

Evolving Landscape of Philanthropy in Thailand: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities in Social Sector Development

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ABSTRACT

Philanthropy in Thailand plays a critical role in addressing social and economic inequalities and has long been influenced by cultural and religious traditions, particularly Buddhist principles of merit-making, which emphasize generosity and community-based giving. In recent years, the philanthropic sector has undergone a significant transformation, driven by urbanization, economic development, and globalization. This study, based on a survey of 124 social organizations in Thailand, examines key philanthropic trends in 2024, focusing on Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs), and compares these trends with regional and global patterns. It also explores the factors influencing philanthropic behavior and the implications for Thailand's broader social development. Findings reveal a growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR), social enterprises, and strategic philanthropy, with 96% of SDOs engaging in collaborations, surpassing the Asia average of 84 percent. However, challenges persist, including regulatory barriers, limited donor support for capacity building, and difficulties in talent recruitment and retention. Compared to regional peers, Thailand excels in corporate engagement but lags in regulatory clarity and donor accountability. This study suggests policy reforms, stronger donor emphasis on impact measurement, and future research to advance impact-based philanthropy in Thailand.

Keywords: Philanthropy, Doing Good Index, Social Delivery Organizations, Thailand

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ภูมิทัศน์ที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปของการบริจาคและการกุศลในประเทศไทย: แนวโน้ม ความท้าทาย และโอกาสในการพัฒนาภาคสังคม

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บทคัดย่อ

การกุศลในประเทศไทยมีบทบาทสำคัญอย่างยิ่งในการแก้ไขปัญหาความเหลื่อมล้ำทางสังคมและเศรษฐกิจ โดยได้รับอิทธิพลมาอย่างยาวนานจากประเพณีทางวัฒนธรรมและศาสนา โดยเฉพาะหลักพุทธศาสนาเรื่องการทำบุญ ซึ่งเน้นความเอื้อเฟื้อเผื่อแผ่และการให้โดยมีชุมชนเป็นศูนย์กลาง ในช่วงไม่กี่ปีที่ผ่านมา ภาคส่วนการกุศลได้เกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ โดยมีปัจจัยขับเคลื่อนจากการขยายตัวของความเป็นเมือง การพัฒนาทางเศรษฐกิจ และโลกาภิวัตน์ การศึกษาวิจัยฉบับนี้อ้างอิงจากการสำรวจองค์กรทางสังคม 124 แห่งในประเทศไทย เพื่อตรวจสอบแนวโน้มสำคัญด้านการกุศลในปี 2024 โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่องค์กรผู้ให้บริการทางสังคม (Social Delivery Organizations: SDOs) พร้อมทั้งเปรียบเทียบแนวโน้มเหล่านี้กับรูปแบบในระดับภูมิภาคและระดับโลก นอกจากนี้ งานวิจัยยังสำรวจปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อพฤติกรรมการบริจาคและผลกระทบต่อการพัฒนาสังคมในภาพรวมของประเทศไทย ผลการศึกษาพบว่ามีการให้ความสำคัญมากขึ้นในเรื่องความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมขององค์กร (CSR) วิสาหกิจเพื่อสังคม และการกุศลเชิงกลยุทธ์ โดยพบว่าร้อยละ 96 ขององค์กร SDOs มีการสร้างความร่วมมือระหว่างกัน ซึ่งเป็นสัดส่วนที่สูงกว่าค่าเฉลี่ยของภูมิภาคเอเชียซึ่งอยู่ที่ร้อยละ 84 อย่างไรก็ตาม ยังคงมีอุปสรรคที่ดำเนินอยู่ ได้แก่ ข้อจำกัดด้านกฎระเบียบ การสนับสนุนจากผู้บริจาคที่จำกัดในด้านการสร้างขีดความสามารถขององค์กร รวมถึงความยากลำบากในการสรรหาและรักษานักวิชาการที่มีศักยภาพ เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับประเทศเพื่อนบ้านในภูมิภาค ประเทศไทยมีความโดดเด่นในด้านการมีส่วนร่วมของภาคธุรกิจ แต่ยังคงตามหลังในด้านความชัดเจนของกฎระเบียบ

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และความรับผิดชอบของผู้บริจาค การศึกษานี้จึงเสนอแนะให้มีการปฏิรูปนโยบาย การส่งเสริมให้ผู้บริจาคให้ความสำคัญกับการวัดผลลัพธ์ทางสังคม และการวิจัย ในอนาคตเพื่อขับเคลื่อนการกุศลที่มุ่งเน้นผลกระทบ (Impact-based philanthropy) ในประเทศไทยให้ก้าวหน้าต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: การบริจาคเพื่อสังคม ดัชนีชี้วัดธรรมาภิบาลภาคสังคม องค์กรผู้ให้บริการ ทางสังคม ประเทศไทย

1. Introduction

Background

Philanthropy is conceptualized broadly as acts of giving. In the Thai context, such giving is deeply embedded in Buddhist-influenced cultural norms that emphasize generosity and merit-making (*tham bun*), fostering individual and community-based support for religious institutions, education, and disaster relief (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2017). Importantly, philanthropy in this sense varies in its degree of engagement and therefore should not be equated solely with corporate engagement, as it also includes one-off and remote donations with minimal direct involvement from donors.

In recent decades, however, philanthropy in Thailand has evolved in line with broader societal changes, including urbanization, economic development, and the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR). It now encompasses a diverse range of activities beyond one-time giving, such as training, seed funding, and other forms of organizational support, mirroring regional and global shifts towards more institutionalized and strategic forms of philanthropy (Sciortino, 2017; Salamon, 2014).

The Doing Good Index (DGI), developed by the Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the enabling environment for philanthropy and the non-profit sector across Asia (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2020, 2022, 2024). By examining factors such as regulatory frameworks, tax incentives, ecosystem support, and societal attitudes, the DGI offers valuable insights into the state of philanthropy in different countries.

The 2024 Doing Good Index is particularly relevant for understanding philanthropic trends in Thailand, as it captures the impact of recent global and regional developments, including the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainties, and shifts in donor behavior (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024). Addressing the lack of empirical data and comparative analysis on Thai philanthropy within the regional context, this study uses the Doing Good Index as its primary analytical lens to examine Thailand's philanthropic landscape

and compare it with the Asia average, thereby identifying unique trends, challenges, and opportunities.

Research Problems

Assessing philanthropic trends in Thailand is essential, as philanthropy has been increasingly recognized as an important mechanism for addressing social inequalities and supporting broader development objectives (Grady, 2016; Salamon, 2014). Despite Thailand's strong tradition of giving, its full potential remains constrained by regulatory barriers, limited transparency, and a lack of strategic focus, challenges that echo broader institutional and regulatory constraints observed in other Asian contexts (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2020, 2022; Sidel, 2018). At the same time, systematic empirical research on the country's philanthropic ecosystem—particularly studies that situate Thailand within a comparative regional framework—remains limited. This study therefore seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of philanthropy in Thailand using the Doing Good Index, with particular attention to emerging trends in 2024.

Objectives

Philanthropy plays a critical role in addressing social needs, complementing public services, and fostering inclusive development. Understanding what drives philanthropic behavior is therefore essential for designing effective policies, creating enabling environments for giving, and strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations. The primary objective of this study is to analyze philanthropic trends in Thailand using data from the Doing Good Index (DGI) 2024 and compare these trends with the Asia average. The Doing Good Index is based on a standardized survey and data collection framework applied across multiple Asian economies, covering areas such as regulatory environment, tax and fiscal policies, social and cultural context, and the ecosystem for civil society organizations. It is selected as the reference for trend analysis because it provides comparable, region-wide data on the enabling environment for philanthropy, allowing Thailand's performance and trajectory to be assessed in relation to its regional peers.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the key trends in philanthropy in Thailand, including changes in donor behavior, institutional support, and regulatory frameworks.
2. Compare Thailand's philanthropic trends with the Asia average to highlight similarities and differences.
3. Identify the factors influencing philanthropic behavior in Thailand, such as cultural norms, economic conditions, and policy environments

Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the key trends in philanthropy in Thailand, focusing on the most recent developments in 2024?
2. How do these trends compare to regional or global patterns, particularly the Asia average?
3. What factors influence philanthropic behavior in Thailand, and how do they shape the sector's development?

2. Literature Review

Philanthropy in Thailand

Philanthropy, in its broadest sense, refers to the voluntary use of private resources—whether financial, material, or human—for the public good, typically beyond immediate family or commercial interests. In Thailand, philanthropy is deeply rooted in its historical and cultural context, with Buddhist principles playing a central role in shaping the tradition of giving. The concept of *tham bun* (making merit) is a key driver of philanthropic behavior, as it is believed to bring spiritual benefits to the giver in this life and the next (Aphornsuvan, 2017). This cultural foundation has historically directed donations towards religious institutions, such as temples, and community-based initiatives, including education and disaster relief. Over time, the scope of philanthropy in Thailand has expanded to include more institutionalized and strategic forms of giving, such as Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) and strategic philanthropy, reflecting the country's economic development and integration into the global economy.

Although CSR, traditional donations, and disaster relief all involve “giving,” CSR is distinct from historical philanthropy in both purpose and practice. Traditional philanthropy in Thailand has often been ad hoc, event-driven, and motivated by religious merit-making or moral obligation, with a focus on immediate relief and charitable support. CSR, by contrast, is typically integrated into corporate strategy, branding, and stakeholder relations, aiming to align social and environmental initiatives with long-term business objectives and reputational goals. In this sense, CSR represents a more structured, programmatic, and sometimes impact-oriented approach to giving, even as it builds upon the long-standing cultural norms of generosity and merit-making.

The philanthropic ecosystem in Thailand today comprises a diverse range of actors. Individuals remain the largest contributors, often motivated by cultural and religious values. Corporations have also emerged as significant players, with many adopting CSR initiatives to address social and environmental challenges. For example, large Thai conglomerates such as CP Group and Siam Cement Group have established foundations to support education, healthcare, and sustainability projects (Sidel, 2018). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in implementing philanthropic initiatives, often acting as intermediaries between donors and beneficiaries. However, the sector faces challenges such as limited transparency, regulatory constraints, and a lack of professionalization, which hinder its ability to maximize social impact.

The Doing Good Index

The Doing Good Index (DGI), developed by the Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), is a region-specific analytical tool for assessing the enabling environment for philanthropy and the non-profit sector across Asia. This study draws on the DGI because it focuses exclusively on Asian countries and is therefore sensitive to regional regulatory, cultural, and institutional dynamics that may be less visible in global indices. Other international measures—such as the World Giving Index or broader civil society indices—provide valuable comparative data

on charitable behavior and civic space, but they tend to adopt a global, high-level perspective and do not systematically examine the structural conditions that facilitate or constrain philanthropy in Asia. In contrast, the DGI offers a more granular and contextually grounded assessment of the philanthropic landscape in Asian countries, making it particularly relevant for analyzing Thailand in its regional context.

The DGI evaluates countries based on four key dimensions: regulatory environment, tax and fiscal policies, socio-cultural factors, and ecosystem support. Rather than measuring the direct social impacts of philanthropic activities, the index focuses on the conditions under which “doing good” takes place—that is, how easy or difficult it is for individuals, corporations, and non-profit organizations to engage in giving and to operate effectively. By examining these enabling (or constraining) factors, the DGI generates insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each country’s philanthropic ecosystem and proposes a roadmap for policy and institutional reform (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2022).

Methodologically, the DGI combines quantitative and qualitative data collected through surveys and interviews with key stakeholders, including non-profit organizations, donors, and policymakers. Countries are assigned scores and classified into four tiers: Doing Well, Doing Better, Doing Okay, and Not Doing Enough. Thailand’s performance in previous editions of the DGI underscores both its strong cultural propensity for giving and the structural barriers that limit the sector’s development. For example, the 2020 DGI report notes that, despite a deeply rooted culture of generosity, Thailand faces regulatory constraints and limited tax incentives for donors, which inhibit the scaling and professionalization of philanthropic activities (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2020). The 2022–2024 edition of the DGI is expected to provide updated evidence on how the COVID–19 pandemic has reshaped the philanthropic environment in Thailand and the wider region, particularly in terms of funding priorities, modes of giving, and operational challenges for non-profit organizations.

Global and Regional Trends

Philanthropic trends in Thailand can be better understood by comparing them with those in other countries in Southeast Asia and globally. In many Asian countries, philanthropy is similarly influenced by cultural and religious traditions, such as Confucianism in China and Islam in Indonesia, and is increasingly shaped by broader shifts towards institutionalized and strategic giving (Sciortino, 2017). However, there are notable differences in the regulatory and institutional environments. For example, Singapore has a highly developed philanthropic ecosystem, supported by favorable tax policies and a strong culture of accountability, which has enabled it to attract significant domestic and international donations (Sidel, 2018). In contrast, countries like Vietnam and Myanmar face greater challenges due to restrictive regulations and limited infrastructure for philanthropy (Sciortino, 2017; Sidel, 2016).

Globally, there is a growing trend towards strategic and impact-driven philanthropy, in which donors increasingly seek measurable social outcomes rather than engaging solely in ad hoc charitable giving (OECD, 2018; Salamon, 2014). This shift is visible in Thailand as well, particularly among corporate donors and high-net-worth individuals. At the same time, comparative data show that philanthropic flows have become an increasingly important complement to official development assistance in many developing countries (Hudson Institute Center for Global Prosperity, 2013; Benn, Sangaré, & Hos, 2018), reinforcing expectations that private resources will shoulder a greater share of development responsibilities. However, Thailand continues to lag behind countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom in terms of institutional support, regulatory clarity, and the professionalization of the philanthropic sector (Grady, 2016; Salamon, 2014; Moran & Stone, 2016).

While the Doing Good Index (DGI) does not directly assess the social impacts of philanthropic activities or the effectiveness of specific interventions, it remains a valuable source of data for this study because it systematically evaluates the enabling environment in which philanthropy operates (Centre for Asian

Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2020, 2022, 2024). By focusing on regulatory frameworks, fiscal incentives, socio-cultural factors, and ecosystem support, the DGI provides a structured basis for identifying the structural gaps that hinder the development of more strategic and impact-oriented philanthropy in Thailand. Moreover, its region-wide coverage allows for comparison with other Asian countries facing similar contextual constraints, thereby offering relevant benchmarks and illustrative “best practices” that can inform policy and institutional reforms. In this sense, the DGI complements, rather than replaces, impact-focused studies by illuminating the contextual conditions that shape the possibilities for impact-driven giving (Grady, 2016; OECD, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The study of philanthropy in Thailand can be informed by several theoretical frameworks. Altruism theory provides a foundational perspective, suggesting that individuals engage in philanthropic activities out of a selfless desire to help others. However, in the Thai context, altruistic motives are often intertwined with cultural and religious motivations, particularly the pursuit of merit-making (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2017).

The concept of social capital is also relevant for understanding philanthropic behavior. Drawing on Putnam, social capital refers to features of social organization—such as trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity—that facilitate coordinated action and collective problem-solving (Putnam, 1993, 2000). In Thailand, these elements of social capital are evident in the strong community ties, mutual aid practices, and informal networks that underpin traditional forms of philanthropy and community-based giving.

Institutional theory offers another lens for understanding the development of the philanthropic sector. This theory highlights the influence of formal and informal institutions, such as regulatory frameworks, cultural norms, and organizational practices, on philanthropic behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For example, the lack of tax incentives for charitable giving in Thailand can be seen as an institutional barrier that limits the growth and professionalization of the sector (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2020, 2022, 2024;

Sidel, 2018). By applying these theoretical frameworks, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the factors shaping philanthropy in Thailand and its regional context, linking individual motivations and social networks with broader institutional and policy environments.

3. Methodology

Data Source

The primary data source for this study is the Doing Good Index (DGI), published and administered by the Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS). The DGI evaluates the enabling environment for the social sector across 15 Asian economies, including Thailand, using a standardized questionnaire and a comprehensive set of indicators. For this paper, all survey data on Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs) in Thailand are drawn from the CAPS/DGI database rather than being independently collected by the author. In addition, secondary data are obtained from the DGI 2024 reports and related CAPS publications, which provide aggregate statistics and comparative insights across economies.

Data Collection

The original data used in this study were collected by CAPS through the Doing Good Index online questionnaire administered on the SurveyMonkey platform. CAPS implemented a purposive selection of SDOs and invited them to respond to the standardized questionnaire. The author of this paper did not conduct any separate surveys but relies entirely on the DGI dataset and accompanying documentation provided by CAPS.

In addition to the survey dataset, secondary information is drawn from the DGI 2024 country and regional reports, which offer detailed interpretations of Thailand's performance across the four DGI dimensions—regulatory environment, tax and fiscal policies, socio-cultural factors, and ecosystem support—along with comparative data for other Asian economies.

Data Analysis

This study focuses on 124 social organizations in Thailand, referred to in the DGI as Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs). These organizations provide goods or services for public or social benefit and include social enterprises certified by the National Social Enterprise Promotion Committee. SDOs can operate as either for-profit or non-profit entities and are distributed across all regions of Thailand. While the broader philanthropic landscape in Thailand involves multiple actors—including corporations and high-net-worth individuals—this paper concentrates on SDOs as the institutional recipients and implementers of philanthropic resources. By examining the conditions under which these organizations operate, the study sheds light on one critical “end” of the philanthropic landscape: how social value is delivered and what constraints SDOs face in doing so.

In line with the DGI research design, CAPS employed purposive sampling to identify and recruit SDOs in Thailand that deliver social goods or services. This paper adopts a quantitative approach based on the existing DGI dataset compiled by CAPS. The DGI questionnaire covers various aspects, including organizational operations, societal attitudes, donor motivations, and media perceptions of social organizations. The data are analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as percentages and averages, and are compared with the Asia-wide averages reported by CAPS. Although the dataset does not directly capture the behavior of corporate and high-net-worth donors, it provides insight into how these philanthropic resources are experienced and mediated at the level of social organizations.

One limitation of the study is the reliance on self-reported survey data, which may reflect respondents’ perceptions rather than objectively verified practices. More broadly, the DGI data may be subject to selection bias (e.g., organizations with sufficient capacity and internet access are more likely to respond) and possible urban bias in the sampling frame. These factors may limit the generalizability of the findings to all social organizations in Thailand and suggest the need for complementary research on the “supply-side” of philanthropy, including corporate and high-net-worth donors.

4. Result of study

Table 1 Scope of Operations of Social Organizations in Thailand

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Youth and/or Child Welfare	44	35.48
Education and Literacy	39	31.45
Community Development	37	29.84
Family Welfare and Health	25	20.16
Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation	20	16.13
Environmental Protection and Conservation	19	15.32
Support for Other Non-Profit Organizations/ Capacity Building	13	10.48
Arts and Culture	12	9.68
Elderly and/or Disabled Welfare	8	6.45

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 1 highlights the scope of operations of social organizations in Thailand, showing the percentage distribution of their focus areas. Most organizations prioritize youth and child welfare (35.48%), followed by education and literacy (31.45%) and community development (29.84%).

Family welfare and health account for 20.16%, while rural development and poverty alleviation make up 16.13%. Environmental protection follows at 15.32%. Other areas include supporting non-profits and capacity building (10.48%), arts and culture (9.68%), and elderly or disabled welfare (6.45%).

Most Thai social organizations concentrate on youth and child welfare, education, and community development, with smaller but notable shares working on family and health, rural development and poverty alleviation, and environmental protection, while relatively few focus on capacity building, arts and culture, or support for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Table 2 General

	Asia average	Thailand
Over the next 12 months, SDOs say their top three needs are:		
More funding	75	65
More staff	30	20
More volunteers	21	35
Upskilling/reskilling of staff	44	46
Support with digitalization and digital literacy	28	36
Over the next 12 months, SDOs say their top three needs are:		
Better internet connectivity and access	7	4
Easing of regulatory burden	12	7
Collaborations with others	60	58
Other	5	3
Over the next 12 months, SDOs say government can best support them by:		
Provide direct funding	52	45
Make it easier to receive foreign funding	23	14
Offer tax relief	20	22
Increase tax incentives for individuals/ corporates to donate to SDOs	23	42
Ease our regulatory burden	25	25
Procure products and services from us	22	25
Other	8	6

Table 2 (Continued)

	Asia average	Thailand
Over the next 12 months SDOs say that corporates can support them by:		
Provide direct funding	71	59
Lend expertise/technical assistance	24	25
Offer guidance	20	16
Donate products	29	35
Provide volunteers	12	25
Over the next 12 months SDOs say that corporates can support them by:		
Provide volunteers	12	25
Procure products and services from us	21	20
Other	4	1
How do you feel about the future of the social sector in your economy?		
Optimistic	52	61
Neutral	38	32
Pessimistic	10	7
How do you feel about the future of your organization?		
Optimistic	61	55
Neutral	32	42
Pessimistic	7	3

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 2 highlights the needs, expectations, and sentiments of SDOs in Asia and Thailand for 2024 . In Thailand, the top three needs differ slightly from the Asia average. Both prioritize “more funding” (65% vs. 75%), but Thailand places greater emphasis on “more volunteers” (35% vs. 21%) and “support with digitalization” (36% vs. 28%), while showing less demand for “more staff” (20% vs. 30%) and “better internet access” (4% vs. 7%). Thai SDOs favor government support through “increased tax incentives for donations” (42% vs. 23%) and “tax relief” (22% vs. 20%), but focus less on “direct funding” (45% vs. 52%) and “easier foreign funding” (14% vs. 23%). For corporate support, they value “product donations” (35% vs. 29%) and “volunteer provision” (25% vs. 12%), but are less focused on “direct funding” (59% vs. 71%) and “guidance” (16% vs. 20%). Thai SDOs are more optimistic about the social sector’s future (61% vs. 52%), though slightly less so about their own organizations (55% vs. 61%), with more feeling neutral (42% vs. 32%).Overall, Thailand’s social sector prioritizes volunteerism, digitalization, and tax incentives, with a generally optimistic outlook.

Thai SDOs broadly share Asia’s top need for more funding but place relatively greater emphasis on volunteers, digitalization, and tax incentives, and less on direct funding, staffing, and internet access. They value in-kind and volunteer support from corporates and remain generally optimistic about the social sector’s future, even if slightly less confident about their own organizations.

Table 3 Aspect

	Asia average	Thailand
Laws/regulations pertaining to the social sector?		
Never/Rarely	37	81
Mostly/Always	63	19
How difficult or easy is it to understand the laws		
Very difficult/Somewhat difficult	55	74
Neutral	33	25
Very easy/Somewhat easy	12	1

Source: Author’s elaboration

In 2024, registering as a SDOs in Thailand is more efficient and cost-effective than the Asia average. While Thai SDOs require slightly more clearances (4 vs. 3 in Asia), the process is faster (90 days vs. 123 days) and significantly cheaper (0.48 PPP USD vs. 23 PPP USD). This reflects Thailand's streamlined and affordable registration system.

However, Thai SDOs face challenges with government enforcement and regulatory clarity. A notable 81% report that laws are rarely or never enforced (vs. 37% in Asia), and 74% find these laws difficult to understand (vs. 55% in Asia). Only 1% find them easy to understand. Disclosure requirements, such as annual reports and audited financial accounts, align with regional norms and are publicly accessible.

Thai SDOs prioritize regulatory improvements, including establishing a single oversight agency (41% vs. 20% in Asia), increasing donation incentives (48% vs. 42%), and promoting recognition of giving (33% vs. 24%). Fewer emphasize reducing reporting requirements (10% vs. 24%) or easing incorporation processes (12% vs. 18%). Overall, they call for clearer regulations, better enforcement, and stronger incentives to enhance the social sector.

Thailand's SDO registration is efficient and affordable, but weak enforcement and unclear regulations are major challenges. Thai SDOs prioritize clearer regulations, better enforcement, and stronger incentives over reduced reporting or easier incorporation.

Table 4 Talent

	Asia average	Thailand
How difficult is it for your SDO to recruit staff?		
Very difficult/Difficult	73	94
Very easy/Easy	27	6
How difficult is it for your SDO to retain staff?		
Very difficult/Difficult	69	93

Table 4 (Continued)

	Asia average	Thailand
Very easy/Easy	31	7
Is there a public perception that nonprofit employees should earn less than their private-sector counterparts?		
No	31	4
Yes	69	96
In your opinion, are young people more or less interested in working for the social sector compared to their parents?		
More interested	42	57
Equally interested	31	20
Less interested	27	23
How difficult is it for your SDO to recruit volunteers?		
Very difficult/Difficult	62	81
Very easy/Easy	38	19
Very easy/Easy	38	19

Source: Author’s elaboration

In 2024, Thai SDOs face significant challenges in talent recruitment and retention. A striking 94% find it difficult to recruit staff (vs. 73% in Asia), and 93% struggle to retain them (vs. 69%). This is compounded by a strong public perception (96%) that nonprofit employees should earn less than private-sector counterparts, much higher than the Asia average of 69%. Despite these challenges, 57% of Thai respondents believe young people are more interested in working in the social sector compared to their parents, higher than the Asia average of 42%. Recruiting volunteers is also difficult for 81% of Thai SDOs, compared to 62% in Asia, reflecting broader challenges in attracting talent.

In 2024, Thai SDOs face severe talent shortages in staff and volunteers, driven by strong expectations of low nonprofit pay, though there is relatively higher optimism about youth interest in social sector work.

Table 5 Collaborations

	Asia average	Thailand
Do you collaborate with other SDOs?		
No	16	4
Yes	84	96
[If Yes] why collaborate with other SDOs?	(n=1834)	(n=66)
To deliver services	67	65
To improve our capacity	63	67
To raise funds	33	26
To conduct research	33	26
To advocate for a joint cause	70	83
Other	4	5
In the past 12 months, has the number of collaborations your SDO has been engaged with:		
Increased	56	59
Decreased	8	2
Stayed the same	36	39
Who else does your organization collaborate with?		
National or central government	37	58
Local or state government	64	83
Corporates	58	78

Table 5 (Continued)

	Asia average	Thailand
Foundations	58	78
Informal, citizen–led initiatives	40	83
Who else does your organization collaborate with?		
International NGOs or international agencies	34	36
We do not collaborate with other organizations	6	4

Source: Author’s elaboration

In 2024, collaboration among SDOs in Thailand is highly prevalent, with 96% engaging in partnerships compared to 84% in Asia. Thai SDOs collaborate primarily to advocate for joint causes (83% vs. 70% in Asia), improve capacity (67%), and deliver services (65%). However, fewer collaborate to raise funds or conduct research (26% for both, compared to 33% in Asia). Over the past year, 59% of Thai SDOs reported an increase in collaborations, slightly higher than the Asia average of 56%, while only 2% experienced a decrease. Thai SDOs collaborate extensively with various stakeholders, including local/state governments (83% vs. 64% in Asia), corporates (78% VS. 58%), and foundations (78% vs. 58%). They also engage significantly with informal, citizen–led initiatives (83% vs. 40%). Collaboration with international NGOs or agencies is similar to the Asia average (36% vs. 34%). Only 4% of Thai SDOs do not collaborate with other organizations, reflecting a strong culture of partnership in the sector.

Thai SDOs collaborate at exceptionally high rates, surpassing the Asian average, especially in advocacy, capacity building, and service delivery, reflecting a strong and growing culture of partnership.

Table 6 Social Enterprises

	Asia average	Thailand
Are donors in your economy showing more interest in social enterprises?		
No	15	0
Yes	85	100
Has your economy experienced a significant increase in social enterprises over the last two years?		
No	18	4
Yes	46	64
Don't know	36	32

Source: Author's elaboration

In 2024, donor interest in social enterprises is exceptionally high in Thailand, with 100% of respondents indicating increased interest, compared to 85% in Asia. Additionally, 64% of respondents in Thailand report a significant increase in social enterprises over the past two years, much higher than the Asia average of 46%. Only 4% in Thailand say there has been no increase, compared to 18% in Asia, while 32% are unsure. This highlights a growing focus on social enterprises in Thailand, driven by both donor interest and sector expansion.

5. Findings

5.1 Key Trends in Philanthropy in Thailand (2024)

The survey confirms that Thai philanthropy remains deeply rooted in Buddhist principles of merit-making (tham bun), driving individual and community-based giving towards religious institutions, education, and disaster relief (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2017). This aligns with altruism theory intertwined with spiritual motivations.

Concurrently, there is a clear shift towards more strategic and institutionalized giving. A high 96% of Thai Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs) engage in partnerships, leveraging social capital for advocacy, capacity building, and service delivery, exceeding the Asian average of 84%. A significant trend is the 100% reported donor interest in social enterprises, reflecting a move towards hybrid models and impact-driven philanthropy.

However, the sector faces critical human resource challenges: 94% of SDOs struggle to recruit and 93% to retain staff. This is exacerbated by public perception that nonprofit employees should earn less (96% of respondents), a finding consistent with institutional theory and the “starvation cycle” in nonprofits. While these are strong descriptive findings, establishing causal links would require further statistical analysis or qualitative evidence.

5.2 Comparison with Regional and Global Patterns

Compared to regional and global patterns, Thailand exhibits unique characteristics. While sharing cultural influences with other Asian countries, Thailand’s regulatory and institutional environment lags behind peers like Singapore. The survey reveals 74% of Thai SDOs find laws difficult to understand, indicating significant institutional barriers, as highlighted by the Doing Good Index (DGI) (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2022, 2024). Furthermore, donor support for impact measurement is low (25% of donors), with 57% never requesting it, suggesting a gap in accountability compared to the Asian average.

Conversely, corporate engagement is robust: 74% of Thai companies donate supplies and 70% partner with SDOs for awareness, surpassing Asian averages. This strong corporate role, while beneficial, also raises concerns about over-reliance from a resource dependence perspective. Such dependency could limit SDO autonomy and potentially overshadow the development of grassroots funding mechanisms. Globally, Thailand is moving towards strategic philanthropy but still trails leaders like the US and UK in institutional support and professionalization. These comparative insights are based on DGI data and theoretical interpretations, requiring deeper analysis for causal claims.

5.3 Factors Influencing Philanthropic Behavior in Thailand

The survey results point to several key factors that shape philanthropic behavior in Thailand. First, collaboration and social capital are highly salient. An overwhelming 96% of Thai Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs) report collaborating with other SDOs—well above the Asia average of 84%—mainly to advocate for joint causes, build capacity, and deliver services (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024). This indicates that giving is strongly mediated through dense organizational networks, consistent with social capital theory (Putnam, 1993, 2000).

Second, human resource constraints significantly influence how philanthropy is practiced. A very high share of Thai SDOs find it difficult to recruit (94%) and retain (93%) staff, and 81% struggle to recruit volunteers, all figures higher than the Asia averages (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024). These constraints limit the ability of organizations to design, scale, and sustain programmes, even when there is strong willingness to “do good.”

Third, the rapid rise of social enterprises is reshaping philanthropic behavior. All respondents (100%) report growing interest in social enterprises, and 64% perceive a significant increase in their number over the past two years, compared with 46% across Asia (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024). This points to a shift towards hybrid, impact-oriented models and new channels for directing resources to social goals.

Finally, overall outlook and sectoral focus matter. A majority of Thai SDOs are optimistic about the future of the social sector (61%), and most concentrate on youth and child welfare, education, and community development (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024). Together, these patterns suggest that philanthropy in Thailand is driven by strong collaborative norms and evolving organizational forms, but is also constrained by persistent capacity and staffing challenges.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of philanthropy in Thailand, shaped by a combination of cultural traditions, economic conditions, and global influences. The strong foundation of merit-making, deeply rooted in Buddhist principles, continues to drive individual and community-based giving (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2017). At the same time, the sector is undergoing significant transformation, with the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR), social enterprises, and more strategic forms of philanthropy reflecting broader societal changes across Asia and globally (Sciortino, 2017; Salamon, 2014).

One of the most notable trends in 2024 is the increasing collaboration among Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs). With 96% of Thai SDOs engaging in partnerships—surpassing the Asia average of 84% (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024)—the sector demonstrates a strong culture of cooperation. These collaborations are primarily aimed at advocating for joint causes, improving organizational capacity, and delivering services, which resonates with social capital theory emphasizing the role of networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity in enabling collective action (Putnam, 1993, 2000). However, fewer organizations collaborate for fundraising or research, indicating potential areas for growth, particularly in building knowledge, evidence, and diversified resource bases.

The comparison with regional and global patterns reveals both strengths and weaknesses in Thailand's philanthropic landscape. On the one hand, Thailand excels in fostering corporate engagement and collaboration: Thai SDOs report high levels of partnership with corporates, foundations, and local government, reflecting strong horizontal and cross-sector linkages (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024; Sidel, 2018). On the other hand, Thailand lags behind in regulatory support and donor accountability. Thai donors are less likely than their regional counterparts to fund capacity building, administrative costs, or impact measurement, mirroring global concerns about the “starvation cycle” in non-profit financing and the under-investment in organizational infrastructure

(Salamon, 2014). This lack of emphasis on accountability and professionalization limits the sector's ability to achieve long-term sustainability and measurable impact, despite the evident willingness of actors to "do good."

Regulatory challenges remain a significant barrier to the growth of philanthropy in Thailand. The Doing Good Index shows that the lack of clarity in laws, limited tax incentives, and weak and inconsistent enforcement hinder the sector's development (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2020, 2022, 2024). A striking 74% of Thai SDOs find it difficult to understand the laws governing the sector, compared to 55% in Asia, and 81% report that these laws are rarely or never enforced. Additionally, only 10% of Thai SDOs report frequent government engagement on policies and regulations, reflecting limited and ad hoc collaboration between the government and the social sector. From an institutional theory perspective, these findings underscore how formal rules, enforcement practices, and state–civil society relations shape the incentives and constraints under which philanthropy operates (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Sidel, 2016).

Despite these challenges, there are promising signs of progress. The growing interest in social enterprises—100% of surveyed SDOs report increased donor interest, and 64% perceive a significant rise in social enterprises over the past two years—highlights a shift towards innovative and impact-driven approaches to philanthropy (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), 2024). Corporate engagement is also strong, with companies actively donating supplies, lending expertise, and partnering with SDOs to raise awareness of social issues. These developments indicate a willingness among stakeholders to adapt to changing societal needs and explore new avenues for social impact. At the same time, they raise important questions about power and dependence: strong corporate roles can provide much-needed resources and capabilities but may also create vulnerabilities if SDOs become overly reliant on a narrow set of corporate funders, echoing concerns in the literature on "new philanthropy" and private influence in development policy (Moran & Stone, 2016).

Taken together, the results suggest that Thailand's philanthropic ecosystem sits at a critical juncture. Deep cultural norms of generosity and dense collaborative networks provide a strong foundation for collective action, yet institutional

and regulatory weaknesses, under-investment in capacity, and uneven donor practices constrain the shift towards fully strategic, impact-oriented philanthropy. Addressing these structural gaps—through regulatory reform, stronger incentives for giving, and donor support for organizational capacity and impact measurement—will be essential if Thailand is to leverage its philanthropic potential more effectively in pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development.

7. Conclusion

Philanthropy in Thailand is at a critical juncture, balancing its rich cultural heritage with the demands of a modern, globalized world. The sector has made significant strides in fostering collaboration, corporate engagement, and the growth of social enterprises. However, challenges related to regulatory barriers, talent retention, and donor accountability continue to hinder its full potential.

To address these challenges, several key actions are necessary. First, the government must prioritize regulatory reforms, including clearer laws, stronger enforcement, and increased tax incentives for donations. These reforms could be advanced through multi-stakeholder policy forums that bring together government agencies, Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs), and private-sector actors to co-design practical regulatory frameworks and tax policies. Second, while the survey findings indicate that SDOs identify funding as their most urgent need, greater emphasis from donors on capacity building, impact measurement, and administrative support is also essential. Rather than substituting for financial support, these forms of assistance are complementary: stronger organizational systems and demonstrable impact can enhance SDOs' ability to attract and manage resources over the long term. Donors can, for example, provide funding that explicitly combines core operating support with targeted capacity-building programmes led by SDOs themselves, alongside advocacy for a more enabling tax and regulatory environment.

Third, the sector must invest in talent development, addressing public perceptions about nonprofit work and creating pathways for young people to engage in the social sector through fellowships, internships, and leadership

development initiatives. Strengthening human capital in this way can further improve SDOs' effectiveness and, ultimately, their capacity to leverage and steward the financial resources they receive. Drawing on regional and global best practices—such as structured corporate–nonprofit partnerships in countries like Singapore, ecosystem–wide giving platforms in South Korea, and outcomes–based funding models seen in parts of East and Southeast Asia—can provide Thailand with concrete reference points for reform. By adapting these models to its own cultural and institutional context, Thailand can accelerate the professionalization, transparency, and impact–orientation of its philanthropic ecosystem.

By addressing these issues and systematically integrating lessons from regional and global experiences, Thailand can unlock the full potential of its philanthropic sector. This will not only enhance its ability to address pressing social and economic challenges but also position the country as a leader in philanthropy within the region. Ultimately, a more robust and sustainable philanthropic ecosystem will contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society, benefiting all stakeholders.

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