

# Enhancing Decent Work and Employability for Young People in Rural Areas of Thailand

Sujittra Rodsomboon<sup>1</sup>, Jidapa Meepien<sup>2</sup>

(1. Sripatum University, Thailand; 2. Kenan Institute of Asia, Thailand)

**Abstract:** This paper is a comprehensive study on the situation of youth employment in rural areas of Thailand. It mainly focuses on how the stakeholders can help improving the decent work as well as improving employability for young people living in rural areas. This paper firstly provides the methodological approaches in understanding the theoretical framework of decent work and the core concepts and components of the employability. For the decent work, it is based on social security. For the components of employability, it focuses on the skills that are needed by labor market. This paper applied a qualitative research, which is including document researches and secondary data analysis. The secondary data are including; the Labor Force Survey (LFS) and the statistical data from the International Labour Organization, UNESCO and FAO. The study discloses that many of young people living in rural areas have less opportunity to access into the labor market, especially young people living in the northeastern part and the northern part of Thailand. In addition, the study also shows that many of them, in particular those, are working in labor intensive sectors are vulnerable to hazardous working condition. The study found that economic and social disadvantages of rural communities are the major factors. Even if the Royal Thai Government has been expanding rural development policies and programs, such as education for all, there are many of young people in rural areas those are unable to access to these programs. Consequently, they obstruct opportunity to improve their employability of young people in rural areas. To increase opportunities for rural youth employment needs the establishment of Programs including; skill trainings, income generating program and social protection program (e.g., health insurance, minimum wages), and livelihood's programs in which reduce the poverty. In addition, the rural areas need learning centers that help providing education for young people.

**Key words:** youth employment; education for all policies

**JEL code:** J

## 1. Introduction

The unemployment rate of young people in Thailand continuously decreases. According to the National Statistical Office, the employed persons at age 15 to 24 years old were decreased during the past ten years. In 2013, the employed persons at age 15 to 24 years old were 4,477,450 persons — which decreased from 5,466,650

---

Sujittra Rodsomboon, Ph.D. of Natural Resources Economics, Associate Professor, lecturer of Sripatum University; research areas/interests: agricultural economics, labour, international migration. E-mail: rodsomboon@yahoo.com.

Jidapa Meepien, Master Degree in Southeast Asian Studies, Kenan Institute of Asia; research areas/interests: international migration. E-mail: jidapam@kenan-asia.org.

persons in 2003. The aforementioned was contrary to the proportion of persons, not in labor force — which shows that the number of young people at age 15 to 24 years old has increased overtime. In 2013, the number of young people at age 15 to 24 years, which were not in the labor force, was estimated of 5,544,890 persons while the number of this people was 5,464,850 in 2003.

**Table 1 Number of Young People at Age 15 to 24 Years Old**

	2546	2550	2556
Population at age 15 to 24 years old	11,241,230	10,539,630	10,199,020
Total Labor Force	5,776,390	5,214,010	4,654,130
1. Current labor force	5,757,020	5,205,370	4,637,160
1.1 Employed	5,466,650	4,972,450	4,477,450
- At work	5,445,120	4,930,510	4,455,400
- With job but not at work	21,530	41,940	22,050
1.2 Unemployed	290,370	232,930	159,730
- Looking for work	73,170	46,340	34,540
- Not looking/available for work	217,190	186,590	125,190
2. Seasonally inactive labor force	19,370	8,640	16,950
Persons not in Labor Force	5,464,850	5,325,610	5,544,890
1. Household work	582,900	696,280	711,570
2. Studies	4,464,030	4,227,120	4,223,590
3. Too young/old/incapable of work	142,140	147,090	172,910
4. Others	275,760	255,110	436,830

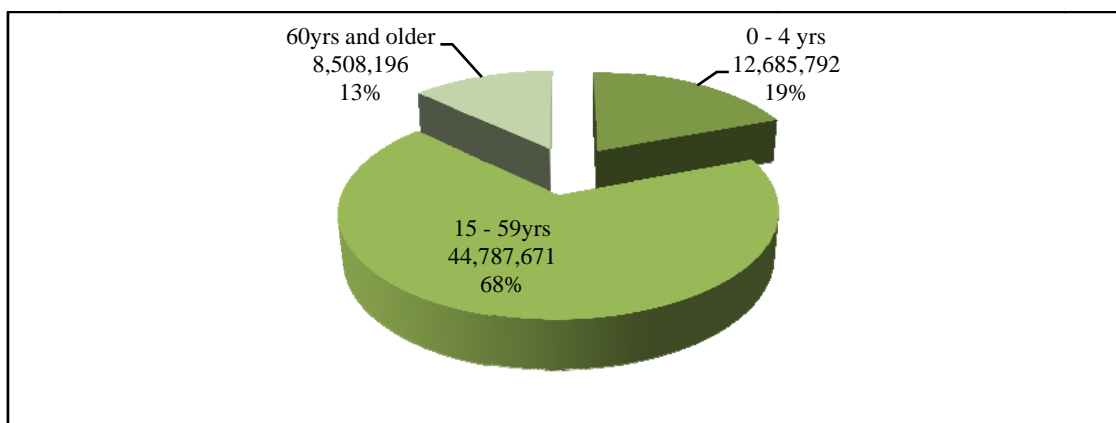
Source: Labor Force Survey, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister

The situation as earlier mentioned is the result of the “Education for All” policy, which was formulated since 1992. The principle of this policy aims to extend compulsory education for all children in Thailand, as well as an opportunity for children from all areas to access at least compulsory education, regardless of races and nationalities (UNESCO, The EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Report)<sup>1</sup>.

This study examines working conditions of young people and how the stakeholders can help improving the decent work for these young people. The study starts by the background information on population to shed the trend of the rural population. Then, it compares employment condition between young people living in rural areas and young people living in urban areas. The study identifies factors that are leading to constraints of young workers in rural areas. It further analyses the government policies that may affect the rural youth employment.

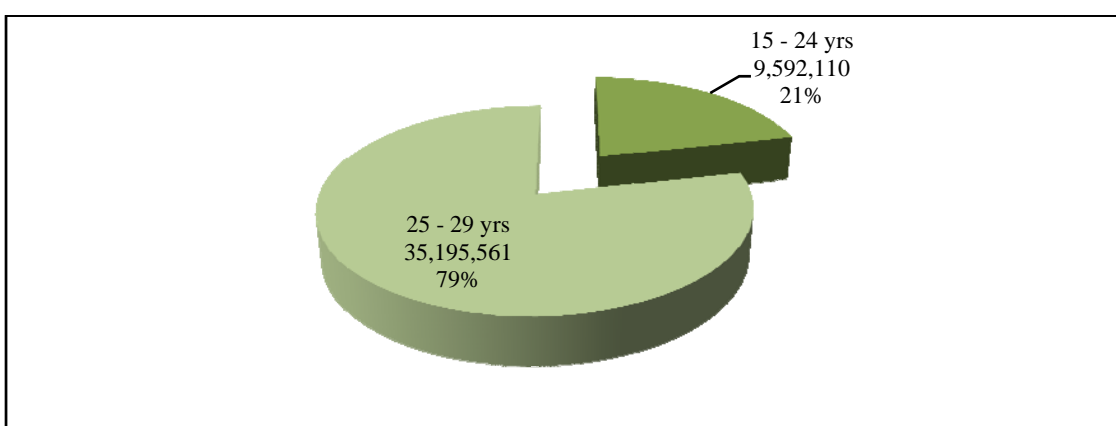
In 2011, the total of people in Thailand was officially recorded at 65.981 million people. In Thailand, nearly 70% were working age group, followed by 19% for childhood and 13% for elderly (Figure 1). Among the working age group, 79% were in the age group 25 to 59 years old, and 21% were in the age group 15 to 24 years old (Figure 2). Like other developing countries, Thailand is predominantly rural areas. According to the official statistical data, 55.85% of communities were living in rural areas, and 44.15% of populations were living in urban areas (Figure 3).

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/thailand/rapport\\_1.html](http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/thailand/rapport_1.html).



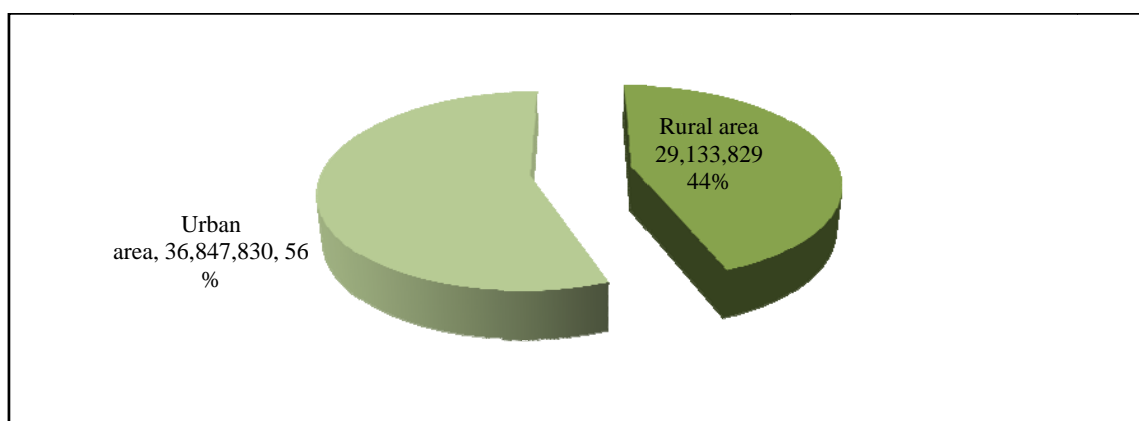
**Figure 1 Population in Thailand Classified by Age Group**

Source: The 2010 Population and Housing Census Whole Kingdom, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister.



**Figure 2 Working Age Population Classified by Age Group**

Source: The 2010 Population and Housing Census Whole Kingdom, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister.



**Figure 3 Population in Thailand Classified by Areas**

Source: The 2010 Population and Housing Census Whole Kingdom, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister.

In 2011, 13.5% of Thai people were below the poverty line. So the households living under the poverty line were predominantly rural areas. The poverty line of the households in rural areas was 2,203 Baht while the urban areas were 2,685 Baht (Figure 4). In the past twenty years, the poverty in Thailand was about twice of the poor in

urban areas, especially during the economic crisis that occurred in late 1990s. However, the poverty gap in rural areas and urban areas nowadays are small as a result of the poverty reduction policy that has been initiated by the Royal Thai Government since 2001. Figure 5 shows that nowadays the poor households in urban areas account for 7.73% while the poor households in rural areas account for 15.22%.

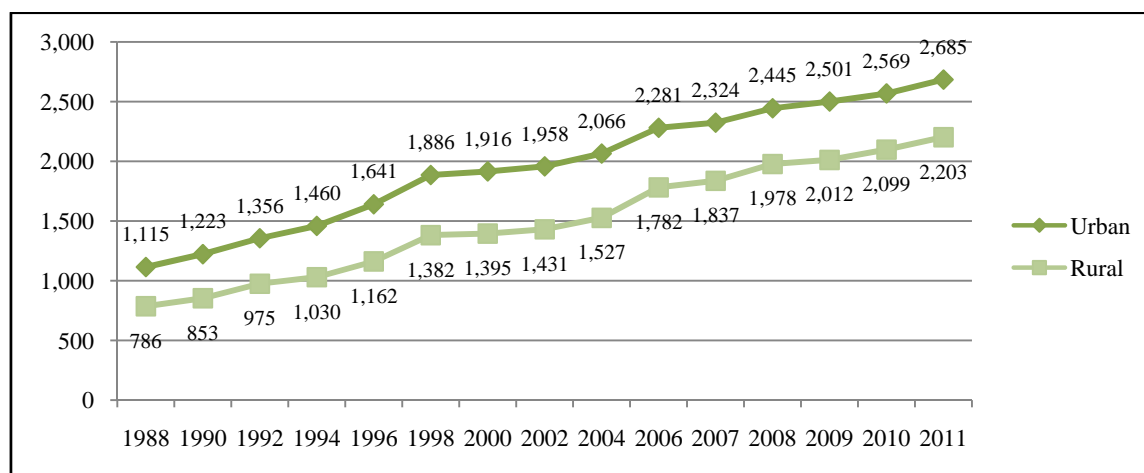


Figure 4 Thailand's Poverty Line

Source: Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister.

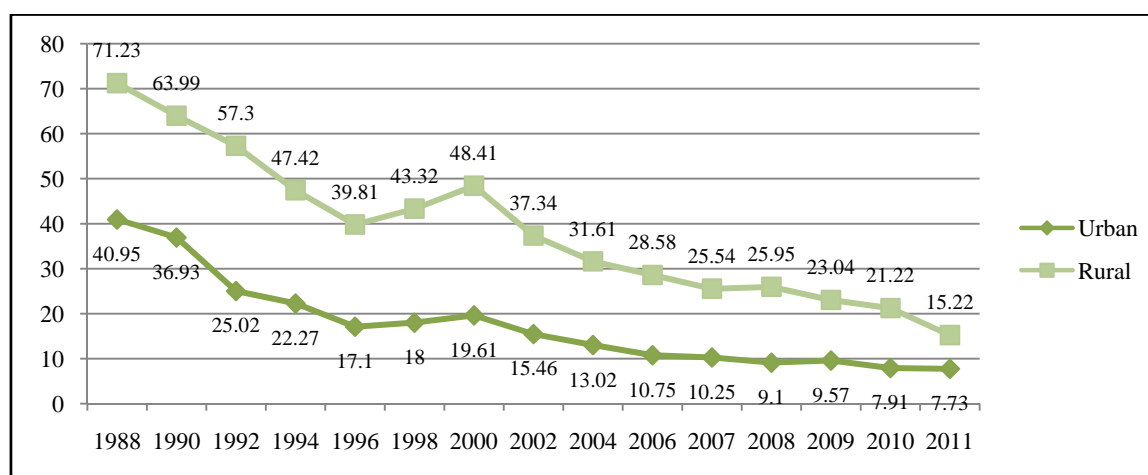
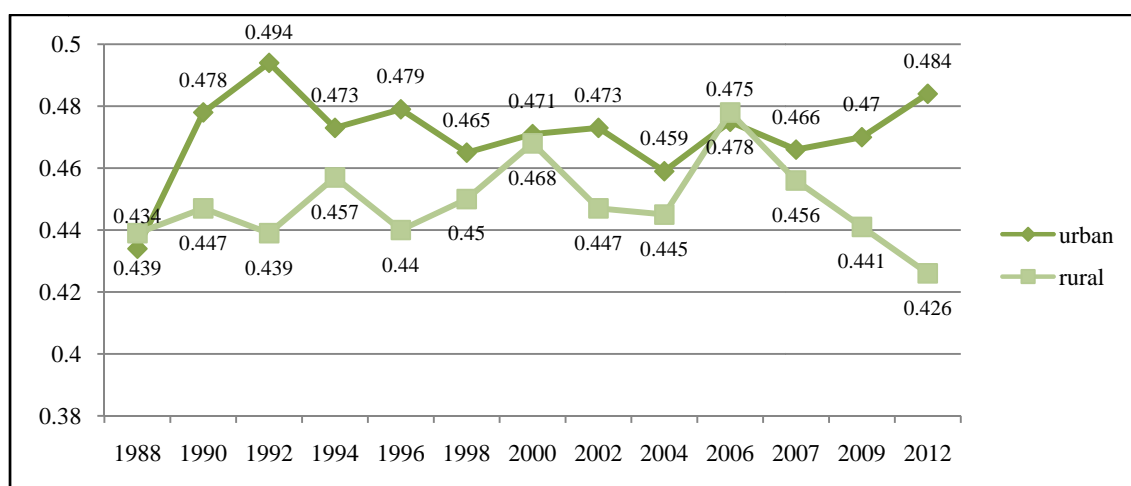


Figure 5 Proportion of the Poor Households Classified by Areas

Source: Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister.

Besides the poverty line, the rural poverty can be measured by the Gini coefficient. The Gini coefficient of household income in 2011 pointed that the Gini coefficient in rural areas is lower than urban areas — 0.426 for rural households and 0.484 for urban households (Figure 6).

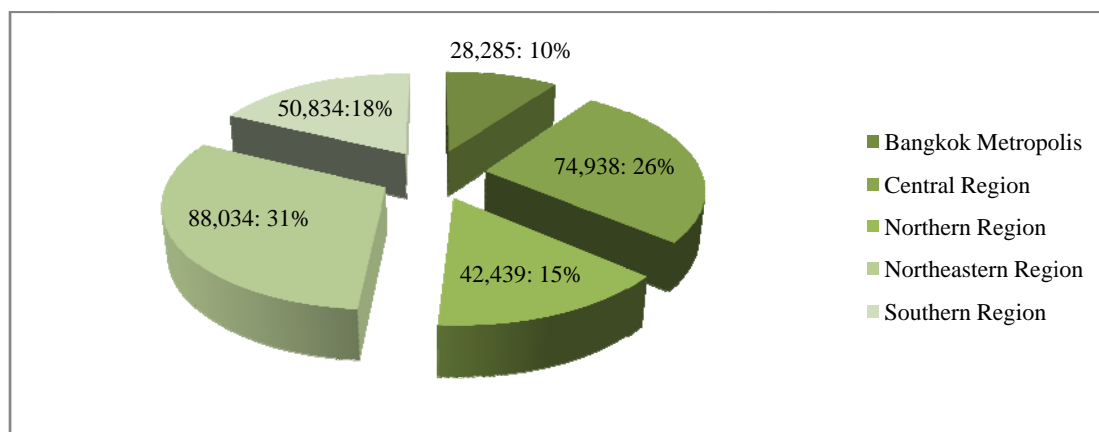
The aforementioned when considering the cause of rural poverty, it is found that the poverty in rural areas predominantly concerns income inequality and lack of equal opportunities (Miller & Mosley, 2004). In terms of income inequality, the main reason is from the lack of employment opportunities. And the lack of equal opportunities herein includes education and social services.



**Figure 6 Gini Coefficient Classified by Areas**

Source: Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister.

For the lack of employment opportunities, the abundant studies have pointed that people in rural areas have less employment opportunities than people living in rural areas. Even if the statistical data collected by the National statistical shows that the unemployment rate in rural areas has continuously decreased, the proportion of unemployed persons in rural areas has been still higher than urban areas. According to the National statistical office, the total of unemployed persons in 2013 was 284,534. Among these, only 10% were unemployed persons from Bangkok areas while approximately 90% were unemployed persons from other regions. Among four regions including Bangkok, the statistical data points that the unemployment is the highest in the Northeastern region (31%), followed by the Central region (26%), the Southern region (18%) and the North region (15%) (Figure 7).



**Figure 7 Number of Unemployed Persons Classified by Region**

Source: The Labor Force Survey, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.

For the less equal opportunity, the study found that people in rural areas have less accessibility into social services. Even though in the past ten years the government has implemented the populist policies-which have extended opportunities for people in rural areas, the study found that many of people in rural areas have been the lack of social services, especially education and social insurance. According to the Office National Economic and Social Development Board, the average year of education of people in rural areas was less than 10 years while the

average year of education of people in urban areas was around 10 years or higher. The same as social insurance, the Social Security Office points that the people in urban areas, especially Bangkok and vicinity can access into social insurance more than people living in rural areas.

The aforementioned shed the profile of Thai society, which points that there are disparities between urban areas and rural areas.

## **2. Recommendation**

The government should create a system to illuminate the basic general welfare and fairness, the opportunity for lower labor in rural areas, should contribute economic development more widely and equally, should promote education to enhance the quality of labor and promoting the private sector took part in the study.

## **3. Conclusion**

The RTG should adopt, as its major policy to promote rural non-farm and off-farm employment, for this would contribute to the increase in income level of the rural households. Such a policy should be combined with the policy to increase farm income, for they have been shown to be interrelated. The non-farm and off-farm employment policy should have a component designed to assist the rural households to maximize their income, and another component designed to increase employment opportunities by creating demand for such employment.