

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY-THAI PERSPECTIVE AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Thailand has been a leader in the ASEAN region contributing to the international hub towards sustainable development in the region. The aim of this study is to discuss the achievements of Thailand on one of the key goals of sustainable development, which is the fight against poverty. Assessment of the current trends of the poverty reduction initiatives in Thailand. Road towards achieving resilience and sustainability in the growing Thai economy. Analyzing the existing legal framework and provide recommendations to fasten the self-sufficiency and sustainability in Thailand. The methodology for this research has been documentary and literature review analysis. The literature provided for the real level data from both government and ground level implications of legal instruments in Thailand. The enhanced analysis involves the data collected from all the secondary sources. The findings included the absence of robust political will, inconsistencies with international declaration and national policies and lack of focus on uncertainties in Thailand.

Keywords: Poverty, Sustainable Development, International Law, Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a multidimensional and very complex problem that causes limitations in the social and economic development of state areas. Most often the sustainable development strategy has been identified with the ecological strategy, not an element of the fight against poverty, but a growing tendency to impoverish the populations influenced the need to search for and apply new solutions limiting this problem. Moreover, the reason for a broader view on sustainable development was related to the development of this concept of actors' activities by an additional social dimension of these activities. The obstacle in fully implementing the idea of sustainable development is the phenomenon of poverty and the associated social exclusion of individuals, which it manifests come in various forms (Aras & Crowther, 2008).

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Sustainable Development states that man is the main element of sustainable development, as his right is the right to live in harmony with nature and in nature (Hens, 2005). More United Nations Summits on Sustainable Development of the Earth indicated that there was a necessity creating institutional solutions for development combining economic, social, political and environmental elements to guarantee opportunities to meet the basic needs of individual communities. The implementation of the adopted goals by individual international and national institutions is expected essential for the effectiveness of combating poverty (Asian Development Bank, 2021). However, the need for broad cooperation

for social, economic and environmental development should be emphasized. Proper implementation of the concept of sustainable development by public administration should be based on taking into account certain principles. Above all local authorities must be guided by the "*principle of balance*", which means integrating a variety of social, economic and environmental objectives. Another principle is the "*principle of rational management*", i.e. maximization benefits with given financial outlays or minimizing costs with an equal level of expected effects within various options performing specific tasks (Avdiushchenko & Zajac, 2019). The last principle is the "*principle of symbiotic functioning of individual entities*" within a given local government (Zalewski, 2005). Sustainable development covers the ethical and moral issues of eliminating and limiting production and consumption patterns that disrupt sustainable development. This concept also aims to eradicate poverty and reduce differences in people's standard of living. It should be pointed out that the principle of sustainable development is valid every. The universal obligation to respect sustainable development applies to socio-economic development which takes into account environmental conditions and assumes the protection of basic ecological processes, to which all citizens contribute (Beckerman & Pasek, 2001).

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Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development was used for the first time at the UN Conference in Stockholm, however, in the very principles of the Stockholm Declaration, this concept was not directly written. The concept of sustainable development was formulated again at the 3rd Managing Session United Nations Environment Protection Program in 1975, but only in the 1980s, its important role was noticed (Ciegis & Ramanauskiene, 2009). The most important element of the present shape of a concept of sustainable development was the publication of the Our Common Future Report (Butlin, 1987), in which for the first time it was comprehensively defined that: "*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (Rees, 1989). Any subsequent formulations of sustainable development as a principle of international law, only aimed at specifying the concept (Górski & Kierzkowska, 2014).

According to international agreements concluded in international declarations adopted as part of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, each State interested in implementing the concept of sustainable development has the power to create its own policy under which it aims to reduce poverty. It must be acknowledged, however, that it is extremely difficult and costly to coordinate actions (at the international, national, regional, local level) that enable developing countries to achieve their goals in line with the internationally agreed poverty goals and objectives (Górski & Kierzkowska, 2014). We can understand sustainable development as a type of development in which ecologically growing costs of development are

eliminated, which threaten the living conditions of future generations on a global scale, thanks to the conscious orientation of people's economic activity on the protection of the natural environment (Avdiushchenko & Zając, 2019) (Handl, 1992).

The doctrine of sustainable development emphasizes the importance social, economic and environmental development. Premises of the concept of sustainable development endorsed under the Action Plan for the Johannesburg World Summit include, inter alia, contributing to poverty reduction through the integration of three elements, such as economic development, social development and environmental protection (Hens, 2005). These activities, carried out at all levels of administration, will have an overall effect and contribute fight poverty and social exclusion.

Sustainable development has a broader approach than nature protection or shaping spatial order. This concept also includes due care for social and civilization development, related to the need to build an appropriate infrastructure, necessary to individual human and different societies. The idea of sustainable development therefore includes the need to take into account different legal values and balancing them accordingly (Khamken, 2021) (Aras & Crowther, 2008).

Sustainable development-based on finding a balance between the goals of economic development, social cohesion, environmental protection and more fair relations between countries is the overriding goal of the international community, which is the point of reference for all its activities and policies (Kongrukreatiyos, 2020).

Sustainable Development and Poverty

During the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, one of the most important documents related to sustainable development was created: Agenda 21. This document is basically a comprehensive roadmap of the 21st century for the United Nations, governments and groups in any area where people have an impact on the environment (Pathak & Ahmad, 2018).

The Earth Summit in Rio clearly warned us that Humanity has come to a turning point in history. By continuing the current policy, we contribute to the widening of the economic gap in societies and between states, the spread of poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy. We will also cause the progressive degradation of the natural environment on which life on Earth depends. The necessity to make changes was strongly postulated at the time but resulted in rather vague conclusion on the need for changes in investing practices in the future. The next step in expanding the concept of sustainable development and the need to take action were the conclusions and goals identified at the UN Millennium Summit, which defined the Millennium Development Goals (Patterson & Theobald, 1995). For the main goals of the Millennium Development, which also developed the concept of sustainable development was recognized:

1. Eliminate extreme poverty and hunger by halving the number of people whose income does not exceed \$ 1 a day.
2. Achieve universal primary education by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to complete a full cycle of primary education basic.
3. Promote gender equality and the social advancement of women by eliminating gender inequalities at all levels of education by 2015.
4. Reducing child mortality by reducing the mortality rate of children up to 5 years of age by 2/3.

5. Applying sustainable methods of managing natural resources by taking into account the principle of sustainable development in national strategies and by applying methods that inhibit the depletion of natural resources, as well as reducing the number of people deprived of access by half for clean drinking water.

When an attempt was made to examine the results achieved in the two years since the Millennium Summit, it found that they were not optimistic and that the Millennium Development Goals did not stand a chance to be delivered on time. The Johannesburg Summit resulted in adopting a radical roadmap for the next ten years. The most urgent of them are:

1. Halve the number of people living below the poverty line (on \$ 1 or less per day). There are about 1 billion of them in the world.
2. Halve the number of people without access to drinking water and sanitary facilities.
3. Two-thirds reduction in infant and child mortality rates and by three-quarters of the maternal mortality rate.
4. Slowing the pace of extinction of rare species of animals and plants.
5. The recovery of fish stocks in the seas and oceans depleted by overfishing.
6. Cessation of the production and use of chemicals harmful to people and the environment.

To analyze the concept of sustainable development as a means of fighting poverty and at the same time to emphasize that it is an obstacle to sustainable development, it is necessary to identify the problem of poverty perception (Sobczak, Bartniczak, & Raszkowski, 2021). Poverty, like other concepts in the field of social sciences, does not have a clear definition. They are usually defined as a state in which an individual or a social group lacks the means to satisfy basic needs considered essential in a given community (Pira, Eslami, & Fleet, 2021).

In line with the principles adopted under the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, all measures adopted by public authorities should serve the dynamics of development and involve regional communities in making key decisions. At the same time, obliging states to act within the framework of the agenda should integrate the activities of public administration bodies at various levels. Agenda 21 is a global collaboration program aimed at achieving lasting and sustainable development (Patterson & Theobald, 1995).

The understanding of sustainable development in Agenda 21 already emerges from the content of the introduction. Sustainable and balanced development should mean the integration of the environment and development (Ciegis & Ramanauskiene, 2009). Integrating the environment and development must take into account the need to meet the basic needs of all people, at the same time provide them with a better standard of living while ensuring better protection and management of ecosystems. The implementation of Agenda 21 should follow the principles of the Rio Declaration on the Environment and development (Handl, 1992). In terms of actions to be taken by the state, it was recognized that the eradication of poverty, the change of unsustainable and the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns as well as the protection and management of the natural resource base of economic and social development constitute them overarching goals and essential requirements of a sustainable development, which at the same time will improve the living conditions of the society.

Sustainable development is also an economic issue that is most often recognized in the field of environmental economics. The main assumption within the framework of environmental economics is the analysis of choices between combating poverty, adhering to the principles of ethical policy, and providing future generations with conditions for development analogous to

contemporary and also preserving cultural diversity (Beckerman & Pasek, 2001). At the same time, the subject of environmental economics is to identify objective constraints in the environment, which is characterized by the irreversibility of natural processes. As part of the assessment assumptions of environmental economics, it should be placed in the stream of normative economics, which emphasizes the role of state policy in shaping economic phenomena. Ecological or environmental economics presuppose the sustainable development to be followed not so much the requirements of economic rationality as of social rationality (Pira et al., 2021).

Sustainable Development in Activities Public Administration of the Kingdom of Thailand

Thailand has been incorporating the jest of poverty reduction and sustainable development since 1960s. The five-year planning known as the National Economic and Social Development plans have been the center of policy implication to overcome poverty at the ground root level. The presence of legal mechanism and infrastructure provides for the policies to be formulated and implemented. There is strict top to bottom approach in the government at all levels of governance (Pathak & Ahmad, 2018). However, the social, economic and political set up in Thailand is complex and requires robust and comprehensive policies in order to achieve resilient and sustainable growth.

Thailand Poverty

Thailand has been struggling with the poverty in the recent decades. The Covid-19 Pandemic accelerated the poverty in Thailand with abundance of small-scale businesses both temporary and permanently shut down. The sustainable growth policies and laws are inconsistent with the changing economic scenarios in Thailand. The trends depict a growing population of more than two million people living below the poverty line and the poverty rate has been rising from 7.2% in 2015 to over 10% in 2020 (Redclift, 1993). Thailand has an inequality rate of 90.2% with disparity among the poor and rich. The exclusion of disaster interventions, inadequate educational and economical laws are factors directly affecting the rate of rising poverty in Thailand (Figure 1).

It is to be analyzed that the trend of the poverty in Thailand was on an increasing trend from 1988-2018 (Table 1) with a decline of 55 percent. However, in recent times it is observed that the rising poverty is due to the inadequate legal instruments resulting in vulnerable business, private and household levels (Kongrukreatiyos, 2020). Thailand has adopted the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (Khamken, 2021). Thailand has been focusing on the population to be self-sufficient and sustainable from the disruptive events. However, the gap in the legal and policy formulation enhances the vulnerability of the lower section (Asian Development Bank, 2021). The No Poverty is the first of the SDGs which results in the alleviating the Thai economy.



Source: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/THA/thailand/poverty-rate>

**FIGURE 1
THAILAND POVERTY**

Year	% Under US \$5.50 Per Day	Change
2019	6.20%	-2.20%
2018	8.40%	0.80%
2017	7.60%	-0.60%
2016	8.20%	1.20%
2015	7.00%	-3.40%
2014	10.40%	-0.90%
2013	11.30%	-2.20%
2012	13.50%	0.10%
2011	13.40%	-4.10%
2010	17.50%	-2.50%
2009	20.00%	-2.50%
2008	22.50%	-2.00%
2007	24.50%	-2.30%
2006	26.80%	-6.60%
2004	33.40%	-6.30%
2002	39.70%	-8.90%
2000	48.60%	0.80%

1999	47.80%	3.90%
1998	43.90%	-1.10%
1996	45.00%	-5.50%
1994	50.50%	-7.20%
1992	57.70%	-6.90%
1990	64.60%	-3.60%
1988	68.20%	-1.10%
1981	69.30%	-1.10%

The factor directly responsible towards poverty in Thailand includes natural disasters, disparities between the rich and poor classes of society, inadequate government policies and unstable government (Rees, 1989). This results in the non-compliances of the adequate implementation the legal policies and instruments at the ground level. Thailand requires including several other SDGs to curtail the disparities and alleviate the Thai population equally. These include SDG 1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2
SDGS

SWOT Analysis

The following Figure 3 presents the SWOT analysis for this research.

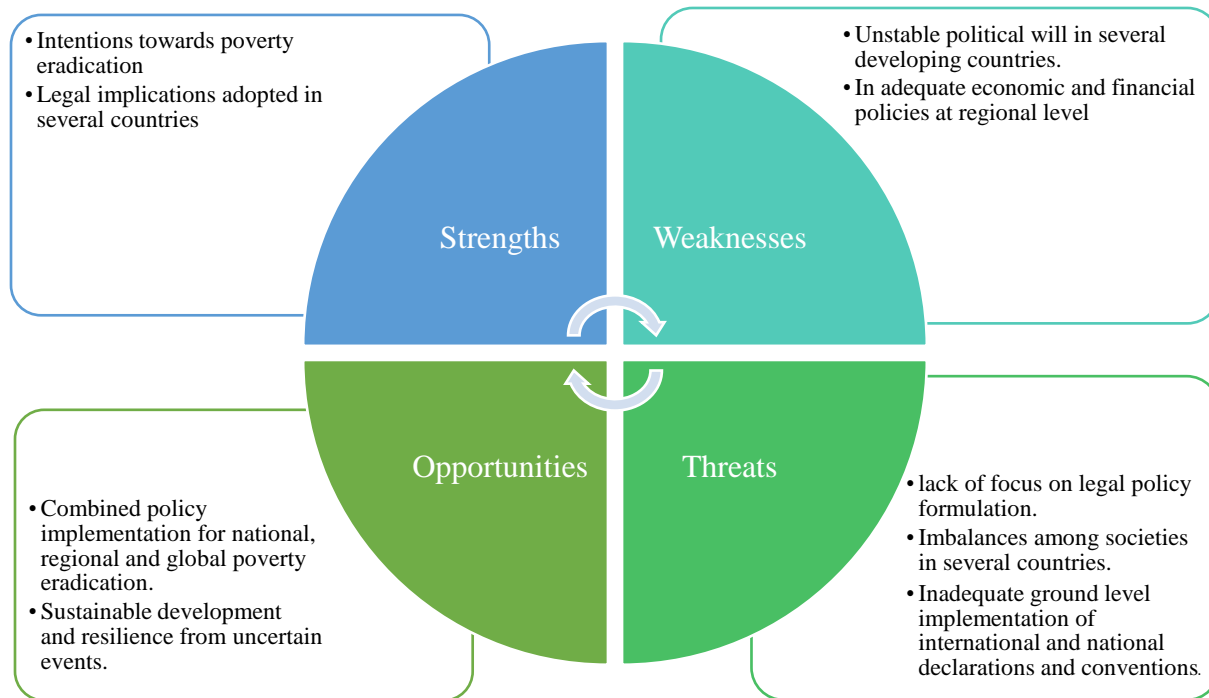


FIGURE 3
SWOT ANALYSIS FOR POVERTY ERADICATION

Strengths: One of the biggest strengths of poverty reduction initiatives in Thailand is the intentions towards poverty eradication among the population and governmental structure (Sobczak et al., 2021). The institutional framework equips Thailand towards advocating and creating apt legal implications adopted which are adopted successfully in several countries.

Weaknesses: Unstable political will in several developing countries is being found in Thailand as well. Civil unrests and politically motivated demonstrations reduce the competencies of Thailand to grow and develop. This is due to the inadequate economic and financial policies at regional level which have almost negligible implementation at the local level of governance.

Opportunities: There are several opportunities with Thai legal and policy formulation. Combined policy implementation for national, regional and global poverty eradication in line with international guideline will provide for sustainable growth and poverty eradication. Emphasis on sustainable development and resilience from uncertain events such as Covid-19 pandemic, terrorism and other catastrophic events is to be adopted at all levels of Thai legal and policy systems (Zalewski, 2005).

Threats: Despite the efforts and strengths, there is a lack of focus on legal policy formulation and effective implementation. Imbalances among societies in several countries are found to be existing in Thailand as well. This in turn enhances the vulnerabilities of Thai population towards vicious circle of poverty. Inadequate ground level implementation of international and national declarations and conventions is one of the biggest threats in the Thai economy.

CONCLUSION

Thailand has been developing the attitude towards a developing economy with poverty eradication and sustainable development in its legal and policy making mindset. The following recommendations provide for a robust and resilient Thai economy.

Recommendations:

1. Political and legal reforms are to aligned with the economic and social growth of the Thai population.
2. Timely strategies to encounter disruptive events and uncertainties in terms of environmental catastrophes and civil unrests.
3. Stakeholder involvement at all levels of governance, especially at the local level of poverty reduction initiatives.
4. National five-year plans and other department policies are to be amalgamated in order to exclude the duplication of the efforts and policies.
5. Robust legal policies and strict implementations are essential in Thailand which should be following the international and regional guidelines.

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