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Social Innovations In Thailand

Walaiphorn Wajavuth and **Amarit Charoenphan** are enthusiastic about the social innovations that are taking place in the Land of Smiles.

Innovations play a crucial role in Thailand's social landscape and they are happening in various sectors across the country. This article presents a few key examples of the innovative work being carried out by non-profit organisations, government, corporations and individuals.

Innovation in Healthcare

Technology has helped quicken and streamline healthcare processes, as well as to empower individuals in the management of their own healthcare issues:

- **Hospital OS project (www.hospital-os.com):** Led by Dr. Kongkiat Kespechara, a social entrepreneur, the Open Source Technology project was created to help small-scale or community hospitals improve the management of their operations and to minimise costs while increasing efficiency. Unlike other proprietary software in the market, Hospital OS is an open-source technology that has been widely accepted due to its operational efficiency, ongoing software updates, and customisation flexibility. With minimal implementation costs, it is also easily accessible to any Thai hospital. This programme is being used by 75 hospitals (or 15-20% of the total number of small-scale/community hospitals in Thailand); collectively, they report an increased efficiency rate of 30%.
- **InCare web application, an online personal health information dashboard and analytics tool:** Also founded by Dr. Kongkiat, the InCare programme allows members to create online health profiles, receive personalised care plans

from doctors, import/export medical records to/from hospitals, analyse their personal health trends, create to-do lists for health activities, and share personal health stories on a social network. This programme has just completed its prototype after winning Thailand ICT awards last year.

Innovation for Policy Crowd sourcing

It's been less than 10 years since technology was introduced to the realm of policy making (comprising the government, on the advice of the academia), but already, there has been greater participation by the public and more interaction between them and policy makers.

In Thailand, a few common ways to make policies are:

- If the government requires a policy for a certain issue, demographic, or geographical location, it usually contacts the government-funded research institutions to develop policy based on the requirements. Conversely, academics and think tanks wishing to advocate certain policies may also apply for funding to the government-funded research institutions to publish research papers on the particular subject in hopes of getting incorporated into the government policy.
- Citizen sector groups hold rallies and seminars to push forward policies to the government. While this method has historically been not very successful, technology is making it easier for the citizen sector to group together, share ideas and organise themselves.



Walaiphorn Wajavuth is a member at Change Fusion, one of Thailand's leading non-profit organisations on social innovation. She works closely with Thai social enterprises in incubating and financing programmes. She is the managing director of Suksatarana Co. Ltd, a social enterprise that delivers alternative high-standards primary health care and preventive care services for all.



Amarit Charoenphan is a member of ChangeFusion's Social Enterprise and Impact Finance team. He works closely with Thai social entrepreneurs through the UnLtd Thailand's incubation and capacity development programme and The SYNC, Thailand's first co-working space and community network for social innovators. He has a bachelor's degree in accounting from Thammasat University and he is the Assistant Managing Director of Gyudon Express, his family-owned Japanese restaurant chain.

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- Policies drawn up arbitrarily by the government and research is done to back up the ideas. This is mostly the case with populist policies.

The Internet and social media have served as significant communication channels between the government and the public in several ways:

- **Ideas for Thailand project:** a competition held in 2010 that allowed the general public to submit their ideas for bringing about positive solutions to social and environmental problems in Thailand. The five ideas with the most votes were selected for implementation with the government funding and support.
- **iLaw (ilaw.or.th):** a platform for people who want to propose changes to laws and regulations that are biased, non-democratic, or that benefit only certain groups of people, and so on. By crowd sourcing policies via iLaw, Thai netizens are empowered to influence existing legislation and even the Constitution via petition mechanisms.
- **Future Thai Leaders:** Thailand's conservative Democrat Party aims to recruit a new generation of talented individuals to participate in party activities and be part of Thailand's political development. These young political actors who come from various provinces across Thailand will have a chance to talk to, and work with, like-minded politicians, while aspiring to change Thailand for the better.

Innovation for Social Entrepreneurship

Of late, social enterprise and entrepreneurship have received some attention in Thailand. This has been further encouraged and sustained by the following initiatives:

- **Thai Social Enterprise Office or TSEO (www.tseo.or.th):** Founded with the support of the Thai government in order to coordinate partnerships, support and catalyse the creation of social enterprises in Thailand, TSEO is positioned as the key facilitator in creating a conducive environment for the advancement of Thailand's social enterprises, and to support and strengthen partner networks.
- **UnLtd Thailand (www.unltd.in.th):** Launched in September 2010 as the first seed funding for Thai social entrepreneurs with branding brought from a similar UK programme, UnLtd Thailand provides staged funding and helps social entrepreneurs in the network with incubation and networking services. Similarly, the BANPU Champions for Change programme was launched as one of BANPU Public Company Limited's CSR projects. The project aims to stimulate entrepreneurship among Thai youths and to raise awareness on social and environmental issues.
- **Grassroot Innovation Network (GIN):** A social enterprise using innovations to support organic agriculture, GIN creates community-based learning networks that introduce and incubate organic farming practices and technologies within the community. GIN then sells organic agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, earth-worms, drip-irrigation and organically raised animals through a network-marketing strategy to generate income and grow the network. As a result, GIN develops pro-poor sustainable agriculture methods that allow farmers to increase their yield by over 400% in the first year with just a quarter acre of land.

