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The Integration of Social Policy and Sustainable Development in Improving Community Welfare in Thailand

Somchai Prasertkul[1]

[1]School of Liberal Arts, Walailak University, Nakhon Si Thammarat 80160, Thailand

*Corresponding Author: Somchai Prasertkul

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the integration of social policy and sustainable development in improving community welfare in Thailand. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of social policies integrated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and limited observations. The research informants included academics, government officials, non-governmental organizations, and community beneficiaries of social programs. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through data reduction, theme categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the integration of social policy and sustainable development in Thailand has significantly contributed to improving community welfare by expanding social protection, improving access to health and education, and strengthening inclusive development. The implementation of the SDGs has encouraged the Thai government to link economic, social, and human development policies within a more integrated development framework oriented toward community welfare. This success is supported by political commitment, institutional capacity, and relatively strong cross-sectoral coordination. However, this study also identified several challenges, such as regional inequality, a high number of informal workers, and limited institutional coordination that impact the effectiveness of policy implementation. This study concludes that welfare development in Thailand requires strengthening the integration of social policies, expanding more inclusive social protection, and collaborative and sustainable development governance so that the benefits of development can be felt equitably by all levels of society.

Introduction

Sustainable development in the 21st century is no longer understood solely as an effort to increase economic growth but also encompasses social, environmental, and overall societal well-being dimensions. The modern development paradigm places people at the center of development (people-centered development), emphasizing the importance of a balance between economic growth, social justice, and environmental sustainability (Lompo, 2023). In this context, the integration of social policies and sustainable development has become a strategic issue in various countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, which is undergoing rapid economic and social transformation. Development is essentially a process of expanding human freedom and capacity to achieve a better life, not merely increasing economic income (Ejike, 2022). This perspective emphasizes that societal well-being must be the primary focus of every development policy.

The United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda in 2015. This agenda emphasizes the importance of integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions in achieving inclusive and sustainable development

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(Krysovatyy et al., 2024). Within the SDGs framework, various goals such as poverty eradication, good health, quality education, decent work, and reduced inequality are a key part of the global development agenda. Sustainable development requires an integrated policy approach so that each development sector can support each other and not operate in isolation (Pouresmaieli et al., 2023). Therefore, social policy plays a crucial role as an instrument to ensure that the benefits of development are shared equally by all groups in society.

Social policy is essentially a set of policies designed to improve public welfare through the provision of social services, social protection, social security, education, health care, and various other forms of state intervention (Obinger & Talos, 2025). The modern welfare state is built on the state's responsibility to ensure social protection for its citizens (Hinrichs, 2025). In the context of developing countries, social policy serves not only as a protection mechanism but also as a development strategy to reduce poverty and social inequality. Midgley explains that social policy is closely linked to social development because it aims to create more inclusive prosperity through a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Mulugeta, 2022).

In Southeast Asia, the issue of integrating social policy and sustainable development is becoming increasingly important as global challenges such as urbanization, climate change, economic inequality, and labor market transformation increase. Many countries in the region face a dilemma between maintaining economic growth and ensuring equitable distribution of social welfare. According to Dafuley (2023), developing countries tend to face limitations in building inclusive social protection systems due to the dominance of the informal sector and limited fiscal capacity. These conditions leave some groups vulnerable to poverty, income insecurity, and limited access to basic social services.

Thailand is an interesting country to study because it demonstrates significant progress in integrating social policy and sustainable development. Thailand is known as one of the countries in Southeast Asia that has successfully achieved progress in human development, poverty reduction, and expanded access to health services. Thailand's Universal Health Coverage program is often considered a relatively successful model of health protection in developing countries. Thailand's success in expanding healthcare access demonstrates the importance of political commitment and institutional capacity in building an inclusive social welfare system (Yuda & Pholpark, 2022).

In addition to the health sector, Thailand has also developed various social policies that support the sustainable development agenda, including social protection programs, education, rural community development, and inequality reduction (Draper et al., 2022). The Thai government has actively integrated the SDGs agenda into national development planning through an approach that emphasizes a balance between economic growth and social welfare. Cross-sectoral policy integration is a crucial factor in SDG implementation because many development goals are complexly interconnected and interdependent (Trowbridge et al., 2022). Therefore, the success of sustainable development depends heavily on the government's ability to create synergies across policy sectors.

Nevertheless, Thailand still faces various challenges in realizing truly inclusive and sustainable development. Social and economic inequality between regions remains a significant problem, particularly between urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the high number of informal sector workers means that some communities lack adequate social

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protection. Economic transformation in Southeast Asian countries often results in high economic growth but has not been fully accompanied by equitable distribution of social welfare (David et al., 2025). This situation demonstrates that development success is measured not only by economic indicators, but also by the state's ability to ensure equitable public welfare.

Global challenges such as climate change, population aging, and global economic instability also impact the effectiveness of social policies and sustainable development in Thailand. According to Mkandawire, developing countries require an adaptive and inclusive social policy approach to address constantly changing socio-economic dynamics (Kumar et al., 2025). Integration between social policies and sustainable development is crucial to ensure that the development process not only generates short-term economic growth but also creates long-term social resilience and sustainability (Mezentseva et al., 2024).

Studies on the integration of social policies and sustainable development in Thailand are still relatively limited, especially those that specifically analyze the relationship between policy integration and improved public welfare. Most previous research has focused on specific sectors such as health, education, or social protection separately. However, a sustainable development approach demands a more holistic and multidimensional analysis. According to Creswell, multidimensional research requires an approach that can comprehensively connect empirical data with the social and policy context (Trein et al., 2023). Therefore, this research is important to provide a deeper understanding of how the integration of social policies and sustainable development can contribute to improving people's welfare in Thailand.

Table 1. Supporting Factors in the Integration of Social Policy and Sustainable Development

Supporting Factor	Role in Policy Integration	Evidence from the Findings
Political Commitment	Provides strategic direction and policy support for integrating social protection and sustainable development objectives.	The findings identify political commitment as an important factor supporting the integration of social policies with poverty reduction, health, education, and inequality-reduction objectives.
Institutional Capacity	Enables government institutions to design, implement, administer, and sustain integrated social welfare and development programs.	Institutional capacity is identified as a key condition influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of integrated policy implementation.
Cross-Sectoral Coordination	Connects government institutions, social-sector actors, local authorities, and other stakeholders in implementing integrated policies.	Effective coordination supports policy implementation, while limited institutional coordination remains one of the challenges identified in the findings.

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The three supporting factors are closely interconnected. Political commitment provides the strategic direction necessary to prioritize social welfare and sustainable development within public policy. Institutional capacity provides the administrative and organizational foundation required to translate these priorities into programs and services. Meanwhile, cross-sectoral coordination facilitates collaboration among institutions and policy domains, allowing social protection, health, education, poverty reduction, and sustainable development initiatives to be implemented in a more integrated manner. The findings consequently demonstrate that the effectiveness of policy integration is influenced not by a single institutional factor but by the interaction of political, organizational, and coordination mechanisms.

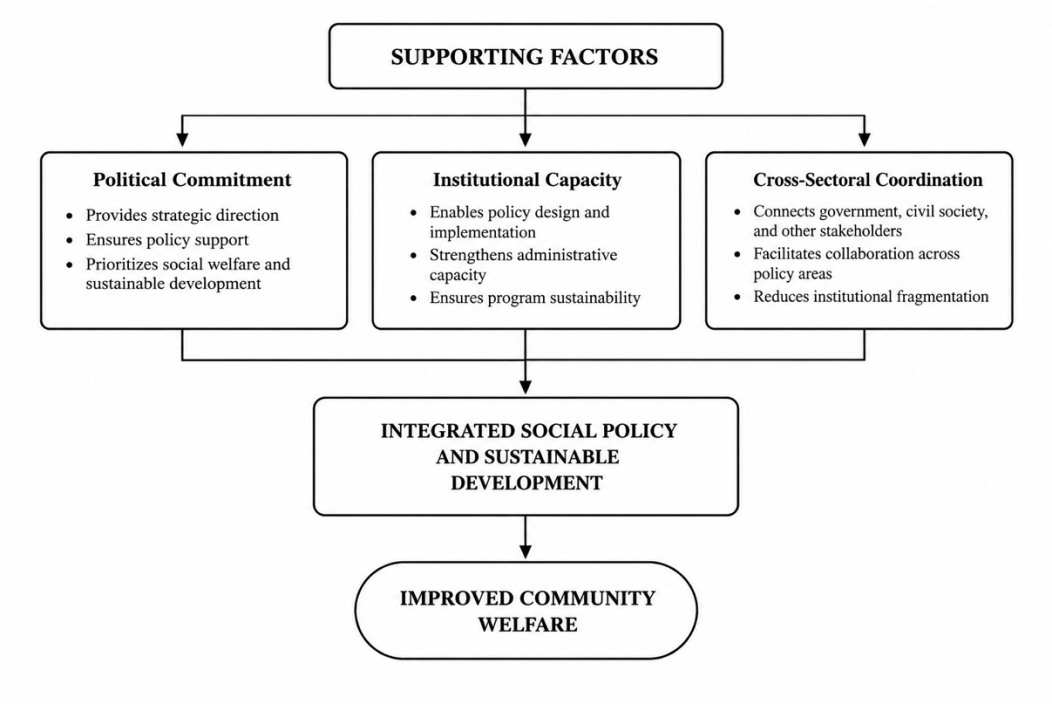


Figure 1. Supporting Factors for Policy Integration and Community Welfare

The figure illustrates the relationship among the major supporting factors identified in the study. Political commitment establishes the strategic foundation for policy integration, while institutional capacity provides the organizational capability to implement integrated programs. Cross-sectoral coordination connects these institutional efforts and facilitates collaboration across policy areas. The interaction of these factors supports the implementation of integrated social policy and sustainable development, which is ultimately directed toward improving community welfare. This interpretation is consistent with the findings that political commitment, institutional capacity, and cross-sectoral coordination influence the implementation of integrated policies, while weaknesses in institutional coordination and differences in local capacity remain important implementation challenges.

Method

Research Approach and Type

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the integration of social policy and sustainable development in improving community welfare in

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Thailand. This approach allows researchers to comprehensively explore social phenomena through the perspectives of actors involved in the policy process. According to John W. Creswell, qualitative research is used to understand social phenomena based on the experiences, views, and interpretations of participants in a natural context. Therefore, this method is considered relevant for examining the relationship between social policy, sustainable development, and community welfare in greater depth.

The research type used is a case study because this research focuses on a specific case, namely the integration of social policy and sustainable development in Thailand. The case study was chosen to gain a detailed understanding of the policy implementation process, institutional dynamics, and challenges and opportunities in improving community welfare. According to Robert K. Yin, case studies are used to examine contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly visible.

Research Location

This research was conducted in Thailand, one of the countries in Southeast Asia that has experienced significant progress in the implementation of social policy and sustainable development. Thailand was chosen because it is known for its various social programs that support public welfare, such as Universal Health Coverage, poverty reduction programs, and development policies based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, Thailand also faces various social challenges such as regional inequality, informal workers, urbanization, and changing demographic structures, making it an interesting country to study from a social policy and sustainable development perspective.

Research Data Sources

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through in-depth interviews with various informants related to social policy and sustainable development in Thailand. Research informants included academics, government officials, public policy researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community beneficiaries of social programs. Primary data was used to gain a deeper understanding of policy implementation, challenges faced, and their impact on public welfare.

Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through various official Thai government documents, international organization reports, scientific journals, academic articles, and development reports relevant to the research topic. Secondary data was also obtained from the United Nations, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and various other research institutions. The use of secondary data aims to strengthen primary data and provide a broader picture of the development of social policy and sustainable development in Thailand.

Informant Selection Technique

The informants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique. This technique was used to ensure that the selected informants possess knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of social policy and sustainable development in Thailand. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to obtain more relevant and in-depth data in line with the research focus. The informant criteria for this study included: (1) Government officials involved in the formulation and implementation

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of social policy; (2) Academics or researchers with expertise in social policy and sustainable development; (3) non-governmental organizations engaged in social welfare; and (4) Community beneficiaries of government social programs. Through this selection of informants, the study hoped to obtain various perspectives on the integration of social policy and sustainable development in Thailand.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques in this study included in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and limited observations. The in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using a flexible interview guide. This technique allows researchers to gain in-depth information about informants' experiences, perspectives, and understanding regarding the implementation of social policies and sustainable development.

In addition to interviews, this research also utilized documentation studies by reviewing various policy documents, government regulations, development reports, scientific articles, and documents related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The documentation study was conducted to understand the direction of Thai government policy and the progress of social development and community welfare.

Limited observations were conducted to gain a contextual understanding of community social conditions and the implementation of social programs in the field. Observations helped researchers understand the social realities related to the implementation of social policies and sustainable development in Thailand.

Data Analysis Techniques

This research employed thematic analysis as a data analysis technique. The analysis was conducted through several stages: data reduction, data presentation, theme categorization, data interpretation, and drawing conclusions. Initially, all interview results were transcribed and classified based on the main research themes, such as social policy integration, sustainable development, community welfare, implementation challenges, and policy supporting factors.

Next, researchers interpreted the data to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings related to the research focus. Thematic analysis was used because it can help researchers understand social phenomena systematically and in-depth. In the analysis process, researchers also used an interpretive approach to understand the social, political, and institutional dynamics that influence policy implementation in Thailand.

Data Validity Testing

To maintain the validity and credibility of the data, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from various informants and different documents. Meanwhile, method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, documentation, and observations.

In addition to triangulation, this study also employed member checking, which involves reconfirming interview results with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation aligns with the informants' intentions and experiences. This step was taken to increase the trustworthiness and accuracy of the research data.

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Results

Integration of Social Policy and Sustainable Development

Social policy integration contributes to improving public welfare through the provision of more inclusive public services, equitable access to social protection, and strengthening community capacity to cope with various social and economic risks. In the Thai context, the integration of social policy with the sustainable development agenda is evident through the development of universal health care programs, expanding access to education, protecting vulnerable groups, and strengthening community-based poverty reduction programs (Pylypenko et al., 2024). Integrated policies enable the government to focus not only on economic growth but also on ensuring that development outcomes are enjoyed more equitably by all levels of society. This approach creates a mutually supportive relationship between economic development, social protection, and improving the quality of life of the community.

The results show that social policy integration in Thailand has a positive impact on public welfare, particularly in improving access to health services and reducing the social vulnerability of the poor. Social protection programs linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda can strengthen community capacity to meet basic needs such as health, education, and decent work. Furthermore, cross-sectoral coordination between the central government, local governments, and social institutions contributes to the effectiveness of policy implementation. One academic informant explained:

> *"The Thai government is beginning to realize that economic development alone is not enough. Therefore, social policies are being integrated with the sustainable development agenda so that people not only achieve economic growth but also social protection and a better quality of life."*

Research findings also show that integrating social policies helps reduce disparities in access to public services between urban and rural communities. Thailand's universal healthcare program is an example of successful social policy integration that has a direct impact on community well-being. With a more inclusive healthcare system, low-income communities can access healthcare at more affordable costs. An informant from a social organization stated:

> *"Before social protection programs were strengthened, poor communities often struggled to access healthcare due to high costs. Now, healthcare access is much easier, helping low-income communities maintain their quality of life."*

In addition to the health sector, social policy integration is also evident in the development of education and economic empowerment. The Thai government is promoting various skills training programs, supporting small businesses, and empowering communities to sustainably increase community incomes. These policies aim not only to alleviate short-term poverty but also to build long-term economic independence. According to one government official interviewed:

> *"Integrating social policy with sustainable development helps the government view welfare issues more holistically. So, the programs created are not just temporary relief but also encourage communities to become more economically independent."*

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Furthermore, research shows that the success of social policy integration in Thailand is influenced by the government's political commitment, institutional capacity, and relatively good cross-sectoral coordination. The Thai government strives to link social protection policies with sustainable development targets such as poverty reduction, improved health, quality education, and reduced social inequality. This approach strengthens policy effectiveness because each development sector supports each other in achieving community welfare goals.

However, this study also found that social policy integration still faces several challenges, such as development disparities between regions, a high number of informal workers, and limited access to social services in certain areas. However, in general, the integration of social policies and sustainable development in Thailand has demonstrated a significant contribution to improving public welfare through a more inclusive, adaptive, and needs-oriented development approach.

Progress in Social Protection and Human Development

Thailand has demonstrated significant progress in social protection and human development over the past few decades. This progress is evident in increased access to health services, education, and social protection, as well as improvements in the general quality of life for the community (Saputra, 2024). One of Thailand's significant achievements is the implementation of the Universal Health Coverage program, which allows most of the population to access healthcare at more affordable costs. This program is a form of social protection that has successfully expanded the reach of public services, particularly for low-income and vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the Thai government has developed various social assistance, poverty reduction, community empowerment, and human resource development programs as part of its national development strategy focused on public welfare.

Thailand's human development progress is also reflected in improvements in education, health, and life expectancy indicators. The Thai government has consistently increased investment in the education and health sectors as part of its long-term social development agenda. This policy aims to create a more productive, healthy society with a better capacity to cope with social and economic changes. An interviewed academic explained:

> *"Thailand has experienced significant changes in human development since the government began strengthening the health and education sectors. These social investments have helped improve the quality of life for the community more equitably than before."*

In addition to improving access to health and education, Thailand has also expanded its social protection system for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the poor, informal workers, and rural communities. The government has developed various cash transfer programs, social subsidies, and community economic empowerment programs to reduce social risks and increase household economic resilience. This approach demonstrates that human development is understood not only as economic growth but also as improving the overall social capacity and well-being of the community. One informant from a social organization stated:

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> *“Social protection in Thailand has improved as the government has begun to focus on vulnerable groups. Social assistance and public services help the poor survive in unstable economic conditions.”*

Thailand's progress in human development is also influenced by the integration of social policies and the sustainable development agenda. The government strives to link various social programs with the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as poverty reduction, improved health, quality education, and reduced social inequality. This approach strengthens development effectiveness because each policy sector supports each other in improving people's well-being. A government official explained:

> *"Human development in Thailand is no longer solely focused on economic growth. The government now places greater emphasis on balancing the economy, social protection, and sustainability so that people can benefit more broadly from development."*

Despite making considerable progress, Thailand still faces various challenges in social protection and human development, particularly related to regional inequality, informal sector workers, and increased social needs due to demographic change. Some people in rural areas still face limited access to adequate public services and social protection. Nevertheless, Thailand has generally made significant progress in building a more inclusive social protection and human development system than many other developing countries in Southeast Asia.

Challenges in Policy Implementation

Although Thailand has shown progress in social protection and human development, this study found that various challenges remain that affect the effectiveness of integrating social policies and sustainable development. One major challenge is the persistently high regional disparity between urban and rural areas. Urban areas such as Bangkok and industrial areas have better access to healthcare, education, infrastructure, and employment opportunities than rural areas in northern and northeastern Thailand (Iamtrakul & Chayphong, 2023). This disparity results in an unequal distribution of development benefits, resulting in some communities in disadvantaged areas still facing limited access to basic social services and economic opportunities.

Interviews indicate that regional disparity is a significant obstacle to achieving inclusive social welfare. One academic explained:

> *“Development in Thailand still tends to be concentrated in urban areas and major economic regions. Communities in rural areas often lag in access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, so social inequality remains quite visible.”*

In addition to regional disparity, the high number of informal workers also poses a significant challenge to the implementation of social policies in Thailand. Most informal workers work without permanent employment contracts and lack adequate social protections, such as health insurance, pensions, or employment protection. This makes informal workers more vulnerable to economic uncertainty, especially during economic crises or social disruptions. Although the Thai government has expanded various social protection programs, coverage for informal workers still faces various limitations, particularly in data collection and policy implementation.

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An informant from a social organization explained:

> *"Many informal workers in Thailand are still difficult to reach by social protection programs because they are not administratively registered. As a result, when economic problems occur, this group is the most vulnerable."*

This study also found that limited institutional coordination poses another challenge to the integration of social policy and sustainable development. Policy implementation often involves multiple government institutions with varying authorities, so coordination between institutions is not always optimal (Kerwin & Furlong, 2025). In some cases, there are overlapping programs, differing policy priorities, and a lack of data integration between institutions. This situation can hinder the effectiveness of social program implementation and reduce the efficiency of government resource use.

One government official interviewed stated:

> *"The biggest challenge is not just policymaking, but ensuring that all institutions work in an integrated manner. Sometimes each institution has its own priorities, making coordination difficult."*

Furthermore, the limited capacity of local governments to implement social programs also impacts the quality of policy implementation at the local level. Some regions have limited human resources and budgets, making them unable to implement social development programs optimally. As a result, the quality of public services and social protection in some regions still experiences gaps compared to more developed regions.

Implementation of the SDGs in Inclusive Development

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Thailand reinforces a more inclusive development direction by placing community well-being at the heart of the national development agenda. By integrating the SDGs into development policies, the Thai government focuses not only on economic growth but also on poverty reduction, improving the quality of education, health, social protection, and reducing social inequality (Waleewong & Yueayai, 2022). This approach encourages more equitable development and pays greater attention to vulnerable groups such as the poor, informal workers, women, the elderly, and rural communities. Thus, the implementation of the SDGs helps the government develop policies that are more oriented towards equitable distribution of development benefits and social sustainability.

Research shows that the implementation of the SDGs in Thailand has encouraged cross-sectoral integration in development planning. The government has begun to link economic, social, and environmental policies within a mutually supportive sustainable development framework. This approach strengthens inclusive development because each policy is no longer implemented in isolation but is instead directed towards achieving the common goal of improving the quality of life for the community. One academic interviewed explained that:

> *"The SDGs have made the Thai government more focused on development, not just pursuing economic growth, but also ensuring that people have more equitable access to social services and development opportunities."*

The implementation of the SDGs has also strengthened inclusive development by improving access to healthcare and education. The Thai government has expanded various social protection programs and public services as part of its efforts to achieve the

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SDG targets, particularly the goals of poverty eradication, good health, quality education, and reduced inequality (Mandela, 2025). These programs have helped improve the quality of life for the community, particularly for groups that previously had limited access to basic services. An informant from a social organization stated that:

> *"Since the SDGs were incorporated into national policy, attention to the poor and vulnerable groups has increased. Many social programs are now geared towards ensuring that no group is left behind."*

In addition to strengthening social services, the implementation of the SDGs also encourages community participation and collaboration between institutions in the development process. The Thai government has begun involving various actors, such as civil society organizations, academics, local communities, and the private sector, in implementing the sustainable development agenda. This multi-stakeholder involvement helps create a more participatory and responsive development approach to community needs. One government official explained:

> *"SDG implementation helps the government strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration. Now, development is no longer solely the responsibility of the central government but also involves communities and various other institutions."*

This study also found that the SDGs provide a clearer framework for Thailand in developing long-term development policies oriented toward sustainability and social welfare. The SDG agenda helps the government establish more measurable development priorities, particularly in reducing social disparities and improving the quality of life for the community. With clear development indicators and targets, the government can more systematically evaluate the effectiveness of social and development policies.

Integrating Social Policy and Sustainable Development for Inclusive Community Welfare in Thailand

This study demonstrates that the integration of social policies and sustainable development has significantly contributed to improving the well-being of the people in Thailand. Research findings demonstrate that a development approach that connects social protection, human development, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda can create a more inclusive development direction than a development approach solely oriented toward economic growth (Sepetis, 2024). In this context, the primary objective of this research, which is to analyze the integration of social policy and sustainable development in improving community welfare, demonstrates that development success depends not only on improving macroeconomic indicators but also on the country's ability to build an adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable social protection system.

These research findings strengthen the argument from a social policy perspective that social policy has a strategic function not only as a social protection instrument but also as a development instrument (developmental social policy). Within this framework, social policy is no longer positioned as a residual policy that only emerges when market failures occur but rather becomes an integral part of the national development strategy. This perspective aligns with the thinking of Hariram et al. (2023), who emphasize that social policy must be integrated with economic development to produce more inclusive and sustainable welfare. In the case of Thailand, the integration of social policy with the sustainable development agenda demonstrates that investments in health, education,

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and social protection can strengthen community capacity to cope with social and economic risks.

This study also shows that the implementation of the SDGs in Thailand has driven a paradigm shift in development from a growth-oriented approach to a human-centered approach. This is evident in the government's increased attention to issues of poverty, social inequality, access to health care, education, and the protection of vulnerable groups. From another perspective, development should be understood as a process of expanding human capabilities and freedoms to achieve a better life (Walker et al., 2022). The research findings demonstrate that the integration of social policies and the SDGs in Thailand have contributed to expanding public access to basic services and social opportunities, thereby enhancing people's ability to improve their quality of life (Chapirom et al., 2025).

The research findings demonstrate that inclusive development in Thailand is strongly influenced by institutional capacity and the government's ability to coordinate across sectors. Implementing sustainable development requires synergy between various government agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and local communities. In this context, the study found that Thailand's success in expanding social protection is inseparable from its relatively strong political commitment and bureaucratic capacity. These findings support another perspective that emphasizes that development effectiveness depends heavily on the quality of institutions and public policy coordination (Masyk et al., 2023). Thus, sustainable development cannot be understood solely as a technocratic agenda, but also as a political and institutional process involving various development actors.

However, this study also found that the integration of social policy and sustainable development in Thailand still faces quite complex structural challenges. Regional disparities between urban and rural areas indicate that the benefits of development have not been fully distributed equitably (Bernard et al., 2023). Urban areas tend to have better access to health services, education, infrastructure, and economic opportunities than rural areas. This situation suggests that national economic growth has not automatically resulted in equitable social welfare. From an inclusive development perspective, successful development should be able to reduce social inequality and ensure that marginalized groups have equal access to development resources (Kumar, 2025).

Another challenge identified in this study is the high number of informal workers who are not yet fully integrated into the national social protection system. The dominance of the informal sector is a common characteristic of developing countries, including Thailand, creating significant social vulnerability (Linh, 2025). Most informal workers lack adequate health insurance, employment protection, or pension benefits. This finding reinforces the argument that conventional social protection models based on formal employment still face limitations in the developing world context. Therefore, this study demonstrates the importance of transforming social policy towards a more universal and inclusive social protection system to reach informal workers and other vulnerable groups.

This study found that limited institutional coordination remains a barrier to the implementation of sustainable development in Thailand. Although the government has integrated the SDGs into national development planning, implementation at the local

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level still faces various obstacles such as overlapping programs, differing priorities between institutions, and limited local government capacity. This situation suggests that the integration of social policy and sustainable development requires a more collaborative and coordinated governance system. From a collaborative governance perspective, the success of sustainable development depends heavily on a country's ability to build cross-sectoral cooperation and strengthen effective institutional coordination (Marin-Gonzalez et al., 2022).

The theoretical implication of this research is that it strengthens the argument that the integration of social policy and sustainable development is a crucial element in building prosperity in developing countries. This research demonstrates that a development approach that solely emphasizes economic growth is insufficient to address social inequality and societal vulnerability. Therefore, this research contributes to the development of studies on social policy, the developmental welfare state, and sustainable development governance in the Southeast Asian context. It also reinforces the relevance of a multidimensional approach in understanding the relationship between social policy, sustainable development, and societal welfare.

Practically, this research has important implications for the Thai government and other developing countries. First, the government needs to strengthen cross-sectoral integration in the implementation of social policy and sustainable development to prevent development programs from being fragmented. Second, expanding social protection for informal workers is an urgent need to reduce social vulnerability amidst global economic changes. Third, the government needs to strengthen the capacity of local governments and institutional coordination systems to ensure more effective and equitable implementation of sustainable development. Furthermore, community and civil society participation needs to be strengthened to ensure development is truly responsive to the social needs of the community.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the integration of social policies and sustainable development in Thailand has significantly contributed to improving public welfare by expanding social protection, improving access to health and education services, and strengthening more inclusive development. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has encouraged the Thai government to link economic, social, and human development policies within a more integrated sustainable development framework. This study found that the success of social development in Thailand is supported by political commitment, institutional capacity, and relatively good cross-sectoral coordination, particularly in the development of universal health programs and social protection for vulnerable communities. However, this study also shows that various challenges remain, such as regional inequality, high levels of informal workers, and limited institutional coordination, which impact the effectiveness of policy implementation. Therefore, strengthening the integration of social policies, expanding more universal social protection, and enhancing collaborative development governance are crucial steps to achieving more equitable and sustainable public welfare in Thailand.

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