



# Bright Young Sparks

Songkhla Forum: Empowering  
Thailand's Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*Siam Commercial Bank Foundation*



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## SONGKHLA FORUM: EMPOWERING THAILAND'S YOUTH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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*An innovative model developed in collaboration with the Siam Commercial Bank Foundation allows young people in Songkhla Province to design and implement community development projects to develop life skills and a sense of civic-mindedness.*

**T**hailand's youth are among the world's most avid users of mobile phones; they use them many times a day to stay in touch with family and friends, increasingly through social media. In a 2014 survey of 16 to 35-year-olds by the Telenor Group-TNS, some 72 percent of Thai youths use their phones to post on social media, while around 80 percent use chat applications to communicate. Yet in a country that is so well connected, its young people are more isolated than ever from their communities.

This situation was already evident in the 1990s in the province of Songkhla, where some 60 percent of 1.4 million people are aged between 15 and 24. A strategically important province on the border with Malaysia, Songkhla has grown rapidly over the past two decades and has emerged as a focal point



Young offenders learning to weave baskets for their Youth Active Citizen's Project.

for government, education, tourism and commerce in the south of Thailand. It is a peaceful multicultural province, where many Muslim families have moved to avoid the strife of other areas in the south; young people from across Thailand are also drawn to its five universities. But despite the province's flourishing economy, former media producer and teacher Pannipa Sotthibandhu noted an emerging disconnect between public decision-making and the community, where Songkhla citizens were not fully informed or aware of their rights as constituents.

In 1991, she established the Songkhla Forum (SF) as a communications platform to share information and raise awareness so that the people of Songkhla could participate in the development of the province and country at large. "If the people are knowledgeable, they can muster the power to prevent elected representatives from doing what is wrong," she said. "My dream is that the people will become citizens with a conscience to help their country."

Sotthibandhu used radio, forums and learning centers to disseminate information and to encour-

age public participation. Through her work with SF, Sotthibandhu recognized that the province's large young population continued to be disengaged from its communities and with the democratic process in general. In 1995, she turned her attention to this emerging social problem. She began with those most at risk, juvenile offenders being held in Songkhla's detention centers, and quickly saw that isolation from family life and an educational system that neglected to teach the skills that young people needed to make their way in a fast-changing society underpinned their behavior. SF has since focused on helping troubled young people to navigate their way, by teaching practical life skills such as logical thinking, participation and respect for others.

In 2012, SF itself received help in the form of a new partner, the Siam Commercial Bank Foundation (SCBF). This collaboration has resulted in an innovative new model for young people to contribute to Songkhla's development while growing their self-confidence and capacity as engaged citizens. Since then, some 300 youth have come together



A project team being advised by a community leader.

through SF to work on more than 60 community development projects, some of which have made a significant contribution to civic life in the province.

### LIFE IS A BEACH

Apisak Tasanee and Alisa Bindusa are teenagers now in their final year at Songkhla's Maha Vajiravudh Secondary School, but they are far today from who they were two years ago. Tasanee was known as a loner who was not prone to helping his friends, while Bindusa was belligerent and rarely took direction from her peers. Today, Tasanee is popular among his fellow students for his willingness to listen to their opinions and for his helpfulness. And Bindusa is now a team player who recognizes the power of delegation and cooperation for reaching mutual goals. "From someone who would never take orders from others, I'm so proud of having changed from a hot-tempered person to someone who listens to and accepts others," she said.

What changed in the past two years for these young people, who have both developed a new sense of self-awareness and social consciousness? Tasanee and Bindusa were members of a community environmental project that they initiated under the Songkhla Youth Active Citizen's Project, a program developed by SF and SCBF. Neither Tasanee nor Bindusa had paid much attention to scenic Samila Beach, beyond as a place for the school's students to gather, until they conducted a school science project on the impact of beach erosion on plankton. Seeing the damage to the beach, the students researched further, learning that erosion was in fact a serious environmental challenge across Thailand with devastating implications for the ecosystem of their very own local beach.

At this point, the students were put in touch with Sotthibandhu, who saw the need to undertake a project to do something about erosion. Selected as one of 20 youth-led community projects in the first year of the Youth Active Citizen's Project, a group of five students formed the "Beach for Life" group. In the first year, they began looking for reasons why Samila Beach was deteriorating. They

researched beach erosion, learning that the local government's methods to combat the problem with giant sand bags or T-shape concrete blocks has been proven by international researchers to in fact compound the problem further. And in exploring what the students and people of Songkhla could do to protect the beach, they made another astonishing discovery: residents actually had very little knowledge of or interest in beach issues, despite Samila Beach being a major tourist attraction and a pillar of the local economy.

In the project's second year, the students set out to make change. They drafted a "Beach Constitution," with the aim of advocating for local government to remove existing sand bags and concrete blocks in favor of sand replenishment, which is international best practice for beach erosion. To meet their goals, they expanded their own network, collaborating with students from nine educational institutes to host a forum on the problem of beach erosion and to promote the Beach Constitution. They held 11 public hearings on proposed solutions to the problem and conducted opinion polls among young people at their partner institutes and the general public.

The students reviewed the 24,673 responses gathered to inform the *Draft Constitution for the Sustainable Conservation of Samila Beach*, which was vetted by a legal adviser and cumulated in a Memorandum of Understanding between the youth network and the municipal government. The damaging sand bags and concrete blocks were removed from a 3-kilometre stretch of beach in Songkhla, and it is now slowly reverting to its natural beauty. A second forum on solutions for beach erosion resulted in a June 2014 proposal to recommend sand replenishment as a viable option for local decision-makers across the province, which was duly approved.

The success of the Beach for Life team instilled a new sense of confidence in Tasanee and Bindusa. With the opportunity to think for themselves, to participate in a process of civic change and to learn from that process, a sense of citizenry has been awakened in these teenagers who are now

both looking to contribute to society in the next phase of their lives. Tasanee has set his mind on attending Songkhla Rajabhat University to study community development; he wants to give back to his home province of Songkhla. And through drafting the Beach Constitution, Bindusa realized that there was a dearth of qualified public solicitors in Thailand; she is pursuing law for her undergraduate studies and continues to advocate for beach protection in Songkhla.

### A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Born to government officials, Sotthibandhu's own upbringing and education was a decidedly political one. While studying international relations at the Thammasat University in Bangkok, she lived through the political upheaval of the 1970s and then became a teacher of vocational studies, before winning a United Nations scholarship to train with BBC Radio in the United Kingdom. After eight months, she returned home and began work as a producer for a distance learning radio program for the southern region of Thailand.

Drawing upon her expertise and a strong conviction in the power of people to come together, she set up a station, Core Radio, which provided a common platform for Songkhla citizens seeking to drive change. Her initiative was validated at an event hosted by Core Radio in 1991, "Loke Sodsai Nai Ban Kerd" – which translates from the Thai language to "Bright World in Our Homeland" – which was attended by more than 1,000 people. Following this, Core Radio became one of the three most prominent stations in the province, with Sotthibandhu receiving some 200 letters from listeners each month.

It was around this time that the national government announced a policy to develop Thailand's civil society. But for Sotthibandhu, this concept was somewhat contradictory. As far as she was concerned, civil society could not be imposed, but needed to emerge organically from the grassroots in the form of groups looking to work for the betterment of society and the country.

In addition, civil society groups – non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – should be able to provide much-needed checks and balances for a functioning democracy, and to play a watchdog role on behalf of communities. She believed that the energy of individuals in the community could be brought together to form a powerful representative voice. For this, communication tools and forums where such people could find each other would be needed. To this end, Sotthibandhu set up the Songkhla Forum (SF) as a platform for the people of Songkhla to exchange ideas. She set the first topic of discussion: a "dream city."

As SF evolved, she became increasingly concerned about a lack of awareness among teachers, provincial leaders and the public of the importance of an informed electorate in a functioning democracy. This disengagement trickled down to Songkhla's youth, who spent their time on their studies or in entertainment venues. Volunteer activities were not commonly encouraged and only occasionally performed as an extracurricular activity by young people.

Sotthibandhu focused her attention on youth issues, which would emerge as an important focal point for the organization. Since 1995, SF has worked with partner NGOs such as the Media Studies for Youth and Family Community Radio Project supported by the Chumchon Thai Foundation and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation; the Southern Youth Life Skills Project supported by the National Council for Child and Youth Development under the Royal Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, and the Life Bridge Project for young offenders supported by UNICEF Thailand.

### A MATCH MADE IN SONGKHLA

In 2010, Sotthibandhu took leave of SF to take up a prestigious role as vice president at the Thai Public Broadcasting Service, but resigned a year later when she realized that she was not suited to corporate life. She returned to SF in 2011 resolved to move the organization in a new direction: design

and run workshops where young people could participate and learn from real-life experiences to hone skills in analytical thinking, problem solving and decision-making. She needed to procure funding to pilot the idea, and at the suggestion of Dr. Jaray Suwannachat from the Rajamangala University of Technology met with Piyaporn Manthachitra, managing director of the Siam Commercial Bank Foundation (SCBF).

As the charitable arm of the Siam Commercial Bank Group, SCBF also was focused on youth empowerment and the development of Thailand's young people as citizens with a social conscience. At the time, SCBF was searching for a partner organization to join it on this mission. Seeing Sotthibandhu's evident passion for working with the youth and SF's track record, SCBF saw an opportunity to partner with a well-regarded local NGO to encourage young people to work within their communities and become more civic minded. The experience would impart critical life skills that could not be taught by rote in Thailand's classrooms.

From the outset, both organizations shared the same objective. The difference at this stage was in the proposed methodology for their partnership. SF was looking to accomplish this in the form of interactive workshops, whereas SCBF believed that students could best flourish when given the opportunity to design and implement community projects with the guidance and support of SF. "Through this process, they would eventually develop important life skills such as how to think, work, manage, communicate and utilize their capabilities to share and engage with the people around them," said Manthachitra.

Sotthibandhu recognized that SF would need to develop its organizational capacity to support this vision. Over the course of one year, the two organizations held numerous discussions and kept returning to the core question: how to best help young people develop the skills and conscience of active citizens? Eventually, the conversations converged around a model in which SF would provide a guiding framework for young people to conduct

projects that addressed the real needs of a community, developed with the support of SCBF. In time, a joint philosophy and process was clarified to the satisfaction of Sotthibandhu. "We realized that this was what we wanted," she said. In 2012, SF and SCBF came together to launch the Youth Active Citizen's Project in Songkhla Province.

### MEETING OF MINDS

From the beginning, the working partnership between SF and SCBF recognized the strengths of each organization. With their project experience and local knowledge, SF would be responsible for operations, raising youth development funds, selecting the community project proposals and acting as coaches for the youth project teams. SCBF would provide financial and organizational support, drawing upon their managerial acumen to reinforce the skills of the SF team in areas such as project management, knowledge management and communications and provide the technology and training for a database to track the projects and to support the SF team with formal reviews and evaluation throughout the process.

The inaugural Songkhla Active Youth Citizen Project began in 2012. Each year, SF would select 20 community projects submitted by young people between 14 and 25 years of age, each of which should be completed within five months and a budget of THB 20-40,000 (around US\$550-1,000 at the time). Participants would attend 3-4 workshops organized by the SF team and partner organizations, and through the hands-on experience of implementing their projects could develop the skills essential for active citizens in a modern democratic society. Upon completion of the projects, the teams would spend 2-3 months preparing for a Learning Festival, where they would showcase their results to the public.

To ensure that teamwork was an essential component of each project, each team should comprise at least five members plus one adult supervisor who could be a villager, community leader, a member of the local administrative council or a

teacher to serve as an advisor and mentor. As conceived, teams would submit proposals from which the SF team would select projects with the input of local experts. Upon acceptance of a team's proposal, an induction workshop for participants would be held and each team is designated a coach – a staff member of SF – who would get to know the project and participants, and set a baseline for evaluating the team and individuals.

But the success of the project itself was not the primary concern for SF or SCBF, but rather, what the young participants ended up learning in the process. “We want to give youths the opportunity to learn through real world experiences in the community or in live social settings,” said Manthachitra of SCBF. “In this sense, we stress the importance of the journey before the destination.”

In the first two years of the Songkhla Active Youth Citizen's Project, more than 300 participants took part in 65 youth projects across 10 districts and 15 educational institutes, from which 30 youth leaders have emerged. Although the projects can range across six categories – career, learning and education, health, community development, socio-cultural and the environment – around one third are focused on tackling Songkhla's environmental problems, including the destruction of watershed forests and water pollution, in addition to beach erosion. But the project range is highly diverse, ranging from poverty alleviation to access to education to the preservation of indigenous culture and healthcare for the elderly. Some of the teams, alongside Beach for Life, have created a lasting impact in the local community.

### TEACHING BY DOING

One example is a project named “Teachers Delivery” which was designed and implemented in 2013 by students of the Faculty of Education at the Thaksin University. With just two teachers on staff at the Phangphao School in Sating Phra District, pupils were often left to learn on their own, meaning that some graduated unable to read or write. Parents were taking their children out

of the school, which with numbers dwindling was in danger of imminent closure. This would primarily affect poorer families who would incur the additional cost of having to send their children to schools farther away.

In response to this, the Teachers Delivery team arranged for volunteer trainee teachers to teach core subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, Thai and English to the students, with almost immediate impact. “Teachers Delivery helped to fill the gaps by teaching core subjects during the week, and tutoring children for the O-Net (Thailand's national proficiency exams for primary and secondary school students) during the weekend,” said Tharadej Mahapunyanont, director of the Phangphao School. “As a result, their grades improved like never before. It also inspired our four primary (grade 6) pupils to continue to secondary school (grade 7).”

Seeing improvements in their children's progress, parents quickly became engaged. “Once Teachers Delivery started, my child would come home and tell me what they learned that day,” said Samart Ratanawong, a parent of a primary grade 4 pupil at Phangphao School. “I saw a change in my child from being a slow learner to being more lively and outgoing, with greatly improved reading abilities.”

In just two years, Teacher's Delivery has addressed the critical issue of teacher capacity at the Phangphao School – which is no longer under threat of closure. But just as important, it renewed a sense of purpose for the trainee volunteers, who would one day graduate and become teachers themselves. They were able to experience a real classroom environment and thrive under often challenging circumstances. “When I first saw the school and the children, I was uncertain whether I could pull this off and wondered whether I should withdraw,” said Saravuth Butrkaew, a trainee teacher. “But then I remembered the words of my SF coach, that active citizens need to have a strong foundation. So I thought if I could give these children some knowledge and life skills, then the quality of their lives might be improved.”



Administrators of the universities who lent support to the project also saw the benefits for the volunteer teachers and the universities, in line with national education reforms to move from lecture-based learning to a more experience-based curriculum. “Our students can use the knowledge they learned to help the school and community, while gaining experience and perspective,” said Kasem Suriyaphan, dean of the Faculty of Education at Thaksin University. “At the same time, the school’s children get a chance at a proper education.”

In the project’s second year, the Thaksin University’s Faculty of Education provided further support by extending the Phangphao School model to other small schools, providing an opportunity for more trainee teachers to develop their skills. It has since become an extracurricular activity, where volunteers can be credited with up to 100 activity hours,



Members of the CD Share project team.

and administrators are now planning to incorporate this model into the formal training curriculum. With some 6,000 small schools across Thailand, this model holds promise to increase education access in areas where universities are operating while allowing trainee teachers to gain work experience.

### YOUNG INNOVATORS

One of the most striking aspects of the Songkhla Active Youth Citizen’s Project is the diversity and innovation brought to the table by young people as they confront community challenges. Alongside Beach for Life and Teachers Delivery, the “CD Share” project was conceived by first-year students at the Rajabhat Songkhla University to create a common space for children in slum communities. Led by Siriwan Masae, a young Muslim student, the project also highlighted the potential to improve intercommunal relations in Songkhla.

Although they faced some resistance from parents and residents of slum communities, the youth project team persevered and were eventually granted permission by the community council to make use of an abandoned child development center as a venue for their activities. “From each person doing their own thing, many of the slum’s residents have since come together,” said Masae of the CD Share team. “Seeing that the children had united into a group, the community council held a Children’s Day celebration for the first time last year.”

The project continues today, exemplifying the potential for young people to bridge socio-cultural differences in the predominantly Buddhist community. Masae – who wears a hijab – sometimes takes the children to monasteries to learn from and interact with the monks. In addition, four other youth projects are currently being run by students from Muslim schools, with the support of the schools’ imams who saw the Youth Active Citizen’s Project as an opportunity for young Muslims to learn life skills and better understand the local community.

Another project that demonstrated the resourcefulness of young people was a conservation project undertaken by the “Miss Cleaning” group of the

Witthaya Foundation Religion Promotion School. Students living in the dormitory saw that their water charges were extremely high and set out to do something about it. By promoting more environmentally conscious practices in the dormitory, water was used more mindfully – reducing their water bills by one half from THB 14,000 (around US\$400) to 7,000 (US\$200) per month. Although the project has been completed, the school and students continue to use the new practices to minimize waste for both tap water and electricity usage.

The creativity and innovation demonstrated by the young project teams has impressed their adult advisors. “They have proved that a few people can make an impact, without the need for a big budget,” said Nipon Pinyo, public prosecutor and legal advisor to one of the projects. A former director of the Southern Vocational Education Centre, Arifen Abdulgadae, concurs. “They came up with their own ideas and managed it themselves,” he said. “I don’t think that even grown-ups could do some of these things as well as the youth volunteers have done.”

### TURNING A NEW LEAF

Youth participants also understood the benefits that accrued to them from their involvement with the Active Youth Citizen’s Project. Some spoke of how they learned to manage stress and work as part of a team. “For this project, there were so many times that I had been up all night to come up with a solution, but my friends said it wasn’t good,” said Thanakrit Sojeya of the Ton Kid Club at the Vajiravudh School and member of the “Images of Songkhla History” project group. “It was disheartening. But in the end I always ended up doing it myself, because it was my responsibility.”

For some participants, these new attitudes became embedded in their daily lives. “My mother used to scold me and have to pick up after me,” said Supatra Thongpaichit of the “RN’Mix” group, which focused on the cleanup of indigenous land. “But now, not only do I put away my own things but I also pick up after my friends! My mother has said that I’ve totally changed.”

One important aspect of the Youth Active Citizen’s Project is to make young people feel a part of the community, which was particularly important in the case of a project team of young offenders. Living in a youth detention center, they initiated a project where they learned how to make baskets from skilled weavers in the community, and then how to market them, with the proceeds distributed to those in the center who could not otherwise afford to purchase supplies. For Manthachitra of SCBF, the track record of SF for working with juvenile delinquents put them in a strong position to support this project team, which had the opportunity to interact with other young people at workshops and forums, helping them regain their confidence. “It shows young people who have made mistakes that they still have the chance to change,” she said.

Inevitably, many of the young participants gained a new appreciation of the challenges that remain within their communities. “The project has helped us to understand that growth and progress have to come from developing the people of the community first,” said Masae of the CD Share team. As a community development student from Rajabhat Songkhla University, she also appreciated the opportunity to “learn by doing.” “We have also been able to apply these field activities to our class work,” she said. “During our exams, we were asked how to adapt theories into practice, and we could answer that easily from what we experienced.”

For SCBF, this process is critical to develop participants as future youth leaders who are able to build the capacity of their peers and future generations to become what SCBF call “quality citizens” for the 21st Century – through first-hand experience. “These are young people who are self-aware critical thinkers; who are able to work in a team and who possess leadership qualities and are socially responsible, with a sense of compassion and duty towards the communities that they live in,” said SCBF Managing Director Manthachitra.

Upon completion of the youth projects, SF organizes a Learning Festival to showcase the work of the volunteer groups to demonstrate to

the public and the media the potential – and power – of a new generation of active citizens. According to their adult coaches and advisors, the change in some of the young people upon completion of the project is remarkable. Many develop the ability to think critically and communicate, making clear and compelling presentations at the closing festival. Some are visibly more outgoing, and most important, have attained a new level of self-awareness and confidence to help them navigate the increasingly complex landscape of modern society in Thailand.

### A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

With this wider objective in mind, SCBF was eager to ensure that its contribution would be one that would best enable the Active Youth Citizen's Project to thrive beyond its involvement. This meant developing the organizational capacity of SF to manage a large program that would entail the supervision of more than 20 groups of youth leaders at any one time. Together, the partners spent one year restructuring SF, putting in place a program management system and training SF staff in preparation for implementation.

One major change for SF was in its management style; whereas Sotthibandhu previously took on responsibility for multiple tasks, the ambition and

scale of the Active Youth Citizen's Project meant that this approach was no longer possible. SF was restructured into a more decentralized organization comprising four core units: academic and training, operations, knowledge management and communications, and finance and general management. This meant that staff members began to specialize in their roles and be clearer in their responsibilities and the operational processes for supporting the program once it was up and running. This division of labor allowed staff to develop confidence in day-to-day tasks.

At the same time, each staff member was required to take on responsibilities as a coach for five individual youth volunteer groups. Coaches needed to be aware of the qualities that they were seeking to develop in the young volunteers, and to gain a deep understanding of each project so that they could guide their young charges towards the right objectives. "Even before the first meeting with the volunteers, the coaches have to be five steps ahead," said Nooraminee Salae, a senior operations staff member at SF.

They must also support the young volunteers in the field, guiding them to review and reflect upon their activities and draw links between the project, the community and development of their own life



The Beach for Life youth project team surveying Samila Beach.

skills. Importantly, coaches had to move away from the more traditional “top-down” model of teaching that is common in Thailand towards one in which youth volunteers were encouraged to think for themselves and generate their own solutions. The role of the coach is to help the young people to polish these ideas, and support them in implementation.

Further, to ensure that the youth volunteers were well-supported in their projects, SF enlisted the support of other non-profit organizations and individuals. Local experts in each of the focus areas were invited to join SF as committee members for individual projects to provide advice to coaches and youth project teams. These have included independent academics, shore ecology experts and legal advisors, among others from the provincial administration, schools and universities, local administrative units, NGOs, the private sector and communities. Inadvertently, the project also created a platform for the advisors to come together, generating an informal forum for active adult citizens to communicate and collaborate in mentoring their young advisees.

### A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Prior to implementation of the Active Youth Citizen’s Project, it was important that SCBF and SF agreed upon and set targets to measure results. Rather than the success of the youth volunteer projects themselves, both parties were interested in tracking aspects of the program that enabled young people to thrive. Empowerment Evaluation (EE) tools were adapted to guide this process, and together SCBF and SF generated key performance indicators (KPI) and key result areas (KRA) that best mapped against the agreed objectives. These would prove helpful for SF in managing this ambitious project, working backwards from the sort of life skills they hoped to impart to the young volunteers to build indicators of progress.

These are used to take stock in an After Action Review (AAR), where the SF team come together regularly to evaluate results and make adjustments based on what they have learned. In addition, SCBF has helped SF to set up a volunteer data-

base to track the progress of both individuals and groups. This data will be critical for SF in adjusting the program over time, allowing them to see the strengths and weaknesses of the process.

For Sotthibandhu, the director of SF, this attention from SCBF to developing the organizational capacity of SF has been critical to the success of the program so far, enabling the team to smoothly manage a challenging project and stay on course through clear goals and progress updates.

### LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

After two years of operations, the Youth Active Citizen’s Project has emerged as a new model for youth development initiatives in Thailand and has attracted national attention for its success in catalyzing young people to participate in civic life. Its innovation lies in allowing Songkhla’s young people the freedom to forge ahead independently to find solutions to community problems, while providing a guiding framework and mentorship to support them along the way.

A driving force behind the program has been Sotthibandhu and SF’s long-time commitment to develop the young, active citizenry in Songkhla. “SCBF has not been the leader in this, but we are a supporter standing behind SF,” said Manthachitra. “We listen to SF, try and understand their problems and give them a helping hand to solve it.” This is an important feature of SCBF’s work, according to Dr Vichit Suraphongchai, chairman of the Executive Committee at Siam Commercial Bank. “Community agencies need help, but they are ultimately the drivers and owners of projects,” he said. “As a bank, we are in a better position to provide support to projects, then get out of the way.”

Hearing Sotthibandhu’s earlier concerns about the capacity of her organization to implement a project of this scope, SCBF initially focused on working with the SF team on organizational development in areas such as knowledge management, communications, project management, finance and accounting and internal restructuring. “Rather than just looking at the result of the

community projects, as is the normally the case, SCBF was the only organization I had come across in Thailand who put more emphasis on investing in human resource development and restructuring the workflow of its partner NGOs,” said Sotthibandhu. “Beyond funding, this is what has made the partnership unique and beneficial to SF.”

In choosing to partner with SCBF, Sotthibandhu recognized the need to overhaul her organization to maximize the chances of success. The openness of SF staff to new ways of working and the tools and ideas introduced by SCBF were important, and Empowerment Evaluation (EE) was key to encouraging collaboration. “We did not want our partner to feel as if our relationship was unequal, or to impose our views on them in a top-down fashion,” said Kittirat Pluemjit, project manager from SCBF. “EE allows for sharing of ideas in a safe space for discussion.” With SCBF’s encouragement, SF staff dared to collaborate and exchange ideas, and to put forward solutions that they thought more fitting than the ones SCBF proposed. “The most important lesson was to be open to ideas, and do things that we never did before,” said Monthakarn Petcharit, accountant, business and project activity staff member at SF. “Even though it wasn’t always a perfect process, it helped us discover potential in ourselves that we never knew existed.”

In many ways, the partnership’s early success is a reflection of the shared values of Sotthibandhu and Manthachitra, with both believing that the journey that young volunteers undertake during the process is just as important as the destination. “SCBF’s first goal is not to develop community projects, but it is to support the development of young people,” said Manthachitra. “When we designed the Youth Active Citizen’s Project with SF, we gave the highest priority to the learning process. Some of the qualities of an active citizen can emerge from the youth during the course of the project – but it takes time.”

One such quality is a young person’s desire to become involved in the development of their home communities, which both SF and SCBF were keen

to nurture. The Youth Active Citizen’s Project has deliberately been conceived as an area-based project, so that participants are encouraged to develop a curiosity about their home province, and reflect upon their roles in the community. “Their projects are the proof that they are part of the community, and allow the youth to recognize the potential value of their contribution,” said Manthachitra.

Challenges remain in the near term. One of the biggest questions is that pertaining to sustainability: can SF continue the Youth Active Citizen’s Project without the organizational and financial support of SCBF after 2017? At this stage, it is not a certainty. With a limited number of staff bearing dual responsibilities in the office, retaining and managing talent will require more attention.

And while SF’s local network has been a source of support to the Youth Active Citizen’s Project, participation by local institutions and adult advisors has been limited. There is also potential for SF to forge alliances and networks with the province’s universities, schools, religious institutions and adult citizens in the community to tap their expertise and energy to provide more support to both the young volunteers and SF staff.

There is also more that can be done by SF to promote greater participation among their local network and garner the support of active groups in the community, both in kind and in cash. Financial sustainability is a potential challenge, especially post-2017 after which SCBF has not committed financial support. SF will need to develop their local fund-raising efforts to strengthen the financial stability of the organization in the future. For this, SF can draw upon its new skills in knowledge management and communications to share stories of their success and reach a wider network of potential donors. This can also be helpful to retain the enthusiasm of the projects’ alumni to serve as advisors and mentors to coming generations of youth volunteers.

## OUTLOOK

Beyond Songkhla Province, SCBF has national ambitions for the Youth Active Citizen’s Project

and its potential to develop the next generation of “change agents” – active young citizens who can participate in civic life and provide the checks and balances important in any modern democratic society. The pilot project with SF has borne fruit, and for SCBF, the challenge is to translate this success to scale up the impact. “We see ourselves as a social lab, where we think big but we start small,” said Manthachitra. To this end, SCBF has a valuable role to play in Thailand as an incubator. “SCBF picks projects with potential for high impact that can be expanded to other communities and have a multiplying effect,” said Suraphongchai of Siam Commercial Bank’s executive committee.


The next step for SCBF is to see if this model can be replicated in other settings, and with another partner. To this end, they are working with the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (THPF) to roll out the Youth Active Citizen’s Project in Samut Songkram, Nan and Srisaket Provinces. Like SF, THPF are focused on the development of young people as active citizens. For Dr. Wilasinee Adulyanont, director of the Healthy Lifestyle Promotion Section at THPF, the political instability of recent years gives greater urgency to the task of developing the potential of young people as future leaders. Seeing SCBF’s focus on youth development, she joined forces with Manthachitra and her team to scale up her own organization’s efforts.

For SCBF, the setting and partner is different, but the challenge remains the same: how can stakeholders work together to develop the potential of Thailand’s young people as active citizens and potential agents of change? Samut Songkram Province provided an opportunity for SCBF and its partner to work with the provincial government, which had also placed a strong emphasis on youth development in their local development plans. SCBF has already been engaged with the provincial government on other youth projects, and it was a matter of drawing upon their existing relationships to bring the Youth Active Citizen’s Project to the attention of provincial officials. There are now plans for the program to be extended to six

districts in the province, with the local government as an active stakeholder along with THPF.

This raises a question for Manthachitra about the future role of SCBF, as interest in the Youth Active Citizen’s Project grows. “A lot of provinces have asked to collaborate with us, and we are thinking about how our role can be more sustainable,” she said. Potentially, it could be down to the pilot leaders such as SF and THPF to support a national rollout, acting as regional hubs and facilitators for other organizations interested in extending this model. This will require customization for each new province, and for SCBF to continue to grow its network of partner NGOs who share their vision of helping young people become active, engaged citizens through first-hand experience.

Creating the next generation of what SCBF calls “change agents” will require the nurturing of exceptional young people who can lead. “It is about noticing outstanding team members from the volunteer groups, and trying to understand their hopes and dreams – and to help them get there,” said Manthachitra. “SCBF could play some sort of role in linking exceptional youth leaders across the country, perhaps through workshops and other means.” In the digital age, SCBF and its partners are providing platforms for young people to meet face-to-face, and to realize their potential as agents of change.

Sitting at the border with Malaysia, Songkhla Province, where this all started, will likely experience another boom and become a major regional trading hub in coming years with the integration of Thailand into the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. With SF and the Youth Active Citizen’s Project, the local community can be assured that a cohort of civic-minded young citizens will be there to help maximize Songkhla’s potential – and to keep watch for their interests. 

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## QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

### Financial

Planned budget or income versus actual expenditure for the fiscal year*	Budget: THB 4.5 million (US\$0.126 million) Expenditure: THB 4.5 million (US\$0.126 million)
Income composition by source: individuals, corporations, events, trusts, other (please specify)	Foundations: 100 %
Income composition: domestic versus international	Domestic: 100 %

### Personnel

Staff retention rate	88% (8) staff retained in 2014
Turnover rate	12% (1) staff left in 2014
What is the board composition?	Occupation: prosecutor, 1; non-profit, 3; academia, 9; translator, 1; doctor, 1; business, 1; government officer, 2 Gender: men, 9; women, 9.
How many meetings does the board hold per year?	5
How many staff members are there?	8
How many staff members have attended some non-profit or management training course?	8

## Quantitative Indicators Continued

## Organizational

Do you publish an annual report?	Yes
How many sites/locations do you currently operate in?	2 provinces in Thailand: Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat
Do you measure results?	<p>Through use of the empowerment evaluation (EE) method, key result areas (KRA) and key performance indicators (KPIs) were defined at the beginning of the project. The KRAs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth citizens</li> <li>• Project management system/staff potential</li> <li>• Mechanisms for linking provincial youth development network</li> </ul> <p>Creation of youth networks</p> <p>Knowledge in the field of youth citizen development</p>
What types of outreach?	Print, social media, TV, radio, newspaper
Do you regularly meet with government representatives?	Yes
If yes, on a scale of 1-3 how close is the relationship with government? 1 = not close; 2 = somewhat close; 3 = very close	Closeness of relationship = 2

\* Exchange rate, THB 35.7 = US\$1. For year 2014.