0.6	0.8	0.3	0.1	0.0
20-29	3.4	5.3	4.0	2.5	3.7
30-39	4.6	4.9	4.0	2.9	5.7
40-49	11.3	4.0	3.1	2.0	4.0
50+	24.3	2.3	2.1	1.5	2.6

Note: The figures within the table sum to 100. Sub-population represented in the shaded cells are those at risk of being left behind.
Source: NSO Labor Force Survey 2019.

12 UNDESA 2019.
13 NESDC 2019a.

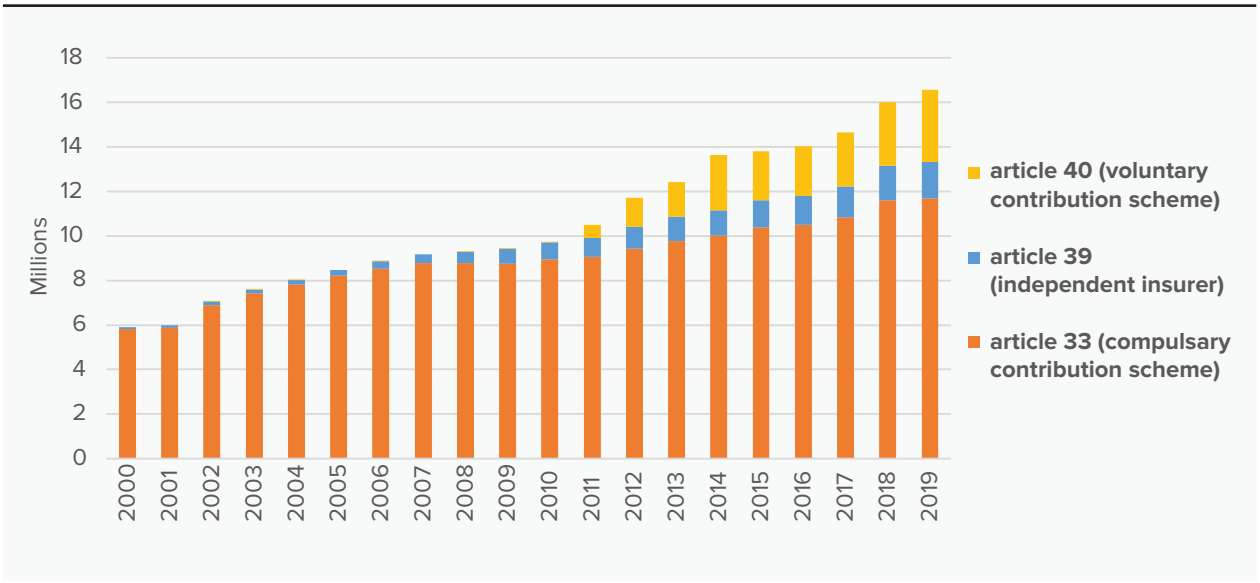
Providing social protection to this vulnerable group is a challenge. Informal-sector workers may enrol in the government's social protection scheme on a voluntary basis but in practice few workers enter this scheme because their incomes are low and irregular.

Informal workers without social protection

As the economy has become more urbanized, social protection has become more important. Thailand has had social protection legislation since 1975, with regular updates. Workers in the formal sector are required to be insured under this law, but in reality only around four-fifths of workers are registered. The problems with informal workers are even larger.

Estimates of the number of workers in the informal sector vary according to the definition, but the figure is undoubtedly large. According to the National Statistical Office, 55 percent of the workforce qualified as informal in 2019, including 38 percent of workers in urban areas.[14] The Social Security Office has made various attempts to extend social security to informal workers, especially since 2011, under article 39 or article 40 of the Social Security Act which provide for voluntary contributions by workers who have no employer. The success has been limited. As of September 2019, 4.7 million workers were covered by these provisions, less than a quarter of the total (Figures 2.12, 2.13).

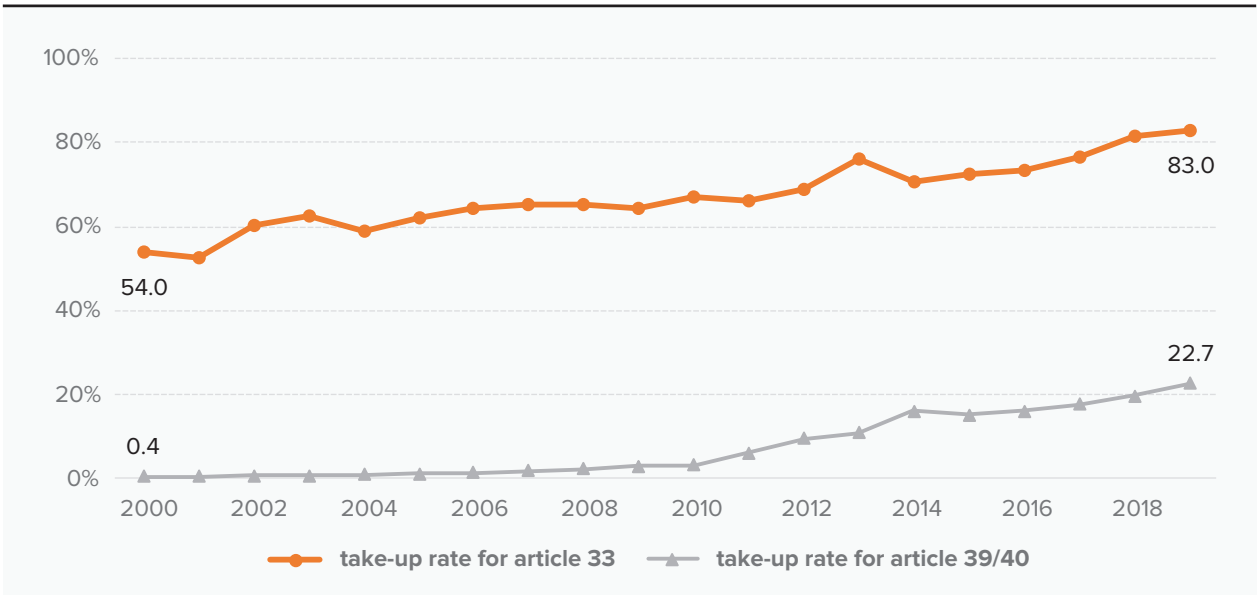
Figure 2.12 Numbers of employees under the Social Security Scheme, 2000–2019



Source: Social Security Office and NSO Labor Force Surveys

14 NSO 2019.

Figure 2.13 Take-up rates for Social Security Article 33 and Articles 39/40, 2000–2018



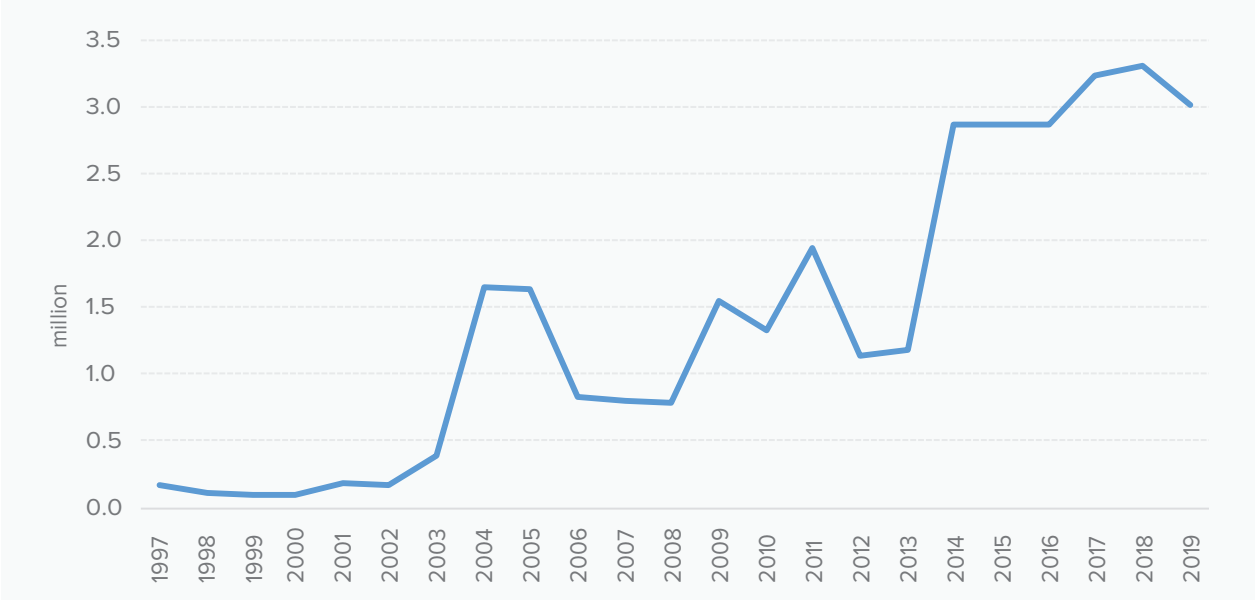
Source: Social Security Office and NSO Labor Force Surveys

The key challenges are to enforce the law requiring employers to insure their workers and to induce more informal workers to enter the voluntary schemes. There is also a need to narrow the gap between benefits under the three articles of the act.

Migrant workers

Thailand has long been one of Asia's major receiving countries for migrant workers, as a result of the significant development gaps with its neighbouring countries, stagnation in the supply of Thai labour, and the long shared borders with Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR. In 2018, around 3 million migrant workers were officially registered (Figure 2.8). Estimates of the number of unregistered migrant workers vary.

Figure 2.14 Number of legally registered migrant workers, 1997–2019



Source: Foreign Workers Administration Office, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour

Thailand has made remarkable progress in providing social protection to migrant workers, to the point that the UN counts Thailand as providing one of the most comprehensive schemes among destination countries.[15] Migrant workers are entitled to health benefits under the Social Security Scheme or Migrant Health Insurance Scheme. Other benefits include maternity leave and child support benefits for women migrant workers. Utilization of these benefits has been increasing, especially the maternity and child support benefits.

Many migrants work in dangerous jobs and are in need of social protection. The remaining issues for migrant workers include difficulties in enrolling under the Migrant Health Insurance Scheme and difficulties and delays in making claims under the Workmen's Compensation Act. These problems arise from the knowledge and attitudes among complainants and claimants, the communication barrier between migrants and authorities, and policy and procedural gaps. These difficulties have resulted in some workers failing to secure proper compensation in cases of illness or injury.[16]

Stateless persons

In June 2020, there were 479,943 people registered with the Royal Thai Government as stateless persons.17 Many of them are ethnic minorities living in remote areas, but others are scattered throughout the country. They are all socially excluded in many ways. Until recently, they were denied access to health and education services, but the situation has somewhat improved in recent years. Since 2010, the Ministry of Public Health has allocated health care budget for some stateless persons, especially those whose nationality is in the process of being determined, but those with no citizen ID card cannot access the Universal Health Coverage system. Stateless children can enrol at schools, but they are not entitled to borrow money for higher education from the Student Loan Fund. Stateless persons are allowed to seek employment in almost all professions except those requiring Thai citizenship by law such as the police, military and judicial officers. Stateless persons must notify the authorities before they travel out of the area where they are registered. They are also not allowed to own houses and land.

But there are positive signs. Over 100,000 registered stateless persons have acquired Thai nationality since 2008. In October 2019, the Royal Thai Government pledged to enhance social protection for stateless persons, improve the processes for civil registration, and pay special attention to the elderly. In September 2020, a first group of over 3,000 stateless students were granted access to government health facilities.[18] In 2021 the Cabinet eased the requirements for permanent resident status, enabling 53,000 people to achieve this status by September 2022.

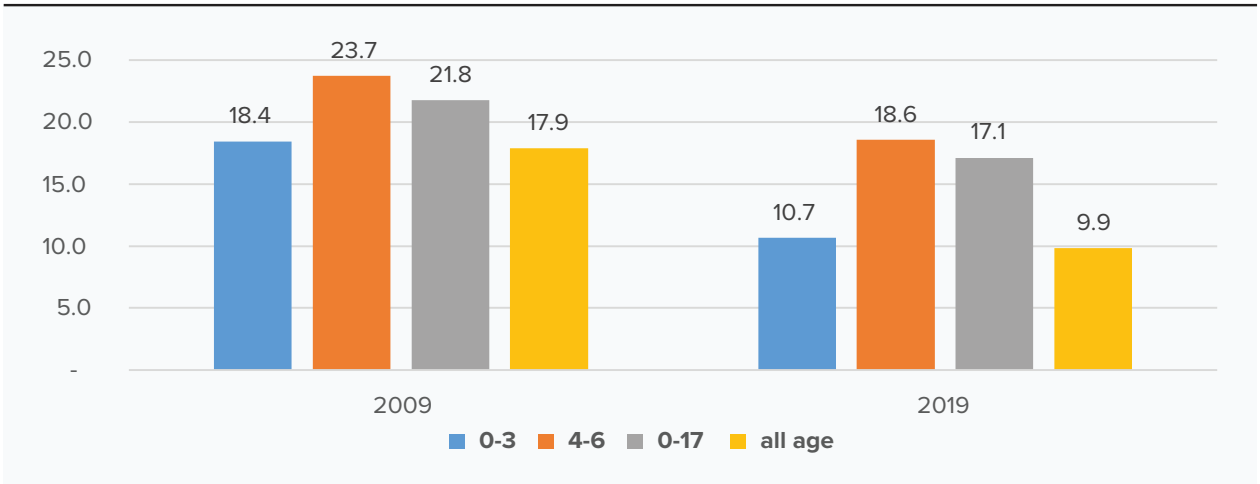
The Thai government has made significant progress in taking care of stateless persons. It should continue in the same direction by providing increased access to education and health care.

Vulnerable children

There are several concerns about the welfare of children. As in many countries, children have a higher risk of living in low-income families than other age groups. Children below 17 have a higher than average likelihood of living in a household below the poverty line. The situation has improved over the past decade, but almost a fifth of children aged 4–6 are below the poverty line (Figure 2.15).

15 United Nations Country Team in Thailand 2019, p. 13.
16 United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand 2019.
17 https://www.facebook.com/UNHCRThailand/posts/3607811469300958/
18 UNHCR 2020a, 2020b.

Figure 2.15 Poverty incidence among children by age-group, 2009 and 2019



Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys

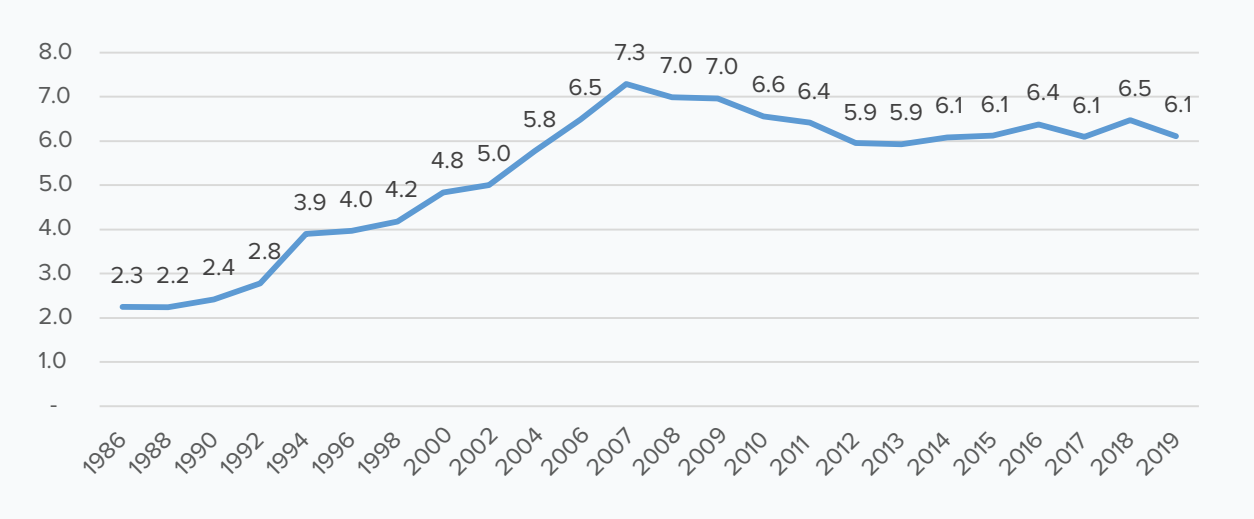
In the past, when Thai families were larger than at present and several generations of an extended family often lived together, children were surrounded by many loving relatives and received close personal care. Families now are smaller. Co-resident extended families are becoming rarer. Both parents are often engaged in making a living, particularly among poorer families.[19] Sometimes one or both parents have to migrate away from the family home to find work. In these cases, children may be left in the care of grandparents or other relatives.

These "skipped generation households" accounted for 7.3 percent of total households in 2007, declining slightly to 6.1 percent in 2019 (Figure 2.16). Almost half of the skipped generation households are found in the Northeast, the poorest region, and 22 percent of all skipped generation households are below the poverty line, much higher than the nationwide average of 8.7 percent (figures from 2018).

When the incidence of poverty increased in 2016 and 2018, so too did the number of skipped generation households, despite the fact that the economy still showed positive growth. The number of skipped generation households seems closely related to the persistence of poverty in the lowest decile. The children in these households may also be left behind.

19 By contrast, children born to higher-income families are likely to get better care than in the past as their parents tend to have fewer offspring and devote more time and resources to their care.

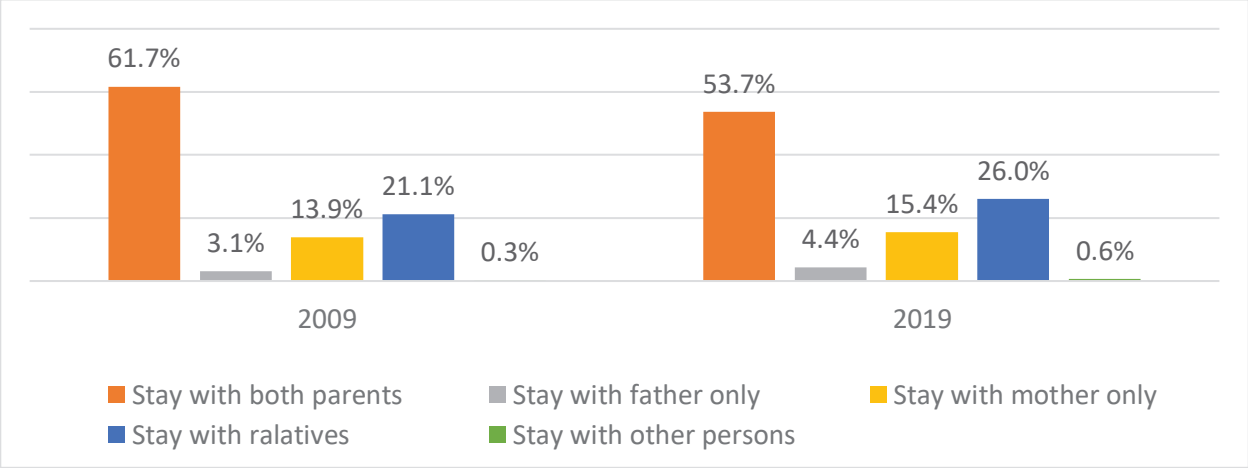
Figure 2.16 Skipped generation households as percent of total households, 1986–2019



Note: In "skipped generation households", children are brought up not by parents but by grandparents or other kin.
Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys

Many other children are now living with single parents, and the numbers have tended to increase over the past decade (Figure 2.17). In rural areas, these children are again more likely to be in families below the poverty line.

Figure 2.17 Living arrangements of children by age groups, 2009 and 2019



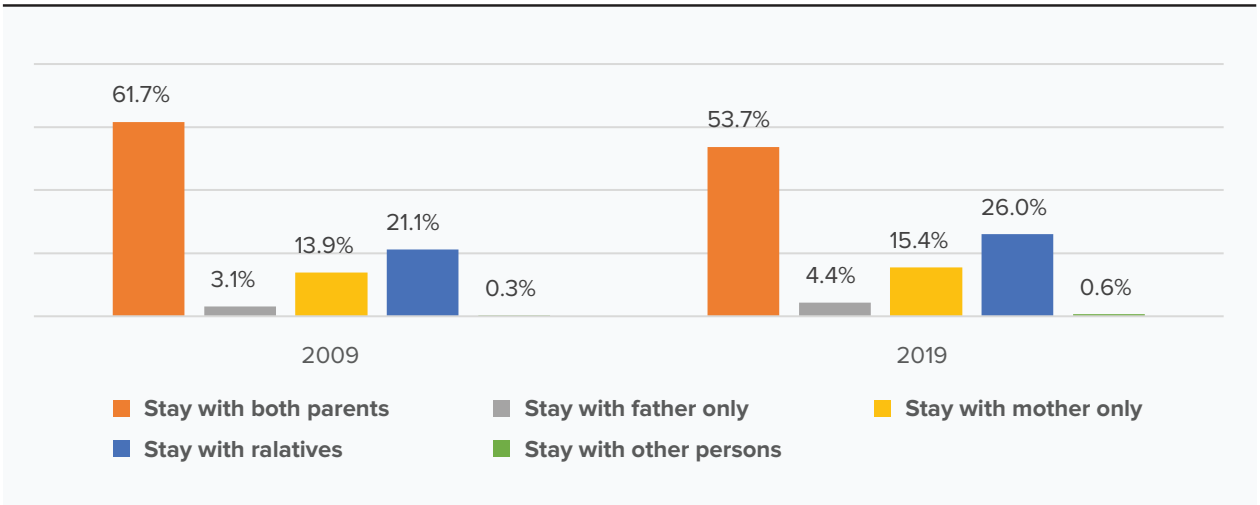
Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Surveys.

Modern education theory places heavy stress on the early years of a child's life. The disadvantages resulting from limited parental care and poor schooling tend to snowball as the child grows up. The Thai state provides only scant public assistance to pre-school children, much less than to older children. Young children from poor families may attend child development centres while their parents are at work, but these centres often do not provide high-quality care. Workers in the formal sector can take advantage of contributory child benefit for children up to 6 years old, but until recently there was no similar provisions for informal workers. Beginning in 2015, a targeted, unconditional, non-contributory child support grant was piloted for infants up to one year old, born to mothers living in poor families. The pilot scheme was subsequently expanded to children under six from families with an annual income of no more than Baht 100,000 (about $3,200). Around 700,000 children were registered in the scheme in

2019. A study funded by UNICEF and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation found that the scheme had many benefits but failed to reach 200,000 children, roughly 30 percent of all who qualified.[20]

Children from low-income families tend to under-perform at school. As measured by PISA scores,[21] the children from poorer families perform lower on science, reading, and mathematics (Figure 2.18).

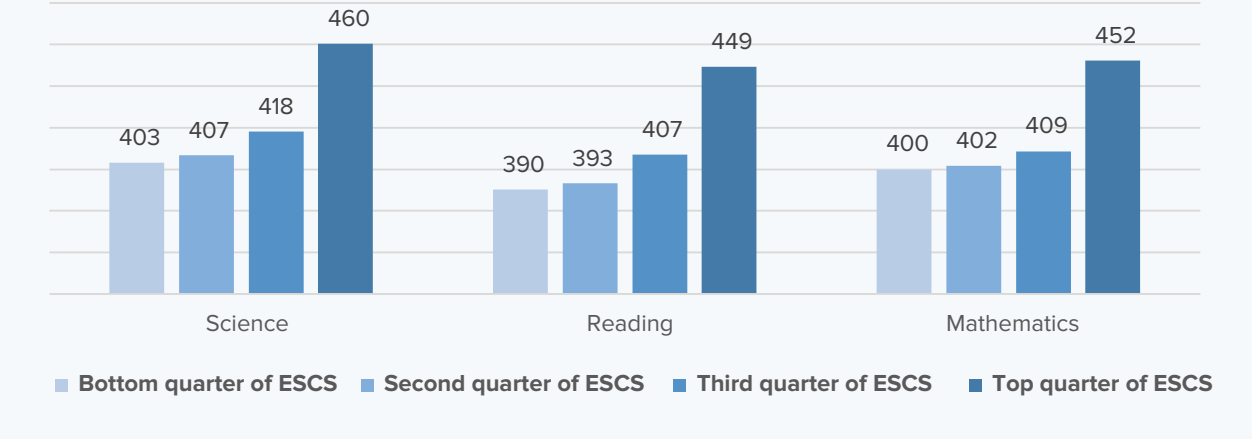
Figure 2.18 Thailand's PISA performance by socio-economic status, 2015



Note: ESCS refers to the PISA index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status.
Source: OECD 2015.

While this is true in most countries, there are measures that can be taken to mitigate the influence of family background. Using the PISA scores, OECD developed a system for identifying those who perform better than predicted on the basis of their background as "resilient students". A country with a good education system will produce more resilient students. In this respect, Thailand's performance declined markedly between 2006 and 2015 (Figure 2.19).

Figure 2.19 Percentage of resilient students among disadvantaged students, 2006–2018



Note: ESCS refers to the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status.
Source: OECD 2015, 2018.

20 UNICEF 2019.

21 Programme for International Student Assessment, an OECD scheme for measuring educational attainment worldwide.

Persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities are both vulnerable themselves and often the cause of precarity for their families. For example, in 2018, households that included persons with disabilities were twice as likely to be poor.

By law, all persons with disabilities are entitled to free healthcare and a disability grant. However, only 70 percent of those qualified actually received such a grant in 2017.[22]

People fail to register because they are not sure of their disability status, or they lack the documents, or they are discouraged by the complex procedure. While some families may find the monthly grant of Baht 800 (around $26) sufficient, many more find it inadequate, sometimes resulting in family members leaving their own jobs in order to provide care. Some persons with disabilities find their health expenses exceed their health entitlement. Few schools accept children with disabilities and even those which do may not be equipped to provide a proper learning atmosphere. Children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to being left behind.

During the pandemic, digital technology and telemedicine was used to provide support and care for persons with disabilities. The process for issuing ID cards is being revised to enable more persons with disabilities to be registered and gain access to social support.

LGBTIs

Thailand may seem to be a culturally open society that accepts or tolerates most forms of difference, yet discrimination still prevents some sub-groups from reaching their full potential as workers, students and community members. This is true for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex groups known collectively as LGBTI.

In 2018, UNDP conducted a national survey on being LGBTI in Thailand.[23] Some 88 percent of non-LGBTI respondents reported that they accept LGBTI persons outside their family, and only slightly fewer (75 percent) claimed to accept LGBTI persons within the family. While these figures are quite high and point to a fairly open and accepting society, half of the LGBTI respondents reported that they have experienced some form of discrimination from their family members, and that they feel safer to express their sexuality on social networks instead. This suggests that acceptance and tolerance are highly contextualized rather than universal. In the workplace, LGBTI respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination in the form of employment refusal (60–70 percent), or abuse ranging from mild sexual harassment to physical violence (40 percent).

Although there is a law prohibiting discrimination against LGBTI, it has not been enforced well, partly because of low levels of awareness of the law. Only 7 percent of LGBTI people interviewed had knowledge about this law, 42 percent had heard of the law but knew no detail, and 51 percent were oblivious to the existence of such a law.[24]

Thailand can rightly claim that its progress on LGBTI issues is among the more advanced in the world. Yet the explicit and implicit discrimination suffered in the family and workplace can contribute to mental health problems that may result in contemplating or even attempting suicide.[25] To prevent such tragic and overall social exclusion for LGBTIs, efforts are needed to raise awareness of the law prohibiting discrimination, to enforce the law effectively, and to foster a social culture that excludes discriminations against LGBTI.

Summary on vulnerable groups

These groups are not separate. People may have multiple vulnerabilities and face multiple challenges. For instance, low-paid migrant workers from Thailand's neighbouring countries may have young children whose future growth and achievements may be at a disadvantage. Those below the poverty line may encounter discrimination as ethnic minorities. Farmers in the bottom ten of the income distribution may live in remote areas where water shortages deny them the opportunity of increasing their productivity, and where they have little access to

22 Estimated from the NSO Household Socio-Economic Survey 2017.
23 UNDP 2019b.
24 UNDP 2019b
25 UNDP 2019b: 45-49

health care and quality education for their children.

These groups require special attention. We shall return to this issue in Chapter 4.

New challenges

In recent years, changes and innovations have appeared which impact on human development in Thailand, as elsewhere. Here we highlight just three. Disruptive technology is a constant factor in the modern world, yet the complexity of technologies which have emerged as a result of enhanced computer power and faster digital communication are likely to have a severe impact on work, education and other areas of human development. Climate change promises to accentuate inequalities and lead to disadvantages of multiple kinds. The COVID-19 virus has not only emphasized the vulnerability of human health to new threats, but also shown the fragility of global and national economies in the face of such threats. These new challenges will impact human development and condition efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Disruptive technology

One of the major global developments that affects the prospect of human well-being is the emergence of disruptive technologies that threaten employment prospects, not only of low-skilled but also skilled workers. The use of information technology and digital communication has advanced very rapidly, especially over the past decade. Thailand has embraced e-commerce. Robotics and artificial intelligence promise to make greater inroads in the near future. These technologies have had a massive impact on media and entertainment, transportation, energy and telecommunications, as well as office work in general. There have also been disruptions in sectors such as tourism, healthcare, manufacturing, finance and retail.

Technology affects the composition and nature of jobs available as well as relative wages. Labour-augmenting technology can complement workers, thereby increasing their productivity and wage, while labour-saving technology can substitute workers for machines in routine, repetitive tasks like manufacturing assembly and back-office work. Advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning mean that the highly skilled jobs of professionals such as lawyers and physicians are at risk of being disrupted as well. In Thailand, more workers are exiting the labour force before reaching 60 years.

However, there is also a counterargument that the fears of massive unemployment may be exaggerated. History has proved that none of the breakthrough technological advancements in the past led to permanent job losses at economy-wide level. Although unemployment may increase in the short-to-medium term because of the frictions in labour markets, technological changes have had only small negative effects on long-term employment levels, and even positive effects in some cases. While some jobs disappear, others are created to meet a range of future needs of which we are currently unaware. And whilst emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence have the potential to reshape the future of work, it will be humans who will accelerate its impact.

New technologies may also be used to reduce inequality. Solar home technologies have provided access to electricity to millions of households in Bangladesh, while providing job opportunities to 140,000 people. Online e-commerce platforms have enabled small producers to sell their products worldwide and develop new markets in rural areas. In China, for example, more than 1,300 "Taobao villages" produce goods worth more than USD 1.5 million each in annual trade.

In Thailand, technology is being used to help vulnerable groups. One real-world example in Thailand is Ricult, a business platform that helps farmers increase their income by using data and other technology to improve agricultural productivity (see Chapter 3). The Thai government has also made use of technology to deliver welfare programmes more rapidly and more conveniently. During the pandemic, electronic cash transfers were widely used to expedite the delivery of relief funds. The challenges that remain are two-fold: first, to accelerate the use of new technologies that will benefit the disadvantaged, such as robotic technology that can help elderly and disabled people to be more mobile and independent; and second, to empower people to be skilled in the new technologies, particularly older people who often

have limited access to retraining. Public training services are needed to equip seniors with the skills they need to stay productive in the rapidly changing world and thus avoid being left behind.

The impact of climate change

Climate change is already affecting Thailand, primarily through more wayward weather, more flood and more drought. This impact will increase, and will influence progress towards the SDGs.

Early international research and analysis on climate change concentrated on the temperate regions of the world and concluded that the impact would be greatest nearer the poles. The fifth report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2014 was the first that broke down its analysis by regions and sub-regions. The projections for Southeast Asia were partial and tentative compared to other regions, largely because the necessary data were not available.[26] At this time, public sensitivity to the prospect of climate change in the region was rather low. Unlike in the temperate zone, there were no dramatic changes in local flora and fauna that displayed the impact of climate change for all to see. The weather systems of typhoons and monsoons were already characterized by violence and variation, and any gradual changes in intensity were hard to appreciate.

In the last five years, this picture began to change. In part that is a result of the global awareness that the impact of climate change is approaching sooner than earlier forecasted. In part, it results from advances in the science which show that many impacts of climate change will be most intense nearest the equator, and that these impacts are already being felt, particularly through more extreme and more wayward weather patterns. In 2019, IPCC predicted that global warming would create "unprecedented climate conditions" in tropical and subtropical regions.[27] In Southeast Asia, the costs (physical, human, and financial) incurred by extreme weather events are already among the highest in the world.[28]

There are three areas of special concern.[29] First, the variation of weather patterns and the incidence of extreme weather are increasing. Localities are becoming more susceptible to both drought and flood. These conditions impact most on marginal farmers who lack the resources to survive bad years.

Second, the sea level is rising. Already this is eating away the coastline, with consequences for communities and tourism. Eventually this will most probably affect Bangkok, although the timing is uncertain. The science is struggling to understand the many factors that will affect the sea level on a global scale.

Third, the social impacts of climate change will cross borders. The social impact of rising sea-levels will be sooner and more intense in neighbouring regions, particularly the Brahmaputra delta in Bangladesh and the Mekong delta in Vietnam. Desertification in northern China may stimulate the historic trend to seek relief in the south. These cross-border impacts are hard to predict but cannot be ignored.

The negative impact of climate change will most probably fall heaviest on those who are poor, marginalized and defenceless.

Thailand signed on to the Paris Agreement in 2015 and committed to reduce emissions. In 2015 the Thai government compiled a *Climate Change Master Plan 2015–2050* covering emissions, mitigation and adaptation,[30] and adjusted its future plans for generating energy. In November 2021 it pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2065 under the Paris Agreement. Delivering on these commitments will be vital but not easy.

Pandemic

Mid-way through the preparation of this report, the world was hit by the worst pandemic in over a century. In mid-January 2020, the first case of the COVID-19 coronavirus outside China was identified in Thailand, and it was widely

26 UN-IPCC 2014.
27 *UN-IPCC 2019, p. 17.*
28 Germanwatch 2019.
29 Thai-Glob 2017.
30 *ONEP 2015.*

predicted that Thailand would be one of three worst hit countries by the virus. Yet, by the end of 2020, Thailand was one of the least affected countries with a total recorded infections below five thousand and a total of 60 deaths.

Undoubtedly a major factor in combatting the first wave of the pandemic was the relative robustness of the public health system. In 2019, Johns Hopkins University ranked Thailand as sixth in the world, and first in Asia, for the readiness of its health system to confront major infectious diseases.[31] This preparedness is the result of social activism within the medical profession stretching back over a half century. In addition, the government acted relatively quickly to impose a lockdown, enforce quarantine on all foreign arrivals, and pass management of the pandemic to a taskforce dominated by medical professionals. Largely because of the high trust enjoyed by the medical profession, coupled with transparency in handling the outbreak, people cooperated with regulations and advice. The World Health Organisation (WHO) identified Thailand and New Zealand as exemplary case studies to be shared worldwide, with the following commendation:

"Decades of investing in public health helped Thailand to respond quickly to COVID-19. Motivated health workers, expert field epidemiologists, strong lab capacity, and all of society engagement across government, private sector and civil society, have been critical to the country's response. [32]"

WHO also noted that Village Health Volunteers were "a critical component of the national COVID-19 response". Thailand's success in managing the pandemic was a testament to preparedness and participation.

From early 2021, Thailand was less successful in controlling the pandemic because of leakage across the land borders and the arrival of more aggressive strains of the virus. Infections climbed to a level of around 20,000 a day in August 2021, subsided, and then rose to a peak of around 25,000 a day in April 2022. Government responded with a program of vaccination. By September 2022, Thailand had administered over 139 million doses. Around 82 percent the population had received one dose, and 77 percent had two or more, achieving the WHO's target.[33] Infections declined rapidly. In October government downgraded COVID-19 from a "dangerous communicable disease" to a "communicable disease under surveillance." In April 2022 the WHO recognized the high level of political commitment in Thailand to the pandemic response, and the contributions of its robust health system, strong community networks and adoption of the "whole-of-society" and "whole-of-government" approaches.[34]

But COVID-19 is not an isolated and extraordinary event. It came on the heels of SARS (2002–2003), bird flu (2004), MERS (2012), plague in India, Ebola in Africa and other outbreaks of new and deadly diseases. Viruses are among the life forms that have benefited from the hugely improved connectivity of our globalized world.

Moreover, the pandemic has been not only a global health crisis but also a global economic crisis. Combatting the virus demanded greater distancing between people, between places, and between countries. This distancing disrupted the basic activities of the economy. People could not purchase and consume, could not work together and play together. Trade plummeted. Air traffic ground to a halt. Moreover, while societies are used to economic crises that stem from the mistakes of governments or banks, there is less experience on combatting a crisis which disrupts every kind of economic activity—working, transacting, spending, consuming, traveling.

Thailand's economy was severely hit as a consequence of its openness and informality. International tourism contributes 12–15 percent of GDP. Exports of goods and services were equivalent to 60 percent of GDP in 2019. The obstruction of international travel and the global contraction in trade had severe and long-term effects. Over half of all Thai workers are in the informal sector. At the moment lockdown was imposed, several million people lost their livelihood. As households in the

31 GHS Index 2019, p. 290.
32 WHO 2020; http://youtu.be/MnxO48joRZQ.
33 https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/searo/thailand/2022_09_14_tha-sitrep-247-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=d1b0bfca_1
34 See the preliminary results of Thailand's Universal Health Preparedness Review at https://www.who.int/thailand/news/detail/12-05-2022-thailand-shares-lessons-learned-from-the-covid-19-pandemic-with-who

bottom two-fifths of the income pyramid have no savings, distress was immediate. The government quickly instituted a system of cash hand-outs, but initially struggled to identify all those who needed this service. Private charity compensated to a large extent, mainly through provision of food by Buddhist monasteries.

In a handful of months, COVID-19 redesigned the future. Progress in achieving the SDGs was rolled back across the board and across the world.[35] While Thailand combatted the pandemic relatively well, taking advantage of forms of resilience built up over many years, the virus has highlighted new challenges. What has to be done to strengthen resilience against global pandemics? What has to be done to mitigate the economic and social impact of global disruptions, whatever the cause?

The path towards the SDGs has become much more difficult. The starting line has been moved backwards, and the track littered with obstacles. 2020 marked the 30th anniversary of the concept of human development. Reviewing the "strain on the planet" evident from the COVID-19 pandemic and increased impact of climate change, UNDP devoted the anniversary report in December 2020 to a major overhaul of the concept. We will consider this revision below in Chapter 4.

Conclusion: The way ahead

The call to "Leave No One Behind" is a massive challenge. Thailand can be proud of its progress on human development. Yet it bears the legacy of high inequality in the recent past. It has pockets of persistent poverty, a residue of spatially imbalanced growth, and the consequences of growth policies careless of nature. Many groups have been marginalized by old and new attitudes and structures. Additionally, there are now new challenges from rapid ageing, disruptive technology, climate change and pandemics.

How then can the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, and especially its prioritization of empowerment, resilience, and the human-nature balance, guide people, communities, institutions and policy-makers towards achieving the SDGs and a better life for all? It is time to look at Thailand's two decades of experience implementing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

35 UNDP 2020b.

CHAPTER

3

Applications of Human-Centred Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in Thailand

How has the human-centred Sufficiency Economy Philosophy been adopted by individuals, communities, private firms and public institutions, and how have the results contributed to human development outcomes? How can the learnings from practical experiences contribute to further improvement in human development and achievement of the SDGs in the future in Thailand and elsewhere?

Over the past two-plus decades, many individuals, groups and institutions in Thailand have been inspired by the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Their experiences have been recorded in many places and forms—in the 2007 *Thailand Human Development Report*, in official publications, in academic studies, in how-to books modelled on business manuals, and in TV programmes, videos, and websites.

In this chapter we do not try to summarise these stories and studies as a whole. Instead, we investigate two main questions. What aspects of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy did the adherents find inspiring and useful? In what ways did the adoption help to advance human development? We apply these questions at four levels: individuals and families, communities, private sector companies and public institutions, which we illustrate through a handful of examples. In the conclusion we suggest how these practical learnings can be enhanced and disseminated to advance human development, help achievement of the SDGs, and ensure that no one is left behind.

Applications at individual and family level

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has provided a guiding light for many individuals and families who, at certain points in their lives, have faced crises. The Philosophy does not present itself as a solution to their problems, but provides a way of thinking that leads individuals to take certain actions and decisions that prove to be life-changing. Many are individuals under stress who faced a crisis in their lives. Others are people making a life-shaping decision at a critical point in their career. Often these are young people near the start of their adult life. What they found useful was the basic core of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, particularly the three principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience, as a guide for taking big decisions. Among the practical learnings from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the most useful was the advice to work in stages, starting small and building a foundation of self-reliance before becoming more ambitious. The results of taking this advice were that they were not only able to improve their own capabilities and opportunities, but also to share their learnings and their success with others in their communities.

Empowering oneself through the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

Vinai Suwanatri is a typical farmer from Chachoengsao Province in Eastern Thailand who overcame poverty, became self-reliant and eventually proved a valuable resource for his community.

In 1991, Vinai realized that he was unable to service the debts which he had accumulated over the years. The stress provoked constant arguments with his wife. It was at this point of his life that he learned about the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and started to examine his way of life using a technique called the "five knows" derived from its principles. The "five knows" are: know yourself; know the problems; know the resources; know how to manage; and know how to plan. He realized that growing cash crops in hope of high profits had lured him into poverty and misery. He adopted the policy: "Eat everything you grow; grow everything you eat; do what you can with the labour of husband and wife." He shifted to integrated farming, growing crops for his family's needs and selling the surplus. He joined an agroforestry training programme and became sensitive to the natural environment. He began to track his family's revenue and expenses, and became aware how much was wasted on gambling, smoking and drinking. He reformed his habits and began to save money. Within three years, he paid off all of his debts, was out of poverty and had a cushion of savings in a community bank. The relationship with his wife improved. The whole family stayed happily together. None of them had to leave for work in the city.

Vinai was so happy with the result that he wished to share the experience with others. He created a learning centre at the community bank where people could share their problems and get help in seeking solutions. Vinai did not tell others

what to do, but encouraged them to examine themselves in the way that he had. The community learning centre became a place not only for sharing knowledge and experience, but also a market for exchanging local products and a place for cultural activities. Vinai gained acceptance in the community as a source of valuable learning. His personal crisis and his encounter with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy resulted in benefits for the community as well. Vinai summed it up: "True happiness in life is sufficiency."[1]

Empowerment, learning and local wisdom

Cosma Lamanae is a Muslim housewife from a well-off family in a Southern border province which has been a site of conflict and violence for several years. After she earned a BA degree in accounting, she decided to stay in her hometown and do what she loved, which was agriculture. To improve the family's economic status just a little, she looked for guidance to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

Using the framework of moderation, reasonableness and resilience, she realised that she would need to make use of local resources to compensate for her lack of capital and expertise. She teamed up with 28 other local women, and laid plans to manufacture hijab, a veil worn by Muslim women, using local traditions of design. She also reasoned that the group should start the project on a small scale and expand only if and when they felt economically secure.

The group learned local techniques of hand embroidery from the elderly in the community. They worked on the project in their spare time. Using her creative mind, Cosma added beads, sequins and flower pattern embroidery onto the traditional designs. Customers liked the result, and the business flourished. The product was given a 4-star award under the government's One Tambon One Product (OTOP) programme for promoting local goods (a Tambon is a subdistrict). The hijabs were exported to a neighbouring country.

The key to the success was the combination of the local knowledge of embroidery with some creative additions. Cosma and the group decided to extend this formula. They began to make local varieties of sweets with unique packaging that enhanced their appeal.

Cosma applied sufficiency principles to other aspects of her life. She practised moderation in her personal life. She learnt accounting in order to monitor the finances of the family. She continued to learn by attending several government training courses on such subjects as citizen participation to fight corruption, community-based business planning, and entrepreneurial development. She passed on her knowledge to others in the community. She became known for her compassion and benevolence towards the sick, the elderly and the unfortunate.[2]

Making the right start

Thanakanyaphud Thingkhot, known as "June", graduated with an honours degree in law from a prestigious private university in Bangkok just at the time that His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away. She decided that she wanted to live with her parents in their hometown of Loei in the Northeast Region. She gave up the idea of pursuing a career in the city, and turned to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for inspiration and guidance in earning a livelihood.

Although she had no prior experience of any kind of farming, she was confident in the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for planning and executing the project. She decided to try duck farming because it lends itself to starting small and scaling up. She gained basic knowledge by attending courses provided by the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives and other institutions. She followed one of His Majesty's development principles, "Our Loss is Our Gain," which she expressed in her own words as: "if you know how to give, you will get back eventually, spiritually and even commercially". After a year, when she had mastered the business of duck farming, she branched into other lines of farming to diversify her risks. She also began to share her learnings, at first with others in the community, and later with people who came to her new learning centre.[3]

1 ORDPB 2007, pp. 55–59.

2 ORDPB 2022, pp. 140–143.

3 http://www.facebook.com/thanthamfarm/.

From stories to numbers

These vignettes are anecdotal. On their own, they cannot prove anything about the efficacy of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles, but they illustrate the transformative potential in people's lives.

In 2018, the Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation, National Statistical Office and Thailand Development Research Institute collaborated on a large-scale quantitative study to investigate the impact of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles in a more rigorous fashion.[4] The study had a representative nationwide sample of 80,000 households. To avoid any emotional bias, the questionnaire did not mention the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Instead it asked about respondents' opinions and behaviour through questions designed to reveal whether or not they followed the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Some questions asked the respondents' opinions about their community's value system such as the level of honesty of typical members of the community, to prevent the respondents' bias in providing answers that would make themselves "look good" if the questions were about themselves. Other questions were designed to determine the well-being of the households, including their income and expenditure levels, education, health, housing conditions, employment and happiness level.

The answers were used to create an index measuring to what extent each household practiced the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy such as moderation, resilience, self-reliance, environmental protection, and explosion-from-within in their everyday lives. This index was then correlated with measures of various "development outcomes" such as income, poverty, education, health, social capital and happiness.

The study showed that practicing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy was strongly connected to achieving a better development outcome in general, and to each of the measures of well-being. The three principles which correlated positively with all the measures of well-being were resilience, perseverance and explosion-from-within. Environmental protection also figured strongly. The results showed very little difference across rural, urban and Bangkok samples. The study concluded: "More happiness can be expected from practicing Sufficiency Economy Philosophy; moderation, resilience, perseverance, reasonableness, self-reliance and environmental protection."

This research was the first attempt to quantify Sufficiency Economy Philosophy's contributions to a better quality of human lives for individuals and communities. The National Statistical Office plans to repeat the survey every 2–3 years, and to examine also whether the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy contributes to sustainable development over time.

Applications at community level

For communities, the most inspiring and useful element of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been the idea of working in stages, developed into a practical model which enshrines the three basic principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience.

From the 1970s, His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej experimented with a three-stage model of a small-scale family farm. When the model was made public in 1996, it was dubbed the *thitsadi mai* or New Theory (see Box on New Theory model of a small-scale farm). The model served both as a practical guide for small-scale agriculture, but also as a metaphor for a three-stage (3S) approach to development with particular relevance at the community level.

The 3S model of development by stages

The approach that the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy used for community development is often divided into stages, originating from the "New Theory" model in farming and later modified into the so-called "3S model". The three stages of the 3S model are *survival*, *sufficiency* and *sustainability*.

- At the *survival* stage, the primary aim is food security. This may require changes in cropping patterns from mono-cropping to integrated farming, solutions to basic problems such as water shortage or soil erosion, and development of ancillary income-generating activities, such as raising livestock or simple crop processing.

4 Jitsuchon 2019.

These changes protect against shocks such as extreme weather causing crop failure.

- At the *sufficiency* stage the primary aim is building a certain degree of resilience at the individual and community level. Productivity may be improved by diversifying production suitable to local condition. Cooperatives may be established for marketing and finance. Knowledge and experience are shared among the community members.
- At the *sustainability* stage, the aim is to preserve all the gains from the first two stages while also opening up further to the outside world in order to reap the gains from trade. The community members may establish their own micro-enterprises that connect with private companies outside and become part of larger supply chains. They may look for alternative markets to diversify market risks. They may access technology and other resources from outside. This stage requires attention to risk management in order to ensure resilience. Often this is best achieved through strong leadership and widespread participation by the community members.

The 3S model does not only concentrate on improving economic condition of people and communities, but also covers social development and environmental protection. The economic, social, and environmental aspects of the community are intimately related. Improvement in one dimension will help improve the others.

New Theory model of a small-scale farm and the Khok Nong Na extension

His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's "New Theory" model is based on a farm of 2.5 hectare, divided into four zones: 30 percent for a water reservoir to be used in the dry seasons and to raise fish; 30 percent to grow rice in the rainy seasons for own consumption; 30 percent to grow perennial plants, vegetables, herbs and other crops for own consumption and for sale; and 10 percent for houses, livestock husbandry, an organic fertilizer plant, and other facilities. This division was illustrative, and would be adjusted to suit each specific case.

At the first stage, this farm can provide the family with enough to live on, to be self-sufficient and self-reliant, but also to create some surplus for exchange on the local market.

The second stage aims to create self-reliance at the community level by increasing the production and availability of local goods and services through mobilizing the surplus resources of the households within a community. This might be done through cooperative forms of production, community savings groups, community health centres, and community forms of social safety net. The idea is to increase the local provision of goods and services by introducing some division of labour to achieve economies of scale and scope, while still relying principally on the community's own capacity and resources. Exchange with the outside should increase, but local exchange should be preferred because it economized on transport and other transaction costs.

At the third stage, the community can engage with the economy beyond the village to sell its excess products, to gain the technology and resources for such projects as founding its own rice mill, to tap the services of banks and other economic institutions, to negotiate with business corporations for mutual advantage, and to get help from official agencies, academics and NGOs to expand production and bring new facilities and functions into the community.[5]

Since 2014 a group of architects and engineers have built on the New Theory principles to design integrated farming landscapes that enable whole communities to follow the principles. The project is known as the Khok Nong Na Model, meaning "mound, pond, farmland". The functional division of the land is similar to the New Theory, but the provision of irrigation is organized at the community level.[6] His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkom Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua has given his personal support to the scheme as an advancement of Sufficiency Economy agriculture.

5 UNDP 2007, p. 28.
6 RID 2018.

The core message of the New Theory and the 3S model is that progress has to be achieved by stages. Before moving to another stage, there first has to be a firm foundation of self-reliance or else there is a strong chance of failure and loss of independence. The driving force for development has to come from within, based on accumulation of knowledge.

This model resonates with a story of development that begins in a remote hill village and ends in the world market.

Akha Ama Coffee

The Akha are one of the ethnic minority groups that live in the hills of northern Thailand. Ayu Chuepa, also known as Lee, comes from Mae Chan Tai, a small village deep in the hills of Chiang Rai Province. He was the first person in his village to study at university. After graduation, he worked for a non-profit organization where he learned about community development. A few years later, he decided to return home, feeling that he should do something for his village. His family, and the other 30 families in the village, mostly grew coffee, but sold the raw product to middlemen at very low prices.

In 2010, Lee launched Akha Ama Coffee as a social enterprise. Ama means mother and the project was dedicated to Lee's mother. Villagers were free to join voluntarily. At the first stage (survival) Lee's idea was to generate more profit by processing and marketing the coffee themselves to ensure better prices for their products. At the same time, the villagers shifted from a traditional cropping system to an organic mixed multi-cropping system, lowering the use of agricultural chemicals such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.

The high-quality Arabica coffee grown in Mae Chan Tai was especially recognized for its citrus notes and acidity. At first, however, Lee had difficulty gaining acceptance in the market. Lee recalled "I started with my parents and submitted a business plan to the Child's Dream Foundation[7] who gave me 300,000 baht to set up a brand."[8] He sent samples of Mae Chan Tai coffee to the World Cup Tasters Championship run by the Speciality Coffee Association of Europe and won awards in 2010 and 2012.

At the second stage (sufficiency), Akha Ama needed to apply knowledge and technology to improve the quality of their product. Lee flew to Portland for a one-month intensive training course with Stumptown Coffee Roasters, who for years have operated a direct trade scheme to support suppliers. Akha Ama Coffee then invested in equipment for roasting and packaging, and set up three outlets in Chiang Mai, the nearest large city, in order to sell the product as well as gain visibility. They started using social media to gain more awareness.

Akha Ama Coffee operates as a social enterprise. The price for buying the beans is settled through mutual agreement between the company and coffee growers, and is around 5 to 20 percent higher than prices offered by middlemen. The company profits are shared among the company and coffee growers at year end.

At the third stage (sustainability), the company started to expand in various ways. In June 2020 it opened a small outlet in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo, and another in the IconSiam luxury mall in Bangkok. The grower network expanded beyond Mae Chan Tai to five other communities in Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son provinces. Efforts were made to develop the brand on the concept of a single-origin coffee. Public relations events, such as bringing foreign journalists to Mae Chan Tai to pick coffee beans for themselves, raised widespread awareness. At the same time, the company paid attention to impacts on the environment. Coffee roasting generates pollution which is smelly and contains volatile organic compounds. The company installed an afterburner that treats this pollution.

The villagers adopted a multi-cropping system. The Arabica coffee plants are grown between larger fruit trees and various kinds of vegetables. The advantages of this are twofold. First, the coffee grown under shade is of superior quality and commands a better price. Second, this multi-cropping system benefits soil ecology, prevents hillside erosion and preserves moisture during the dry season. The new system has not only increased

7 A Swiss NGO, also known as Kindertraum, founded in 2003, active on child and youth issues in the Greater Mekong subregion. See http://childsdream.org/

8 Bangkok Post, 16 July 2020.

the economic value of the products but has also resulted in an improved environment.

The company has resisted the temptation to expand beyond its capabilities. It has turned down opportunities for franchising due to concern over quality control. The goal of the company is not to generate the highest profit but to achieve sustainability for a community-based social enterprise, which improves the villagers' well-being. The company has never taken loans and is not at any financial risk.[9]

Akha Ama Coffee has grown impressively over a decade. It has exploded from within, basing its success on the capacity of the area to grow high-quality coffee, and the potential of the place of origin to build a niche brand with a distinctive image and a reputation for quality. It has grown in stages by learning skills, adding technology, and using marketing technique. It has remained resilient by resisting temptations to expand too fast. It is organized as a social enterprise which channels benefits back to the community. It is sensitive to the relationship of humanity and nature. It showcases many of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles which are relevant at the community level.

The Royal Initiative Discovery projects

The 3S model has also been applied in Nan Province by the Royal Initiative Discovery Foundation, a body set up in 2008 to coordinate various royal development projects. The guiding principle of the Foundation is to empower communities by combining local participation with expert outside advice.

Nan is a remote and hilly province with important watershed forests and limited reserves of arable land. In the past, valuable forest was lost to logging and swidden cultivation and water resources deteriorated. Much of the agricultural land was allocated to mono-cropping with heavy use of chemicals, resulting in deterioration of soil quality. Crop failures had resulted in rising levels of debt, often owed to loan sharks demanding high rates of interest. All these practices combined had led to negative impacts on the health and livelihoods of local residents.

The Royal Initiative Discovery Foundation approached these problems using the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The working model had three fundamental elements: area-based development; project ownership and participation by local communities; and an integrated development model. The sequence followed the 3S model.

- *The survival stage*: The communities identified their major problems as food security and the lack of necessary water. The Foundation brought in expert help to develop water sources for agriculture, resulting in an almost six-times increase in the extent of agricultural land with sufficient water and increased yields by 44 percent. Some 97 percent of households benefited and became food-secure.
- *The sufficiency* stage: A total of 24 production groups were founded to collaborate on finding ways to reduce costs and increase output. These production groups included water-user groups, seed funds, organic fertilizers funds, and rice mill funds. The Foundation brought in experts to teach the communities about farm management skills, including planting various types of crop and animal husbandry. With the accumulation of a new set of knowledge and skills, local people started to shift away from monoculture farming and reallocate their land for various agricultural activities. Their household incomes began to rise, and their debts were eliminated. In addition, the project also benefited the natural environment by reversing deforestation and improving soil quality. The transfer of knowledge and the provision of training from outside experts enabled local farmers to be self-reliant and empowered to better their livelihood.
- *Sustainability stage*: The communities began to link with the outside world to receive knowledge, technology and innovations from various agencies and to gain access to wider markets. This resulted in increased revenues from crop production and other activities.

The Royal Initiative Discovery Foundation works closely with various government agencies. At the same time as bringing outside help into the

9 Bangkok Post, 16 July 2020; http://adaybulletin.com/talk-guest-ayu-chuepa/39871; http://mgronline.com/onlinesection/detail/9580000083406; http://www.rakbankerd.com/agriculture/rbk-view.php?id=26; http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20130313-thailands-mountainous-coffee-journey.

community, the Foundation is bringing the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into the government agenda on community development. The Foundation also collaborates with private companies in an attempt to integrate the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy more widely and deeply into Thai society.[10]

The Mae Fah Luang Foundation and the 3S model

A key role in developing the 3S model was played by the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage, a not-for-profit organisation founded in 1972 by Her Royal Highness Princess Srinagarindra, the mother of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The initial aim of the Foundation was to replace the cultivation of opium poppy with other income-earning activities such as growing premium quality coffee and macadamia nuts and pursuing opportunities in horticulture, high fashion textiles, home accessories and tourism.

HRH Princess Srinagarindra believed "No one wants to be bad but they don't have the opportunity to be good."[11] She felt that growing opium and destroying forest were the results of poverty and lack of opportunities. Creating alternative forms of livelihood provided the opportunity for people to help themselves. Once they had work, they could also enhance their education and acquire greater knowledge. This step-by-step development is a gradual process that requires perseverance and effort but ensures sustainable development of the practitioner and the whole community.

The flagship project was launched at Doi Tung in Chiang Rai Province in 1987–88. The first years were devoted to basic education and healthcare. From 1994, the focus was on developing income-earning activities, with products sold under the Doi Tung brand. By 2001, the Doi Tung brand was financially self-sustaining and profits could be invested back in development activities, making it one of the first social enterprises in Thailand.

From the beginning, the work at Doi Tung was based on the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, and the 3S model emerged from this practice. At the early survival stage, surveys were used to collect data on the communities and on the natural resources for planning development projects in cooperation with the local communities. Special attention was paid to humanity-nature balance, and natural methods were used for reforestation and combatting soil erosion.

By the mid-1990s, the project moved on to the sufficiency stage by developing the income-earning projects under the Doi Tung brand. In the third sustainability stage, the Foundation transferred most of the management of the project to local communities. Extra efforts were made to take care of the humanity-nature balance through zero-waste management and using green energy in its food and handicraft production process. At the same time, practices pioneered at Doi Tung were extended to neighbouring communities and farther afield.

The Doi Tung experience is a long-term and relatively large-scale example (11,000 people now live in the project zone) of applying the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in a stage-by-stage manner with the ultimate result of empowering communities to enhance their capabilities to improve their livelihood.[12]

Applications by the private sector

In the private sector, the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy have served as inspiration or guide in three different ways. First, the practice as a whole, and particularly its emphasis on resilience to achieve sustainability, has appealed to owners and managers, particularly of small and medium enterprises. Second, several large firms have looked to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for guidance on designing and managing projects of corporate social responsibility. Third, in the new but expanding sector of social enterprises, some young entrepreneurs have benefited from the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

Resilience for small and medium enterprises

For small and medium enterprises, which operate with limited resources in an environment with great uncertainties, the principles of moderation and resilience have an evident appeal. Family-based enterprises are often quite similar to communities in that their primary aim is to survive

10 http://www.pidthong.org/.
11 Bangkok Post, 9 March 2020.
12 http://www.maefahluang.org/?page_id=2168&lang=th.

and be sustainable rather than to maximize profit at every opportunity. As a result, several small and medium firms have taken guidance from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, particularly in allowing the principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience to guide their long-term planning and their short-term decision-making.

Other firms have taken inspiration from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in partial ways. In particular, the emphasis on the humanity-nature balance in royal development practice has sensitised firms to the importance of managing their impact on the environment.

Ampolfood is an example of a manufacturer that has integrated care for the environment into all its operations. The packaged foods firm uses renewable sources of energy, especially biogas generated from food waste, to replace 80 percent of its fuel consumption. It has a goal of achieving zero waste in manufacturing by efficiently sorting waste for recycling. The waste from the manufacture of packaging containers is turned into tables and chairs made from parawood, donated to schools and communities. Bathroom Design is a manufacturer that has similarly emphasised environmental care, including investing in technology to reduce noise pollution from its production lines and to ensure clean water discharge.

Plan Toys: Sustainability as mission, culture and brand

Plan Toys was founded by a group of Thai graduates in a shophouse in the Bangkok suburbs in 1981. From the start, sustainability was part of the company's mission and operating culture, and ultimately it became part of the company's international brand, now sold in 68 countries.

The founding idea of the company was to manufacture toys from the wood of rubber trees that had exhausted their use for tapping and would normally become waste. In 1989, the firm moved its production to Trang Province in Southern Thailand, a centre of rubber cultivation. Today, almost three-quarters of its input materials come from a radius of 30 kilometres from this plant and almost none is imported. All design work is done internally. Attention has been paid to developing the skills of employees so they grow with the company and the company grows with them. Innovations have come from the company's own staff. Some work is outsourced to housewives in the local community.

From the beginning, the expansion has been gradual and borrowing has been minimal and carefully rationalized. The company also pays careful attention to risk management. In order to assess its own performance and assist planning, the company developed its own version of the Balanced Scorecard technique modified to fit Sufficiency principles.

The company is also careful to minimize its impact on the environment. No toxic chemicals are used, while the use of inputs is subject to the principles of reduce, reuse, recycle and rethink. A technique has been developed to recycle sawdust to fabricate certain toys. Other waste is used to generate electricity for the plant.

A tenth of the profits is devoted to projects of corporate social responsibility. By 2011, the firm had planted 36,000 trees. Other projects promote the awareness and practice of sustainability in the locality.

The company's motto is "Sustainable Material, Sustainable Manufacturing and Sustainable Mind". Its products and its corporate culture have won awards all round the world. Plan Toys products have a strong reputation for being safe and educative. The company has also made sustainability part of its global brand. Its corporate slogan is "Sustainable Play". Its website states: "It is our hope that your little ones not only grow in their ability to imagine and create with our wooden toys, but that they also grow closer to nature, better understand the importance of a green lifestyle and successfully develop along the way."[13]

Sustainable corporate social responsibility

For some larger firms, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy acts as a guide for achieving growth while balancing the interests of investors, managers, employees and the society as a whole.[14] For others the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has principally been an inspiration for projects of corporate social responsibility. Some firms venturing into such projects have focussed at first on short-lived

13 ORDPB 2011, pp. 352–357; http://www.plantoys.com/.
14 Rungruang and Ractham 2016.

activities such as giving donations, planting trees, cleaning streets and building small school libraries. Over time, there has been a growing interest in contributing to longer-term social benefits. Two trends have emerged. First, firms try to make their business processes more socially friendly by, for instance, integrating a human rights lens into business operations (supply chain management, labour rights, inclusive employment to the persons with disability and LGBTI), and promoting the concept of fair business. Second, firms install a social impact assessment as part of their management and investment framework and make adjustments to eliminate any harmful impact found. In Thailand, this trend is at an early stage but is expected to increase. Firms that are listed on the stock market are increasingly aware of their need to manage their public image.

Several firms have also targeted their projects of corporate social responsibility at disadvantaged and marginalized peoples. MK Restaurant Group, for example, opened a special school for persons with disability and recruited them after their graduation. It also provides job opportunities for LGBTIs. The Central Group purchases products grown by people with disabilities for its Tops supermarkets and provides them with financial support. It also shares knowledge in order to create jobs for people with disabilities. Its initiative "Central Tham" offers help to the needy such as women with cancer, hospitals lacking medical equipment, people affected by natural disasters and youths in the conflict-ridden Southern provinces. These are just some examples among many other similar activities undertaken by the private sector.

Betagro Group and multistage community development

Betagro is a business group in the food industry and agro-industry that has undertaken projects of community development which reflect the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. It began in 2007 with a pilot project in Lopburi Province, and has since expanded to projects in 20 provinces. Each project is based on a *tambon* or sub-district. The company engages with local government, schools, health facilities, and community enterprises to find the best ways to improve the quality of life of the community members. It has found ways to adapt the software used for its corporate planning to collect, store, and manage data for planning community development. The resulting sub-projects depend on local needs, but may include community development, village banking and job creation. The company also taps the resources of local universities for needed expertise. Betagro stresses that its commitment to these projects is for the long term. The company has dubbed this approach as Holistic Area Based Community Development.

The main inspiration from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is that the ultimate aim of these projects is to make the communities and their members self-reliant and resilient. The company has set up Learning Centres for Sufficiency Economy that offer advice on rice farming, vegetable growing, compost, chicken eggs, charcoal, biodiesel, food processing and waste management. The advice stresses the multi-stage model of attaining self-reliance within the household before selling excess to earn extra income. For the communities to genuinely be self-reliant, they must be able to eventually stand on their own feet without external assistance. There are procedures for communities to gradually leave the Group's network of community development.[15]

Social enterprises: Ricult, technology and farming

There is growing interest in social enterprises as an avenue for delivering economic benefits while making a positive social impact. Social enterprises combine the creative problem-solving mindset of entrepreneurs, the revenue-generating model of for-profit businesses, and the social agenda of non-profit organizations. Typically, social enterprises use their for-profit activity as a vehicle to finance their social causes.

One example is Ricult, a social enterprise that aims to increase smallholder farmers' incomes by applying the technology now available in the era of big data and near-universal ownership of smartphones. Smallholder farmers typically lack

15 Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University and Betagro Corporate Social Responsibility 2020.

both the data and the analytic ability on such matters as crop nutrients, real-time weather forecasts, vulnerability to pest attacks, and updated market information on pricing and demand.

Ricult was co-founded in 2016 by a Thai graduate of MIT, Aukrit Unahalekhaka, and Usman Javaidas from Pakistan. The name Ricult comes from the middle syllables of the word agriculture. By 2018, Ricult had 10,000 farmers as clients in Thailand and Pakistan.

Ricult cross-references the farmer's location, derived from the farmer's smartphone, with databases on weather and other inputs that will affect the farmer's yield. Ricult also visits client farms to conduct soil tests and collect other relevant data. Smallholder farmers typically have difficulties accessing credit and often end up paying high rates of interest. Predictions of the farmer's yield are used to generate a credit score which the farmer can use to apply for loans from bank partners in the scheme. Ricult transmits data to the farmer's smartphone on weather predictions and market trends that will affect farming decisions including the timing of harvest. Ricult's platform also gives farmers access to suppliers of inputs and potential buyers of their output.[16]

Ricult is a business, but a business which can succeed only if it can improve the livelihood of significant numbers of smallholder farmers.

Sustainable business on the rise

Sustainable business is becoming mainstream in Thailand. In 2020, 21 Thai companies qualified for inclusion on the Dow Jones Sustainability Emerging Markets Index, which aims to represent the top 10 per cent of the largest 800 companies in 20 emerging markets based on long-term economic, environmental and social criteria. Thailand has had more companies included in the Index than any other ASEAN country for seven consecutive years. In addition, 11 Thai companies joined the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index, which identifies companies based on long-term economic, environmental and social criteria. Seven of these are industry leaders, performing best in their categories compared to all companies worldwide.

Global Compact Network Thailand was founded in 2016 under a UN scheme calling on companies to align their strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. The Network is an excellent example of how a conglomerate of private companies can drive sustainable development in a more integrated manner. Member companies have pledged to invest a total of USD 43 billion in more than one thousand projects by 2030 to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.

To support the private sector's drive towards sustainable investment, the Thai government established the Sustainable Financing Framework to finance projects aligned with the SDGs. As part of this Framework, in 2020 Thailand issued the inaugural sustainability bond, the first of its kind in ASEAN. The country is also studying the feasibility of issuing blue bonds to support the preservation of ocean and marine resources.

16 http://www.ricult.com; http://techsauce.co/tech-and-biz/ricult-offers-machine-learning-credit-scoring-for-farmers.

Government and social enterprises

For decades, when the government did not provide adequate support, many Thai social enterprises suffered from isolation and disorganization, unable to create positive synergies with one another to have a far-reaching impact. The situation has changed since 2010 when the government began recognizing the importance of social enterprises and actively promoting them through the establishment of the Thai Social Enterprise Office. A Social Enterprise Promotion Act was further enacted in 2019 which allows registered social enterprises to be exempt from corporate income tax, while making them eligible for state financial aid. Registered social enterprises may also launch an initial public offering on the stock exchange without submitting a request for permission from the Securities and Exchange Commission. This allowance significantly improves their access to long-term, lower-cost financial sources. The Thai Social Enterprise Office can act as a liaison between relevant social enterprises to coordinate and synergize social activities so that they could have a greater, far-reaching positive impact.

From stories to numbers, again

There have been several quantitative studies examining whether Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can improve the performance of business firms. These studies assess how far firms are following Sufficiency-related practices such as good risk management and a moderate and balanced approach to profit and growth. Some studies also include related dimensions such as stakeholder accountability.

Supawadee Khunthongjan and Aree Wiboonpongse gathered data from 120 small and medium enterprises competing for the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Awards. They found that enterprises which upheld the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy were able to adapt to change, apply wisdom in production, and lower costs and maintain quality of goods and services.[17]

Sooksan Kantabutra and Thomas Siebenhuner measured the "corporate sustainability" of firms based on their competitive performance, crisis endurance and market leadership. Using data from interviews with 112 middle-level managers and business owners, the study examined the factors underlying the firm's performance under five categories: geosocial development, broad stakeholder focus, perseverance, moderation and resilience. The last three are related to Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles. Regression analysis showed that adherence to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy was strongly correlated with high levels of corporate sustainability. Moderation, resilience and perseverance were either direct or indirect predictors of the three sub-components of corporate sustainability: competitive performance, crisis endurance and market leadership.[18]

These and other[19] studies found that the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles contributed to corporate sustainability by making firms more competitive, better at managing crises and more ambitious in achieving market leadership. Small and medium enterprises were also able to reduce costs while maintaining quality.

Applications by public institutions

This section is devoted to one example that is not typical at all but is richly illustrative. Public institutions play a major role in improving livelihoods and advancing human development by providing public facilities of all kinds. Both the quantity and quality of these public facilities have a major impact on people's everyday lives, especially for those who are disadvantaged and at risk of being left behind. Some of the institutions that have the most intimate contact with people's everyday lives are bodies of local government engaged in delivering education, health services, welfare provisions and much besides. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the development of local government bodies in Thailand has been discontinuous and uneven. This example shows the potential.

17 Khunthongjan and Wiboonpongse 2010.

18 Kantabutra and Siebenhuner 2011.

19 See summaries and listings in Kantabutra 2016 and Barua and Tejativaddhana 2019.

A modest-sized rural municipality in southern Thailand adopted the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as its guiding light. Besides the core principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience, it took to heart the urge to achieve "Explosion from Within".

A rural municipality in southern Thailand

Plai Phraya is a community of a little over 6,000 persons in Krabi Province on the west coast of southern Thailand. It is located inland, with no tourist industry. Most of the inhabitants work on plantations or processing of rubber and palm oil. The average per capita income in 2015 was Baht 77,000 (about $2,400) per year. In 1996, the local government was upgraded to a rural municipality (*thesaban tambon*), and the mayor and councillors were chosen by election. In 2007, the municipality formally adopted the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as a guide for all its activities. What has this meant in practice?

The municipality drew up a subset of fourteen of the Royal Development Principles. Among these was "Explosion from Within". The municipality has made special efforts to involve the local people in its activities. Open meetings are held regularly to hear critiques and suggestions, and to invite suggestions on new projects. All major activities are subject to an informal local hearing. At the last municipal elections held in 2008, the turnout was 75 percent, much higher than the average for local government elections. Local people also have electronic access. The municipality has a remarkably sophisticated and comprehensive website (www.plaiphraya.com) which gives access to the municipality's services as well as other local events. It also posts regular news and information on the website, including full details of the municipality's revenue and expenditure, and details on such matters as the bidding on contracts for municipal projects.

The municipality set up a Sufficiency Economy Learning Centre at the municipal office with the aim of utilizing local knowledge along with outside expertise to strengthen the community social and economic capital. The Centre has six divisions: economy; administration; education; energy; environment; and social welfare. Each division has a working team which collects information, runs training programmes and conducts other activities. The municipality has a primary school, pre-school, small hospital, and health centre—an unusually full array of facilities for such a small population.

The municipality office is situated on a large plot of land which is used for various experimental activities. Following the Sufficiency principle of self-reliance, the economy division of the Sufficiency Economy Learning Centre has promoted several projects to make everyday consumption goods in order to reduce the expenses of local people. These include bottled water, soap, shampoo, washing-up liquid, fish and snack foods (some made from edible insects). The projects are organized as public enterprises with the municipality and local people holding shares. The products are distributed in the sub-district and neighbouring areas.

Another of the Royal Development Principles guiding the municipality has been the call to preserve natural resources. The municipality has a project to reduce its own carbon footprint, which includes initiatives for the production of bio-diesel and an organic fertiliser plant. Plans have been mooted for generating energy from palm-oil waste. A large project was launched to make the main road that snakes through the community both safer and greener. The result made the road more attractive for motorists, doubling the numbers passing through and buying from the local shops.

The municipality has paid special attention to the disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community. A number of programmes have focused on children, the elderly, persons with disability and sickness, and people living in poverty. For several years the municipality has run the Plai Phraya Summer Camp. During school break, while parents have to work in the fields, large numbers of children were left unattended at home or in the care of the elderly, neighbours or relatives living nearby. The summer camp provides the children with a safe environment, while also running courses on mathematics, English language, computer skills, soccer, swimming, Thai boxing and local performing arts. Children are also taught the importance of self-discipline, responsibility and consideration towards others.

The municipality also offers free training programmes for the disadvantaged from low-income families. One example is a training in hairdressing where graduates then provide their services to the elderly, disabled and bedridden in

the community. The programme both creates jobs and improves community services.

Several programmes and activities were created to serve the elderly and people with disability and sickness, including a learning centre for those with disability, and a nursing care plan for bedridden persons. Some disadvantaged people are employed as cleaners and guards at the municipality and community centres, giving them both livelihood and dignity.

Only three years after adopting the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles, the Plai Phraya Municipality won first prize from the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board in 2010. Since then, it has won more than thirty awards related to community development, local government and good governance. These awards have increased the local people's pride in the municipality, and have also made it easier for the municipality to secure funding from government agencies for new projects. Success also breeds success.[20]

As the number of awards indicates, the Plai Phraya Municipality is exceptional. The population of the municipality is only a little over six thousand, their average income is modest, and the budget of the municipality is only around Baht 56 million (around $1.8 million). Yet the municipality not only provides a full range of public services that enhance the quality of life, but also helps to promote local livelihoods by reducing everyday expenses and promoting local enterprise. The inspiration for the municipality's work came explicitly from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, and the impact on the economy was realized within a very short time.

What the municipality took from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy was the core principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience, along with a handful of the Royal Development Principles. Most important of these was "Explosion from Within," by empowering local people and making use of local expertise and local resources.

Applications of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy beyond Thailand

Several countries have expressed interest in adopting the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as an alternative means to attain sustainable development, and some have already applied the principles in their development agenda. The Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (MFLF) have promoted the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in the context of South-South cooperation between Thailand and its development partners. TICA has made Sufficiency Economy Philosophy part of Thailand's technical cooperation in more than twenty countries while the Mae Fah Luang Foundation has assisted at least three countries.

Table 3.1 Sufficiency Economy Philosophy cooperation facilitated by Thailand International Cooperation Agency

Sustainable community development through the application of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy	
Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Model Villages	Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Cambodia, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Vietnam
Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Centres	Brunei, Fiji, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vietnam

Source: http://tica-thaigov.mfa.go.th/en/page/overview-of-sep-for-sgds

20 ORDPB 2018; telephone interview with Khun Jare Banjin, mayor, 28 July 2020; www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwDfyy78hwY.

Table 3.1 depicts two types of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy projects facilitated by TICA. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Model Village project adheres to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy's concept of making communities develop gradually and in steps. It aims to enhance local capability in both the understanding of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy thinking process and the proficiency in technical knowhow required. Building on these two sets of knowledge, the project also seeks to promote good governance and community grouping while ensuring that development remains participatory, sustainable and in harmony with the environment and local traditions. Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Centres have been established as a one-stop service for interested public and local communities to observe, learn, and apply technical knowledge along with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy concept for to improve livelihood.

The application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in both types of projects starts from the initial planning stage, by thoroughly analysing the project's area to learning about its local geosociety in details prior to identifying challenges and setting the project's goals, outputs and activities. The project also strikes a balance between neither doing too much nor too little by conducting the project step-by-step based on local wisdom, modern knowledge, and virtues. This is instrumental in ensuring the project's sustainability in the long run. TICA also seeks to ensure prudence as all projects and activities are to be regularly monitored and evaluated by experts and all stakeholders in order to maximize efficiency, enhance resilience, and create a sense of ownership which would in tum foster their sustainability.

What Thailand offers through its "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for SDGs Partnership" is not just another development cooperation programme, but an understanding of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy concept and all its core tenets of three principles (moderation, reasonableness and resilience) and two conditions (knowledge and virtue). These can be applied as a thinking framework and conceptual guideline towards the achievement of all UN SDGs through partnerships that prioritize human resources development, transfer of context-suitable knowledge and long-term sustainability.

More than the projects conducted abroad and demonstrating TICA's commitment to sustainable human development, TICA also offers scholarships to people from partner countries who are interested in learning Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and technical knowhow in the areas where Thailand excels. These scholarships are conducted through TICA's Annual International Training Courses (AITC) and Thailand International Postgraduate Programme (TIPP). The former consists of short-to-medium-term training courses for international participants while the latter offers international scholars unique opportunities to study in Thailand's leading universities where they could heighten their expertise in the fields most valuable to their countries' sustainable development.

These courses and grants cover a wide range of sectors, from agriculture, natural resources and environment to public health, tourism, social development and welfare. In 2019, TICA granted 630 AITC scholarships to over 110 countries and 39 TIPP scholarships to 17 countries. Apart from AITC and TIPP, TICA has also provided 47 scholarships to recipients from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore and Bhutan through individual request arrangements.

MFLF has also been active in disseminating Sufficiency Economy Philosophy thinking and practices to other countries. Since 2002, the MFLF cooperated with Myanmar, Indonesia and Afghanistan by introducing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy concept and practices into various programmes in each of these countries. In Indonesia and Myanmar, the emphasis was to reduce cannabis growing and drug abuse and replace with sustainable agriculture. This is similar to Thailand's success application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in many Northern provinces decades ago. MFLF also helped establish a learning and demonstration centre in Indonesia focusing on irrigation, agriculture, livestock etc. This is again similar to Thailand's Sufficiency Economy

Philosophy Learning Centres. In all three countries the areas chosen were the poorest and least developed ones which were rife with poor health, poverty, food insecurity, and limited public transport and infrastructure. MFLF took part in alleviating these difficulties in an integrated and holistic way, following closely the guidance of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Development was also done in stages in Myanmar similar to the 3S model of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy approach to community development. The establishment of learning centres reiterated the importance of knowledge and sharing for the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

In Afghanistan, MFLF joined hands with TICA and the Afghan government in establishing "The Balkh Livestock and Rural Enterprise Development," also known as the A4 Sheep Bank (A4SB). The A4SB aimed to increase sheep ownership in rural Afghanistan by reducing the mortality rate through better veterinary services. This was consistent with Sufficiency Economy Philosophy's knowledge condition. In exchange for veterinary services, sheep owners repaid A4SB with 10 percent of their new-born ewes, which were loaned to poor and vulnerable households. This was consistent with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy's emphasis on helping the poorest.

Thailand has also been active in promoting the "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for SDGs" policy at the international level through the United Nations. In particular, Thailand has exchanged knowledge and best practices at the regional level, at the annual Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) hosted by UNESCAP, and at the global level through the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

Summary: Learnings from applying the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been part of the landscape in Thailand now for over two decades. Many individuals, groups, and institutions have adopted its principles to a lesser or greater degree. Several outstanding examples have been widely publicized. Here we have not tried to summarize this whole experience, but to highlight some key examples that provide rich illustration of the principles at work. What are the learnings from these examples? What elements of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy seem to work for individuals, communities, corporates and public institutions? How do they contribute to human development?

For some individuals, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been an important support at times of crisis in their lives. For others, it has provided guidance in taking life-changing decisions, particularly at the beginning of a working career. For these people, the model of three principles and two conditions has served as a guide for taking major decisions of great personal consequence. They were able to enhance their own capabilities and grasp the opportunities for a more balanced and fulfilled life. In some cases, they either served as an example for others, or were able to share their learning and experience with others.

Many communities have benefited from following the 3S model. This model grew out of His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's practical development work, was demonstrated in ideal form in the New Theory model of a small-scale farm, and was elaborated in fuller form through the work of the Mae Fa Luang Foundation at Doi Tung. The 3S model is developed from the call for an "Explosion from Within", to build on local resources and internal capacity, and on the call to "Development According to Steps", to develop self-reliance before expanding. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has also guided communities to pay special attention to the humanity-nature balance. By following this guidance, communities have been able to enhance not only their material well-being but also other aspects of human development, particularly their health, their access to knowledge, their security, and their level of people's participation.

In the private sector, the major appeal of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been its emphasis on resilience. This has resonated for small and medium firms which often work in conditions of limited resources and high levels of uncertainty. Many small and medium firms have applied Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles in order to take decisions which increased their potential to survive and prosper. Plan Toys has made sustainability not only the core of its operations and company culture but also part of its global brand. Among larger firms, the potential for the Sufficiency

Economy Philosophy to advance human development lies in its impact on projects of corporate social responsibility and new ventures in social enterprises. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has guided corporate managers away from short-term projects to more comprehensive and sustained programmes of community development, and to special attention on vulnerable and marginalized groups. These projects have a broad impact on human development within the target communities, and help to ensure that the vulnerable and marginalized are not left behind. These projects serve as examples of corporate social responsibility which enhance the reputation of the corporate group. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has also served as inspiration for a new wave of social entrepreneurs who see the potential to apply their advanced technical skills for social benefit.

Public institutions engaged in the delivery of public services have a major role in all aspects of human development. By following the call for an "Explosion from Within", they can mobilize the enormous capacity of people to help themselves and to help others. By following the condition of integrity, they can ensure transparency and efficiency in the delivery of public services. The example of Plai Phraya, a modestly sized municipality in a rather remote area, shows the enormous potential of combining Sufficiency Economy principles with the powers and responsibilities of local government. Precisely because of their small scale and their local-ness, such local bodies are especially important in the task of ensuring that no one gets left behind.

In different levels and areas of the society, the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can assist people in taking decisions, designing projects, managing businesses and delivering public services which enhance the capabilities and opportunities of themselves and others. Across these experiences, the important elements of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy were the emphasis on empowerment as a means, the focus on resilience as a goal, the benefit of working in stages, and the need for sensitivity to the human-nature balance.

Many issues in human development have to be addressed at the national level, drawing on the power of government along with the participation of individuals, communities, and companies. How can the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy guide the work of government to continue the trend of improvement in Thailand's human development in the face of new challenges and with no one left behind?

CHAPTER

4

Strengthening the Path to Achieving Human Development with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

In Chapters 1 and 2 we identified the SDGs which require prioritization, the areas of human development which still require attention, and the groups which are at most risk of being left behind. In Chapter 3 we examined how individuals, communities, corporates and public bodies have adopted aspects of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to bring in the lives of themselves and others. In this chapter, we turn the attention to public policy. How can the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy guide the planning and implementation of public policies to advance human development in Thailand and thus contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in ways that no one is left behind?

Since this report was conceived and this question was posed, the task has become a lot more difficult. The starting line has been moved backwards, and the gradient has become steeper. Both the approach to human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy need to be adjusted to confront this tougher task.

The global *Human Development Report* 2020 has redesigned "human development for the Anthropocene". Here we summarize the main innovations. Then we take a fresh look at how the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can serve as a guide to national policy by drawing on the analysis of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the Royal Development Principles in Chapter 1, and on the learnings from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in action in Chapter 3. On this basis, we identify nine areas where public policy guided by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can make significant contributions to the achievement of many aspects of human development including well-being, health, education, security, and protection against risks. Within these nine areas we highlight special measures needed to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are not left behind.

Human development at the "next frontier"

2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the UNDP concept of human development. Reviewing the "strain on the planet" evident from the COVID-19 pandemic and the advancing impact of climate change, UNDP devoted the anniversary report in December 2020 to a major overhaul of the concept under the heading *The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene*.[1]

The report argues that we are at a critical moment in history. As we have entered the Anthropocene and admitted that "humans are a dominant force shaping the planet", we must take responsibility and accept custodianship of the planet's resources. We should also recognize that the imbalances in society, especially inequalities, and the imbalances in our relationship to the planet tend to be mutually reinforcing.[2] Inequalities obstruct our capacity for collective action to prevent pandemics and climate change. Pandemics and climate change worsen social inequalities. Improving people's lives by advancing human development and reducing the "planetary pressures" hence become inseparable.

The core of the human development approach is still expanding the capabilities, freedoms and choices for people to live the lives they value. But the way forward requires something more:

> **"We must also carefully consider two other critical dimensions of human development: agency (that is, the ability to participate in decision-making and to make one's desired choices) and values (that is, the choices that are most desired), with special attention to our interactions with nature, to our stewardship of the planet. [3]"**

Agency means, in the words of Amartya Sen, "the recognition of human beings as reflective agents rather than passive patients", as people able to act on their own volition and reasoning in pursuit of what they value.[4] Ensuring people have the agency to participate in the decisions and actions that affect their own lives will mean removing current obstructions and restrictions, including poorly designed institutions, outdated laws and ingrained social attitudes—especially those that underlie economic, social and political inequalities. Partly this must be achieved by changing the values and norms that shape actions, both individual and social. This may require changes in education but, most importantly, space for people to debate and to demand. Inequalities and imbalances need to be overcome because they inhibit collective action. The steeper challenges of the future will require a

1 UNDP 2020c.

2 This point was developed further in UNDP 2022.
3 UNDP 2020c, p. 6.
4 Sen 2014; UNDP 2020c, p. 93.

"whole-of-society" response.

In particular, the Report notes, "it is important to develop a deeper awareness of our interdependence with the planet",[5] partly by appreciating those communities that still live close to nature and understand it well. Among such communities there remain "many practices and traditions that promote a general philosophy of subsistence not waste".[6] To reduce the "planetary pressures" which weigh on the future we need to develop and apply "nature-based solutions", including planting trees to absorb carbon, becoming more careful in our relations with wildlife, and recycling more of the planet's materials. We will also need to innovate, especially in the way we use the planet's materials, and to change the incentives to bad practices inherited from the past and often built into old institutions. The goal is "nature-based human development" which retains the focus of human development on capabilities and freedoms but recognizes that humanity and nature are inseparable and must develop together. In sum,

> "to navigate the Anthropocene, humanity can develop the capabilities, agency and values to act by enhancing equity, fostering innovation and instilling a sense of stewardship of nature. If these have greater weight within the ever widening choice sets that people create for themselves—if equity, innovation and stewardship become central to what it means to live a good life—then human flourishing can happen alongside easing planetary pressures.[7]"

With this revision, the intimate relations of human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy remain unchanged. Indeed, the emphasis on empowerment, resilience, and the human-nature balance gain added emphasis, and there is more attention to moderation in the use of the planet's resources.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in a new world

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been adopted by all Thailand's economic and social development plans since 2002, by the 20-Year National Strategy launched in 2018,[8] and by the planning to achieve the SDGs.[9] But sometimes it is difficult to see how the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy are translated into policies and projects. Expositions of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy tend to concentrate on the development of the qualities of an individual as a social actor, and how those qualities can have a wider impact through leadership.[10] How can we extend Sufficiency thinking to be of more assistance to public policy making?

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy grew out of the practical development work of His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej over several decades. His approach was bottom-up, focused on ordinary people and targeting the disadvantaged. His work covered four areas which are at the heart of SDGs: health, education, agriculture, and disaster relief.

His approach was formulated into the three principles and two conditions of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Other learnings from His Majesty's work were later codified as the 27 Royal Development Principles. Some of these act as a gloss on implementing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles in practice, such as "Do not Be Too Dogmatic About Theory While Adhering to Simplicity" and "Solving Small Problems First: Think Macro, Start Micro". Most importantly, they enshrine the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles in simple formulas. For example, the call for an "Explosion from Within" emphasises that self-reliance is founded on empowerment. And "Planting Forests in the People's Hearts" combines the importance of participation with attention to the balance of humanity and nature. The three areas where the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy most closely aligns with the human development approach are the emphasis on *empowerment*, *resilience*, and the *human-nature balance*.

5 UNDP 2020c, p. 41.
6 UNDP 2020c, p. 92.
7 UNDP 2020c, p. 8.

8 NESDC 2019a.
9 MFA 2018.
10 For example, Avery and Bergsteiner 2016.

His Majesty began his development work when Thailand was largely a rural society, the role of government was still rather limited, and the country was fairly isolated from the world. Today, the situation is utterly changed. The population is roughly evenly balanced between urban and rural, and villages have become urbanized. Government now pervades every aspect of society and economy. And the country is deeply embedded in the globalized economy.

His Majesty never addressed in any detail the application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to public policy. The advances of urbanization and globalization have increased the importance of public policy in all respects, and especially for achieving the goals of human development. How can the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy be reformulated for guiding public policy? The three principles and two conditions are, of course, fundamental, relevant, and sacrosanct. But how can the practical learnings and the *spirit* of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy be applied to public policy in a new world and a new context?

The answer is to adapt the key principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into questions that can be used both for guiding the choice of policy and evaluating the means of implementation. The list of questions here is based on the core principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the Royal Development Principles, with special emphasis on the three shared principles of human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, namely *empowerment, resilience,* and the *human-nature balance.* This list is tentative and could easily be extended.

1. *Does this policy take a moderate path, especially in the use of the planet's resources*? Moderation is fundamental to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and has increased importance in the revised approach to human development.
2. *Does it empower, increase agency, remove obstructions to participation*? Perhaps the most evocative and popular of the Royal Development Principles is the call for an "Explosion from Within", to give people, communities, and institutions the tools, the capabilities, and the freedoms to pursue their own development.
3. *Does it build in resilience to be sustainable*? This leverages from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principle of resilience. It reflects His Majesty's principle of working in stages, building self-reliance before expanding further, and ultimately aiming for a sustainable result. It encapsulates the principles of "Solving Small Problems First: Think Macro, Start Micro", "Development According to Steps", "Self-supporting", and "Perseverance". It is the key principle at the heart of many successful applications of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.
4. *Is it sensitive to the human-nature balance, does it allay the pressures on the planet*? This leverages from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principles of moderation and reasonableness (understanding the consequences of actions), and reflects the Royal Development Principles, "Using Nature to Cure Nature" and "Planting Forests in the People's Hearts". It reminds us that all public policies impact on the balance between humanity and nature, so this principle should always be taken into account. It reflects the planetary pressures that underlie pandemics and climate change.
5. *Does it promote the public good*? This comes from the 17th on the list of Royal Development Principles, "Common Interest". It leverages from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principle of integrity, focussing on the purpose of public policy, and warning against allowing private interests to intrude. It encapsulates the people-centred focus of human development.
6. *Is it inclusive and fair, does it reach out to all*? This leverages from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy principle of moderation, which implies balance, fairness, and equity. It reflects the Royal Development Principle's call for "Understanding, Gaining Insight and Access, and Engaging in Development". It reflects the spirit of His Majesty's work, focusing on ordinary people, and especially the most disadvantaged.
7. *Does it enhance knowledge*? This comes from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy condition of knowledge. It reflects His Majesty's interest in education, and especially in non-mainstream forms of schooling.

8. *Is it economical, neat, productive, practical*? Much of decision-making on public policy is about making optimum use of a limited budget. This maxim extends from the 12th of the Royal Development Principles, "Economy and Simplicity with Maximum Benefits". It demands a responsible approach to the management of public revenues. It also echoes the principles of efficiency and equity for human development.

The Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model

The BCG Economy Model is Thailand's post-pandemic growth strategy whereby science, innovation and technology are applied to promote more efficient use of resources while maintaining and restoring the ecosystems. It aims to contribute to the global efforts to maintain human-nature balance and comprehensively address the environmental challenges, while creating growth and well-being for all.

The Bio-Economy involves the production of renewable biological resources and converting them into value-added products using technology and innovation. The focus of the bio-economy is on the use of renewable biological resources and bio-based materials to achieve sustainable production.

The Circular Economy envisages a regenerative production-consumption system where product, service, and system design choices enable the elimination of waste and pollution, existing materials are kept in use, and natural systems regenerated due to reduced flows of residuals. The focus of the circular economy is to look at the overall production and consumption system to ensure that it is regenerative and to redesign the notion of residuals by designing waste and pollution out of the system.

The Green Economy leverages ecosystem processes to benefit human beings equitably and inclusively without jeopardising the sustainability of ecosystems. The green economy focuses on how ecosystems provide inputs to society and the economy.

Nine priority areas for human development

Given the progress on the SDGs noted in Chapter 1 and the review of Thailand today in Chapter 2, here we suggest nine areas of focus for government action that will advance human development and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

- *Deliver quality education for all.* Knowledge is one of the two underlying conditions of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Education is a major pillar and enabler of human development. SDG4 on Quality Education is one of the goals that requires attention.
- *Empower people through local government.* Empowerment is fundamental to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The services provided by local government enhance human development in many ways, and are especially important in ensuring that no one is left behind.
- *Make society more resilient through better social protection.* Resilience, fairness and inclusion are key principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in the systems of social protection. Correcting those weakness will contribute to human security and human development.
- *Reverse the decline in the marine environment.* The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy places a priority on maintaining the balance between humanity and nature. The health and livelihoods of many people depend directly or indirectly on the seas. SDG 14: Life Below Water is one of the goals which demand attention.
- *Manage the forests for harmony and sustainability.* The forests provide livelihood for many communities. The forests also have a role in the climate, both locally and globally. Managing the forests for sustainability will contribute both to SDG15: Life On Land and SDG 13 Climate Action.
- *Act urgently on climate change.* The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy emphasises resilience and the balance between humanity and nature. Climate change poses a threat to human development across the board. Thailand is committed to contributing towards the global

reduction of emissions, but delivering on this commitment will not be easy. Thailand also needs to prepare for the impact on livelihoods, health and human security to achieve SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

- *Secure peace, safety and justice for all.* The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy promotes resilience, inclusion, fairness, which are also important elements of achieving human security, removing or reducing the insecurities that threaten human lives. SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions is one of the goals demanding attention.
- *Reduce inequalities in income, wealth, power and publicgoods.* The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy promotes fairness. Reducing inequality has been part of the national agenda for several years but little has been achieved. The distributional implications of all public policies should be scrutinized in order to achieve SDG 9 Reducing Inequalities.
- *Engage regionally and globally to promote sustainable development.* Thailand is recognised as a champion of sustainable development, based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, in the global and regional arena.

Thailand and the SDGs in the regional and international context

Thailand has consistently underlined the importance of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in the achievement of the SDGs at international and regional gatherings including the Group 77 and China meeting in 2016, the annual Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held at the United Nations in New York under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations General Assembly.

Thailand's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2019 was guided by the theme of "Advancing Partnership for Sustainability". As ASEAN Coordinator for Sustainable Development since 2016, Thailand worked to promote complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and proposed the Bio-Circular-Green model as a possible strategy for ASEAN's post-pandemic recovery and sustainable future growth.

Thailand co-hosted the Global South-South Development Expo 2022 for the first time in the Asia-Pacific Region under the theme "Advancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable COVID-19 Recovery: Towards a Smart and Resilient Future." The forum served as a platform to exchange knowledge and good practices in revitalising the economy and society in this challenging period. It was also an opportunity for Thailand to highlight its commitment to working closely with developing countries and other partners worldwide to achieve the SDGs.

At the APEC meeting in Bangkok in November 2022, Thailand highlighted the "Bangkok Goals on BCG Economy," focusing on issues such as carbon neutrality and zero emissions, transition to clean and renewable energy, sustainable and environmental-friendly food and agricultural systems, as well as sustainable trade and investment. The Bangkok Goals have become the comprehensive guides for APEC work on sustainability and will reinforce global efforts on the SDGs and climate change in the years to come.

The COVID-19 crisis has weighed heavily on the resources of government, especially its financial resources, including future potential revenues. To achieve these policy goals, government will need to pay special attention to empowering people, especially by removing restrictions and obstacles, and will need to seek "nature-based solutions" wherever available.

1. Deliver quality education for all

Education is a main pillar of the Human Development Index and an enabler of enhanced capabilities and freedoms. Knowledge is one of the two underlying conditions of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. In His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's development work, education came second only to his emphasis on

agriculture. His many education projects focused on unconventional areas, outside the mainstream. He set up free-entry vocational schools, promoted distance learning before its time, and supported projects in life-long learning. The Royal Development Principle calling on people not to be dogmatic seems especially relevant to his work in education. His Majesty said, "The reason I would like everyone to pursue knowledge and establish themselves is so that they can have a prosperous life, with happiness and self-reliance as the first step."[11]

SDG 4 reads: "Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." In Thailand, the quantity of education provided has expanded to meet expectations, but the quality has become a persistent problem. The inequalities in the provision of education between rich and poor, urban and rural, central and remote are stark and persistent. Variation in two "enhanced capabilities", digital literacy and financial literacy, are contributing to inequality. The digital divide, the stark variation in skill and access to new technology, demands rapid attention. SDG 4 is an area where challenges remain and progress has been weak.

Besides, other factors suggest the time is ripe for far-reaching reforms of Thailand's education system. The society is in the late stage of a demographic transition. The numbers in the cohort for tertiary education have fallen dramatically, and entries to universities have almost halved. Digital technologies have begun to revolutionise the delivery of learning, and this trend has accelerated under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital disruption of the labour market will increase the need for retraining across a career.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been adopted into the national education system at two levels: as an element in the curriculum and as a guide for the management of certain schools known as Sufficiency Education Learning Centres. The curriculum in these schools balances academic learning with skill sets that foster self-reliance, discipline, and ethical considerations for the greater good of the students themselves, their families, communities and society as a whole. The results have been encouraging. The students in these schools demonstrate a higher level of competence in life skills, communication, logic, problem-solving and IT literacy. Parents regard these schools as partners in solving both education-related and other issues in their communities.[12]

Current educational theory stresses the importance of early learning, and the potential for inequality at this early stage to accumulate from then on. Resources should be transferred from the tertiary to pre-school stage. Around three-quarters of the cohort now have access to pre-schooling, but the quality is variable. Following the call for "Explosion from Within", attention should be given to training parents on pre-school education. More educational day-care centres are needed in urban areas where both parents are often employed.

A recent innovation to combat inequality is the Education Equity Fund that grants cash transfer to poor students who qualify through a "proxy means test", a method used worldwide in poverty targeting. Care is needed to ensure that eligible students are not excluded by this method.

Digital literacy has rapidly become essential for everyone. Financial literacy has also become more important as more and more households have taken on debt. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both these areas. Digital technologies enabled the government to deliver relief schemes very rapidly, but ran the risk of omitting some of the targeted recipients because they lacked the equipment and skills. Household debt surged when the pandemic disrupted livelihoods. Government is well aware of the importance of these new enhanced capabilities. Developing these skills must be integrated into the education system at all levels.

Studies have suggested that better accountability is needed to improve the quality of education at the primary and secondary levels. At present the incentives to improve the quality are too weak. There need to be standardized tools for testing students' accomplishment, and rewards for teachers and school managers based on these scores.[13] In keeping with the stress on empowerment in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, parents should be given a larger role in monitoring the performance of schools.

From 1995, His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej began transmitting teaching by satellite to under-resourced schools in remote areas. The

11 Grossman and Faulder 2011, p. 212.

12 Dharmapiya and Saratun 2016, 2018.
13 TDRI 2012.

network now covers thousands of schools nationwide. The technology for such teaching is now much cheaper and more reliable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mechai Bamboo School under the Mechai Viravaidya Foundation and the Population and Community Development Association served as a centre for sustainable community development and a lifelong learning centre for all. The school provides academic learning alongside practical life skills, discipline and ethics for students as well as income-generating opportunities for parents and the community.[14] Distance learning should be more widely adopted in secondary schools, especially for subjects where it is difficult to recruit enough qualified teachers (such as English language) and subjects where teachers have difficulty keeping up with changes in the curriculum (such as several sciences).

However, the experiments with distance learning during the pandemic had many lessons. Many schools lacked the right equipment, a good WiFi connection, and teachers with the necessary skills. Volunteers helped to alleviate these problems to some extent, yet disadvantaged pupils at schools in poorer areas were most affected. Government responded quickly by expanding high-speed broadband access in rural areas, particularly through the Net Pracharat project. Ensuring that increased use of distance learning does not widen the digital divide will require investments in equipment and training.[15]

At the tertiary level, the Sufficiency approach suggests it is time to rationalize the number of institutions, make more use of technology to improve the quality of teaching, and reorient resources to more life-long learning.

2. Empower people through local government

One major way people can contribute to human development is through participation in the life of their local communities. Community participation is a human development goal in itself, measured on Thailand's Human Achievement Index, where the highest scores are found in the North and Northeast regions. In Thailand there are both informal and formal structures for participation. The Committee on Quality of Life Development monitors progress on the informal side, showing some modest evidence of progress in participation. In 2011, 26 percent of villages held more than six meetings while in 2019 the figures had risen to 35 percent. Over the same period, the proportion of villages that had compiled a "community plan" rose from 87 to 98 percent, and the numbers of "local wise men" and "community learning centres" also increased. At the same time, the number of villages reporting problems with drugs increased dramatically from 8.5 percent in 2011 to 80.5 percent in 2019. [16]

As shown by the experience of Plai Phraya Municipality described in Chapter 3, local government bodies have great potential to contribute to human development, especially when inspired by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Administrative bodies composed of local people and elected by local people are more likely to respond to the needs of local people. Democratization is often more effective in outcome at the local rather than at the national level. However, the development of local government in Thailand has been discontinuous, controversial and problematic. The potential of local government has not been fully realized.

Thailand has had a limited level of decentralization to municipal areas for many decades. The extension of a nationwide system of elective local government began tentatively with legislation in 1994, and gathered pace following the 1997 Constitution and a more comprehensive Decentralization Act passed in 1999. By the early 2000s, a nationwide system was in place: the cities of Bangkok and Pattaya had municipal government constituted by specific legislation; 2,442 urban areas came under municipal government of three types; each of the 76 provinces had a Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO); and the rural areas were governed under 5,332 Subdistrict Administrative Organizations (SAO). After 1997, village heads and subdistrict heads, who had previously been appointees, were elected locally for 5-year terms.

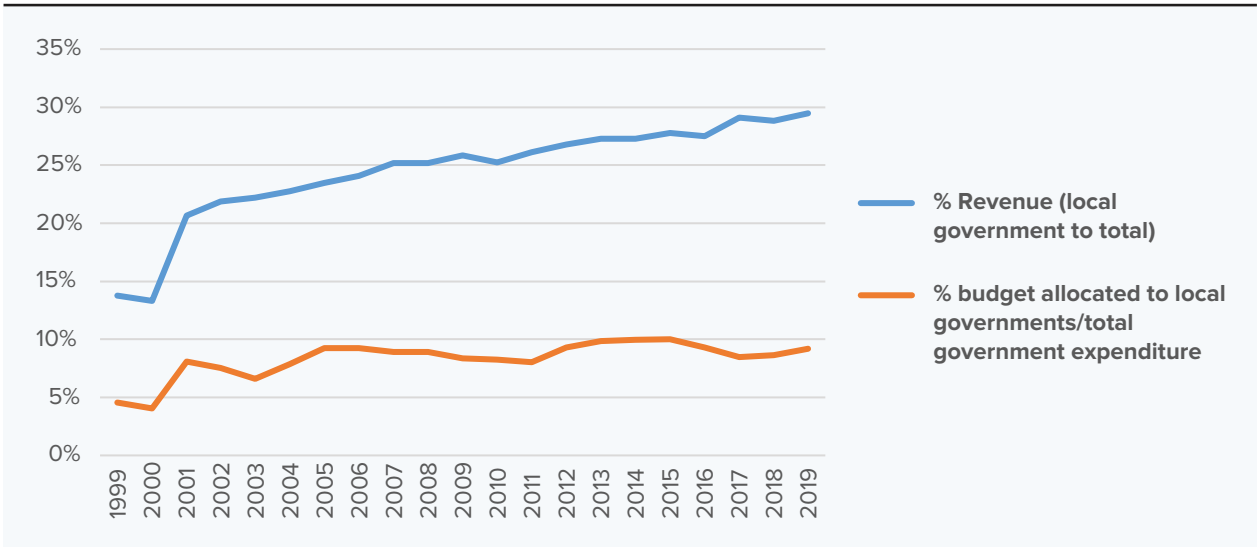
14 http://mechaipattana.ac.th/?lang=en.
15 http://thegeopolitics.com/thailands-covid-19-education-crisis/

16 Officially there are 75,000 villages in Thailand. For administrative purpose, these are grouped into sub-districts (tambon) and districts (amphoe) with a rough average of 10 villages per sub-district and 10 sub-districts per district. Committee on Quality of Life Development 2011, 2019.

People enthusiastically welcomed this innovation. They formed local parties to contest at the polls on platforms promising to improve the quality of life by paving roads, providing water connections, dealing with waste and improving other basic services. Several thousand people participated in local administration for the first time through these new bodies. But there were disappointments in store.

The 1999 Decentralization Act set a target of devolving 35 percent of total government revenue onto local government by 2006. This target was postponed and never achieved, reaching 30 percent in the 2019 budget year (Figure 4.1). Some local bodies asked for certain responsibilities to be transferred back to central government on grounds that their revenues were inadequate.

Figure 4.1 Local government budget as percent of total government spending, 2000–2019



Source: Source: Bureau of Budget reports

The new structure of local government was criticized, particularly on grounds that the SAOs were too small to support the personnel and undertake the responsibilities expected of them; that the duties of the PAOs and SAOs were duplicative; and, most of all, that local bodies were susceptible to corruption and elite capture. Without empowered communities, decentralization is susceptible to elite capture. Marginalized groups, particularly the poor, may fare worse under decentralization when local governments do not pay attention to the distribution effects of their policies. This can come about when the primary beneficiaries of such distributive programs are the people least likely to vote. Empowerment and decentralization need to proceed in parallel.

Some of the advances in decentralization were reversed. Regulatory amendments gave the Ministry of Interior, auditor-general and other central offices more oversight over the local bodies' activities. After a military coup in 2014, the government discontinued elections to local bodies. In some places, the incumbents remained in place while elsewhere the elected representatives were replaced with appointees. Bangkok's city council was replaced with an appointed body headed by a retired city clerk as mayor. No elections to local bodies were held for over six years.

Although the new local government bodies created since 1994 had many problems, people in general appreciated their work and recognized that they were gains from learning by doing. Surveys conducted in the early 2010s found that "villagers acknowledge a continuous improvement and are more satisfied with local government than a decade before". Four-fifths of respondents reported that the situation had improved.[17] Villagers recognized that local bodies were more responsive to local needs in such areas as water supply, waste management and local infrastructure.[18] On the

17 Dufhues et al. 2015.
18 Nagai, Funatsu and Kagoya 2008.

Human Achievement Index, the sub-index on participation is the only component to have fallen quite markedly between 2015 and 2017, and recovered only slightly by 2019.

There may have been problems both in the design and the operation of local government bodies. Yet the government seems to have been over-hasty in drawing power back to the centre and suspending elections, rather than allowing time for learning by doing and improving systems for monitoring.

Elective local bodies respond to the call for an "Explosion from Within." They empower people to improve their own opportunities and capabilities. They allow services to be tailored to local needs. As the Plai Phraya case above demonstrates, they can be very effective in ensuring that vulnerable groups are not ignored and left behind. It is vital to get the project of decentralization back on track. The process has begun. On 20 December 2020, elections were held for the PAOs nationwide. In 76 provinces, a total of around 300 people stood for the post of chairman and over 3,000 for places as councillors. This pattern was followed in elections for 2,400 municipalities in March 2021, and 2,400 SAOs in November 2021. These elections showed how much people valued this level of government. The campaigns were lively, the turnouts relatively high, the conduct mostly peaceful, and the instances of corruption and malpractice relatively few. This pattern was repeated at the Bangkok governor elections in May 2022 which attracted 31 candidates and a turnout above 60 percent, prompted a media frenzy, and delivered a winner with a record majority.

These are promising signs. The next step is to ensure that local bodies can deliver on the people's expectations. Decisions are needed on the several proposals for overhauling the structure of local bodies to ensure they are effective and efficient.

3. Make society more resilient through better social protection

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy highlights resilience, the ability of an individual, institution or society to withstand shocks. The capacity of people to live a fulfilled life are easily undermined by accident, illness, natural disasters and man-made crises. In the past, people in Thailand often looked to their family, extended family, or community to carry them through personal or national crises. But for many people this no longer works as well as it once did. Over the past two decades, the society has become much more urbanized, family size has shrunk, extended families have disintegrated, and people have become more remote from their natal communities. As a result, the responsibility for securing resilience falls more on the state.

Thailand has been developing a modern social protection system since the early 1990s. In designing the system, there has been debate back and forth between various approaches, especially between universal and contributory schemes. The Social Security scheme, providing a full menu of benefits to workers in the formal economy, is based upon a contributory model. There is difficulty in adapting this model for the large number of workers in the informal sector, and as a result the system is not universal. The Universal Health Coverage system launched in the early 2000s is available to all. Although there have been pressures to abandon this approach, so far these have been resisted.

Universal Health Coverage System

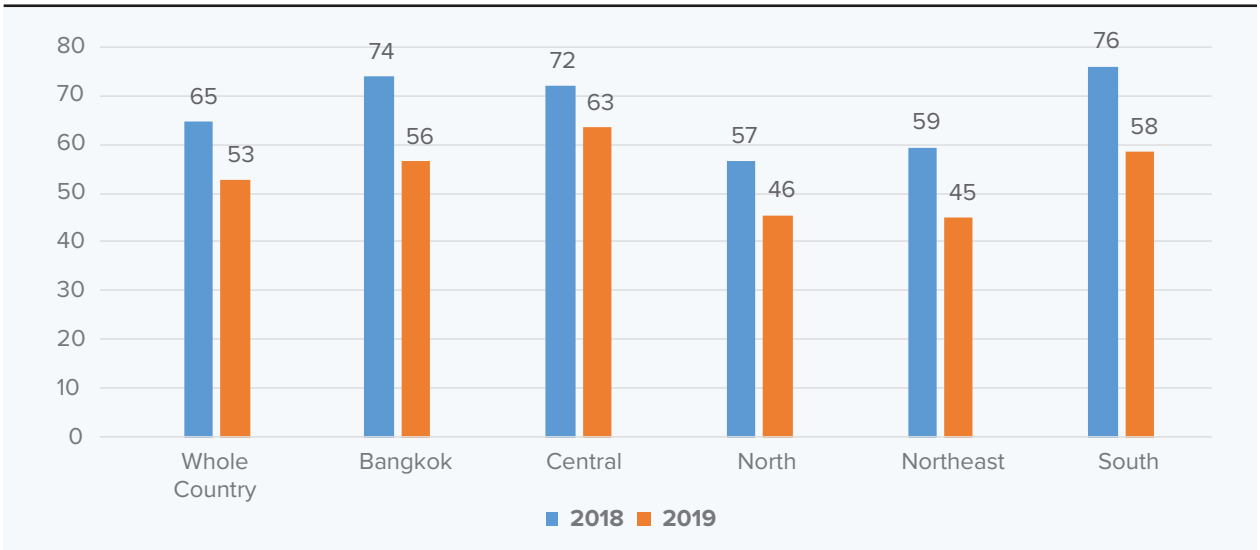
In 2022, Thailand launched the Universal Health Coverage, providing coverage for all those 47 million people not covered by either the Civil Servant Medical Benefit Scheme or the Social Health Insurance for private-sector employees. The scheme, which was warmly welcomed locally and praised internationally, has been steadily improved to ensure easy access to quality health services. The network of primary health care centres has been expanded to facilitate local access.[19] The range of treatments has been enlarged including high-cost treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy and anti-retroviral treatment. The list of essential medicines has been expanded to over 850 items, close to the WHO model list of essential medicines, and including high-cost specialized medicines.[20]

The number of households dropped into poverty because of spending on a health catastrophe dropped from 2.2 percent in 1996, before the UHC, to 0.3 percent in 2016. The target is to reduce that to 0.25 percent in the near future.[21]

From 2009, all persons over 60 who are not covered by formal pension schemes became eligible to apply for an old age allowance. The amount is rather small (600–1000 Baht a month), and many people do not apply, but the system is universal. A disability grant scheme is also nominally universal, but administrative difficulties result in many qualified persons failing to receive the grant.

In 2017, with the aim of eliminating remaining poverty, government introduced a state Welfare Card. People with income and assets below a threshold can apply through state banks, and their eligibility is screened. Those who qualify receive various benefits including subsidized travel and a cash quota for buying everyday consumption goods from selected stores. Government also introduced a Child Support Grant with a similar system of targeting. Currently there are 14.5 million people registered under the Welfare Card scheme. However, in the first year of operation as many as 65 percent of those eligible failed to gain inclusion in the scheme. In the second year, 2019, the number excluded fell to 53 percent but was still large. The rate of exclusion differed by region (Figure 4.2). Similarly, UNICEF reckoned that 30 percent of eligible children failed to gain access to the Child Support Grant.[22]

Figure 4.2 Exclusion error in the Welfare Card by region, 2018 and 2019



Note: Data are for those over 18 years old.

Source: NSO Household Socio-Economic Survey 2018 and 2019.

19 As of August 2022, there are 9767 Tambon health promotion hospitals, 41 health centres and 773 district hospital; see http://203.157.10.8/hcode_2020/query_02.php

20 Viroj et al. 2020a; NHSO 2022a.

21 Viroj et al. 2020b; NHSO 2022b.

22 UNICEF 2020.

In mid-March 2020, when government imposed a lockdown to counter the spread of the COVID-19 virus, it also launched a scheme to support those who lost their job or livelihood as a result of the lockdown with a cash grant of Baht 5,000 a month for three months. Applicants had to prove that they had lost their livelihood, which was difficult for many in the informal sector. Almost 29 million applied in the first wave, and over half were rejected. Some groups, including casual workers, sex workers and farmers, were excluded by the scheme's design. Government had to allow applicants to appeal against rejection, and had to craft supplementary schemes for some excluded groups. During the delay, many had recourse to private charity, including free meals offered by some Buddhist monasteries and neighbourhood schemes. Eventually, 15.3 million people benefited under this scheme, and another 7.6 million under a supplementary scheme for the agricultural sector.[23] However, some of the neediest potential recipients failed to secure relief because of difficulties in negotiating the system.[24] Formal-sector workers eligible for relief under the Social Security Scheme also faced delays because the computer system could not manage the spike in applications.

Government agencies delivered relief schemes rapidly by making use of today's technology of smartphones and digital banking. Yet, this experience coupled with concerns over the Welfare Card have prompted renewed debate on the appropriate design for social protection. This debate has continued for years. It covers the issues of universal-vs-targeted provision, the menu of services, and the means of financing. In the global *Human Development Report 2019*, UNDP advocated schemes with "two pillars":

- Comprehensive social services ensuring equal access to quality services in line with the new demands and aspirations of the 21st century.
- Complementary special policies for excluded groups. Even though poor and marginalized people may benefit from universal policies, these alone might not be enough to reach those furthest behind, including due to group-based discrimination.[25]

In keeping with this second point, the following are recommendations for reform of social protection systems which pay special attention to these most vulnerable groups.

- *Bottom Ten*. In the COVID-19 crisis, more people fell below the poverty line.[26] For the short term, government should be pro-active in identifying those households which qualify for the Welfare Card but have not been registered.
- *Rapidly aging population with low educational attainment*. Expand the pension scheme; induce more informal workers to enter the voluntary schemes under Articles 33 and 39/40 of the Social Security Ac; expand retraining schemes.
- *Informal workers without social protection:* Enforce more effectively the law requiring employers to insure their workers; induce more informal workers to enter the voluntary schemes under Articles 33 and 39/40 of the Social Security Act; narrow the gap between benefits under the three articles of the act.
- *Migrant workers:* Overcome the barriers to enrolling in the Migrant Health Insurance Scheme; overcome the difficulties and delays in making claims under the Workmen's Compensation Act; expand the possibilities for registering all migrant workers.
- *Stateless persons*: Provide increased access to education and health care.
- *Vulnerable children:* Ensure that the child support grant is accessible by all those eligible; improve the accessibility and quality of child development centres and ensure all those eligible can access the service; develop a scheme for "resilient students" along the lines of the OECD model.
- *Persons with disabilities:* Take pro-active steps to ensure that all persons with disabilities are registered for the free healthcare and disability grant; increase the amount of monthly grant; develop the capacity of more schools to accept children with disability
- *LGBTIs*: Raise awareness of the law prohibiting discrimination against LGBTIs, and enforce the law effectively.

23 World Bank 2020b, p. 37; Tinakorn 2020.
24 Asia Foundation 2020; Hirunyatrakul 2020; Sapsing and Komin 2020.
25 UNDP 2019a, p. 226.
26 In the World Bank's estimate, 1.5 million more people had fallen below the poverty line in 2020. World Bank 2021.

Hopefully the COVID-19 crisis will spur efforts to resolve these debates and complete a social protection system which gives all Thais the resilience to manage shocks in their personal lives and to survive the crises that beset an interconnected world.

4. Reverse the decline in the marine environment

At the start of the development era sixty years ago, the priority in Thailand was to achieve economic growth in order to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life. Dealing with the consequences of growth was deferred until later. But once this course was set, any change of direction proved difficult. Concerns over the environment surfaced from the 1980s, but actions have only slowed the damage, not eliminated it.

Water is fundamental to human development in Thailand, especially to livelihood and health. Fish is the main source of protein. Many people live in villages strung along the coastlines and waterways, and depend in some way on water for their livelihood. Around two million people derive their main income from fishing. In Thai culture, water is sacred, a symbol of purity and a source of life. SDG 14, Life Below Water reads: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. On this SDG, progress has been stagnant and major challenges remain.

The exploitation of the sea by many countries has shown no sense of moderation and is not sustainable. In the late 20th century, Thailand became a major exporter of fish and seafood products, and around 2000 was briefly the largest exporter of these products in the world. The number of marine trawlers grew from 99 in 1961 to 10,500 registered boats today. Aquaculture spread, especially prawn farming in former mangrove forests. The marine catch plateaued in the 1990s, then plunged in the 2000s as a result of overfishing, and is now less than half its peak level (Figure 4.3). Prawn farming in the coastal zone declined after outbreaks of disease in the early 2000s.[27]

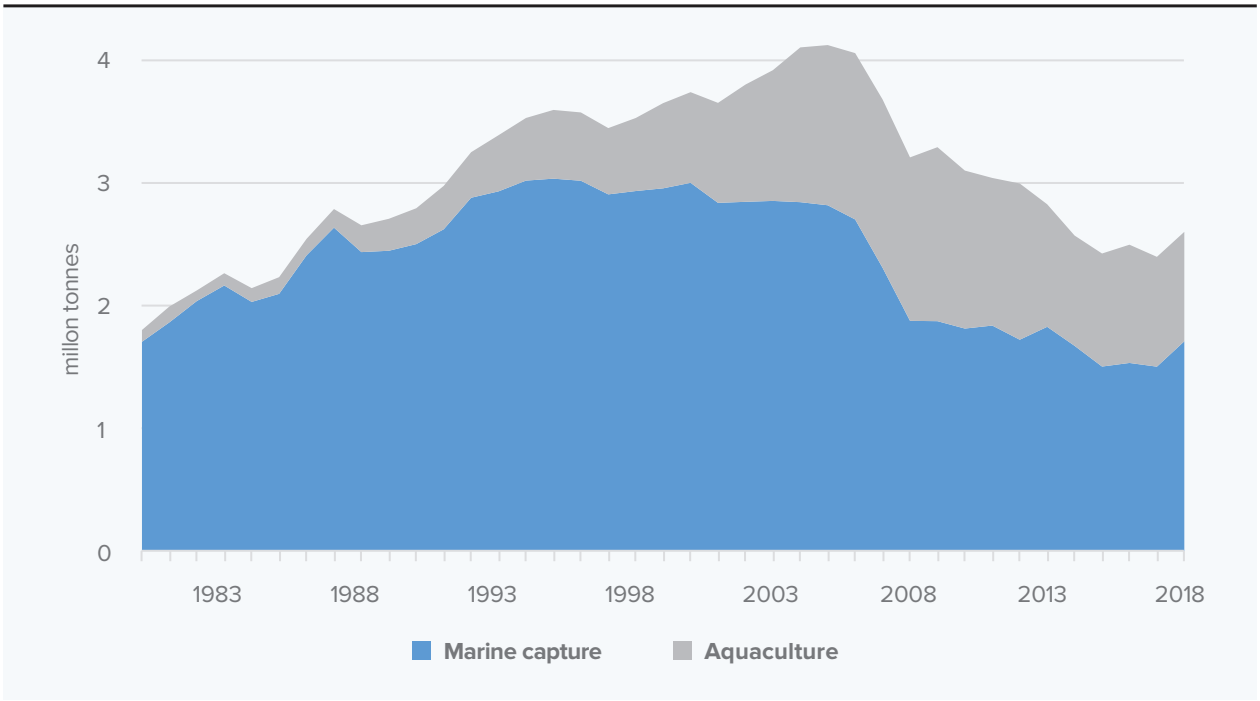
In 2017, the European Union issued a "yellow card", threatening to block imports of fish and seafood from Thailand, on grounds of the scale of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Both the EU and US raised concerns over trafficking of labour in Thailand's fishing industry. Once authorities implemented new controls, the yellow card was lifted in early 2019, after which trawler owners mounted a campaign to roll back the new controls. The government agreed to pay compensation and to buy back some trawlers to reduce the fleet. Negotiations on quotas are under way to limit overfishing.[28] Thailand pioneered the establishment of an ASEAN Network for Combatting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in order to enhance regional cooperation on this important issue. Following a decline in prawn aquaculture, there has been some success in restoring areas of mangrove forest.

The fishing industry is important to the economy and to the livelihoods of many households. However, the immoderate expansion of the industry has had negative consequences for human development. Small-scale coastal fishermen have been worst affected by the decline in stocks. Many people have been trafficked and employed in unreasonable conditions. Food security is at risk in the future.

27 FAO 2019.

28 *"EU withdraws ban threat on Thai fisheries after reforms", Bangkok Post, 8 January 2019; "Govt eases fishing regulations after protests", Bangkok Post, 19 December 2019.*

Figure 4.3 Fish: marine capture and aquaculture, 1980–2018

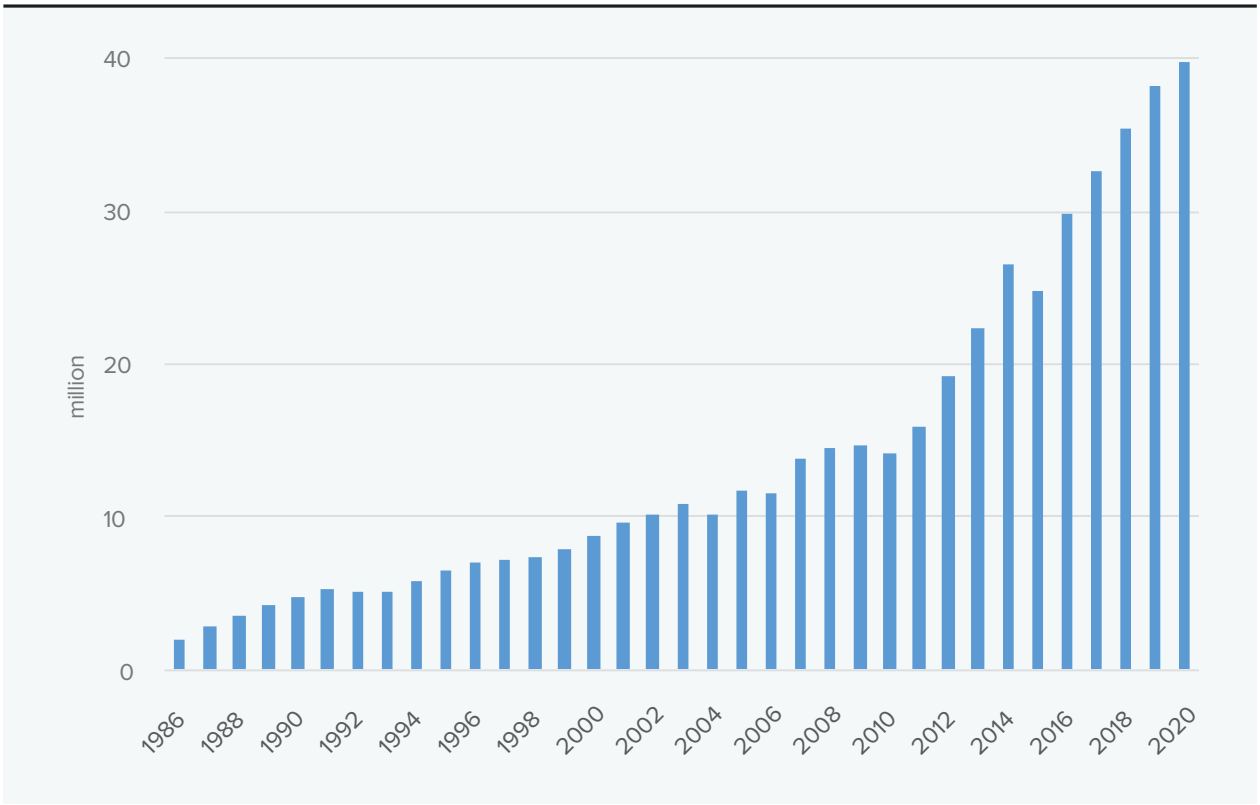


Source: FAO 2019.

The exploitation of the marine environment by tourism has also been immoderate and unsustainable. Thailand's beaches and islands are a major tourist attraction. The successful promotion of these and other attractions boosted tourist arrivals, growing from 14 million to almost 40 million between 2010 and 2019, an average addition of 3 million visitors per year (Figure 4.4). Tourist numbers combined with rising sea-level are damaging coastal areas. In the early 2000s, marine biologists began to notice an acceleration in damage to coral, especially from pollution caused by plastic and by waste from expanded tourist facilities. In 2018, they estimated that the damaged proportion of coral reefs had increased from 30 to 77 percent over a decade.[29] The destruction of coral reefs and mangrove forests has increased coastal erosion by making areas more vulnerable to storms. In 2018 the resort of Pattaya had to rebuild its beach with 360,000 cubic metres of new sand. In 2019, Maya Bay, made famous in the movie *The Beach* and then visited by five thousand people a day, was closed for two years to allow the deteriorated environment to recover.

29 "Ecologist rates coral reef decay as alarming", *Bangkok Post*, 29 January 2018.

Figure 4.4 Tourist arrivals, 1986–2019



Source: World Bank databank; Ministry of Tourism and Sports

Plastic waste not only damages coral but kills marine life and contaminates the food we eat. Awareness of marine pollution has grown with a steady stream of media stories on the fate of fish, dugong, sharks, whale sharks and turtles fouled by plastic waste and discarded fishing gear. Thailand is the 6th largest contributor of marine waste in the world, especially plastic. Since 2018, the Royal Thai Government has begun a programme of raising public awareness of the problem, and phasing out plastic products that contribute to waste. In 2019 it spearheaded the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN. In January 2020 it launched a ban on single-use plastic bags that was generally well received by the public. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the momentum on this issue. The use of plastic has surged for many hygienic purposes and especially in the rapid growth of food delivery services. It is important to get this programme back on track by reviving public attention to the issue and ensuring that the *Thailand 2018–2030 Roadmap on Plastic Waste Management* is updated and implemented.[30]

NGOs, agencies and activists engaged in projects to rehabilitate mangroves, combat coral bleaching, and restore coastal habitats have taken inspiration from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, especially the importance of moderation and resilience. These principles should be more widely adopted in the post-pandemic era. Communities that have suffered from the over-exploitation should be empowered to shape the future course of these industries (See box: Communities and the coastline). These communities include the small-scale coastal fishermen who have suffered from the over-fishing, and the local communities in tourist area whose voice has been smothered in the race to expand the size and profits of the tourist industry.

30 PRD 2019b.

Communities and the coastline

Thailand's long coastline is a thing of great beauty and great bio-diversity. Over the last forty years it has also been a battleground. The old local communities make their livelihood from fish, shellfish, and other natural resources. This livelihood has been threatened by large fishing boats with destructive equipment that have severely reduced fish stocks in the coastal waters, by aquaculture that rips out mangroves and spills out pollution, and by tourism that encroaches on land. There has been a string of protests along the coasts, but in general the local communities and the ecosystem have been the losers in these battles.

Yet there are a few examples that show how empowerment can swing the balance in favour of the communities and the natural environment.

Baan Bang La is a small community on the coast of Phuket Island, one of the centres of Thailand's tourism development. The community members make their living from fishing and from the rich life in the mangrove forest along the coast. But, as Phuket's tourism boomed, the mangrove was being nibbled away for resorts, yacht marinas, and housing for those made rich on income from tourism. In 2004, the remaining mangrove saved Baan Bang La by serving as a defence against the devastation of the Andaman tsunami. This stirred the community to act.

They negotiated with the local authorities to have the remaining 192 hectares of mangrove designated as a conservation zone under their management from 2007. They formed a management committee of 18 people, all women. They divided the mangrove into zones for total conservation and economic exploitation. They assigned a section for the young people in the community to get them involved in the management. They also set up a savings group and green energy projects.

The success of the project was marked when endangered species of otter and dolphin returned to this habitat after a gap of thirty years. In 2017, the project won the UNDP Equator Prize which recognizes community projects for sustainable development. It has become a model, copied in nearby localities, feted with prizes and grants, and serving now as a learning centre.

This is a case where a local community empowered themselves through organization, and gained agency by negotiating with local authorities, and where the benefits accrued both to the community in terms of livelihood and to the natural environment. Such cases are resonant but they are rare. Yet, looking backwards, the booms in export-oriented fishing, aquaculture, and now tourism have proved both destructive and unsustainable. Perhaps it is time to pay more attention to the demands of local communities.[31]

5. Manage the forests for harmony and sustainability

Forests are the main source of livelihood for many households, and of ancillary income for many more. In indirect ways, they influence the supply of water and the quality of the air. Tropical and subtropical forests are great stores of biodiversity and play a vital role in carbon capture. They grow quickly. Expanding the area of tropical and subtropical forests is one of the "nature-based solutions" that can significantly mitigate climate change.[32] Forests are also a powerful symbol of the human relationship with nature. His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej was fascinated with techniques for regenerating tropical and subtropical forests. Her Majesty Queen Sirikit patronized the recovery of coastal mangroves.

SDG 15, Life on Land reads: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. Progress on this SDG 15 is stagnating and attaining the target presents "significant challenges" in large part because of the forest issue.

Thailand's forests suffered during Thailand's era of rapid development in the later 20th century. Forest cover shrank from around 60 percent of total area in the mid-20th century to possibly less than 20 percent (the estimates are varied and controversial) by 1990.[33] A target to restore the level to 40 percent has been part of the national agenda

31 Equator Initiative 2019.
32 UNDP 2020c, pp. 185–190.
33 Hirsch 1990, 1993.

for thirty years, and remains in the long-term national plan. There have been countless forest regeneration projects over the years, both by government and private initiative, but the achievement to date has fallen short of the target.[34] Possibly as a result of global warming and with some human intervention, forest fires have contributed to more and more PM2.5 haze[35] in the cool season, with adverse effects on health and economy.

At the crux of the issue over forests is a debate over strategy. Many thousands of people reside in areas defined as forest. On one side of the debate are the excluders. They believe that humans destroy forests by logging, poaching and swidden farming. They argue that people must be moved out and the forests managed by experts. On the other side are the guardians. They claim their communities have been resident in the areas defined as forest for a long time, and know and cherish the forests . They argue that these communities can and will protect the forests if they are allowed to live there in peace with secure rights to their land.[36]

In 1999, government began a Forest Community Registration Programme. Communities that registered with the programme were allowed to make use of the forest in return for managing it under rules agreed with local officials. By 2018, 11,114 villages had registered, covering around a seventh of the official area of reserved forest. The programme appears to have worked well. By 2018, the forest cover in the registered areas had increased by around 6 percent, and the number of forest fires had significantly declined. However, the programme was not extended to areas defined as national parks, a quarter of which also have resident communities. Here there had been no similar improvement in forest cover or forest fires.[37] Communities resident in the parks, which number around 4,000, had pinned their hopes on a Community Forest Bill which has been drafted and redrafted in versions reflecting each side of the debate for over 25 years. A version based on the excluders' agenda was finally passed in 2019. Some guardian communities promptly announced that they would cease monitoring the forest fires that occur naturally in the hot season—with disastrous results (see box: Successes and failures in Mae Chaem).[38]

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy would suggest the application of moderation and reasonableness to find a compromise between the two sides which accommodates both participation and expertise. The experience of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation at Doi Tung can serve as a guide. Experiments along these lines, inspired in part by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, have already been launched in some northern forests. These projects are testing models for achieving cooperation at the local level between forest-resident communities and local officialdom. The models are based on regulations and codes of practice agreed between the two sides, and systems for monitoring. They exemplify the approach highlighted in the global *Human Development Report 2020*: "Nature-based solutions are typically bottom-up.... They often rely on the participation and initiative of indigenous peoples and local communities.... Local nature-based solutions have the potential to contribute to transformational change."[39] His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej expressed a similar sentiment:

> **"There are three things in forests: firewood, fruit and wood for building houses. People—both highlanders and lowlanders—have knowledge about these things.... They've been working for generations and have done it well. They're clever and know where to grow crops and where the trees should be kept.[40]"**

If government "drew lines on paper," defining an area as forest, and thus defining the people already living there as trespassers, it was wrong, His Majesty said, "They have human rights. It's a case of the government violating the people, not the people violating the law."[41]

Hopefully these experiments will give rise to a middle way which can be incorporated in a revised

34 The official figure for 2018 is 31.7 percent; http://forestinfo.forest.go.th/Content.aspx?id=72.
35 Atmospheric pollution from particulate matter measuring 2.5 microns or less.
36 Forsyth and Walker 2008.
37 Chankrajang 2019.
38 "Community Forest Bill won't benefit all, campaigners say", Bangkok Post, 21 February 2019; Ekachai 2020.
39 UNDP 2020c, p. 129.
40 Grossman and Faulder 2011, pp. 256–257
41 Pinthong 1991, p. kho; Grossman and Faulder 2011, p. 246.

Community Forestry Act, opening the way for a new era of sustainable forest management and successful reforestation.

As part of the Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model, the government in 2020 announced plans to increase the overall green coverage to 55 per cent by 2037.[42] In 2018 the National Biobank of Thailand was established to oversee the long-term preservation of biomaterials, including plants and microorganisms, and biodata, using information technology and complying with international standards.

Successes and failures in Mae Chaem

Mae Chaem is an area of watershed forests west of Chiang Mai. A fifth of the forest area has been converted to agriculture. In the 2000s, demand from China's growing economy prompted a boom in maize. After-harvest burning of maize stalks worsened the haze that cloaks the region, including Chiang Mai City, around year-end. When maize prices dropped in 2011, community leaders and local officials got together with corporate social responsibility executives to plan for the future. They used GPS to properly assess the resources. They agreed a short-term plan mainly aimed to minimize the haze by developing water resources to moisten the forest and deploying villagers as forest guards. They set out a long-term plan to transition away from maize to agroforestry and other chemical-free crops, and to regenerate the forest. By 2016 the fires were under control. The Thailand Development Research Institute surveyed the project and gave an enthusiastic judgement:

"The change resulting from switching the farming practices in Mae Chaem to chemical-free sustainable agroforestry comes with many dimensions. The farmers are enjoying better health. Relationships within their families have improved. So has their sense of well-being. The consumers, meanwhile, are safe from foods contaminated by toxic farm chemicals. With better health among the locals, the central government has less of a financial burden in taking care of people suffering from chemical poisoning. The environmental impact is also impressive. The forests are returning, serving as a carbon sink to alleviate climate change. Such local efforts help significantly save the country's resources in tackling environmental problems."

TDRI calculated that the social return on the project was around seven times the amount invested.

The local communities, who claim to have been resident in Mae Chaem for a long time, believed their cooperation in the project would be rewarded with secure land rights. But after a change in government and change in local officials, the authorities returned to arresting villagers on grounds of forest encroachment. The villagers responded by ceasing to police forest fires. The haze returned with a vengeance in 2019–2020. Somkiat Meetham, a local environmental activists claimed: "If the officials believe they can look after the forests by themselves, let them. This is what the local villagers feel.... Land rights and community-based forest conservation is the answer. Yet, power and prejudice prevail."[43]

42 NESDC 2019a, ch. 18.

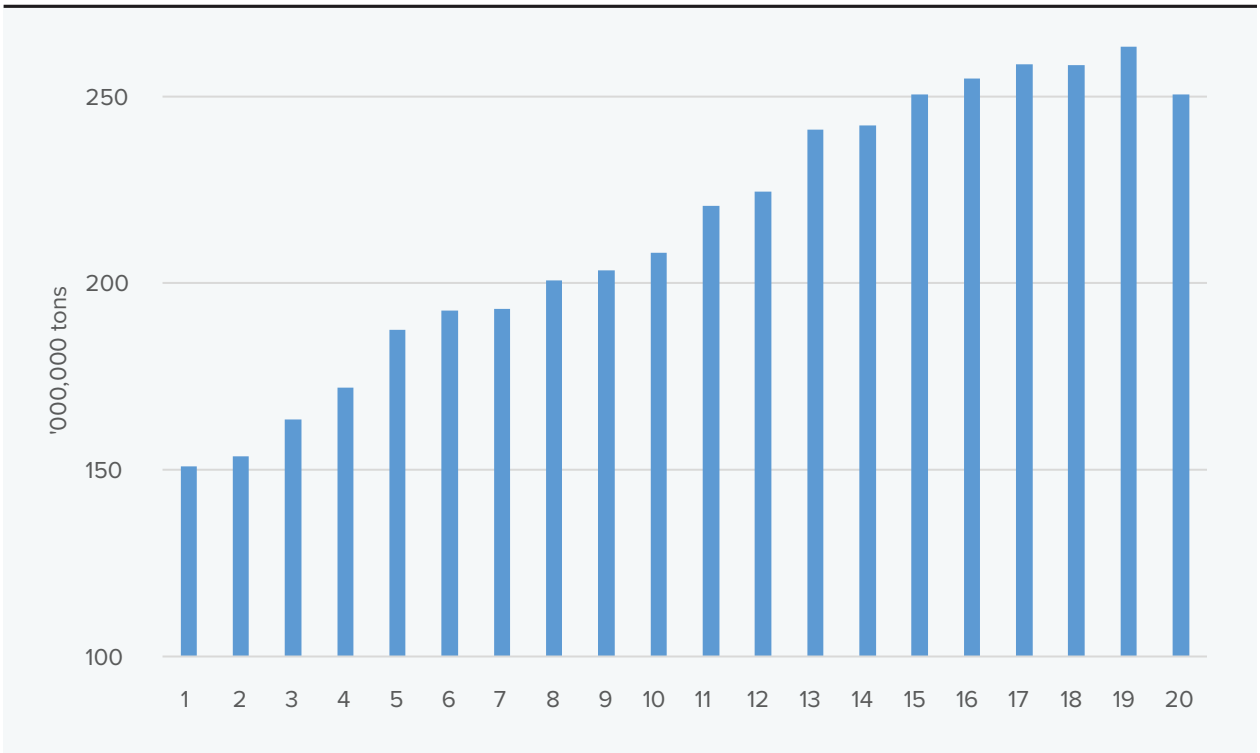
43 Thampanishvong and Butpho 2020; Ekachai 2020; Chankrajang 2019; Open Development Thailand 2019.

6. Act urgently on climate change

SDG 13 urges countries to "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts" by integrating climate measures into national policies and plans, raising public awareness, and building the capacity for resilience and adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

Per capita emission of greenhouse gases in Thailand is close to the world average. Emissions of CO_2, the largest component, grew 66 percent between 2000 and 2019, but have levelled off in recent years (Figure 4.5). Thailand has been active and consistent in joining global efforts to address the climate crisis. Thailand was among the first countries to sign the Paris Agreement in 2015, giving a provisional commitment to reduce emissions by 20 percent by 2030, or 25 percent if financial and technical assistance is available. In October 2020, Thailand became one of the first countries to confirm its commitment to the Agreement, with the figures unchanged. It explained that measures to meet this commitment had been built into planning for water management, agriculture and food, security, tourism, health, natural resource management, and human settlement and security.[44]

Figure 4.5 CO2 emissions, 2000–2019



Note: Excluding land use change
Source: EPPO 2020.

44 ONEP 2020. The commitment is measured against a business-as-usual projection of emissions from a base year of 2005. The commitment is officially called the "nationally determined contribution".

Since the 2015 Paris Agreement, evidence has mounted that the impacts of climate change are closer and more severe than earlier projected, requiring more ambitious targets.[45] In November 2021, Thailand pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2065, and noted that the targets could be achieved earlier with the provision of adequate and timely international support. In 2022, Thailand submitted a revised set of commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Thailand's early commitment and its revised pledge are highly welcome but the task ahead is daunting. In confirming its commitment on the agreement, Thailand noted that the difficulties in meeting the commitment included "uncertainties of climate change and its impacts, lack of data and researches on coping capacities and vulnerabilities in sectors and local area, lack of tools and methods to support implementation, and a lot of institutional barriers to encompass sectoral and political boundaries".[46] It drew special attention to the technical difficulties and costs in converting the electricity grid to handle a higher proportion from renewables.

Hard decisions are being taken. The latest national Power Development Plan aims to increase Thailand's renewable energy to 30 percent of the total energy production by 2037, doubling from 15 per cent at present. By 2030, 30 per cent of all new vehicles produced in Thailand must be electric vehicles.[47] But delivering on this commitment will not be easy, not only for technical reasons, but also because of the need for popular support for the investments and changes needed. While government agencies and academic bodies are well aware of climate change, the issue has low priority among the public at large.[48] To heighten public awareness, a Thailand Climate Action Conference was held for the first time in August 2022. The aim is to mobilize participation and resources, particularly from the private sector, through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

There are two areas where Thailand has natural advantages to contribute to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The first is in the area of increasing forest cover. This has been considered under priority 5 above. The second is in solar energy. Thailand still looks to coal as a cheap source for future energy, but this is an illusion. There is a plentiful supply of sunlight. Costs of solar capture have already fallen. Costs of storage are set to follow. The necessary grid technologies are already installed elsewhere. At present the projections for tapping solar energy are rather modest. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand has impressive and innovative plans, including floating solar farms on reservoirs, and several private firms are contributing under the Independent Power Producer and related schemes. However, domestic solar installation remains very limited. Such installations are important not only for their contribution to energy supply, but because there tends to be a positive feedback loop between investment and attitudes. For householders and small businesses, making an investment in solar installations primarily on economic grounds tends to build a wider commitment to support for action on climate change.[49]

Besides reduction of emissions, there is a need to limit the exploitation of materials of all kinds that has increased so dramatically with industrialization and urbanization, especially over the past century. The *Human Development Report 2020* calls this task "closing material cycles" or "reducing the material footprint" by extracting less and recycling more. According to the *Report's* calculations, Thailand's per capita material footprint is rather high compared to other countries at a similar level of per capita GDP and human development.[50]

Thailand has launched a Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model with the aim of combining technology with Thailand's strengths in biological diversity and cultural richness in order to develop new areas of economic growth that are green and sustainable. The Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model aims to promote more balanced and sustainable economic growth by paying more attention to the social and environmental aspects. The model combines three elements: the Bio-Economy converts renewable biological resources

45 IPCC 2021.
46 ONEP 2020: 6.
47 https://www.thaigov.go.th/news/contents/details/58686
48 Rahman et al. 2020.
49 Poortinga et al. 2018.
50 UNDP 2020c, p. 36, and annex table A7.1.

into value-added products using technology and innovation; *the Circular Economy* eliminates waste and pollution by prioritizing natural inputs and keeping them in use by recycling; **the Green Economy** draws on natural processes to benefit human beings equitably and inclusively without jeopardizing the sustainability of ecosystems.

The project focusses on four industries: agriculture and food; medical and wellness; bioenergy, biomaterial and biochemical; and tourism and creative economy. The strategy is to promote research, build infrastructure, adjust the regulatory framework, promote start-ups and develop clusters.[51] In 2018, government created the National Biobank of Thailand to support projects of conservation and research on conservation of natural resources. The Biobank's mission is the long-term preservation of biomaterials, including plants and microorganisms, and biodata.[52] Government is encouraging development of the plastic industry to achieve the twin goals of reducing plastic waste and taking advantage of the projected growth of the international market for returnable packaging.

Confronting the social impacts of climate change is another challenge. The government has a project to track the emerging science on the local physical impact, and has compiled a *Climate Change Master Plan (2015-2050)*, covering emissions, mitigation, adaptation, and capacity-building.[53] However, the social impact of climate change in Thailand is still under-studied.

In 2020, the UN-IPCC declared "Climate change will hit the tropics harder first."[54] The major physical impact is already being felt in weather patterns. Rainfall always varies from year to year, month to month, and place to place through the fickleness of the monsoon showers and storms. But there are long-term trends that are well-attested. Average temperature is rising and average rainfall is falling. Spells of drought are becoming deeper, longer, and more frequent. This trend is worse in the North, Northeast, and South regions. Instances of flood are becoming less frequent, but deeper and longer.[55] The primary consequence is greater incidence of localized crop failures. Patterns of disease are also being affected. Climate change is probably behind the surge of dengue fever cases in the region. Heat stress is increasing, especially in cities which are developing "heat islands" with temperatures several degrees higher than average.[56] The rising sea level is nibbling at the coasts and will soon affect the capital, where several areas are scarcely above sea level and sinking because of the extraction of groundwater.[57]

The greater incidence of drought and flood falls heaviest on marginal farmers. In the last resort, they are forced to abandon the land and migrate. Typically they gravitate to the urban areas, and especially the capital and other larger cities where opportunities appear greater. The cities will be caught in a pincer movement of rising poor population and rising heat.

Some cities in Europe and China have begun to prepare for similar trends by projects for "greening" to minimize the physical impact and cushion the social impact. They are replacing hard surfaces (concrete, asphalt) with grass, expanding tree cover, creating "sponges" for water storage, reducing the space devoted to vehicles, as well as creating more public facilities.

Thailand should continue to prepare for the social impact of climate change through similar projects organized on the principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Following the call for "Explosion from Within", these projects should rely heavily on people participating alongside government agencies, especially local government bodies. The projects should follow the 3S model of starting small and building knowledge and capabilities with the ultimate aim of a sustainable result. The techniques used should follow the royal development principle of "Using Nature to Cure Nature". This will contribute to Thailand's achievement of SDG11, Sustainable Cities and Communities.

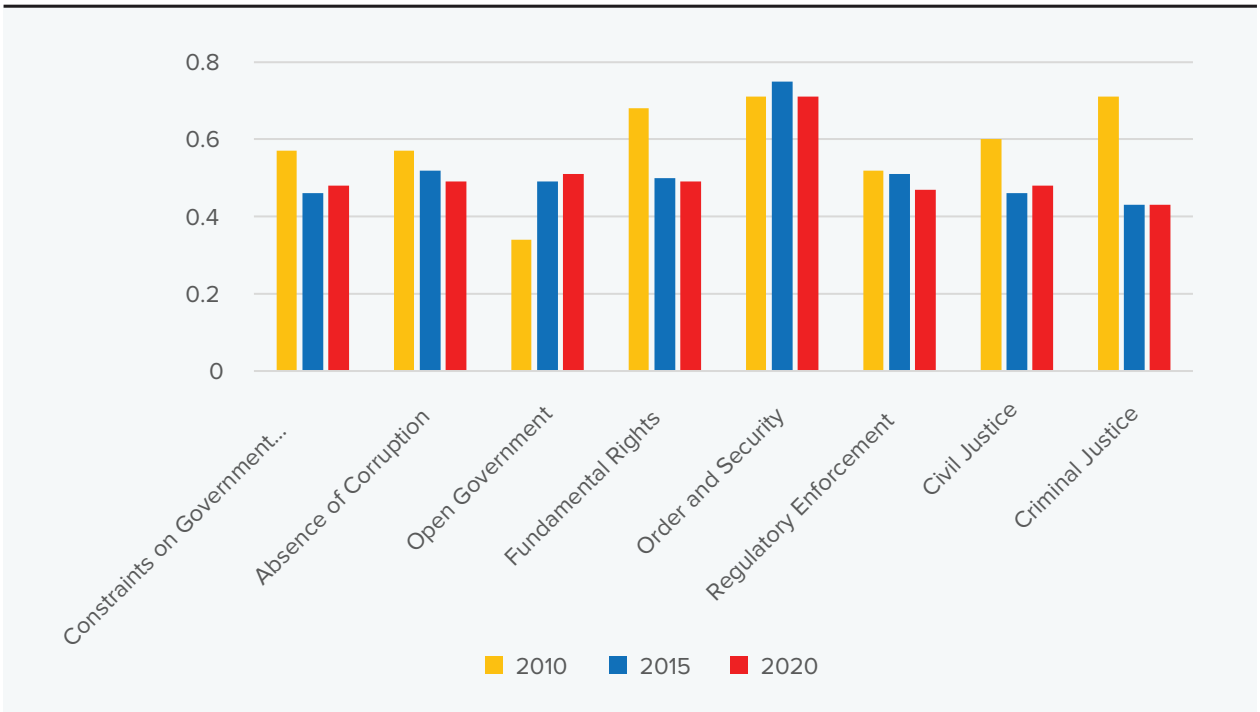
51 http://www.nxpo.or.th/th/en/bcg-in-action/.
52 https://www.nbtthailand.org/
53 ONEP 2015.
54 UNDP 2019a, p. 179.
55 Dr. Seri Supharadit, www.thairath.co.th/spotlight/watercrisis/.
56 Marks and Connell 2023.
57 Thai-Glob 2017.

7. Secure peace, safety and justice for al

One of the prerequisites of human development is to ensure that people are safe and feel safe. SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions reads: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The aim is to eradicate violence, conflict, corruption, and human trafficking, while promoting the rule of law, participatory government, access to information, and fundamental rights of speech and assembly. According to the 2020 assessment, Thailand's performance on this SDG is stagnating and significant challenges remain.

Despite many high-profile campaigns, Thailand's rating on the Transparency International index for corruption has scarcely improved over recent years.[58] On the World Justice Project's Rule of Law index, which covers several topics under this SDG, Thailand ranks 71st out of 128 countries in 2020. On the sub-measures of constraints on government, protection of fundamental rights, and access to civil and criminal justice, there has been a trend of decline since 2010 (Figure 4.6).[59] On the Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders, Thailand has fallen steeply from 59th among 167 countries in 2005, to 140th among 180 in 2020.[60] But there are positive signs. A survey in 2014 found that the level of corruption experienced by ordinary people at government offices had halved over the previous 15 years.[61] Thailand was raised from Tier 2 Watchlist to Tier 2 on the US State Department rating in 2018 in recognition of changes made to curb human trafficking and regulate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Figure 4.6 Thailand on the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index, 2010, 2015, 2020



Source: World Justice Project 2010, 2015, 2020

58 http://www.transparency.org/en/countries/thailand#

59 http://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/
60 http://rsf.org/en/Thailand.
61 Pasuk et al. 2014.

More people are prepared to speak out against instances of injustice, especially those where the rich and powerful seem to possess impunity. There has been a resurgence of activists and organizations dedicated to furthering human rights, judicial reform, and protection of the media. Both individuals, such as activist lawyers, and organizations, such as Thai Lawyers for Human Rights and Prachatai, have won international awards for their contributions to human rights. A Thai publisher won the prestigious Prix Voltaire from the International Publishers Association. [62] In part these trends reflect a generational shift. Those under 40 today are better off, better educated, more worldly, more confident and more demanding than their forebears. This trend is set to strengthen in the future.

The Thailand Institute of Justice, a public organization founded in 2011, has a mission to promote changes which enhance the rule of law, criminal justice systems and crime prevention.[63] The new president of the Supreme Court has promised that the courts will become "the first refuge of the people, not the last."[64]

One aim of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a society at peace with itself. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy lends support for the empowerment of people and communities to take charge of their own lives, including their own safety and security. At a degree ceremony in 1968, HM the Late King Adulyadej said: "As law is only a tool for maintaining justice, it should not be counted more important than justice, but rather that justice comes before law and is above law".[65] And on another similar occasion:

> **"The happiness and prosperity that people seek can be achieved, but by actions that are ethical in intention and execution, not by chance or by fighting and grabbing from others. True prosperity is something creative because it gives benefit to others and to people in general as well.[66]"**

62 https://tlhr2014.com/en/archives/50002; https://prachatai.com/english/node/9723; https://prachatai.com/english/node/7684; https://prachatai.com/english/category/international-publishers-association-ipa
63 http://www.tijthailand.org/home.
64 http://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-57096365.
65 Chulalongkorn University, 7 August 1968.
66 Chulalongkorn University, 10 July 1975.

8. Reduce inequalities in income, wealth, power and public goods

SDG 10 calls for a reduction of inequalities in income as well as those based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status within a country, by boosting incomes of the lower 40 percent, promoting political inclusion, breaking down institutional barriers and discriminatory practices, and providing better social protection.

Inequality in wealth is exceptionally high. Inequality in income has improved only marginally in recent years. There are large number of "near poor" barely above the poverty line. TDRI suggests that the gap between the bottom and middle of the income distribution has widened although the Gini coefficient has not risen.[67] The impact of the COVID-19 impact on informal workers and small businesses[68] may have pushed the Gini coefficient of income up to 0.5.[69] In addition, there are inequalities in access to power, public goods, justice, and respect. Some inequalities are legacies from the past. Some are the result of newly constructed monopolies in business.

Reducing inequalities is an important goal in its own right, but is also key to the pursuit of human development as a whole. Inequalities obstruct collective action. A "whole-of-society response" to the challenges of today will emerge only when the society feels like a whole, rather than a collection of deeply different and divided parts.

Reducing inequality has become part of the national agenda since the early 2010s, but little has been done. The following is a list of suggestions.

- Assess the distributional impact of all public policies.
- Adjust the tax system to properly tax high incomes and wealth.
- Allocate more of the state budget to social protection and welfare.
- Revise laws that support monopolies in business and enforce the existing anti-monopoly legislation.
- Decentralize by devolving power and budget to local government.

67 TDRI 2017.
68 Asia Foundation 2020.
69 Jitsuchon 2020.

- Reduce the quality gaps in education.
- Sustain and reinforce the universal health coverage system.
- Urgently provide for income, health care and other requirements of an ageing society.
- Counter the unevenness in access to technology among individuals and businesses.
- Ensure fair access to power through democratic institutions.

Improving data on human development

His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej always collected data when travelling to remote areas and used the data to plan development projects suitable to the area. Comprehensive data is needed in order to design evidence-based policies to ensure that no one is left behind.

One criterial for assessing the robustness of Thailand's data gathering and analysis system is its ability to provide information required for monitoring progress on the SDG goals. Over 230 indicators are used to calculate progress on the 17 goals. Yet, this information is not readily available, especially disaggregated according to region, province, municipality, sex, age, income, disability, and migration status. In the 2020 evaluation, progress on two of the SDGs could not be assessed because of lack of information. These were SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities and SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production. Data was also missing to monitor SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals.[70] Overall, disaggregated data for calculating SDG progress for sub-populations is not consistently available or reliable (see Table 4.1).

Even in cases where data is available, access can be difficult because data sources are scattered across many different institutions, and there are no tools for facilitating access. Consultancy companies usually charge fees to overcome these barriers.

There is an urgent need to invest more in improving data collection needed for human development. As UN-ESCAP notes, "the Asia-Pacific region faces a big challenge to fill data gaps in the decade ahead to achieve the SDGs".[71]

70 See UNDP 2020a, pp. 444–445.
71 UN-ESCAP 2020, p. 45.

Table 4.1 Data availability to calculate SDGs through disaggregated indicators

SDGs	Number of Fields Required	Number of Fields Available	% Availability
Goal 1	126	7	5.6
Goal 2	117	12	10.3
Goal 3	243	25	10.3
Goal 4	99	10	10.1
Goal 5	126	15	11.9
Goal 6	99	4	4.0
Goal 7	54	0	0.0
Goal 8	153	11	7.2
Goal 9	108	0	0.0
Goal 10	99	5	5.1
Goal 11	153	8	5.2
Goal 12	117	0	0.0
Goal 13	72	4	5.6
Goal 14	90	0	0.0
Goal 15	126	2	1.6
Goal 16	207	2	1.0
Goal 17	225	11	4.9

Source: Authors' calculation based on SDG meta data provided by the National Statistical Office.

9. Engage regionally and globally to promote sustainable development

The SDGs cannot be achieved by any one country alone and that is why SDG 17 with its emphasis on cooperation and partnership is very important. Thailand is recognized as a champion of sustainable development and the attainment of the SDGs, both at the UN, at the regional level of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), and in the broader international community. Thailand must sustain these important roles in the face of challenges to come.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Leave No One Behind

In Chapter 2 we identified eight vulnerable groups with the warning that this list is not comprehensive. How to ensure that these and other vulnerable people are not left behind?

As shown in Chapter 2, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy serves as a guide for individuals and communities for taking decisions which expand their capabilities and increase their opportunities to live the lives they deserve. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy also provides inspiration for corporate social responsibility projects and social enterprises which target disadvantage groups. As shown by Plai Phraya Municipality, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can also provide a working framework for local government bodies to prioritize assistance to vulnerable members of the community in a very efficient fashion.

In addition, the nine priority areas for human development identified in this chapter will all contribute to leaving no on behind.

Developing quality education for all must put emphasis on providing access for all children from the pre-school stage, improving quality across the range of schools, and developing scheme for "resilient students" on the OECD model.

Empowering people through local government must ensure local bodies have the budgets and authority to help vulnerable groups in local communities.

Making society more resilient through better social protection should expand the provisions and increase the efficiency of schemes for the "bottom ten", ageing population, informal workers, migrant workers, stateless persons, vulnerable children, persons with disabilities and LGBTIs as detailed above.

Reversing the decline in the marine environment should empower the coastal communities whose livelihoods have been prejudiced by large-scale fishing and mass tourism.

Managing the forests for harmony and sustainability should allow marginalized communities, including ethnic minorities, to continue their traditional practices and contribute to the preservation and regeneration of forests in cooperation with government agencies.

Acting urgently on climate change must place emphasis on preparing for the impact on marginalized farmers and vulnerable groups in the cities.

Securing peace, safety and justice for all should uphold human rights and community rights, ensure equal treatment before the law, and allow the voices of all to be heard.

Reducing inequalities in income, wealth, power and public goods will increase the capacities of all, including the most vulnerable groups, to develop their capacity to live the lives they deserve.

Engaging regionally and globally to promote sustainable development will help the attainment of the SDGs both regionally and globally.

Looking Ahead: Human development, crisis, and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

As this report is completed, the COVID-19 pandemic is officially over, but the impact on human development is severe, and there will be no return to an "old normal".

Crises create opportunities, and big crises such as the pandemic that started in early 2020 create big opportunities. How to look at those opportunities through the lens of human development and with the mindset of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy?

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy presents a pathway towards more balanced growth and attainment of the SDGs in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philosophy focuses on all aspects of development with an aim of building resilience at all levels. It provides a lens through which to see the future of capitalism, economic activity, industrial policy and technological advancements. The moderation mindset at the core of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can lead to a more balanced approach to development and achievement of the SDGs. At present nine provinces and five local government authorities are engaged on pilot projects for "localizing" the agenda of the SDGs by taking into account the local context and adjusting the goals and the methods. The application of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in the execution of these projects can lead to more practical solutions to meeting the development needs of each locality.

The priority for the immediate future will be to provide support for the millions of people who have lost their employment and livelihood. This is an opportunity to create a comprehensive framework of social protection with long-term benefit for human development. Special attention will need to be paid to the most vulnerable groups and to those people who often fall through the gaps. The design should meet the Royal Development Principle of achieving "Economy and Simplicity with Maximum Benefits", and the means for financing the system should be transparent and secure.

A second priority will be to further strengthen the public health system which has dramatically proved its worth in the COVID-19 crisis. This crisis will not be the last pandemic, and in some ways, it prefigures the coming impacts from climate change. The WHO has commended the performance of Thailand's public health system during the pandemic, but has also drawn attention to some weaknesses, particularly the limited supply of certain skilled personnel.[72] The future development of the internationally celebrated Universal Health Coverage system should be mapped out and the means found to finance this development. Studies may be needed on ways to expand and strengthen the network of health volunteers to meet future health crises including the new patterns of disease,

72 WHO 2020.

increased vulnerability to heat stress, and other expected impacts of climate change. Thailand should continue to promote international cooperation in this area, including through its chairmanship of the Group of Friends on Universal Health Coverage at the UN.

What can be done to shape the recovery to benefit human development? Over the past decade, the growth in the national economy had become over-dependent on tourism. The total tourist arrivals spurted from 16 million to 40 million in one decade. It is hard to imagine that this expansion met the conditions of moderation, reasonableness and resilience. The upside has been that tourism generates a lot of employment, but the downsides have been the impact on the environment, on local cultures, and on communities that have suffered in various ways. When coral reefs are being damaged by the pollution from tourists who have come to see the coral, then the situation is clearly not resilient or sustainable. The crisis is an opportunity for a rethink. People must be better empowered to participate in shaping tourist policy at the local level.

The economic recovery will require a sustained effort by the whole nation. Thailand will receive little help from outside because most of the world is in a worse state. Government can only do so much. Recovery will have to come from within, from bottom up, from empowering people, communities and businesses to develop their own potential, and ensuring they have the agency to act. The task of the government will be to break down the structures and barriers which currently disempower people or hinder their empowerment. Shifting power and resources from central to local government will increase the opportunities for people to participate in projects which are tailored to the needs and resources of each locality. Enhancing people's rights and freedoms will increase their ability to contribute to the recovery and to the advance of human development. Expanding non-standard forms of education will be important for retraining people for a new normal. Promoting the transition to a "green economy" will create new opportunities for entrepreneurship as well as preparing for climate change. The Bio-Circular-Green Model provides a framework for channelling investment and effort into activities which create sustainable development and address global environmental concerns. The route to a "whole-of-society response" lies in these directions.

In this crisis, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy's principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience, and its emphasis on self-reliance and sustainability, are more relevant than ever. In the 1997 financial crisis, His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej advised that "we have to take a careful step backwards" in order to find a foundation of self-reliance from which to move forward again. Six years later, in a spirit similar to the vision of human development, His Majesty noted that development had to be ambitious and all-embracing:

> **"Progress is not just about planting enough rice to eat. There must be enough to create schools, even works of art, so that Thailand prospers in every way, with no hunger or poverty, food for body and soul, and many other things.[73]"**

The COVID-19 pandemic has delivered a terrible reminder of our common humanity, our common vulnerability, our equality in the face of nature. Hopefully this lesson will shape the policies beyond the crisis.

[73] Dusit Palace, December 2003.

Conclusion

In recent decades, people in Thailand have had the opportunities and freedoms in general to live better lives. Hunger has disappeared. Poverty has dramatically declined. On average, people's real income is three times that of their parents. Inequality in income has declined. Many more are equipped with secondary or tertiary education. Virtually everyone has access to universal health care. Most markers of human development have steadily improved. Government has contributed policies that are people-centred and promote human security.

But the improvement in human development has slowed in recent years. That is partly to be expected because mountains become steeper nearer the peak. Economic growth has slackened, impacting on the supply of resources for social investments and programmes. There are also certain aspects of human development that the society finds more difficult to achieve than others because of historical legacies, cultural preferences, and institutional structures. Poverty has even slightly increased in some years. Inequality in income has improved, but remains comparatively high. Inequality in wealth may have worsened, and other inequalities remain—in access to power, access to education and other public services, and in social standing, respect and human dignity. Several vulnerable groups are at risk of being left behind, including those remaining in persistent poverty, migrant workers, the ageing with low education, vulnerable children, and those with disabilities. Women fare as well as men in many areas, including education, but remain vastly under-represented in the corridors of political power, with many consequences. LGBTI persons have won a large measure of acceptance and respect but still face prejudice and discrimination despite protective legislation. Thailand can rightly claim that its progress on LGBTI issues is among the more advanced in the world. Thailand's performance on international indices for rights, freedoms and the rule of law is cause for concern.

And there are new threats. New technologies are disrupting the labour market and making new demands on education systems. Climate change is already being felt in growing incidence of drought and flood, rising sea-levels, and the development of "heat islands" in cities. These trends will also have consequences for human development, for everyday lives, but exactly when and how is still not well understood.

Thailand has a lot in common with other middle-sized countries that were once classified as "developing" or "less developed" countries, but have graduated to "middle-income" status with rising levels of human development but many persistent inequalities, injustices and failings. But Thailand has one striking difference. Its traditional monarchy survived through the colonial era and into the modern world. The King who reigned from the middle of the twentieth century to the early part of the twenty-first involved himself deeply in development and left as part of his legacy an approach to development which puts people at the heart of policies and aligns closely with the UNDP's concept of human development.

This Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has a special status as a result of being authored by a monarch, but has also won domestic and international followers because of its proven impact on people's lives. Many individuals and communities who have applied its simple principles of moderation, reasonableness and resilience have been empowered to increase their own capabilities, opportunities and freedoms. Several communities and corporate enterprises have drawn on the three-stage model derived from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to plan and execute a long-term transformation in their well-being and prospects. Corporate social responsibility managers have adopted the approach to nurture projects of community development. Some local government bodies have applied the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy—empowering the members of their communities to expand their opportunities and capabilities, and ensuring that the most vulnerable are not left behind.

The synergies between the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the concept of human development have been recognized and explored before, including in the *Thailand Human Development Report 2007: Sufficiency Economy and Human Development*. They share a common focus on the development of human well-being rather than income alone, on the importance of empowerment, on the need for resilience to build sustainability, and on the balance between humanity and nature. This report set out to re-examine how the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can contribute to the goals of human development and in particular to those identified in the SDGs. But while the answers were being investigated, the scale of the

task was utterly transformed—by the COVID-19 pandemic.

By June 2020, UNDP concluded, "COVID-19 will have severe negative impacts on most SDGs.... it is gravely amplifying income inequalities and other forms of inequality.... The world will change markedly." [1] By December, it found that the pandemic had delivered "an unprecedented shock to human development" around the world.[2] In Thailand, large numbers dropped into poverty, and human development took a hit across the board.

UNDP has responded by taking a new look at the approach to human development. Enhancing people's capabilities and freedoms remains the core of the approach, but more emphasis is now placed on those areas where human development and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy have synergies—namely empowerment, resilience, the human-nature balance, plus heightened need for moderation in use of the planet's resources. More than ever, the task of advancing human development requires a "whole-of-society" involvement in the pursuit of "nature-based human development".[3]

From the start the Royal Thai Government has made an enthusiastic commitment to the SDGs, and has placed the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy at the heart of its planning under the headlines "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for SDGs", "Sufficiency for Sustainability" and the Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model.

For individuals, communities, corporates and public agencies, the adoption of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is a matter of choice. There is plenty of documentation in reports, videos, how-to books, and memoirs. The instructions, examples and learnings are easily available.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can also guide public policy. Over the time since His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej began to develop his approach, Thailand has been utterly transformed in two main ways: from an overwhelmingly rural society to one where the urban segment is relentlessly becoming dominant; and from a society where the intrusion of government was patchy and shallow to one where government is pervasive. The task of sustaining improvement in human development, and managing the new threats of pandemic, climate change and disruptive technology, now falls largely on public agencies and policy makers. Whether people are empowered or disempowered, included or excluded now depends heavily on government or on the cooperation between government and citizens.

Since 1998, all Thailand's major plans and policy documents, including the regular five-year plans and the 20-year National Strategy compiled in 2018, have been headed by a commitment to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model builds up from the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to guide policies that are both people-centric and planet-centric, that find the right balance between growth, human well-being, and the protection of the natural environment.

Here we suggest that the key principles of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy can be used to guide the choice of policy and evaluate the means of implementation. We propose a tentative list of questions, based mainly on those principles where human development and Sufficiency Economy Philosophy have strong synergies, namely *empowerment, resilience,* and the *human-nature balance*.

Does this policy take a moderate path, especially in the use of the planet's resources? Does it empower people to realise their own capabilities and dreams, and remove the barriers that disempower people? Does it build resilience, the capacity to manage the shocks which undermine people's capabilities, and thus to achieve progress that is sustainable, or does it expose people and resources to greater risks? Does it respect the balance between humanity and nature, on which all human achievement ultimately relies, or does it make reckless use of the planet?

In this report, we have identified nine priority areas for action to advance human development and to further Thailand's commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. They have been chosen on the basis of the analysis of Thailand's situation in Chapter 2, the progress report on the SDGs,[4] and this Sufficiency checklist. The nine recommendations include:

1 UNDP 2020a, pp. vi, 1.
2 UNDP 2020c, p. 7.
3 UNDP 2020c.
4 UNDP 2020a.

- Deliver quality education for all (SDG 4). Education is the basic means to empower people to improve their own lives. Thailand has improved the quantity of education but not its quality, and has only marginally moderated the inequalities in access. Solutions have been researched and proposed: improve the quality and quantity of pre-school education; introduce more accountability at primary and secondary levels; reform the tertiary sector to reflect changes in the demography, technology, and labour market.
- Empower people through local government. Elective local government is proven round the world to be an effective mechanism for providing public services which enhance people's lives. Around twenty years ago, Thailand launched a comprehensive framework of local government but then lost faith in the project and reversed to more centralized, bureaucratic control. People appreciated the benefits of local government. It is time to get this scheme back on track.
- Make society more resilient through better social protection. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the unevenness in Thailand's systems of social protection. Medical care is world-class and the Universal Health Coverage is rightly celebrated. But social security has gaps. Care of the aged is work-in-progress. Hopefully the pandemic will inspire efforts to provide a framework of social protection that conforms to UNDP's two-prong model of providing comprehensive coverage for basic services supplemented by targeted schemes for vulnerable groups, particularly those identified here as being at risk of being left behind.
- Reverse the decline in the marine environment (SDG 14). Thailand's past development has over-exploited the stock of natural resources in the pursuit of growth, with many consequences for health, well-being and the state of the environment. Fish stocks have declined because of over-fishing. The coastal environment has been damaged by under-controlled tourism. Policies to correct these excesses, including regional initiatives, have begun but will need to be sustained.
- Manage the forests for harmony and sustainability (SDG 15). Forests are important for livelihoods, biodiversity, and carbon capture. The effort to restore Thailand's forests has been hampered by conflicts over policy. Empowering local communities to work in harmony with officialdom can lead towards harmony and sustainable management of the forests.
- Act urgently on climate change (SDG 13). Thailand has made a firm commitment on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and must now confront the difficulties of delivering on that commitment. Climate change promises to propel more migrants into the cities at the same time as it creates "heat islands" there, with severe consequences for health and well-being. Several cities around the world are already pioneering policies to counter these trends. Thailand should follow their example by empowering local communities to improve the local environment and public facilities. Implementing the Bio-Circular-Green Economy will contribute.
- Secure peace, safety and justice for all (SDG 16). One of the goals and means of human development is that everyone should be safe and feel safe. On international measures of rights, freedoms and the rule of law, Thailand's scores have worsened in recent years. On the bright side, several new groups have begun to campaign to correct these trends. Empowering these groups will help build a happier and more resilient society.
- Reduce inequalities in income, wealth, power and public goods (SDG 19). Thailand remains a society with disparities and inequalities. Reducing inequality has been part of the national agenda for some years but with limited result. The distributional implications of all public policies should be scrutinized.
- Engage regionally and globally to promote sustainable development. The global challenges are accumulating, and no country can overcome these alone. Thailand should continue its role as a moderate, pragmatic champion of sustainable development at the regional and international levels.

This list has no claim to be comprehensive. The same approach can be applied to other areas of policy and other aspects of human development.

At the same time, special attention must be paid to those groups identified as being most at risk of being left behind.

- the Bottom Ten, the lowest tenth of the income distribution, mostly rural households with an older household head, large family size, and low levels of education;
- older person with low education who risk being left behind by the rapid transition to an ageing society and the rapid change in the labour market;
- informal workers who are not yet covered by social protection;
- over a million migrant workers from neighbouring countries who have only partial access to social protection;
- almost half a million people who are stateless;
- children brought up in "skipped generation households";
- persons with disabilities;
- and LGBTI persons who face discrimination in employment and other problems because the law giving them protection is not well known or effectively enforced.

Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted calls to build forward better, greener, and bluer, to take this opportunity to correct the failures in the past approach to development, and to make a serious commitment to managing climate change. This report, while far from comprehensive, hopes to make a contribution to this task by advancing the thinking on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in the context of the SDGs and the COVID-19 era. As UNDP has recently affirmed, "The SDGs provide an invaluable framework for recovery from COVID-19.... The SDGs were adopted to address unnecessary risks and fragilities across the economic, social, and environmental domains."[5] The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy came to prominence two decades ago because its framework of moderation, reasonableness and resilience had obvious appeal in a time of crisis. Both the human development approach and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy put people first. They are *by* people and *for* people. In the context of such a severe crisis, the call to Leave No One Behind is more difficult than ever, but also more important than ever. That is the great challenge of today.

Follow the path of moderation. Empower. Build resilience. Respect the human-nature balance. Leave No One Behind.

5 UNDP 2020a, p. 7.

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