### Table of Contents

- **Foreword** .................................................................................................................. 01  
- **About Us** .................................................................................................................... 02  
- **Youth Co:Lab Thailand 2021** ...................................................................................... 05  
- **2021 Program Theme** .................................................................................................. 07  
- **Program Elements** ....................................................................................................... 09  
- **Youth Co:Lab 2021 Impact Stories** .............................................................................. 14  
  - **Origiri** ......................................................................................................................... 15  
  - **We Are the Same** ......................................................................................................... 16  
  - **Chance** ......................................................................................................................... 17  
  - **Carter** ........................................................................................................................ 18  
  - **Online One-Stop Service Zakat Platform** ................................................................... 19  
  - **Gender Matters** .......................................................................................................... 20  
  - **Fast Fight Flood** .......................................................................................................... 22  
  - **Akha Handicraft Clothing and Wisdom Preservation Project** ................................... 23  
  - **Esquilla by Second 2 None** ....................................................................................... 24  
- **Key Learning from Participants** .................................................................................. 25  
- **Our Partners** ............................................................................................................... 28  
- **Contact Us** .................................................................................................................. 28
To create a value-based economy that is driven by innovation, technology and creativity, while keeping the goals of stability, prosperity and sustainability in mind, is not an easy job for any society. With social innovation, solutions for a transformative and inclusive economy are now within reach. Youth Co:Lab was initiated with the aim to strengthen the capacities of Thai young people to enhance their livelihoods through social innovation, by designing and implementing ideas and business models for social impact in their communities.
YOUTH CO:LAB

Co-created in 2017 by UNDP and Citi Foundation, Youth Co: Lab aims to establish a common agenda for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to empower and invest in youth, so they can accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship.

By catalyzing and sustaining youth-led startups and social enterprises across the region, Youth Co: Lab is positioning young people front and center in order to solve the region’s most pressing challenges. In addition to supporting youth entrepreneurship, Youth Co:Lab also works closely with multiple stakeholders to strengthen the entrepreneurship ecosystem and to promote policies to support and enable young people to take the lead in finding and developing new solutions for social and environmental problems in their communities.

YOUTH CO:LAB THAILAND

Youth Co: Lab Thailand is a platform to empower youth in Thailand to create social impact and enhance livelihoods through social innovation, thus contributing to resolving existing social challenges in Thai society. Through Youth Co: Lab, UNDP connects young people and leaders in technology, development, innovation and business to improve cross-sector collaboration, and promotes policies to support and enable young people to lead the development of both new and existing solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges in their communities.

The initiative accelerates the implementation of the SDGs and, ultimately, advocates for the sustainable development of tomorrow.

IN THE PAST 5 YEARS

In the past 5 years, we have equipped more than 1,000 youth with social innovation and entrepreneurship skills.

- Youth applicants: 575
- Youth have been incubated through youth Co:Lab programme: 245
- Youth have been equipped with social innovation and entrepreneurship skills (e.g. through SDG Hackathon and Food System Heroes): 250
- Social Innovation ideas have been incubated: 75
- Youth have been trained as Mentors/ Learning Supporters of the programme youth Co:Lab programme: 37
- Partners have been engage with us to strengthening the Social Innovation Ecosystem in Thailand: 28

OUTCOME

Cultivation of innovators who possess both entrepreneurial mindset and social awareness

Deepened understanding of struggles of various marginalized groups and how to navigate this world with appreciation and support for socio-cultural diversity

Meaningful friendship and support system fostered on the digital realm
The philosophy behind this year’s Youth Co:Lab is “what it takes to leave no one behind”. In the era where technology pushes the boundaries of human progress ever further, minoritized groups are still left stranded at the periphery of society. In face of ableism, urban and rural poverty, homelessness, statelessness, and other forms of oppression, decent life sounds like an impossibility for so many people. If we are to ask ourselves who gets the opportunity to thrive, the answer lies in this layered structure of inequalities.

With the COVID-19 pandemic spreading in Thailand, inequalities were even more exacerbated. Those without any social safety net were constantly exposed to both life-threatening health problems and severe economic precarity, a direct result of pandemic-induced recession. Necessities for living slowly turned into an unaffordable luxury, and living became survival.

Under this predicament, we believe that social innovation will be indispensable in the mission to end inequalities, remove societal barriers and make opportunities to thrive accessible to everyone. Equality matters, and the only way to achieve it is to move forward together. We also believe that the future is in the able hands of youths, and their lived experiences and vision for a better society are the bedrock for social innovation that will leave no one behind.
Discrimination takes many forms. It can set a life-long barrier for someone on the basis of their race, religion, gender, race, ability, and/or age. Without addressing this issue, disparities between the society’s most and least privileged will not only remain, but also deepen and widen. That means the existing societal problems will be aggravated ever more. It is our responsibilities to ensure that discrimination does not take root in the foundation of our society, and that every single person has equal representation, rights, and protection.

Geography presents another barrier to the marginalized communities. Those located in the remote areas are also removed from opportunities, basic services and infrastructure necessary for everyday living, such as hospitals, public transportation, and internet connection. For example, people in rural areas have no choice but to use private vehicles to go to the hospital in a more affluent area, simply because their community is medically underserved and unequipped with mass transit. This is true for most parts of Thailand, in which public transportation is non-existent. Apart from Bangkok Metropolitan Region, other provinces lack mass transit systems (e.g. subway, skytrain), meaning that around 51.56 million people out of 66.18 million, or 77.90% of the entire population, have to rely on themselves or other people for mobility. This situation puts burden after burden on people with the least resources to lead a decent life.

Socio-economic status is one of the most important determinants of one’s growth. For example, people living in poverty are deprived of resources to take care of their health, such as nutritional food, proper rest, or healthcare packages. This means that there are people struggling to survive day to day, with a dim prospect of progress. To make sure that no one is left behind, it is crucial that we find a solution to improve such living conditions. As of now, governance has turned digital. Citizens’ data are extensively collected online, while services and a welfare system are but a fingertip away with digital access. However, digital governance does not automatically equate to good or inclusive governance, especially when digital technology comes with a high price.

According to the Office of the National Economics and Social Development Council, the average monthly income of people in Mae Hong Son is around 1,916THB. On the other hand, a smartphone that supports applications for social assistance programs costs more than 2,000THB. Among mobile phone owners, more than 30.4% use feature phones, lacking access to all the applications required for social assistance programs. Therefore, it is important to fill the voids in the current governance system, and ensure that everyone will not be left behind in this digital divide.

The more vulnerable people are, the less resilient to ‘shocks’ they become. We can think of the said shocks in terms of incidents that increase the level of precarity in one’s life, for example, natural disasters. To recover from extreme setbacks, a large amount of resources, such as wealth, would be required. However, for the communities of the vulnerable population (e.g. the urban poor or undocumented migrants), their pre-existing living conditions are characterized with lack of income, insecurities, and exclusion from basic services and the welfare system. This means that they will take any shock without protections offered by their socio-economic privilege or governmental programs.
Consultation with the experts on the social issues

Due to health risks that came with the ongoing pandemic, this year’s Youth Co:Lab was once again organized exclusively on online platforms. With the help of technology, the participants could reach out to experts in the field of their interest for consultations. Each team received guidance and insights distilled from the experts’ work experiences. This mentorship helped participants to better understand the context and the root causes of the problems addressed in their projects, and identify the most viable solutions.

Social Innovation Online workshops

Throughout 4 sessions of intense workshops, participants grappled with the questions of how to integrate the cause for social change with entrepreneurship. They were introduced to different types of social enterprises and the core elements of any business, including production and management capacity, and marketing and sales.

The participants used the “Impact Value Chain” method and “theory of change” to engage with their initiative more critically. They were able to identify problems, create a stakeholder map, and consider both the social impact of their action on concerned parties and possible measurement of outcome. All these nascent ideas were finally molded into an Action Plan that clearly defined each team’s goals for social transformation and business success in the next 6 months, operational procedures, and outcome evaluation. This was a preparation for them to present their innovation ideas that both addressed challenges of disadvantaged groups and sustainability of their business model on a pitching day.

Peer-to-peer learning between diverse youth group

Apart from guidance of mentors and experts, the selected teams also enjoyed the opportunities to improve their projects with commentaries from fellow participants. Throughout the workshops, each participant was committed to understand each team’s project, and provide input useful for further development of other team’s projects. Exchange of perspective helped them see that each problem did not stand alone; rather, they were all interrelated and fed off each other.

Consultation with business experts from their provinces

To cultivate entrepreneurial mindset in every young participant, we connected the teams with local business experts. Participants learned about the needs of the local community, and the context and nuances of the social issues faced by their target groups. With this information, they were able to develop solutions that were financially viable, fit for the local context, and sustainable.
**Learn to make partnership**

Each team was asked to think about one of the integral elements of Youth Co:Lab, which was collaboration. This session began with our belief that collective efforts will help all of us reach our goals, increase the efficiency of our work, and add more value to our products. Before launching into the discussions about the future, the participants took a step back to think about the problems that they thought needed their solutions, what the society would look like after their project came into realization, and both the positive and negative impact each SDG had on their work. Afterwards, each team exchanged their ideas on the projects with which they wanted to form future partnership, and how to make such collaboration work to everyone’s benefit.

**Reflection on Social Entrepreneur journey (through Youth Co:Lab reflection card)**

After months of embarking on the Youth Co:Lab, the teams finally gathered to write their thoughts on “Youth Co:Lab reflection cards”, a tool intended to help changemakers stop, look back at their experiences, and start a conversation with themselves or others. The participants used the reflection cards to ask questions that allowed them to process their feelings and action up till then, as well as other people’s stories. It was the honesty, not eloquence, of answers that counted. Each took turns opening their hearts and listening to other people deeply and without judgement, creating a safe space for all.

**Pitching**

Each team had 5 minutes to present innovation ideas and potential business models. This year, we were honored to have representatives from Citi Thailand, Change Ventures, and Young Entrepreneur Chamber of Commerce in the panel of judges. The experts were given 4 minutes to pose questions to each team. The innovation proposal would be then evaluated by the following criteria: solution, creativity, feasibility, sustainability and scalability.
Prototyping and Testing

Experts selected 5 teams to test their innovation ideas with a financial support of 30,000 Baht. The progress of their business will be presented to experts for evaluation in January.

Implementation and Follow Up

The experts will choose 2 teams as the recipients of funding worth 100,000 Baht. UNDP continues to follow up with their impact stories after 6 months.
**The Big Issue**
In Thailand, many local and SME products contain a trove of cultural values and meaningful stories about the local creative communities. However, the market values of these products are relatively low, and the stories behind creations remain shrouded in mystery due to lack of effective communication.

Moreover, many local businesses were greatly affected by economic stagnation and the COVID-19 pandemic. Their income gradually dwindled as the situation continued to worsen over time. The stability of job security of local artisans are now in peril more than ever.

**The Big Idea**
Under the brand “Origi”, this team will provide a platform for local and authentic products. The partner communities will be able to improve their business knowledge, and receive assistance in various aspects, such as marketing, impactful storytelling, and partnership formation.

Each product will be labeled with a QR code that gives a swift access to the stories about the creations and the creators themselves. The team will personally make assessments of each product in order to maintain consistent quality.

**The Big Impact**
Origi is expected to establish a sustainable ‘ecosystem’ for local artisans, where value is added to their product and local markets are connected with the rest of the society, resulting in increase in income and sustainability of their business.

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**The Big Issue**
This team notices that stories of disabilities are everywhere, but rarely are they told by people with disabilities themselves. The disability community always assumes the role of mere key informants or case study in the works of able-bodied content creators. The struggles of people with disabilities are depicted as objects of pity, and their everyday lives the sources of inspiration for able-bodied people to ‘do better’. In other words, their humanity is strictly limited to their disabilities. Society cannot see an individual with disabilities as an ordinary person with hopes and interests beyond their survival. They are the tear-jerking ‘content’, but hardly ‘creators’ with total control over the narrative of their lived experiences. Without a platform that allows people with disabilities to tell their stories with their own voices, their insights and nuances in their lives are lost amidst a plethora of content about themselves.

**The Big Idea**
The team aims to start a podcast for storytellers with disabilities. In each episode, 2 visually impaired members of this team will act as hosts, conducting interviews with advocates of accessible and inclusive design, and discussing various aspects of disabilities such as their experiences in navigating this society, disability inclusion on a global scale, civic engagement for the disability community, and possibilities for more accessible services and innovation in the future. The podcast episodes will be distributed on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Youtube.

**The Big Impact**
The insights offered on this podcast are expected to raise awareness about disability rights in the society, helping able-bodied allies to better understand how to assist people with disabilities with resources available to them. This podcast is also intended to affirm people with disabilities that they have the creative power and freedom to speak their truth, just like anyone else.
“CHORPHAKA”  
BY CHANCE

The Big Issue
This team finds that 9 in 10 incarcerated people have issues with stress management during their prison term, and they seek activities that help relieve their distress. In addition, anxiety around the post-release unemployment and lack of income is common among prisoners, as they fear that the stigma of incarceration makes them unfavorable in the eyes of potential employers. Ex-prisoners are also likely to struggle with providing for themselves post-release due to their lack of skill sets needed for today’s job market. All these factors constitute a barrier to their reintegration into a society.

The Big Idea
With “Chorphaka”, a clothing brand by Chance, incarcerated people will have the chance to earn money as well as professional skills.

In partnership with Ubon Ratchathani Central Prison and Ubon Ratchathani Polytechnic College, Chance will provide apparel and accessory manufacturing training and certificate of the completion of the training programs. Trained participants will then take charge in producing painted clothes and accessories from the design made by Chance, and receive income from the fruit of their craftpersonship. The prison will be responsible for depositing wages in each prisoner’s account.

The Big Impact
By contributing to Chorphaka, formerly incarcerated people also gain access to a variety of skill sets that can help them secure decent jobs. As a result, the prospect of post-release employment is expected to increase. Now that they are equipped with knowledge about apparel manufacturing, ex-prisoners can also take the initiative regarding clothes and accessories, as well.

The Big Idea
This team invents “Carter,” an application that allows users to track real-time location of street vendors and markets, and receive notification when street vendors are nearby. Partner vendors who undergo health inspection will receive the “Carter Clean” label, a testimony to their high level of public hygiene.

Carter aims to establish long-lasting partnerships with NGOs and the banking sector. Benefits from using this application include access to formal loans and inclusion into a cashless society. This team also works closely with the Street Vendor Assembly and the Health Assembly on the lifting of a street vending ban and promotion of the informal economy in the cities.

The Big Issue
In Thailand, street vendors are considered as the backbone of the metropolis. However, they remained rooted in an extremely precarious spot. Despite the popularization of the platform economy, street vendors have yet to be integrated into the digital sphere. The utilization of technology for profits is a foreign concept to street vendors. Most of them own smart technology, but they lack the proficiency in digitising their business. Street vendors are also not legally allowed to register their business, making them invisible in the economy. Their status as informal workers means lack of entitlement to welfare and social protection programs. Moreover, many street vendors have troubles with financial literacy, leading to them being trapped in a never-ending cycle of debt and poverty.

The Big Impact
Like workers in the formal sector, Carter-affiliated vendors will be recognized as the beneficiaries of social welfare. Their pools of customers are expected to expand with the help of the online platform. Their visibility will also be enhanced greatly, making their business sustainable and more deeply integrated into the cities.

Paithong Ice Cream, a staple of street food desserts, has agreed to join Carter after its official launch.
GENDER MATTER

The Big Issue
In the age where possibilities of progress seem limitless, discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation still persists, creating barriers that put LGBTQ+ community behind everyone else. Under such circumstances, LGBTQ+ people cannot enjoy equal opportunities in employment, as prejudice and bias against them are deeply entrenched in the workplace, lending weight to unfair treatment even in the hiring process. As a result of socio-economic inequality, wellbeing of LGBTQ+ is severely affected.

Although the Thai media always includes LGBTQ+ community in news report or entertainment; the depiction is done in such a way that perpetuates gender stereotypes, harming the targeted group in process.

The Big Idea
To tackle gender inequality, the team “1.30.64” believes that a change of a society begins with a change of media. This intention is the premise of “Gender Matters,” a media agency that aims to raise gender awareness in public and private sectors with their services in written, graphical, and audiovisual content.

Their creative approach is intersectional at heart, shedding light on how ethnicity, gender, disabilities, class, and other social factors interlock with one another, shaping our experiences in navigating the world. Their content, such as ‘literary documentary,’ will present the complexities of LGBTQ+ lives and struggles, and serve as the foundation for future hub knowledge regarding gender issues.

Back in October 2021, an official Facebook fanpage, twitter, and instagram accounts for Gender Matters were already launched. These online platforms are intended to be both knowledge-sharing and revenue-generating sites. The team will market their published works towards people with interest in gender issues, the potential patrons, while offering consultations, content, and marketing services to private parties and public organizations.

The Big Impact
With Gender Matters, members of LGBTQ+ community will attain a new avenue for self-expression and critical engagement with gender issues, as hub of gender knowledge is expected to launch later. Collaboration with Gender Matters will also reinforce the brand reputation of partner organizations, and...
The media agency will also assist their clients in solidifying human rights policy centered on gender justice.

The impact made on individual, community, and organizational levels are expected to cause a ripple effect across Thai society. This team hopes to see the elimination of prejudice and discrimination, and the rise of job employment, social wellbeing, and legal justice for LGBTQ+ community, such as the recognition of LGBTQ+ marriage.

**FAST FIGHT FLOOD**

**The Big Issue**
In Northeastern Thailand, flooding is a matter of crisis that has yet to be sufficiently addressed. Without governmental support for flood preparation, local communities are hit by floods without proper protection, leaving them too vulnerable and under-resourced to deal with the aftermath of the disaster.

**The Big Idea**
This team has come up with a project called ‘Fast fight Flood,’ or a flooding prevention model that will respond to sudden occurrence of disaster. This model is designed to mitigate flood-induced risks and damages, and assist affected groups in rebuilding their communities post disaster.

This project is collaborative efforts of community leaders from flood-affected areas; students, professors in the area of social development, and staff from Faculty of Science, Ubon Ratchathani University; and Thai PBS. The team will start out by assessing available resources and coping capacity of the partner communities. Afterwards, they will help the flood-affected communities in establishing emergency operation center, which will be in charge of managing donation (e.g. financial support, non-perishable food, and basic necessities), connecting people who suffer from income loss and business interruption (maximum 5 people per day) with daily gigs (e.g. ferry or car service, cooking at community centres), and sourcing food by purchasing and processing perishable items into other consumable forms. These value-added food products are also for sale, bringing in revenue and funding for the continuation of community kitchens.

**The Big Impact**
In the past, the flood-affected communities could do nothing but wait for aid helplessly. With this proactive model that introduces daily income, and both financial and material support, the affected communities will feel less of ‘victims’ and gain a renewed sense of agency through their participation in community-rebuilding. Financial resources accumulated over time will transform into community funding for sustainable flooding prevention.
AKHA HANDICRAFT CLOTHING AND WISDOM PRESERVATION PROJECT

The Big Issue
After discussing with elderly Akha people, who had at least 40 years of experience in handicraft clothing, this team discovered that Akha youth lost interest in preserving this aspect of their culture, creating a vacuum between older and younger generations. As a result, the Akha community is experiencing the loss of knowledge in handicraft clothing. They also struggle with low income, putting them in a socio-economically precarious situation.

The Big Idea
The team intends to recover Akha wisdom by tailoring workshops on traditional clothing to youth, introducing the concept of ‘integrated product design’ to young and elderly members of the Akha community, and helping them produce handicraft clothes with modern and functional design. After the production period, the team will open an official Facebook fan page for this contact, and approach the following venues about carrying products from the Akha community: Doi Chaang Coffee, indigenous cultural festivals, provincial specialty shops at the airport, and OTOP shops.

The Big Impact
With this project, the entirety of Akha cultural wisdom is not only preserved, but also developed into modern products that can stand the test of time. The bonds between the elderly and the young, once severed, are also restored and strengthened by intergenerational activities centered on handicraft clothing. The economic predicament that plagues the community is expected to be solved gradually with profits from selling artisanal handicraft.

ESPA BY SECOND 2 NONE

The Big Issue
Violation of human rights and environmental degradation are 2 major issues found in the fast fashion industry. Seeking a more ethical way of consumption, socially aware customers are oftentimes at a loss to identify sustainable and fair business. Some also find the sorting system in sustainability-informed fashion platforms inefficient, yielding unsatisfying and incorrect search results.

For social enterprises that promote sustainable fashion, there are several hindrances to their growth. Most of such businesses rely on a single social media platform, meaning that their brand visibility rises and falls according to the algorithm behind a platform. Under this circumstance, vendors are forced to bear an additional burden of paid advertisement. Furthermore, the registration system on existing fashion platforms is extremely complicated, time-consuming, and costly, especially for NGOs. Some wish to expand their pools of customers so that their products will reach international audiences; however, a language barrier still stands in their way.

The Big Idea
The team ‘Second 2 None’ plans to launch ‘Espa,’ a new fashion platform where customers can find myriads of products from green businesses and social enterprises. This team will make sure that sorting system is streamlined, and that their website provides information in both Thai and English. In addition, products from indigenous communities will contain detailed descriptions in Thai, helping their customers consider each craft with better clarity. For featured brands, payment will be made to them directly through this platform.

The Big Impact
For customers, they can rest assured that each purchase endorses green activism, and each payment goes directly to workers. With Espa, social enterprises tackling sustainable fashion will gain the limelight they rightfully deserve. They can also access an online vending platform that is user-friendly and effectively reaches a variety of customers.
YOUTH CO:LAB REFLECTION CARDS

Youth Co:Lab Reflection Cards are a tool for changemakers to take a step back and reflect on their experiences in their journey to change society. No matter where you are at the moment, whether you have started your project for years, for months, you are burning with enthusiasm or you are burnt out, you can have conversations with companions and with yourself about the path you have walked on by playing this deck of cards.

Youth Co:Lab Reflection Cards are a part of Youth Co:Lab co-hosted by UNDP and Citi Foundation. The card questions are designed based on The Social Incubation Playbook.

We recommend you to use The Social Incubation Playbook together with the Youth Co:Lab Reflection Cards.

The Social Incubation Playbook: You can find tools that can be used to plan your social innovation project here.

Youth Co:Lab Reflection Cards: The deck of cards are filled with questions about your social change journey. It will help you to reflect on your journey, your feelings and what you want in this social innovation path.

Download Cards Here!

Scan to read the book!
KEY LEARNING FROM YOUTH CO:LAB 2021 PARTICIPANTS

OUR PARTNERS

NATIONALS PARTNERS

CONTACT US

For more information, insights and updates about:
Social Innovation Ecosystem in Thailand
Sustainable Development Goals
Thailand Social Innovation Platform
Youth Co:Lab Thailand in 2021

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