

SOCIO-ECONOMIC NEEDS AND PROBLEMS: CHALLENGE TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN THAILAND

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Introduction

The ultimate objective of national development is to achieve the social and economic progress that would render the population of that country a higher standard of living in the forms of social security and economic welfare. Thailand, one of the developing countries in this region, has carried out no less than three 5-year economic and social development plans with the Fourth Plan in its first year of implementation. As with any sound development planning, the economic and social needs of the society were the main bases for formulating development programme in the previous plans.

Ever since the formulation of the first economic and social development plan in the last decade, education was solidly recognized as one of the most important factors contributing towards the fulfillment of the nation's development goals. National education development plan has always been an integral part of Thailand's national economic and social development plan.

The institutions of higher education in Thailand especially the universities have as their main responsibilities in regard to national development the four following functions:

1. Production of university graduates
2. Research activities
3. Public services
4. Cultural preservation and promotion

In the past, the role of graduate production by the institutions of higher education in Thailand was emphasized in serving the country's need for high-level manpower requirements. The implementation of the other three functions were not, therefore, carried out to a fuller extent. However, in the 4th Plan which commenced last year, four main functions, production of graduates, research, public services and the cultural preservation and promotion were stressed so that the institutions of higher education would be able to play their role more actively in regard to the overall national development.

The Classical Role

The classical role of the institutions of higher learning as recognized since the inception of the first university in Thailand more than 60 years ago, was to train the personnel to serve the society particularly the government sector. This classical role may be regarded as a direct service to the society as opposed to research activities which was carried out on a limited scale. In contrast, research was then considered an academic exercise and a part of the teaching function with the advancement of knowledge as the ultimate objective. It was much later that research activities were generally recognized as related and relevant to national development. Thus, the institution's readiness and capabilities in regard to research activities are un-

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derstandably limited. While provision of public services were mostly in the instruction-oriented form including short course training, dissemination of knowledge through various mass media, health services made available by the teaching hospitals, and agricultural promotion in the forms of extension work. The institutions of higher education performed these functions as academic-related and campus-based services.

The Public Service Role

Since the inception of the First National Economic and Social Development Plan in 1961, the roles of the institutions of higher education in Thailand have become more development-oriented. These institutions made great efforts to meet the rising demands for social progress by integrating social service activities into an essential part of all the major functions.

The off-campus, action-oriented projects formulated during this period assumed three common characteristics:

- concentrating on rural development in the areas which contain a large majority of the population
- responding to economic and social needs of the local communities
- utilization of multi-disciplinary approach in solving local problems and rendering services

Projects with the above-mentioned characteristics have been implemented by a number of universities, some of the more innovative projects categorized according to the basic functions are cited below:

A. Instruction-Related Projects

1. *Graduate Volunteer Programme — Thammasat University*

The conception of the graduate volunteer programme stemmed from the realization that graduate studies were only in the lecture rooms, laboratories and libraries on the one hand while the rural community has been lacking high-level manpower especially teachers in the local school on the other. Deriving from this initial thinking the graduate volunteer programme was formulated with the following objectives:

- a. to train the graduates to work for the public benefits
- b. to give the graduates the opportunity to be involved in field work in rural areas and to promote their interest therein, and
- c. to encourage them to use their initiatives and their human-relation skills that will be beneficial to the community in which they live.

The programme was initiated and organized in 1969. In the following year, the National Education Commission officially recognized the GVP's curriculum which was also recognized by the Civil Service Commission as a "Professional Certificate" course.

The recruited graduates were trained, both academically and practically, for approximately three months. After completing the training courses, they are sent out to live upcountry where they perform their jobs individually.*

* Graduate recruits are not limited to any particular discipline. The recruits are assigned according to their backgrounds.

Since the setting up of the project up to 1976, 244 graduates were trained as volunteers (shown in Table 1). From Table 2 it can be observed that most of the volunteers were from the social sciences while the remainders were from the natural science departments. Type of activities undertaken by graduate volunteers include teaching in secondary school, primary school, hill-tribe school and villages, health activities and social welfare. Another interesting point is that the number of female volunteers substantially exceed the number of their male counterparts (58.20 percent to 41.80 percent).

During the 4th Plan (1977-1981) period, it is expected that the number of volunteers will increase from 130 in the first year to 250 in the last year of the implementation.

Table 1

Numbers and Percentages of Graduate Volunteers Working in Various Regions of Thailand from 1969 - 1976

Year	Lot	No. of Graduate Volunteers	Region			
			North	Northeast	Central	South
1969	1	18	7	4	3	4
1970	2	19	9	3	4	3
1971	3	25	10	7	-	8
1972	4	29	11	10	2	6
1973 ¹	5	41	16	11	7	7
1974 ²	6	40	19	12	7	2
1975 ³	7	42	16	14	8	4
1976 ⁴	8	30	12	13	3	2
Total		244	100	74	34	36
Percentages		100.00	40.98	30.33	13.93	14.76

Remarks: ¹Two graduate volunteers lot 4, in 1973, worked for the second year.
²One GV of lot 5, in 1974, worked for the second year.
³Five GV of lot 6, in 1975, worked for the second year.
⁴Three GV of lot 7, in 1976, worked for the second year, and one GV of lot 6 worked for the third year.

Sources: 1. *Graduate Volunteer Programme (GVP)*, Registration Book of Graduate of Volunteers.
2. *Graduate Volunteers of Thammasat University*, Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, B.E. 2517.
3. *Graduate Volunteer Bulletin*, Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, September 1975.
(1 and 2 in Thai)

Table 2
Numbers and Percentages of Graduate Volunteers Classified by Type of work (or Line of Activity) Sex, and Degree

Year	Sex	Type of work or line of activity						Bachelor Degree in	
		Secondary Schools	Health Activities	Primary Schools	Hilltribe Schools & Villages	Social Welfare	Total	Sciences	Social Sciences*
1969	Male	4	—	—	—	—	4	—	4
	Female	14	—	—	—	—	14	—	15
1970	M	4	—	—	—	—	4	1	3
	F	15	—	—	—	—	15	1	14
1971	M	15	—	—	—	—	15	1	14
	F	10	—	—	—	—	10	2	13
1972	M	11	4	—	—	—	15	—	15
	F	11	3	—	—	—	14	—	14
1973	M	8	1	8	3	—	20	5	15
	F	10	3	3	5	—	21	1	20
1974	M	6	4	6	2	—	18	2	16
	F	6	5	7	4	—	22	3	19
1975	M	3	4	4	4	—	15	2	13
	F	4	7	8	8	—	27	2	25
1976	M	2	2	2	4	2	12	—	12
	F	2	4	7	5	—	18	2	16
Total		125	37	45	35	2	244	23	221
Percentages		51.23	15.16	18.45	14.34	0.82	100.00	9.43	90.57

* Remarks: Social Sciences include graduates in Education

Sources: Same as TABLE 1

Table 3

Numbers of Graduate Volunteers Estimated to be Recruited
in the Planned Period (1977-1981)

Name of Project	Number of Graduate Volunteers										Total
	1977		1978		1979		1980		1981		
	1st lot	2nd lot	1st lot	2nd lot	1st lot	2nd lot	1st lot	2nd lot	1st lot	2nd lot	
¹ Graduate Volunteer Project	60	60	70	70	80	80	90	90	100	100	800
² Supporting GV to further their Second and Third Year Work Project	5	5	10	10	25	25	20	20	25	25	150

Source: *Thammasat University Development Projects During the Fourth Development Plan B.E. 2520-2524*, Volume 3, p. 10 (Mimeographed in Thai).

Remarks: GVC has been supporting second-year volunteers since 1973, by which the contributions are provided from Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), and the Ford Foundation. In 1976, CUSO provided Baht 40,000 — for GVC in supporting 2nd-year GV work and activity concerning rural development. It is called "Revolving Loan Fund". The criteria and conditions for the Fund request & approval must be considered by the Administrative Committee.

2. *Phuket Community College — Prince of Songkla University*

Attempts were made among the institutions of higher education in Thailand to explore the possibility of providing more flexible education programmes to meet the needs of local communities.

Prince of Songkla University volunteered to experiment on the community college concept as a pilot project.

As a part of Prince of Songkla University, the college offered short cycle education to high school graduates and equivalents who had completed high school courses in designated areas covering five southern provinces: Phuket, Ranong, Trang, Phang-nga and Krabi provinces.

The formal training programme will emphasize local manpower needs by concentrating on the occupational areas, with emphasis on self-employed jobs, in demand by the community. In this respect, the first programme offered was tourism and hotel business.

The target plan is as follows:

Course	Number of Students				
	AY 1977	AY 1978	AY 1979	AY 1980	AY 1981
A. Regular Course (2-yr. programme)					
1. New entrants	50	420	600	600	600
2. Total number of students	50	470	962	1,120	1,120
3. Graduates	—	45	400	540	540
B. Special Course (continuing programmes: academic/vocational ed- ucation)	unlimited (at least about 1,000 students a year is anticipated)				

Academic courses and training as community services in the form of adult education will later be offered in the following fields: agriculture, business administration, applied sciences, natural sciences, liberal arts, home economics and education extension and vocational development.

3. *Medical Education for Students in Rural Area Programme*

To solve the problem of shortage of doctors in the rural areas and to train medical students for working in the local communities, a project to promote medical education for students from the provinces was initiated by Mahidol University in 1975 whereby approximately ten M.S. 5 (high school) graduates with appropriate scholastic standing and good behavior were selected from designated central provinces to study in the medical schools. During the training period, each student receives a financial support of approximately 6,000 baht (US\$ 300) per year. Upon graduation, they are required to go back and work in their hometown in accordance with the contract earlier concluded with the government.

Chulalongkorn University operates a similar programme for eight provinces in the eastern region of Thailand — Chachoengsao, Cholburi, Chandhaburi, Trad, Rayong, Nakorn Nayok, Samut Prakarn and Prajeenburi. These medical students will be trained in the last two years at the local facilities, i.e. in their provincial hospitals and medical centers while Mahidol's students undertake their internship training at Mahidol's hospitals in Bangkok.

It is believed that by implementing such project, this new "generation" of doctors will nurture a new attitude towards working in the rural areas and at the same time provide the much-needed medical services to the people in the rural areas.

The first group of graduates from Mahidol University are expected in 1981 and Chulalongkorn's in 1983.

B. Research and Services

1. *Mae Klong Integrated Rural Development Project*

The Mae Klong Integrated Rural Development Project is regarded as the first project in Thailand bringing together the expertise of three universities — Kasetsart, Mahidol and Thammasat with the financial assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation — in a pilot project to improve rural conditions by emphasizing the means of introducing new technology and multi-disciplinary approaches leading to a better way of living.

The project was conceived when Kasetsart, an agricultural university, created in 1943 by the Ministry of Agriculture, sought to improve land — and water-use technology in the rural area surrounding its new campus and experiment station near Bangkok. Because the rural problems were complex and interrelated, it invited two other universities — Thammasat, oriented to the social sciences, and Mahidol, which emphasizes medical sciences — to join with it in finding solutions to the problems.

The project area, Mae Klong and Tha Jeen Rivers basins includes approximately 1,440,000 hectares of seven central provinces with the population of more than 2.5 million.

In 1974, the project set out to gain as much knowledge as possible about the area and to outline an interdisciplinary and interuniversity approach to improving the production, income, health, education, and other aspects of life in the area. Teams of four people each — a university teacher-researcher and students in agriculture, medicine, and/or social sciences — were sent to six different parts of the region to enlist the support of local people while living among them, to determine the needs of the locality, and to collect firsthand information about village life.

The investigations of these faculty-student teams confirmed the original conviction that the area would be a good place to test development methodology and to improve rural conditions.

Eventually, each research leader will prepare a list of problems in one zone of the Mae Klong area and will rank the problems in order of difficulty and possibility of solution. An executive committee will screen these analyses and will outline an interdisciplinary programme for action in each zone. Research leaders and specialists will discuss and modify these work plans, and pilot projects will then be established.

After a general survey of basic data was carried out in 1974, six pilot zones have been selected to study and conduct test development. During the two-year work, a number of activities were implemented including the followings:

- promotion of fish raising in place of fertile rice cultivation.
- four village health posts were established and village health volunteers have been trained to handle first-aid problems and advise villagers on sanitation, nutrition, common health problems and drinking water, etc.

- provide data and academic recommendations for operating government agencies.
- vocational group training for local needs: motor repairing, dressmaking, fermented fertilizer making, etc.

The Mae Klong Project seeks to test several development “packages” for impact and for evidence that programmes that benefit one group of villages can provide similar benefits elsewhere. Project planners hope learning experiences will be introduced into classroom teaching and that the combination of better teaching and fieldwork will give students a better understanding of rural development.

Certain excerpts were taken from “Mae Klong Integrated Rural Development Project”, *Higher Education and Social Change*, by Kenneth W. Thompson and Barbara R. Fogel, 1976.

2. *Nam Pong Environmental Management Research Project*

Being part of a plan for an ecological study of the Nam Pong basin in the northeast of Thailand, the project is sponsored by the National Mekong Committee of Thailand with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation. With blessings of the Thai government, a number of research workers from four universities in Thailand are conducting various research studies pertaining to the optimization of natural resources development as pointed out in the preface of the project plan prepared by the Committee for Co-ordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin Secretariat “. an ecological study of a human environment in a state of transition from a largely traditionally based pattern of development to one that is based mainly on technology. A change from the traditional to the technological approach to development would normally result in unprecedented positive impacts followed by unexpected negative impacts on the system. In such transitional periods the environment is, by definition, changing rapidly. The research, here proposed, is aimed at obtaining information on the Nam Pong system in its current transitional state, and identifying various imbalances, dysfunctions, and inadequacies in development approaches. Based on this information, it is expected that improved approaches to management of the basin could be devised”.

The construction of the Nam Pong Project — the Ubolratana dam and power station — near Khon Kaen, in the northeast of Thailand — was completed and went in operation since 1966. Since 1965, the Nam Pong basin has undergone dramatic changes in the qualities of natural resources, the productivity of resource use and the welfare of the population. The project has impacts both negative and positive on power supply, fisheries, agriculture, flood patterns, transportation, the growth of urban and other settlements, changes in income levels, health and other environmental and social conditions. Other indirectly accountable changes, e.g. population growth and movement, new technologies and the general intensification of resource use, have also had effects on the programme itself. Furthermore, activities and conditions in areas contiguous to the basin have affected those in basin and *vice versa*. The character of these effects is determining the quality of life in the basin, the success in resource development programmes and prospects for the future.

With a view to taking stock of the changes that have occurred and are still occurring in the Nam Pong basin, and to assess the overall performance of the development programme, the time is now considered appropriate to launch investigations to improve an understanding of the changes, their causes and

effects. This understanding would provide the information necessary to develop means for guiding these changes toward maximum advantage in the Nam Pong basin and could be of value for other river basins as well. Therefore, the specific objectives of the Nam Pong ecological study would be:

- a. to define the changes related to water resources development that have occurred and are occurring in the Nam Pong basin system,
- b. to develop knowledge about the causative factors and the effects of these changes,
- c. to improve means for managing the system so as to direct the changes toward desired ends, and
- d. to evaluate the significance of the results in formulating planning and management procedures relative to development projects in the Mekong basin.

Among research tasks being performed by Khonkaen and several other university research workers are:

- plankton production in the reservoir and distribution system (Prince of Songkla University)
- land use (Kasetsart University)
- socio-economic studies (Khon Kaen University)
- human health and nutrition, blood and blood diseases, parasites and disease vectors (Mahidol University)
- pests and parasites (Khon Kaen University)

3. *Highland Agricultural Development — Kasetsart and Chiang Mai University*

The objective of the project is to conduct study and research in regard to the development of economic, social and health conditions of the hill-tribes in the north in order to persuade members of various tribes to give up opium growing and shifting cultivation so that they would become more useful not only to themselves but to the society as a whole.

Initiated more than a decade ago by His Majesty the King, the project was implemented by Kasetsart and Chiang Mai University with cooperation from other government agencies in the following manners:

- a. Setting up of agricultural research and development stations in the highlands.
- b. Development of pasture in the highland to make use of the once fertile (alang/cogon infested) land in animal husbandry and dairy farming.
- c. Cultivation of substitution crops (e.g. tea, flowers, orchards) in the formerly opium growing area as a part of the government policy to combat the drug addict problems.
- d. Watershed area development as a supporting activity toward soil and water conservation and ecological studies.

C. Community Services

1. *Health Care Delivery Services*

Health care delivery services are carried out by institutions of higher education offering medical sciences courses which include medicine, dentistry, medical technology, nursing, public health, tropical medicine and pharmaceutical science. Services by these institutions are both in the forms of hospitals and specialized clinics.

The demand for these services is overwhelming. From sources under the Office of University Affairs (OUA) jurisdiction, the figures show that the period during January-November 1977, over 2 million treatments have been carried out by the existing five government university teaching hospitals.

Institutions	In-patients	Out-patients	No. of treatments
1. Chulalongkorn University	31,427	488,990	520,417
2. Khon Kaen University	728	22,212	22,940
3. Chiang Mai University	244,363	187,954	432,317
4. Mahidol University*	28,900	994,081	1,022,981
5. Prince of Songkla University	The university hospital is now under construction. University services are given with the cooperation of Songkhla Provincial Hospital		
Total	365,418	1,693,237	2,058,655

On the financial side, during FYs 1977 and 1978, the government expenditures and allocations for health services were 217.23 million baht (US\$10.34 million) and 248.88 million baht (US\$11.85 million) respectively. These amounts roughly equal to 11 per cent of the OUA total budget of each fiscal year mentioned.

2. *Student Voluntary Services*

In the past two decades, students of the institutions of higher education have become more active in participating in social development especially in the upgrading of the living standard of the population in the rural areas. The voluntary work has been organized in many forms: the most popular and regarded as an institutionalized activity was the voluntary work camps conducted by the students during their summer vacation. The students from various fields of study set up camps in the rural communities in order to work hand in hand with the people on the projects according to the local needs. Each work camp usually lasts from two to three weeks. The majority of the work projects involved road building, well digging, bridge, school and playground construction and health and agricultural extension work. Such activities not only fulfill the needs of the communities but also are a part of a "self-development" education for the students.

Problems and Prospects

Efforts by the institutions of higher education in Thailand to answer the needs of the society in the form of social commitment-oriented activities are still in the infancy stage and thus it would not be feasible to assess the degree of success at this time. However it has been noted that campus-based services through existing facilities such as health care provided by the university teaching hospitals have not confronted with serious problems. On the contrary, the off-campus social services carried out by university staff and students having direct contact with various communities, more often than not, have faced with both internal and external problems. *The internal problems within the university itself have to do with thorough understanding and readiness of the teaching staff as well as the students involved regard-*

* Mahidol University has two hospitals: Siriraj and Ramathibodi

ing social commitment. The public service function of the institutions of higher education has been a much talked-about topic for some time. However the majority of the academic staffs of the institutions of higher education is still reluctant to take on the tasks for which they have neither been selected nor prepared.

The main external problems include the understanding and working relations between universities and other government agencies. In providing public services to the community, such as the Mae Klong project cited earlier in this report, efforts by the universities were generally regarded by the local authorities and other government agencies conducting development work in the area as duplication and going beyond their own "boundaries". They expressed all sorts of suspicions and at times conflicts occurred.

Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the need to promote proper understanding and define appropriate roles to the Universities and government agencies if co-operative efforts and coordination between these bodies were to be achieved.

It is invariably inevitable that institutions of higher education in developing countries cannot turn away from rendering services to the society. In fact, increasing responsibilities by the institutions of higher education is anticipated for the future. However, the success lies largely on the creation of positive partnership between universities and other government agencies. The fact that most of these institutions are government organizations, it should not, therefore be out of question to foster such partnership as well as to eliminate any existing suspicions among the organizations concerned. This is in itself a challenge to higher education in Thailand in the years to come.

DISCUSSION

The discussants of the country papers entitled "Socio-economic Needs and Problems: Challenge to Higher Education" were Dr. Harsja W. Bachtiar, Encik Zulkifli bin Mohd. Ali, Mr. S.T. Peter Lim, Dr. Wichit Srisa-an, Prof. Dr. Winarno Surakhmad, Dr. Nayan bin Ariffin, Prof. Wong Poi Kwong and Prof. Kasarn Chartikavanij.

The essence of the discussion is summarized below:

The two sessions began with Dr. Amara Raksataya's paper which attempted to outline on a general basis the relevant parameters of social commitment through higher education.

An immediate reaction to his paper was that despite its usefulness, practical problems would be confronted when applying some of the suggestions contained in the paper. In specific reference to part VII of the paper (Proposals to Policy Adoption), a few participants mentioned the fact that it would be extremely difficult to effect liberalization along the lines suggested in the paper. Another related view was that the suggestions were 'localized' and not generally applicable to other social and political situations. In any case, it was felt that there would be problems when the criteria for liberalization were being set-up.

Another view was that the thrust of the paper gave prominence to the university and its staff in social commitment without mentioning the role of students. Along a similar vein of thought was the comment that in matters pertaining to research there was a need to effect a balance between pure research or research to satisfy one's own interests and inclinations and applied research, that is, research oriented to solving immediate problems as a form of social commitment. Furthermore research should be in two forms, viz., research that sought to understand or identify a problem and research that led to the formulation of social policies. Having obtained the data from research, there was the need to consider how such data could be presented to the government for purposes of formulating policies. It was suggested that close co-operation between government officials and university staff would help in this respect. There was also a suggestion that perhaps the use of the word "indoctrination" in the paper was inappropriately understood within the context of the concept of social commitment and higher education.

In reply, Dr. Amara clarified that the proposals for policy adoption as suggested by him were not to be applied indiscriminately nor totally. The strategy proposed was programme defined not individual nor university. He was of the opinion that the proposals had regional relevance and were broadly applicable.

The meeting then got down to discussing the four country papers presented.

The problems that came into focus were:

1. Whether it was possible to set up objective criteria in order to ascertain that there was a problem and to determine its priority in the community concerned? For example in what way was a problem and a challenge to the university thus necessitating a social commitment to its resolution?
2. Whether, in view of the fact that teaching, research, and public service were clusters of inter-related concerns, it was possible to set-up criteria to determine their relatedness in terms of importance? Clarification of this could lead to a better understanding of what social commitment meant and implied.

3. Whether cooperation between the government and its agencies with the staff of the university could be enhanced further and if so in what acceptable forms?
4. Whether it was possible to determine the 'legitimate' clientele when higher education was linked to social commitment?
5. Whether in bringing research findings to the end users it was possible to do so more effectively through other means than academic journals?
6. Whether there was a need to take a look at the university again in terms of its organization and administration with a view to enhancing social commitment among staff and students? Specific mention was made to the problem of setting up criteria when selection of staff was carried out.

A view offered was that there was no need to set up criteria regarding how a problem might be identified. It was explained that there was generally no problem of recognition rather it was more a question of delineating those areas in which the university was in the best position to help.

It was generally agreed that linkages existing between bureaucrats and academics should be maintained and expanded with a view to enhancing social commitment in a more direct way. It was stressed that the concept of "matrix" management should be encouraged whereby manpower and expertise from every relevant source was brought together in an integrated fashion (as apposed to compartmentalization of skills and disciplines) to enhance social commitment.

On the question of reorganizing the university in order to enhance social commitment, several reservations were made. First of all there was the question of the university having to perform its basic responsibilities (teaching, research and publication) adequately. Secondly, it was suggested that social commitment could not be allowed to reach such a degree that the university's limited resources became over extended, thus jeopardising both the university as an institution of higher learning as well as general academic standards. The various university directed rural projects cited in the paper on Thailand were good examples of social commitment by both staff and students in a direct and tangible way, though not necessarily possible in all countries. Finally, one participant stressed that developing a scientist with social commitment was a complex affair, involving many dimensions and stretching over many years beginning at the elementary level of education. Higher education in this respect was part of a total system, though a vital one. Thus it might be more useful and relevant to think in terms of developing a scientific community with social commitment.