



**THAILAND'S LONG-RANGE PLAN FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION (1990 - 2004) : A SUMMARY**

**MINISTRY OF UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS
THAILAND
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THAILAND'S LONG-RANGE PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (1990 - 2004) : A SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION

Alongside the changing context of a nation emerged a serious rethinking of the functions and roles of higher education system in Thailand. Amid rapid and continuing socio-economic changes in the country and an apparent turnaround from years of striving for stable development and becoming newly industrialized economy, the Ministry of University Affairs took the initiatives to embark on a long-range planning for higher education development. In October 1987, a special meeting among leaders and scholars in the Thai higher education community was held in recognition of the necessity and relevance of longer term strategic planning. Agreement was reached that a 15-year plan based on extensive policy research and consultative meetings were needed to make higher education more responsive to the continuing growth of the country. It was also noted that in the formulation of the 15-year plan, consideration should be made to build in the elements of dynamism, clarity, continuity, and flexibility into the higher education system.

In the process of formulating the plan, a total of 23 policy research project were commissioned and completed (list of the projects appears as Annex 1). These projects were grouped as follows :

- Environmental scanning (11 projects)
- Manpower analysis (3 projects)
- Internal efficiency studies (7 projects)
- Studies of private sector's roles in higher education (2 projects)

In addition, a series of consultative meetings and seminars on themes related to the research topics as well as to the issues of national development and manpower planning were organized periodically to gather views and useful information from experts and officials from educational and related agencies of both public and private sectors. Advice was also sought from foreign experts who served as short-term consultants.

A total of US\$ 320,000 was granted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support the policy research projects and consultative activities. Additional support for the service of foreign experts was also provided by the World Bank, the British Council, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

II. THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF THAI SOCIETY

The synthesis of the findings of the 23 policy research projects as well as information from experts' group meetings had identified development trends in Thai society and subsequent scenarios for the higher education system were built to adjust it to the changing needs of the country. The highlights of these research findings could be summarized as presented below :

2.1 Demographic variable particularly population structural change during the next fifteen years was to be witnessed as pointed out by the research findings. The population age group 6-15 years would decrease in number because of the declining birth rate. However, those high school age (16-18) and college age (19-24) will continue to increase at the present rate. The labor force age group (25-59) and those over 60 will increase proportionally to total population, eventually reaching 38.7 million and 5.5 million respectively from a total projected population of 68.2 million by the year 2005.

2.2 There was indication in the research findings that relationship between Thailand and other countries would become more broadened regionally and internationally, especially with respect to commercial activities. It was foreseen that Thailand would move to expand market shares in Indochina and to establish trade relations with her recovering neighbor countries.

2.3 It was expected that Thai economy would continue to grow at a satisfactory rate. More specifically, research in this area predicted that Thailand would be able to maintain its 8% growth rate for at least the next 5 years (1990-1994) and a growth rate of approximately 6% during the following 5 years (1995-1999). Industries, especially service and export industries dealing in high value-added products would enjoy greatest expansion.

2.4 Agricultural sector was predicted to retain its extreme importance both economically and socially. As the export industry depends on agricultural raw materials produced in rural areas, the majority of Thai labor force would remain to be engaged in farming. By focusing on appropriate use of agricultural technology, Thailand's production would be on the rise without increasing the amount of land under cultivation to prevent problems of environmental degradation, particularly forest encroachment.

2.5 Within the next 15 years, 80% of the new births were predicted to be living in urban areas. However, 60% of the total population would still be residing in rural areas. The majority of the urban population was projected to continue living in Bangkok and its suburbs because of job opportunities in industrial sector which was concentrated around metropolitan area. Since 1984, over 1,800 projects worth billions of baht were launched in Bangkok, causing a continuing influx of rural labor for the next 5-10 years.

2.6 In terms of manpower and the labor market, all research findings pointed to increased employment in the industrial sector with a greater demand for skilled labor. The need for workers trained in science and technology was expected to be on the rise. In addition, between 1988 and 1995, the need for university graduates would grow at the rate of 8% to 12%. More of these graduates would be entering the private sector or establishing independent careers and would thus require language, computer, and management skills

2.7 As regards social changes, research findings indicated that families would be smaller and there would be more single-family households due to economic factors rather than the traditional extended family. In addition, the growth of capitalism, an increase in tourism and advances in technology would contribute to an upheaval in social values with regard to marriage, childrearing, sexual relations, consumption habits, etc.

2.8 Politically, it was seen that there would be more power sharing. The government, formerly dominated by the bureaucrats and military, would allow other political institutions such as Parliament, political parties, and special interest groups to play a greater role.

2.9 The trend toward increased scientific and technical advancement, as reported in the findings, would lead to Thailand's becoming an information society. As communication technology was becoming more efficient and less expensive, organizations and individuals would have greater access to information and be able to acquire knowledge in various fields both inside and outside the education system to meet their individual needs. Technology would also play a more vital role in the service and production industries, leading eventually to the manufacture of products with added value. Technology would be put to

use in industries requiring a higher level of basic knowledge such as biotechnology, materials technology, automatic processing technology, etc.

2.10 The ecological environment was found to be reaching a critical stage and was likely to degrade further due to deforestation and to people's search for new areas to earn a living. Forests and mangrove swamps now account for less than 20% of the country's land area, endangering the existence of certain species of plants as much as animals.

III. THE CHANGING ROLES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In accord with the projected changes in Thai society which produced both threats and opportunities to the country. The functions of higher education must be critically reviewed and radically improved in order to meet the changing demands of the society.

Some of the proposed changes and reforms in various functions of the university are :

3.1 Teaching

Teaching at the tertiary level must be dynamic, diversified and relevant in terms of objectives, target groups, methods, and content to meet the country's need for human resource development in both modern and traditional spheres of production. Educational opportunities must be provided to suit the socio-economic conditions of diversified target groups. Most importantly is the notion that the country's human resources must be developed on a continuous basis.

Teaching methods must also promote basic scientific knowledge, independent thinking, analytical reasoning, and creative thinking. Skills necessary to survive in the modern world must be stressed such as knowledge acquisition skills, language and communication skills, information skills, and management skills.

3.2 Research

Research must aim for academic excellence and relevance to the country's social and economic development goals. Research agencies/bodies will have to develop special areas of expertise and train sufficient personnel to carry out their tasks. In terms of long-range directions for research activities, research must consist of both basic research to support the country's long-term goal of self-reliance and applied research for continuing social and economic development. Also included must be research and development in technology for modern

industry and research aimed at promoting efficiency in the use and conservation of natural resources.

Furthermore, other areas of research should be given more attention such as policy research to study the effects of development on the country, and to recommend strategies for development suitable for both society and the environment.

3.3 Academic Services

Academic administrators must aim at the development of an informed and learned society which can serve as a foundation for the well-being of the society as a whole. Accordingly, academic service organizations within the university such as the Continuing Education Department, the Information Dissemination Department and the Science Park should become more viable and innovative.

It is also suggested that a network be developed between tertiary institutions and external organizations to provide various types of academic services to the public. This network should involve the cooperation of various local and foreign professional agencies.

3.4 Preservation of Art and Culture

The mission of preserving art and culture must be expanded on a larger scale. It should not be limited to just the preservation of Thai cultural heritage, but should instill a deeper understanding of what it means to be Thai. This should to a feeling of pride in having a national identity while at the same time being able to participate actively as a member of the world community. In doing so, art and culture must be incorporated into teaching and learning activities, extra-curricular activities, and the environment on campus.

Art and cultural organizations must therefore become more diversified. They must have adequate resources in terms of manpower and capital, and increased cooperation with internal and external organizations.

IV. THE DEMAND FOR MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY

In light of the changing roles of higher education, the management system must become more dynamic, adopting various approaches that are tailored to its different missions and its diversified target groups. All university's academic organizations and institutions must be able to adapt to the changing demands of the society. To achieve their goals, these organizations must become more self-reliant and independent from

bureaucratic restriction. Some of the major steps to be taken to promote such capabilities include :

4.1 A national center of higher education must be established to supervise all institutions of higher education to ensure policy consistency and to maintain high educational standard.

4.2 Government control should be relaxed. Universities must be moving forward in pursuance of gaining full autonomy. This will allow for greater independence in administering their internal affairs in such areas as finance, personnel, and academic programs. This will also facilitate and promote free competition and continuous development among institutions.

4.3 Underlying such increased freedom is the notion that internal administration must be made more efficient as characterized by greater accountability. Representatives from the community must have a share in the management at different levels of the organization.

4.4 New modes of operation should be developed to provide for greater flexibility and to allow for more efficient use of resources. Various new projects could be administered by independent units or be carried out in cooperation with external agencies.

4.5 Institutions of higher learning should seek for more extensive cooperation with the private sector and with foreign organizations to increase the efficiency of their operations.

V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1 : The government should support the development of a national agency for higher education which would serve as a central coordinating agency for academic policy and standard for all higher education institutions.

RECOMMENDATION 2 : The government should encourage a reform of the public higher education institutions' relationship with the government. Public universities, predominantly bureaucratic in administration, should be allowed to change toward becoming autonomous public universities in accord with readiness and potential of each individual institution.

RECOMMENDATION 3 : The government should maintain the present level of financial support to higher education institutions. The

government should also improve the methods of funding in the form of block-grant budgeting.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The government should support the research function of the university as an important component of the national development scheme. Budget allocation for research should be increased to at least 1% of the G.N.P. by the year 1997 and 1.5% by 2004.

RECOMMENDATION 5 : The government should give support to the establishment and development of endowment funds to promote excellence in higher education, and to help higher education institutions carry out their missions on a continuing basis.

RECOMMENDATION 6 : The government should utilize the 15-year plan as the directive plan for all related plans for higher education from the Seventh Development Plan (1992-1996) to the Ninth Development Plan (2002-2006). It should be used as guidelines for setting objectives and policies for each 5-year plan and for each annual operation plan.

RECOMMENDATION 7 : The government should ensure cooperation between agencies concerned in the implementation of the 15-year plan. It should also establish a mechanism to consistently obtaining feedback and evaluating effectiveness of the plan.

List of Policy Research Projects**Environmental Scanning**

1. Population and Enrollment Trends
2. Regional and Major City Development Plans
3. Internal and External Influence on Social Changes
4. Cultural Changes and Ethical Problems
5. Trends in Political Development
6. Thailand and the World Community in the Next Fifteen Years
7. Future Prospects of Industry and Service Industry Development
8. Future Prospects of Agricultural Development
9. Future Prospects of Thailand's Export Market
10. Future Development in Science and Technology
11. Ecological and Environmental Changes in the Future

Manpower Analysis

12. Manpower Projections
13. Manpower Preparation for Changes in Thai Economy and World Economy
14. Analysis of Labor Market Fluctuations

Internal Efficiency Studies

15. Current Status of Higher Education in Thailand
16. Historical Development of Higher Education in Thailand
17. Cost and Financing of Higher Education
18. Regional Opportunities and Needs for Higher Education
19. Academic and Professional Autonomy in Higher Education
20. Articulation between Secondary and Vocational Education and Higher Education
21. Staffing in Higher Education

Role of Private Sector in Higher Education

22. Role of Private Higher Education Institutions
23. Private Sector and Higher Education