unicef

for every child

UNICEF THAILAND

75

YEARS OF COMMITMENT

FOR CHILDREN



UNICEF Thailand: 75 Years of Commitment for Children

Written by Jaime Gill

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), November 2023
Front Cover: children from Chiang Mai province. ©UNICEF Thailand/2012/Jingjai N.

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The statements in this publication are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF.





Welcome to this book celebrating UNICEF's 75 years working in Thailand. It has been created as a coffee table book, so that it can be dipped in and out of easily. Some facts and figures may be repeated, so that every article makes sense standing on its own. Whether you read it chronologically, or jumping between the pages that most interest you, please enjoy.

The drawings used on our front cover and throughout the book were all drawn by children in Thailand who participated in learning activities with UNICEF.

Schoolboy with friends © UNICEF Thailand/2008/Athit

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VOICE OF THE FUTURE

FOREWORD



Atichat Butchan, centre, with schoolfriends - Supplied by Atichat Butchan

Atichat Butchan
Sakon Nakhon

Atichat Butchan, 11, from Sakon Nakhon province, became the youngest ever member of UNICEF's Young People Advisory Board in 2023. The Board advises UNICEF on its work in high priority areas including education, mental health and climate change. On this 75th anniversary of UNICEF's work in Thailand, he shares his views on Thailand's past, present and future.

"My Dad says Thailand has changed a lot. When he was young he had to wake at 5am to help his parents do housework and feed the animals on the farm, then walk all the way to school. Even listening to that routine exhausts me! I'm glad life isn't so hard now. I only get up to go to school, meaning I can focus fully on my education. My parents had to drop out after primary school, and they want better for me. They dream of seeing me in a khrui graduation gown one day. It's going to be difficult to afford for me to go to university, but I'm already thinking of ways to make the money. I design mobile phone wallpapers for my friends in the evening, so I can be quite creative.

Education is very important in the 21st century. I want to be fluent in English and Mandarin so I can get a good job and travel. I got a chance to travel when I put my name forward for UNICEF's Young People Advisory Board (YPAB). I'm really interested in education and environmental issues, and helped my teacher organize recycling at school. So she suggested I apply and I thought I should try, hoping I could gain knowledge and then bring it back home to improve my community.

I was so excited when I was accepted and knew I would go to Bangkok for the first time that I couldn't sleep the night before. I learned a lot from the camp and I'm going to apply again next year because I really want to do something about climate change.

I first noticed the world was getting hotter when I was in kindergarten. I thought the heat was from the sky. As a little kid, I thought to myself 'why can't someone fly into the sky to switch off the heat for us?' But I later learned that there's no switch in the sky, it's things like waste, forest fires, and car emissions that make it hot. I think we need to move to electric cars, we need to understand and use technology to help us solve problems. Technology is a very important part of our lives now and I think we can use it to make things better in the future.

My message to UNICEF and the people who help it is to say thank you for believing in us. Kids need support from adults and the whole society. I'm really lucky that my parents give me a lot of their time. I want to see a future where every kid in Thailand gets that kind of support and can go as far in education as they want. Children are the future, and if we get the right education we can achieve great things for Thailand."



"Thank you for believing in us. Kids need support from adults and the whole society."

THAILAND'S INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

Introduction by Kyungsun Kim, UNICEF Representative to Thailand



© UNICEF Thailand/2021/Preechapanich

What do the last 75 years tell us? That was the question we kept asking as we wrote this book telling the story of Thailand since UNICEF began its work here in 1948. One answer is that these years reveal the extraordinary resilience, ability and determination of the Thai people. Though the nation has faced repeated disasters – from malnutrition following World War II to modern calamities like the 2004 tsunami – it has not only overcome them, but emerged stronger on the other side.

Thailand has achieved this through fortitude, collaboration, and the dedication of families to creating a better life for themselves and their children. And we believe that in the same spirit the country will continue this progress during the next 75 years, again overcoming challenges that will surely arise.

Thailand's crowning modern achievement has been its development from a low-income society where most families and children struggled to upper-middle-income status. Many call this an economic miracle, but it is really a human miracle. Tens of millions of people in Thailand have worked themselves out of poverty and made the future brighter for their children. Almost one in five children born in 1948 would have died before age 5 and many of those that lived would have left school before Grade 4. In 2023, most children live into adulthood and graduate from high school.

They will grow up in a Thailand vastly more developed, healthy and prosperous than that of their grandparents. The nation has developed alongside its people. Where once UNICEF spearheaded national health initiatives and raised its funds from outside the country, the Royal Thai Government now provides essential services and the Thai people themselves donate to UNICEF's ongoing work within the country and, indeed, to help children in worse off nations around the world.

With UNICEF's support, Thailand has committed itself to further progress towards upholding the rights of young people by signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, putting children at the forefront of the national agenda. Collaborating with UNICEF and other UN agencies, the country has also made extraordinary strides towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, a roadmap leading the way to a better, fairer and more sustainable future.

While researching this book, we at UNICEF were awed by the country's achievements, and proud of the part we have played. This work is an honour. But the journey isn't over. While much has improved, some challenges remain and others have emerged.

"I'm awed by the country's achievements, and proud of the part we have played."

Too many children in Thailand are still born into inequality, with those from ethnic minorities, migrant families and remote regions more likely to experience poverty, health problems, inadequate education, and limited opportunities. New challenges such as poor mental health, inter-generational gaps, a fast-changing world, online safety, obesity and climate change have increasingly come into focus.

The good news is that these challenges can be overcome, just as those of the past have been. The even better news is that by doing so, Thailand will become a stronger, better, fairer nation, one where every child can thrive, contribute, and be happy. We can work with children and young people to equip them with the skills they need to succeed and help Thailand become a rich nation of shared prosperity. We must also all work together, young people at the forefront, to take action against climate change and create a more sustainable, greener, cleaner Thailand.

We hope you'll find this book as inspiring and thought-provoking as we do. Though it does describe UNICEF's work, and dips into its history, it is not solely about UNICEF. It is about the Thai nation, its people, and its children, who will take the centre stage in the next 75 years.

Atichat's wonderful foreword gives so much cause for optimism. He is excited about the future and though he sees the challenges ahead, he believes they can be solved, and wants to be part of that solution. He calls for all children to get the education they want and need, in a world united to solve seemingly insurmountable problem such as climate change.

Thank you to every one of you for all you have done to support children like Atichat. As you read this book, we hope you will see the astonishing impact of your generosity, the way that millions of young lives have been lifted and transformed. It is in our power to create a society where even more opportunities to thrive, shine and be happy are created for every child. Let's build this better world, together.

THE UNICEF PROMISE

FOR EVERY CHILD

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world facing rapidly changing challenges, UNICEF remains steadfast in its mission. It's a promise encapsulated in three simple but powerful words: For Every Child.

UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, help meet their basic needs, and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. As a nation, Thailand has made important strides towards respecting and protecting child rights and in 1992 signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention now guides UNICEF as it strives to establish child rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. All children.

For Every Child is a pledge that transcends geographical borders, cultural differences, and political landscapes. It rings out in the bustling streets of New York, echoes in the rainforests of the Amazon, and reverberates across the rice fields and cities of Thailand. All children everywhere are born with fundamental human rights, such as the rights to healthcare and education, or the rights to be treated equally and protected from harm.



Children from Baan Mai Nai Soi refugee camp. © UNICEF Thailand/2007/Few

For every child in Thailand, UNICEF promises opportunity. The opportunity to learn and grow, to dream and aspire, to play and laugh. UNICEF pledges to continue its work until every child can access quality education, nourishing food, clean water and air, and healthcare - the fundamental building blocks that allow a child not just to survive, but to thrive.

For every child in Thailand, UNICEF promises unwavering support. Whether improving early childhood learning in rural areas, assisting families to recover from emergencies, or supporting the mental health of young people, UNICEF pledges to continue working with the Royal Thai Government, alongside public and private sector partners, to turn our promises into actions.

UNICEF's commitment also means working to prevent exploitation, end violence, and promote young voices. We work towards a future where every child is seen, heard, and valued, and a world that invests in children as the architects of tomorrow.

For every child, hope. For every child, a chance. For every child, a future. Because the progress of our world hinges on the wellbeing of every child, everywhere.

"Because the progress of our world hinges on the wellbeing of every child, everywhere."

Elephant hauling truck with penicillin and other medical supplies to remote regions of Thailand to eradicate yaws - from archive.

75 YEARS OF PROGRESS

Thailand's journey over the last 75 years has inspired nations around the world. It has transformed itself from an agrarian country struggling to recover from the impact of World War II - a country where widespread poverty and limited healthcare meant that average life expectancy was just 42 - into a confident, modern and prosperous society, where people live longer, happier lives. During the boom years of 1960 to 1996, Thailand's economy grew at an astonishing average annual rate of 7.5 per cent, and it continues to grow to this day.

This transformation is very visible to those who live in Thailand or visit it, whether in the glittering skyscrapers of Bangkok, the confidence with which 21st century technology is used, or the Thai talents who have become famous around the world. But all of this was made possible by more fundamental yet sometimes invisible work, such as the programmes which brought relief from the suffering, sickness, and early death that poverty can cause.

Even as late as 1960, child mortality was still high in Thailand, with 148 children out of every thousand dying before five years of age. When UNICEF first began its work in Thailand, malnutrition was rife and tuberculosis, malaria and the disfiguring disease of yaws were the most common causes of death and disability among children. Now yaws has been eradicated, malnutrition alleviated, and tuberculosis and malaria beaten back, and that heartbreaking figure of 148 early deaths has tumbled to eight. The proportion of the population living below the poverty line decreased from 67 per cent as late as 1986 to 6 per cent in 2019.



Children of Thailand, from archive.

How was this and so much more achieved? One reason is the long-standing independence of the nation, which helped prevent it from descending into the conflicts that gripped many neighbouring countries in the post-war years. Indeed, Thailand has often stood apart as a leader in the region, as illustrated when it became one of the five founding members of the ASEAN union, an agreement signed in Bangkok.

King Bhumibol Adulyadej's long reign provided additional stability and inspiration through often challenging times, and his Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy provided a powerful model for development. But much of the credit must go to the Thai people themselves. It is through its citizens and their determination to create better lives for their children, that Thailand has achieved so much. They have put in the hard work that made economic plans a reality. It is they who stepped up and became the health workers, the educators and the community workers who transformed Thailand's way of life. UNICEF is proud to have played a role in supporting Thailand's governments and families as they made this transformation happen.

UNICEF first started working in Thailand in 1948, when it faced a number of enormous challenges. Poverty was perhaps the most pressing, with the country still largely agrarian and most families impoverished. Poverty also exacerbated the second biggest problem, health, with malnutrition and preventable disease still leading to millions of early deaths.

"It is through its citizens and their determination to create better lives for their children, that Thailand has achieved so much."

Thailand focused on addressing these challenges through urgent reforms in the late 1940s, with UNICEF providing support at every stage. Thailand's healthcare system was centralized and top-heavy in 1948, so it began to invest in grassroots-focused "primary healthcare". In even the most remote villages, lay people were trained to give advice and basic medical assistance for illnesses such as diarrhoea that were widespread and easily treated. These "village health volunteers" focused on prevention and basic hygiene, concepts that were little understood in most villages. At the same time nutrition was improved, through increased availability of healthy food and dietary education.

The effects were powerful enough that by the 1980s, Thailand was regularly visited by officials and experts from developing countries, eager to learn from its success. The establishment of the Universal Healthcare Coverage Scheme in 2002 marked a further significant step forward, not just in health but in social progress. This initiative made Thailand one of the first middle-income countries to provide healthcare access to all of its citizens.

At the same time, land reforms were gradually introduced which provided land to smallholder farmers, promoted rural development and reduced income disparities. In the 1960s, a turning point was reached when Thailand shifted towards modernization and manufacturing. In conjunction with the Thai Government's infrastructure development programs, these efforts sparked a period of rapid economic growth known as the 'Thai Economic Miracle'. This transformed Thailand from an agrarian society to an export-oriented industrialized economy, which then diversified further into sectors such as tourism, textiles, and electronics.

Thailand's world-famous tourism industry was driven by successive governments and the hard work of the population. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand was the world's eighth most visited country according to the rankings of the United Nations World Tourism Organization. In 2019, Thailand received an astonishing 39.8 million international tourists - ahead of the United Kingdom and Germany. All of this contributed to it being named an upper-middle-income country in 2011.

As Thailand sets its sights on the next stage in its development, becoming a high-income country, it faces challenges, old and new. Income inequality remains a pressing issue, and one which must be addressed, not just in the name of fairness but in the name of progress. At the same time, the country's changing demographics and fewer young people presents a new obstacle to growth.

Children in Mae Hong Son province run to greet UNICEF-supported mobile library truck.© UNICEF Thailand/2015/Prommarak





Thailand can overcome these problems and continue on its remarkable journey, but this will require a renewed focus on its children and young people. When there are fewer young people in a society, it becomes even more important that every single one of them can contribute and is given the right opportunities to thrive. UNICEF will continue to advocate for and work towards a better future for every child, with modernized education, reduced inequalities, and better support for the disadvantaged as priorities.

Thailand's transformation has been a testament to the nation's resilience, determination, and innovation. These same qualities will be essential as Thailand takes its next steps forward, young people to the fore.

"Thailand's transformation has been a testament to the nation's resilience, determination, and innovation."

THOUGHTS ON PROGRESS AND CHANGE

FROM UNICEF'S GOODWILL AMBASSADOR FOR THAILAND

H.E. ANAND PANYARACHUN

His Excellency Anand Panyarachun was born in 1932, became Thailand's Prime Minister in 1991, and has been UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador for Thailand since 1996. As Prime Minister, he won widespread respect for his leadership during a challenging time in Thailand's history. H.E. Anand's Government was instrumental in implementing wide ranging legislative, economic and social reforms to strengthen the economy, improve the environment, and enhance education and healthcare as well as advance the rights of women and children. A nationwide programme mounted by his Government to promote HIV prevention, treatment, care and support won international recognition, inspiring other countries across Asia and beyond. H.E. Anand has been awarded multiple honours in Thailand and internationally, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award and others from Japan, Republic of Korea, United Kingdom, Indonesia, and Sweden.

As UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador, H.E. Anand has been instrumental in raising UNICEF's profile in Thailand, has been the architect of its resource mobilization strategy, and has advised UNICEF on a range of issues to respond to emerging socio-economic challenges. For his work with UNICEF, H.E. Anand has received several awards, including a Special Award in 2003 by UNICEF's global Executive Board "in recognition of his work to fight HIV/AIDS in Thailand and to raise funds for UNICEF."

"Looking back over the last 75 years, I see a Thailand that has transformed itself remarkably. As a nation, we should be proud of how far we have come. Thailand has made tremendous progress in economic and social development, moving from a low-income country to an upper middle-income country in less than a generation. The country is also making progress in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thailand currently ranks fifth in the world in terms of global health security, reflecting the high quality of our healthcare system. When UNICEF first began its work in Thailand, far too many children died young as a result of poverty, malnutrition, and preventable diseases, and life expectancy was just 42. Now, the vast majority of newborns survives and life expectancy has risen to 80 years. UNICEF has supported Thailand throughout this long journey, and I am proud to have been part of this work since 1996.



Anand Panyarachun and children in Krabi province. © UNICEF Thailand/2008/Athit

But we cannot be complacent. Inequality continues to be a major issue in Thailand, with rural households bearing the brunt of poverty challenges. If we want to make our society fair, harmonious and rights-based, we need to address the underlying structural barriers to bridge the divide.

I was fortunate to have parents and teachers who imbued me with a sense of social justice from a young age, and that has always guided me in my work. I am also keenly aware that there are still too many children living in poverty and its many manifestations. Providing them with access to good quality and equitable education and healthcare is a powerful means to address that inequality.

"One of the biggest changes I have seen in our society over the last 75 years has been the growing role of young people."

I agreed to become UNICEF's first Goodwill Ambassador for Thailand as I knew the organization was dedicated to these same goals, but I had three conditions to be met. The first condition was that funds raised had to support all children in Thailand, including migrant children. Secondly, if sufficient funds were raised to support children within Thailand, we should also seek to support children in crisis in other countries of the world. Thailand, an emerging developing country at that time, could assume a role in supporting international humanitarian efforts, particularly for needy children. My final condition was that the bulk of funds raised should be spent on programmes directly benefitting the children of Thailand, rather than for administration costs, which should be kept to a bare minimum.

Those conditions were met. I am proud to see how UNICEF has become self-sufficient in Thailand. I am also grateful to the Thai people who have contributed generously to make this possible. Aside from the support that we have received for UNICEF's work in Thailand, we have also raised funds through other channels to support children in countries such as Japan, Nepal, the Philippines and Syria during times of crisis or natural disasters, reflecting our commitment to international humanitarian causes in a globalized world.

UNICEF has been able to achieve all this through close cooperation with the Royal Thai Government, collaboration with the private sector and civil society, and supported by a team of dedicated staff led by competent Country Representatives. In addition, UNICEF has benefitted from expert guidance from an Advisory Board, comprising Thai leaders and thinkers. The Board has evolved over the years to ensure that UNICEF continues to be attuned to the national situation. More recently, representatives of the Young People Advisory Board have joined to ensure that our work is driven by the real needs of children.

This last point is important because one of the biggest changes I have seen in our society over the last 75 years has been the growing role of young people. When I was young, it was expected that young people should always listen to their parents and do exactly what they were told. This has shifted with time, and parents have slowly become more accustomed to having conversations with their children, listening to them and getting feedback from them on matters that affect their lives.

I have always had faith in the young people of Thailand, and that faith just keeps growing. I have always had an interest in listening to their views. I have always learned from their insights. I have watched them become more independent. And I have seen them develop into confident and capable individuals. In conclusion, I do believe our young people are in a prime position to lead and build a better future for Thailand."

BIRTH OF UNICEF



UNICEF's Teddy Blu mascot and young boy attending Safer Internet activity at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre. © UNICEF Thailand/2023/Preechapanich

It is almost impossible to imagine now, from the distance of 78 years, just how devastating the impact of World War II was, leaving vast swathes of Europe and Asia in ruins, with tens of millions dead and even more people struggling to survive its aftermath.

Millions of people needed urgent assistance and global opinion was resounding: something needed to be done to prevent such a catastrophe happening again. In this spirit, representatives of 50 countries gathered at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, California from 25th April to 26th June 1945, drafting the UN Charter. This created a new international organization, the United Nations, born to prevent another war like the one the world had just lived through.

The plight of children was one of the most urgent considerations and so, in 1946, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund – UNICEF - was also born. The organization was conceived as a beacon of hope for a world yearning for stability and renewal. It would attempt to ease the suffering of all children, raising their needs above the politics and tensions of the day. This is the foundation on which UNICEF's policies continue to stand to this day.

The organization began its work distributing essential supplies like food, medicine, and clothing to children in war-ravaged regions, with China and Europe the initial focus. As the dust of the global conflict began to settle, the plight of South East Asia increasingly came to the fore. Economies lay in ruins and poverty was rampant, particularly in Europe's former Asian colonies. Malnutrition and disease were widespread, causing profound political and social upheaval.

Recognizing the need to act, UNICEF expanded its reach by making Manila its first regional headquarters, a hub from which to serve the diverse needs of a vast region of 600 million people stretching from the Philippines to Indonesia and as far west as India. However, as the full scope of need in Asia became more apparent, it was evident that Manila, on the continent's fringe, was not the perfect location. A decision was made to move the headquarters to a more central hub.

The new headquarters would be in Thailand, an ideal base for the next chapter in a story of global compassion and action amidst extraordinary circumstances. Today, UNICEF continues its mission in Thailand, Asia and the world, honoring its core principle that every child has the right to health, education, equality, and protection.

"UNICEF was conceived as a beacon of hope for a world yearning for stability and renewal."

HOPE IN ASIA

Thailand's pivotal role in Asia's recovery after World War II can hardly be overstated, not least as the headquarters for all of UNICEF's activities in Asia for many years. Thailand was chosen as the organization's permanent regional base on the basis of its stability, cooperative administration, and central location in the Asia region.

UNICEF's Bangkok office opened in March 1949, with an initial Thai Area Mission staff of just 17 who rapidly began working with the Royal Thai Government to assist the local population. Although Thailand had escaped the worst conflicts of the war, the after-effects had been devastating, particularly for Thailand's children. As the Japanese Empire lost its grip on Asian shipping lanes, imports and exports were disrupted, leading to food and medicine shortages. Diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, and yaws caused misery and death, particularly in rural areas, which also suffered from malnutrition and very limited access to medical care. The small UNICEF team would need to work hard to solve these urgent local challenges alongside those of the wider Asia region, from India to Hong Kong.









Early work in Thailand, from archive.

The first UNICEF Thailand office was located in the Ministry of Public Health, a clear indication of how closely UNICEF worked with the Royal Thai Governments from the start. Ten years later it was granted a new location, a former palace on the Chao Praya River. 65 years later, this remains UNICEF's central hub - not just for Thailand but for the entire East Asia and Pacific region.

UNICEF's early relocation to Thailand would prove to be a milestone in its mission to uphold children's rights in Asia, and - as many neighbouring countries experienced civil wars and other disasters - the country became a beacon of hope amidst turmoil.

The coming pages will go into detail on UNICEF's work in Thailand, decade by decade, as well as providing in-depth accounts of pivotal moments and shining a spotlight on our current work.

"UNICEF's early relocation to Thailand would prove to be a milestone in its mission to uphold children's rights in Asia."

1950s

1948

Thai Government invites UNICEF to begin work in Bangkok and provides its first home a year later
read more on page 20

1950

UNICEF's initial health projects begin tackling trachoma, parasites, and environmental sanitation
read more on page 28

1951

Yaws Control Programme implemented: by the end of the year, more than 110,650 victims are cured read more on page 36

1953

Mass tuberculosis vaccination campaign implemented, later becoming a national programme
read more on page 34

1960s

1960

Potable water and sanitation programmes rolled out across rural areas, improving health for all read more on page 34

1964

Assisted Teacher Training and Education Extension Project launched to boost primary education read more on page 34

1965

UNICEF wins global Nobel Peace Prize for promoting solidarity amongst nations

1970s

1972

National Institution of Food and Nutrition is established with UNICEF support, a landmark nutrition achievement
read more on page 56

1974

Integrated Delivery System for Health, Family Planning and Nutrition launched, achieving life-changing results

1977

Public Health Care System is adopted as a national priority, laying a blueprint for future success read more on page 38

1979

Thailand's fifth Five Year National Development Plan includes Child Development as a priority for first time

122,000 Village Health Communicators and Volunteers trained with UNICEF support
read more on page 38

1980s

1980

Primary school and teacher training curricula developed, 6,000 school kits provide boost to rural schools read more on page 74

1981

National Committee for the Promotion of Children and Youth Development established

1984

First HIV/AIDS case reported in Thailand, leading to an epidemic which UNICEF helped the Government respond to
read more on page 36

1986

20,000 Thais join global UNICEF-supported Sport Aid fundraising initiative, a milestone in Thais helping children of other nations read more on page 46

Government conducts first nationwide "basic minimum needs" survey, informing future planning

75 YEARS OF PROGRESS

Presented here is a summary of some of the most important development milestones achieved by Thailand with UNICEF's support. In the early years, UNICEF ran many of the projects and programmes listed. In later years, the Royal Thai Government has led the way, with UNICEF acting as advocates or offering technical support.

1990s

1990

PM launches National Assembly on Child Development and adopts National Declaration on Children

1991

Thailand achieves Universal Child Immunization goal of 90 per cent, saving countless lives
read more on page 56

1992

Thailand ratifies Convention on the Rights of the Child, a milestone commitment
read more on page 54

1995

90 per cent of 791 targeted government hospitals are designated as baby-friendly

1996

Direct mailing for fundraising launched by UNICEF in Thailand and becomes major success
read more on page 48

1997

Asian economic crisis engulfs region, causing severe downturn in Thailand – UNICEF provides support read more on page 54

1998

UNICEF increases support to Government response to economic downturn and soaring school dropout rates

2000s

2000

HIV medication distributed through public health facilities, a milestone in curbing the epidemic
read more on page 36

2002

Universal Coverage Scheme introduced, providing healthcare access for all
read more on page 60

2003

Child Protection Act enacted, providing a crucial legal framework for child protection
read more on page 64

2004

Tsunami devastates Andaman Coast - UNICEF provides support during this humanitarian crisis
read more on page 62

2010s

2011

Thailand designated an upper-middle-income country, but experiences severe flooding.

Law is passed requiring iodization of salt, improving health for millions read more on page 66

2013

Online Birth Registration system becomes available at public hospitals, crucial for future rights and services read more on page 66

2015

After advocacy from UNICEF, Thailand introduces Child Support Grant for disadvantaged families
read more on page 70

2016

Act to Prevent and Solve Adolescent Pregnancy enacted with goal of protecting rights of girls, while mother to child transmission of HIV is eliminated in Thailand with UNICEF support
read more on page 36

2017

Law passed regulating marketing of food, particularly formula milk to infants and young children
read more on page 56

2019

National Early Childhood Development Act passed, focusing on critical younger years
read more on page 44

2020s

2020

COVID-19 becomes pandemic with UNICEF playing a leading role in the global response
read more on page 68

2021

UNICEFsupports Thai Government with prevention and education around COVID-19vaccines
read more on page 68

2022

Mobile civil registration units, supported by UNICEF,launchedto facilitate the registration of stateless and migrant children in northern Thailand. Volunteers visited schools, registering 22,000children at the time of writing, in 2023

A SHARED COMMITMENT

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNICEF'S FAMOUS SUPPORTERS

UNICEF was one of the first development organizations to recognize the power of famous and trusted figures to enlist public support for its causes and Thailand has played a crucial part in that story.

The first of UNICEF's global Goodwill Ambassadors was the internationally famous entertainer of the 1950s, Danny Kaye. Kaye helmed 1955's "Assignment: Children," an award-winning documentary with Thailand as a key location. Kaye later recalled, "The children were the real stars of our film. And that goes double for seven-year-old Sam, whom we met in a Thai village. Sam's real name was Boonting Choeykholai... Just like a million other Thai youngsters, little Sam had yaws. I watched Sam being given a shot of penicillin provided by UNICEF, and he took it without a quiver. Fourteen days later – even before we finished shooting our film – his sores had completely dried up." The film was translated into 19 languages and inspired millions, with Kaye later saying that "it is possible that more people saw that film than any other film I made."



Anand Panyarachun, UNICEF Thailand's Goodwill Ambassador, visiting a school in Chiang Mai province. © UNICEF Thailand/2015/Thuentap

Other famous names soon joined Kaye as Goodwill Ambassadors, notably when the world-famous actress Audrey Hepburn visited Thailand, further raising its international profile. However, with time, it became clear that notable Thai figures were best placed to represent Thailand and, particularly, to engage the Thai people. Former Prime Minister H.E. Anand Panyarachun signed up as UNICEF's first National Goodwill Ambassador in 1996 and has since worked tirelessly to champion Thailand's children. He has played an important role in raising awareness on a range of issues facing children, and been a driving force in the mobilization of funds that enable UNICEF's work for children in Thailand and across the world.

UNICEF's new National Ambassador - Nualphan Lamsam, popularly known as Madam Pang - is one of Thailand's most influential public figures, with noted achievements in business, football, fashion and philanthrophy. She was appointed in 2023 and has already been a vocal and energetic supporter of UNICEF's work to promote child rights.

Since 1996, many other famous names have agreed to be Friends of UNICEF and done extraordinary work to further UNICEF's mission in Thailand. Famous Friends have included Nichkun Horvejkul, Davika Hoorne, Pachara Chirathivat, Kiatisuk Senamuang, Theeradej Wongpuapan, Anne Thongprasom and Kathaleeya McIntosh.

UNICEF's current Friends show the breadth of talent who support UNICEF: Kunpimook "BamBam" Bhuwakul (rapper, singer, songwriter and producer), Vanessa "Noodi" Race (child development expert), Pechaya "Min" Wattanamontri (actress and model), Palitchoke "Peck" Ayanaputra (composer and singer) and Paula Taylor (actress). UNICEF is very proud of our relationship with every one of the talents we have collaborated with over the years, grateful for their time and support, and excited to continue working alongside them to inspire new generations of Thai children.













Left to right, top to bottom
Nualphan Lamsam, popularly known as Madam Pang, with migrant and stateless children in Chiang Mai province. © UNICEF Thailand/2023/Roisri
Vanessa "Noodi" Race at Special Olympics Thailand. © UNICEF Thailand/2016/Preechapanich
Paula Taylor bonds with child. © UNICEF Thailand/2015/Thuentap
Pechaya "Min" Wattanamontri in Kenya. © UNICEF Thailand/2018
Kunpimook "BamBam" Bhuwakul supporting UNICEF © UNICEF Thailand/2020/Chotsuwan
Palitchoke "Peck" Ayanaputra supporting UNICEF in Chiang Mai province © UNICEF Thailand/2020/Chotsuwan

HOW UNICEF WORKS IN THAILAND

FURTHER, TOGETHER

As Thailand has changed over the last 75 years, UNICEF has changed with it. Its earliest initiatives were emergency relief programmes with short-term goals and limits. As outlooks shifted and new approaches to development emerged, UNICEF's policies evolved and it now primarily focuses on long-term gains achieved through partnerships, supported by advocacy for child rights. UNICEF acts as a unifying force bringing people together, including governments, donors, humanitarian agencies, businesses and children themselves.

The most important partnership is with the Royal Thai Government, one that stretches back to the moment the Government invited UNICEF to work in the country. In the early days, UNICEF directly delivered some key health and education programmes, supported by funding from overseas, but over time it has moved into a more supporting role. That can mean providing data and knowledge that guides government decision-making and ensures child-focused services are prioritized and funded, or technical support to improve services, drawing on UNICEF's global experience and programmatic excellence.

UNICEF also works to influence policies and decision-making in pursuit of its mandate of protecting children's rights. It gathers information which helps the Government understand the challenges facing children and young people, and advocates for ways of solving them that put children first. Sometimes UNICEF will directly run pilot projects to demonstrate effectiveness, then encourage the Government to develop them to scale and fund them sustainably - but more often its role is behind the scenes. A good illustration is the creation of the Child Support Grant in 2015. UNICEF provided the evidence demonstrating that families with children needed more support, evaluated how it might work, advocated for its adoption, and provided technical support during its creation. It continued this work even after the Grant was established, providing further evidence that persuaded the Government to expand its reach to children under three. The Grant now benefits 2.3 million children and is funded entirely by the Government.

The public sector is another crucial partner, and often a key means by which UNICEF engages with ordinary Thai people. Thailand has a strong network of local NGOs and other non-profit organizations which work directly with vulnerable or marginalized groups, including children. UNICEF has fostered two-way relationships with these organizations, sometimes providing direct support to important initiatives but also asking for their support, such as by sharing knowledge, data and expertise that advances UNICEF's goals. Much of this is achieved through formal collaborations such as the Child Rights Coalition, where all are equal partners in advancing the child rights agenda.

As Thailand and its economy has developed, the private sector has become increasingly important. Private businesses now help fund crucial areas of UNICEF's work in Thailand and overseas - but these partnerships are not solely financial. Often, businesses are best placed to address social problems that affect children. One example is online safety: UNICEF helped found the Thailand Safe Internet Coalition, led by the Government and including the major internet and mobile service providers, which now work together to reduce online risks. Similarly, many of Thailand's most vulnerable children live on building sites with their families, and UNICEF works with construction companies to create environments which protect children's education, safety, and health. In addition, private sector partners have used their influence and resources to help UNICEF achieve core goals, such as enhancing early childhood development and youth skills.

Partnership is the lifeblood of the international development sector. International organizations share knowledge and collaborate on shared goals while working towards the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals. During crises such as the 2004 tsunami or the COVID-19 pandemic, international organizations united to provide frontline support to families and children dealing with grief, trauma and uncertain futures.

Finally, children and young people are themselves increasingly important and empowered partners. Through UNICEF's Young People Advisory Board, they consult directly on the organization's policies and plans, ensuring these really are focused on the outcomes that matter to them, as well as participating in Government consultations on policies that affect them. Young people also make an important impact on other children and youth through initiatives such as the I AM UNICEF volunteer programme, which mobilizes more than 20,000 young Thais into creating powerful, on-the-ground initiatives which shape communities for the better.

UNICEF's latest Thailand Country Programme demonstrates how important collaboration is to the organization. In 2022 - the first year of the Programme - UNICEF agreed 18 formal partnerships with key national and government bodies including the National Human Rights Commission, while managing 36 strategic relationships with civil society and private sector groups. Every one of these partnerships is crucial if UNICEF is to achieve its goals in the years ahead, building a stronger Thailand and a better life for children together.

"UNICEF acts as a unifying force bringing people together, including governments, donors, humanitarian agencies, businesses and children themselves."



© UNICEF Thailand/2009/M.Thomas

In 1950, UNICEF had been based in Thailand for one year, and already begun working with the Royal Thai Government to address the challenges the country's children faced. Those challenges were daunting. The 1950s saw the Cold War intensify, creating geopolitical tensions that increasingly shaped politics in South East Asia and which Thailand had to navigate. Closer to home, the country remained an almost entirely agrarian society with rice as its only significant export, and poverty was widespread. Modest financial gains were unevenly distributed: as the country turned to modernization and manufacturing, urbanization accelerated, leaving rural areas behind and causing economic inequality and societal stress.



An infant child is measured for nutrition purposes, from archive.

Children, in particular, faced profound healthcare challenges throughout this period, exacerbated by poverty alongside supply and infrastructure deficiencies. Malaria, tuberculosis, and malnutrition were prevalent and deadly. For every thousand children born in 1950, 139 would tragically die before the age of one. Disfiguring diseases such as yaws and leprosy still devastated lives. All of these conditions could be treated, and for much of the 1950s this is where UNICEF concentrated its energies.

UNICEF's initial programmes grew from work it had already implemented in Europe and China in the post-war years. Key among these were a school milk programme which - after being adapted for the local population – began to blunt the impact of malnutrition. Another was an anti-yaws campaign, based on earlier initiatives to eradicate infectious diseases. By the decade's end, the once widespread scourge of yaws was on the retreat as UNICEF ensured sufferers received the penicillin that could cure the illness. Healthcare facilities multiplied nationally and more healthcare professionals were trained than at any other point in Thailand's history.

Meanwhile, the Government's plans for economic development began to bear fruit, through land reform policies and initiatives to boost rural income through cash crops like rubber and sugarcane. This economic progress went hand in hand with an improving education system.

Looking back in 1960, UNICEF Regional Director Sam Keeny called this first decade of UNICEF's work "a good showing… yaws is on the way out… TB is being attacked vigorously… the campaign against leprosy is growing rapidly." Poverty and inequality were still enormous challenges and had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of millions of children, but these early signs of progress encouraged a national belief that Thailand could go further.

1950s

CHILD OF THE FIFTIES



Peythai Jirapaet (neePotibundit)

Peythai Jirapaet as a young nurse, supplied by Peythai.

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Peythai Jirapaet (nee Potibundit) was born in 1951 in Ayutthaya Province at a time when Thailand faced many hardships after World War II. Most people were struggling economically and the majority of children dropped out of education early. As Peythai recalls, "most of my neighbours were poor and their children left school early to help their families. They then married young, had children, and their children then left school to help them. It was a vicious circle."

UNICEF had then worked in Thailand for three years, focusing particularly on health and education. Peythai was among the first Thai children to receive routine vaccinations at school and was also fortunate that her parents valued studying highly, perhaps because their own schooling had been cut short. "Dad was a tuk tuk driver and always said he had nothing material to give, but he would support our education until the end." Encouraged, she became a hard-working student, and passionate reader. Her mother folded paper bags for sale, and Peythai helped, quickly realising that the papers used were a treasure trove of learning. "I would look at the papers, newspapers and magazines my Mom used for the paper bags. I looked for anything that might be useful for my studies and read them before folding them."

A major turning point came when Peythai completed high school and passed the difficult entrance exams for a Government-funded university place. She was accepted by the prestigious economics faculty of Thammasat University, but times were different, and her mother worried about a young woman going to an institution with a progressive reputation. She insisted Peythai study nursing at a university with strict female-only dorms. "I was very sad, I cried a lot," Peythai remembers of this early disappointment.

Despite her misgivings, Peythai worked hard as a nurse for three decades and lived a full life, marrying twice, raising two children, and living in the United States for seven years. But she never abandoned her dreams of further academic study and retired from nursing to earn a law degree in her sixties. Her life has been a testament to the power of lifelong learning.

"Thailand has changed a lot in the last 70 years," Peythai says. Although she has concerns about growing materialism, she is impressed with the country's progress, such as improved health and education, and a modern infrastructure that delivers clean water and electricity. Most importantly, she sees that education is available to more children, who don't have to fight for it like she did. "Back then everyone had to compete to get into Government-funded schools and if you didn't make it, where could you go? Now there are so many more options, including non-formal education and open universities. If you are committed, you can learn."



Children from Tak province with handmade paper puppets. © UNICEF Thailand/2017/Thuentap

FOCUS

MILK AGAINST MALNUTRITION

In history books, Thailand is often called “the land of bounty”, with famine or hunger rarely recorded. This abundance was vividly reflected in a famous inscription stone from the Sukhotai period (1200-1400): “In the water we have fish; in the paddies we have rice.” This made it all the more shocking when, in the aftermath of World War II, Thailand faced an increasingly acute problem of malnutrition. This particularly affected young children, leading to lifelong consequences.

The problem was most severe immediately after the war, but was still widespread in the 1960s and persists among some disadvantaged minorities even today. In 1960, a team of Thai and United States experts conducted a survey, published by the U.S. Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defence, which found that undernutrition and nutritional deficiencies were serious and widespread in the population. Protein-energy malnutrition was the most severe problem, especially among pregnant and lactating women, infants, and preschool children in poor urban or rural areas.



Child receiving medical attention, from archive



Children in need of nutrition support, from archive.

One of UNICEF’s most urgent priorities was tackling this state of affairs. A school milk programme was launched, drawing on previous similar UNICEF programmes implemented in Europe. This was initially unsuccessful because the type of milk used proved difficult for Thai children to digest, but newly formulated, soy-based varieties were a breakthrough in 1960 and Sam Keeny, UNICEF’s Asia Director throughout this period, said two years later that “in spite of all our talk of nutrition, more children are being helped by milk powder than all of our other schemes put together.”



Students inspect a milk-powder mixing machine, from archive.

Though milk was a powerful weapon in the fight against malnutrition in those early days, UNICEF’s approach to nutrition in Thailand soon evolved in ways which inspired other nations. It was understood that availability of sufficient food wasn’t enough on its own, that it had to be accompanied by education around what types of food to eat and when in a child’s lifecycle, along with improved hygiene practices to reduce contamination and disease. In other words, good nutrition, hygiene and healthcare were intertwined, and Thailand has since promoted policies that give equal weight to all three aspects.

Nutrition has improved radically in Thailand over the last 75 years, and proved one of the foundations on which the nation’s progress has been built. However, overweight has become more common and there are still some disadvantaged groups of children for whom malnutrition remains a reality. 2022 figures indicate that 12.5 per cent of children still show some evidence of stunting, and UNICEF will continue to support the Royal Thai Government and partners in the private and public sectors until all children receive the nutrition they need to live up to their full potential. Only then will Thailand itself fully live up to its own potential.

“Nutrition has improved radically in Thailand over the last 75 years, and proved one of the foundations on which the nation’s progress has been built.”

Having shown remarkable resilience after World War II, the 1960s saw Thailand drive its economy forward at an accelerated pace. Guided by its National Economic Development Plan, the country reduced its reliance on rice exports and expanded its manufacturing and industrial sectors. Major infrastructure projects - such as the construction of roads, dams, and electricity networks - were undertaken. Progress did not come without challenges, however, with urban areas growing more rapidly than urban areas, creating inequalities that fed social unrest.

Simultaneously, the country became more deeply international in outlook and connections, with a surge in foreign investment and the advent of mass tourism. The Royal Thai Government recognized the potential of tourism to drive economic growth and promoted Thailand so effectively that by the end of the decade tourism had become a significant contributor to the country's economy, as it remains today. Thailand also co-founded the original ASEAN union in 1967. More troublingly, civil unrest had turned into civil war in three neighbouring and nearby countries – Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos – and while Thailand didn't experience the same convulsions, it was affected by the turmoil and the situation became a major focus for UNICEF in the region.

UNICEF's work in Thailand also evolved considerably during the 1960s. In 1960, all UNICEF support for Asia – including the vast nation of India – was run from Thailand.



Photograph shows children receiving nutritious food, from archive.

Increasingly, new offices were established in other Asian nations, allowing the in-country UNICEF team to focus more on the situation within the country. At the same time, as the country's most severe post-war crises were alleviated, UNICEF shifted towards a longer-term view of development. Instead of primarily responding and reacting to emergencies, UNICEF adopted long-term planning and sustainable development. Instead of importing tons of powdered milk, for example, UNICEF supported Thailand to develop its own self-sufficient dairy industry.

One of the most extraordinary achievements of the decade was in health and the fight against infectious diseases. Efforts to curb malaria and tuberculosis continued, with encouragement provided by the virtual eradication of yaws. UNICEF initiated potable water and sanitation programmes in rural areas, providing enormous health benefits, and supported improved primary education and teacher training. All of these factors helped make the sixties a nation-changing decade.

1960s

CHILD OF THE SIXTIES



Apinya Wechayachai

Apinya Wechayachai and mother, supplied by Apinya.

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Apinya Wechayachai was born in 1955 in Chumphon, at a time when UNICEF, the Royal Thai Government and partners were working to improve healthcare nationwide. As the daughter of a hospital director and a nurse, Apinya benefited from these advances early, and was breastfed and received vaccinations against diseases which still claimed the lives of many Thai children.

Apinya grew up in a "secure, middle-class family where fears and worries were nonexistent", but witnessed the struggles of the disadvantaged families her parents helped. "When I was young, I would go to remote villages with my parents when they provided voluntary medical service. Flooding was regular in Chumphon back then. Villagers would come to our clinic to get relief bags filled with food."

Apinya later went to boarding school and university in Bangkok, becoming increasingly socially conscious. "There was no single defining moment or incident that changed my life," she says. "My perspective has been shaped by a series of experiences, shifting my perspective from 'pity' to 'empathy'. Pitying those who struggle often leads to a sense of superiority. But I've learned that understanding their resilience can empower us."

Apinya's career has taken many turns, as a hospital librarian, social worker, researcher, editor and ultimately a lecturer at Thammasat University, from 1997 on. It was here that she came to learn more about UNICEF's role supporting Thailand's development both directly and indirectly. "UNICEF funded many of the studies I worked on. This research has gradually influenced Thailand's working systems, helping us identify hidden problems and address them more efficiently."

Through the years, Apinya kept her sense of empathy, and tried to pass it on to her students. "In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, I visited Krabi with approximately 20 of my students, to provide them with first-hand experience. I encountered a toddler who clung to her mother incessantly. Later, I discovered that during the tsunami, the mother managed to save the toddler by holding her to her chest, but tragically lost her older son, whom she was only holding by the hand." She and her students established a centre where traumatized children could play and learn. Apinya has now retired, but stays active, reading 100 books a year and continuing field visits.

Reflecting on Thailand's recent history, Apinya says, "The country has embraced international practices, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopting these practices is crucial to becoming an integral part of the global society." Looking to the future, Apinya hopes "everyone can find a safe space. Divergent perspectives should not be seen as right or wrong, but rather an opportunity to learn from one another. Respecting others, although challenging, is the key to coexistence."

FOCUS

DEFEATING DISEASES, OLD AND NEW

When UNICEF first began its work in Thailand, it faced two deadly, urgent and interconnected challenges: malnutrition and disease, which were killing Thai children in their thousands. These two problems were naturally the focus of early efforts.

Preventable diseases took priority, with yaws and leprosy chief among them. Yaws was then a widespread and horrifying disease that left sufferers with open sores covering the entire body, disabling and disfiguring them. A village afflicted by this highly contagious disease, which could even be spread by flies, would often have few residents able to work or farm, leading to mass malnutrition. Yaws was endemic in South East Asia and villages in southern, central and northeastern Thailand were frequently infected.

One of the most tragic things about the disease was how easily, quickly and cheaply it could be cured, with a single shot of penicillin. Danny Kaye, the world-famous entertainer, launched a groundbreaking documentary about UNICEF in 1955 and at its heart was the seemingly miraculous recovery of a Thai boy suffering from yaws on his entire body. That such a life-changing cure could be provided for so little expense perfectly illustrated to donors in wealthier nations the difference that UNICEF could make. UNICEF's anti-yaws campaign in Thailand became a flagship early programme.

The real challenge of curing yaws was reaching isolated villages at a time when road infrastructure was incredibly limited, and often affected by floods. Language barriers also had to be overcome. This was a time when in some parts of Thailand very few people spoke or understood the central Thai language. Dr Sem Pringpuangkeo, Director of Chiang Rai Provincial Hospital in the 1950s and later Deputy Minister of Public Health, joined a mission and recalled making first contact with an infected village in a remote region. "We had to gain their trust. But we couldn't do this by just talking to them; they couldn't understand us. We had to use our eyes and expressions to show that we didn't look down on them, that we meant no harm."



A mother and child afflicted by yaws, before and after receiving penicillin.
From archive.

Within 15 years, yaws had been almost entirely eradicated and is now almost forgotten. The same cannot be said of leprosy, a contagious bacterial disease that causes disfigurement as it attacks the skin, flesh and nerves. The stigma surrounding leprosy was so intense that in cultures all over the globe, sufferers were banished from their homes and villages and forced to live in isolated colonies. Thailand was no exception.

Like yaws, leprosy was treatable, but sulfone injections were not as easily administered as a shot of penicillin. Supervision was needed and so eradicating the disease required working with local health workers to increase their skills, while building up the country's national and local health infrastructure. Now leprosy, like yaws, is almost entirely eradicated.

Though the Royal Thai Government and UNICEF enjoyed great successes against these ancient diseases, they also had to collaborate as new ones emerged. The greatest modern health crisis was the emergence of HIV/AIDS, a global epidemic that Thailand took a major role in combating. In the time between the eradication of yaws and the emergence of HIV, Thailand was much more self-sufficient and the Ministry of Health fully led the way, with UNICEF in a supporting role.

When the first cases of the virus began to appear in Thailand in the 1980s, the initial reaction was one of denial. Because HIV was usually spread via sexual contact, a taboo subject in polite Thai society, this proved a difficult health matter to communicate. But Thailand was quick to realize that ignoring HIV/AIDS would not make it go away. Men contracted the virus through contact with sex-workers and then brought it home to their wives. Women infected with HIV began giving birth to HIV-positive babies. At the peak of the crisis, in 1991, prevalence of HIV in Thailand was estimated at 2.3 per cent, meaning that more than 1 million Thais were infected.

By confronting the problem head-on with UNICEF-assisted programmes that stressed prevention through education, Thailand became the first developing country where the rate of HIV infections started to decline before antiretroviral medicine appeared. Thailand was then among the first Asian nations to provide antiretroviral medicine to people with HIV for free, leading to even greater success in combating the virus.

UNICEF continued to support the Government's later efforts, particularly by supporting psychosocial services to children living with HIV and working towards the prevention of mother-to-child transmission by promoting services for women living with HIV, regardless of their economic or social status. Although HIV remains a serious public health issue in Thailand, the achievements have been considerable. In 2016, Thailand was recognized as the first country in Asia to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Such milestones make it possible to dream of a future where AIDS - like leprosy or yaws - is considered an affliction of the past.

"The Royal Thai Government and UNICEF worked together to overcome these ancient diseases"



Child receiving vaccination, from archive.

The 1970s was a time of political volatility in South East Asia, with many of Thailand's neighbouring countries plunged into civil wars that began to be felt inside its borders. In April 1975, Cambodia's notorious Khmer Rouge came to power, imposing a brutal reign of terror. This threat led vast numbers of Cambodians to flee, mostly on foot across the land border into Thailand, in numbers that eventually became hundreds of thousands.



Children in Thailand receiving UNICEF support, from archive.

Thailand remained on a very different trajectory to Cambodia, pushing modernization forward. The economic policies of the 1960s increasingly bore fruit, with the manufacturing and services sectors expanding rapidly. The Thai Government also increased investment in infrastructure, including roads, ports, and electricity networks. However, inequality remained a stubborn problem, and most families and children in Thailand still lived in poverty.

UNICEF supported the Government in its efforts to address this inequality through improved services for all Thais. After the healthcare breakthroughs of previous decades, the 1970s saw UNICEF supporting the Government on the expansion and maturation of Thailand's public health infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. In 1979, an astonishing 122,000 Village Health Communicators and Volunteers were trained with UNICEF support. By the middle of the decade, universal coverage of immunization for children against major diseases was in sight, and a Health Card Scheme in 1975 was an early attempt to provide health insurance, particularly for the rural poor.

The decade also saw UNICEF continuing to support the Government on the expansion of education, as illustrated in rising literacy rates: in 1960, adult literacy had stood at 67.7 per cent but by the end of the seventies this had risen to 88 per cent. Increased education led to an increasingly politically engaged population, which would help provide the impetus for further strides forward in the 1970s and beyond, particularly in the areas of poverty reduction, gender equality, and community development. In 1978, UNICEF conducted its first Country Programming Exercise, a systematic analysis of children's situations in Thailand, providing a roadmap for further progress in the decades to come.

1970s

CHILD OF THE SEVENTIES



Lakkana Timjiem

Lakkana Timjiem as a small child, supplied by Lakkana.

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Lakkana Timjiem was born in 1965 in Klong Toey, one of Bangkok's most deprived areas. Though her family were better off than many who lived there, thanks to her policeman father, there were still many challenges involved in growing up in an urban poor environment. Her neighbourhood was flooded daily by tidal changes in the Chao Phraya River, so she would often have to navigate waterlogged paths to get to school. Another problem that developed during the 1970s was drug abuse, with an increasing number of local children recruited as "runners" for the drugs trade.

A major turning point in Lakkana's life came when her father retired, with the family still in debt. Until that day, she had enjoyed her childhood, but when he could no longer work she dropped out of school to help her mother at the family food stall. "I told myself I'd go back to school someday, but never had a chance," she remembers sadly. She works on a food stall to this day. Though her own dreams were dashed, her sacrifice and hard work meant her younger brother went to university, and she has worked hard to support her own two children's education. She is proud they both completed higher education and have found good jobs.

In the last decade, Lakkana has found fulfilment in becoming increasingly active in her community. She works with local NGO Klong Toey Dee Jung to create spaces for children to learn and play. "Children in Klong Toey can't afford to go to cram schools or pay for any extracurricular activities, such as sports or music. They don't have as many opportunities to learn and see things as other children in the capital. We try to change that."

Lakkana played a key role when Klong Toey became the epicentre of Thailand's first COVID-19 outbreak, volunteering at a community kitchen. "Sometimes I prepared more than 1,000 meals a day for families who were infected and quarantined." She worked alongside UNICEF during this time, as it provided support with COVID-19 prevention, such as hygiene equipment and face masks, while also working to provide emergency healthcare equipment such as oxygen concentrators. Lakkana is proud of being able to step up and support her community through this dark period.

Lakkana is pleased that children now have better access to education than when she was young, but wants to see schools continue to improve so that no children drop out early. "If we can design classes to be creative, fun and relevant, every student will want to remain in school," she says. "Education improves people's quality of life so much and it's essential to keeping up in a fast-paced world."

Children from Mae Hong Son province who are part of a UNICEF-supported hilltribe school project © UNICEF Thailand/2009/M.Thomas

FOCUS

THE INDOCHINA CRISIS



A UNICEF supported classroom in Phnom Penh, before the Khmer Rouge took over the city, from archive.

Thailand's progress over the last 75 years has sometimes been in tragic contrast to the situations of the countries around it, who have often experienced profound turmoil. As early as 1946, Vietnam was fighting for independence, a conflict that later mutated into one of the most brutal civil wars of the modern age. In 1948, shots between rival factions were first fired in Myanmar (then known as Burma), while the bordering nations of Cambodia and Laos had each descended into civil war by the late 1960s in conflicts which mirrored Cold War tensions.

UNICEF strove to provide support to the stricken nations. As soon as a peace agreement was signed by the United States, North Vietnam and South Vietnam in Paris in 1973, UNICEF acted swiftly to set up an office in Phnom Penh, followed by one in Hanoi. Phnom Penh was in a particularly desperate state, as rural Cambodians flooded into the capital to escape the civil war taking over much of the countryside. Between 1970 and 1974 the city had ballooned from half a million people to more than 2.5 million, with thousands of children living in desperate situations in squatter camps. UNICEF was able to support these children for a brief period, but then the situation deteriorated and Phnom Penh fell to the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime.



Cambodian refugees gathered at a camp in Thailand, from archive.

UNICEF was forced to leave Cambodia, at the same time as thousands of Khmer refugees began to pour across the border into Thailand. Despite the enormous strain on its resources, Thailand stepped in to support its neighbours in this darkest hour. It provided shelter to Cambodian refugees and worked with international organizations to establish vast refugee camps on its borders. The United Nations and UNICEF stepped in to support Thailand as it struggled to cope with the crisis and provide relief to the desperate refugees. The UN coordinated the establishment and administration of the camps, providing essential services such as food, shelter, medical care, and education. It also worked with the Thai Government on the resettlement of refugees in third countries and supported voluntary repatriation efforts, all essential in easing the burden on Thailand.

UNICEF's primary concern was, as always, the children affected by the situation and so it worked within the camps to provide essential services to refugee children and families. This included nutrition support, health services, and educational programs. UNICEF also facilitated vaccination campaigns against diseases like measles and polio, which are critical in crowded refugee camp settings, and also helped reduce health risks to the wider Thai population.

In the longer-term, the UN played a critical role in mediating conflicts in the Indochina region, improving Thailand's security. The UN sponsored negotiations and peace agreements, such as the 1991 Paris Peace Accords which ended the Cambodian conflict. These diplomatic efforts contributed greatly to the present stability of the region, an outcome of vital importance to Thailand.

THE ALL-IMPORTANT EARLY YEARS

EVERY CHILD SURVIVES AND THRIVES

The early childhood years, from conception to age 6, are the most important in our lives. A child who is loved and cared for in a safe, stimulating and nourishing environment will develop the skills they need to embrace opportunity, bounce back from adversity and thrive. In these early years, neurons form new connections at the astounding rate of 1,000 per second, creating the building blocks of a child's future, lifelong learning, health, abilities and behaviour.

In its first decades in Thailand, UNICEF focused chiefly on health during children's early years, particularly nutrition and immunization, necessary priorities at the time. This work had an undeniable impact: children dying before age five is now a rarity where once it was all too common. But over time, early childhood development has become an ever-growing priority.

There have been great strides in early childhood education services, with 74.8 per cent of children aged 3 – 4 years now attending some form of early childhood education. Yet these services are uneven, with children in remote areas less likely to benefit. Too many children in Thailand miss out on the right care and stimulation in their early years, with too few parents engaging with their children in a meaningful and responsive way. Children who experience violent discipline are at particular risk of blighted early years. Another risk comes about if children aren't raised by their parents: currently, almost one in five children live neither with their mother or father, normally due to parents travelling far from home for work.



© UNICEF Thailand/2009/M.Thomas

"A child who is loved and cared for in a safe, stimulating and nurturing environment will develop the skills they need to embrace opportunity, bounce back from adversity, and thrive."

UNICEF supports parents, caregivers, teachers and service providers to create a nurturing environment for children in their early years of life, especially targeting the most disadvantaged families and children. It has worked with the Royal Thai Government, civil society and academia to improve financing for Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres and has embraced the potential of technology to drive change forward. Its Early Moments Matter initiative used mobile technology to deliver parenting messages to more than 120,000 parents and caregivers, along with 4,000 health workers.

UNICEF also works behind the scenes, gathering data and contributing to research on early learning to build evidence and inform policy. It works with the public and private sector to advocate for more family friendly policies such as parental leave and childcare in workplaces, helping parents bond with their children in those critical years. Working with the Government, civil society and academia, it has helped to push early learning up the national agenda. A breakthrough came in 2019 with the National Early Childhood Development Act, a launching pad for further action, with improved funding and more consistent provision of ECD centres a priority.

Nutrition for the under-fives remains a concern, with stunting and wasting remaining stubbornly high despite Thailand's overall improved nutrition while - conversely - overweight has become a problem. In recent years, Thailand has also had one of the world's lowest rates of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of a child's life, and UNICEF has advocated strongly for change. This contributed to the Government introducing an Infant and Young Child Food Marketing Control Act in 2017, restricting the marketing of formula milk. UNICEF has also worked on a trial online breastfeeding counselling service, which could ultimately benefit 600,000 mothers a year. The most recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, for 2022, showed breastfeeding was on the rise, and 29 per cent of children were exclusively breastfed for the first six months.

The stakes couldn't be higher or the rewards greater. If Thailand can improve early childhood development, it will not just be improving millions of future lives but laying down the foundations for another 75 years of extraordinary national progress.

The 1980s saw Thailand's economic progress become an economic boom. Deregulation measures and business reforms encouraged growth, foreign investment continued to pour in, and by the decade's end Thailand was recognized as one of the "Asian Tigers" maintaining exceptionally high growth rates.

Economic progress enabled social progress. While inequality remained a problem, one still not fully resolved today, the Government was able to achieve milestones such as 1983's Universal Health Care Program. UNICEF had advocated for this policy for many years, and while the program faced challenges - such as inconsistent quality and coverage - it represented an historic turning point in commitment to public health.

The 1980s also witnessed development in civil society and non-governmental organizations across Thailand, which played a significant role in pushing forward social development, environmental activism, and human rights advocacy. UNICEF works with many of these organizations to this day. Key social indicators, such as literacy rates and school enrollment, continued to improve, reflecting the Government's sustained commitment to education.

Thailand's economic progress also enabled the beginning of a shift in Thailand's standing in the world. While previously Thailand had largely been a recipient of international aid and donations, the 1980s saw increasingly prosperous Thais step up to support those in need in other parts of the world. In 1986, 20 million people turned out in 78 countries to run in Sport Aid's UNICEF-supported "Race Against Time" to raise money to help children in Africa facing famine. 20,000 Thais took part in Bangkok, an inspiring moment which showed just how much Thailand was ready to contribute to the world. Meanwhile, Thailand continued to offer shelter to hundreds of thousands of refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, with support from UNICEF and other UN agencies.



Photo shows Thais participating in 1980s Sport Aid event, from archive.

Although progress was palpable, the 1980s also saw new challenges emerge. The first case of HIV occurred in Thailand in 1984, swiftly becoming one of the greatest health emergencies Thailand has faced in modern times. Meanwhile, the cost of industrialization and urbanization became increasingly apparent in environmental pollution. Such problems would need to be addressed as the country pushed onwards to further progress in the decades ahead.

1980s

CHILD OF THE EIGHTIES



tawin srikaew

Adult Tawin Srikaew with schoolchildren, supplied by Tawin.

For each decade UNICEF has worked in Thailand, we will share the story of a child who grew up then. They were chosen to reflect Thailand's diversity, rather than provide a case study of UNICEF's work – although their lives have been shaped by the improved healthcare, education and opportunities we have worked towards.

Tawin Srikaew was born in 1975 in Ban Non Khaen, a remote village in Surin province with no electricity or water. He remembers walking several kilometres daily to get water during dry season and looking forward to rainy season. He received a full set of vaccinations, a result of years of work from Thailand's Ministry of Health, UNICEF and other partners.

From a young age, Tawin dreamt of being an educator, but faced many obstacles. Though his family owned a small rice paddy, it didn't produce enough to survive on and so, during school breaks, the family travelled to Bangkok to work in construction. "As a young worker, I made around 90 bahts a day while the adults made 200," he remembers. Although he pursued non-formal education after completing high school, he was unable to finish due to difficult economic circumstances.

For the next 20 years, Tawin tried to find his place in the world. He was a singer in a band at school and later ordained as a monk. Another fateful moment came when he met his wife, who was from the remote, mountainous province of Mae Hong Son. They raised a family there, but in order to earn a livelihood he had to move around the country for different jobs, including a return to construction and a spell as an ice cream seller in Bangkok. His life journey mirrors that of many other Thais, at a time when migrating for work became increasingly common.

A turning point came when a friend recommended him for a teaching position in Mae Hong Son. "This was a dream come true," he says. During this period he began working with UNICEF, who provided educational support to children from ethnic minorities including the provision of a mobile library able to travel to remote schools.

Tawin loved teaching and became a passionate champion for education for hilltribe children, advocating for more classrooms and school dormitories to be built close to their villages and driving on his motorbike to ensure that children could travel safely to dormitories. He has now dedicated himself full time to this calling, leaving behind a salaried position and becoming a volunteer to dedicate his time to helping more children receive an education.

Looking back over nearly 50 eventful years, Tawin is proud of Thailand's progress and his own achievements. "I've been through a lot. I'm grateful I was patient and kept learning. I'm happy I've helped dozens of disadvantaged children to get an education. My message to all children is 'don't stop studying and improving yourself'."

FROM BENEFICIARY TO BENEFACTOR

A FUND-RAISING JOURNEY

UNICEF has change in its DNA. In every country where it operates, its programmes are developed to meet the exact needs of children in that country at that exact time. As those needs change with time, so does UNICEF. In Thailand, the single biggest factor in UNICEF's evolution has been the country's progress from a beneficiary nation to a benefactor nation, one that not only funds programmes supporting its own children, but also children in need in other countries.

Like most long journeys, it was one of many steps. In 1948, Thailand's economic situation was desperate, and UNICEF needed to raise money overseas to fund life-changing health and education programmes for the country's children. Over time, the Royal Thai Government was able to take over the funding and management of many of these programmes, while UNICEF shifted towards a role where it focused on particularly disadvantaged groups and advocated for policies and actions that furthered child rights nationally. As economic development lifted living standards for millions, UNICEF Thailand increasingly looked to become entirely financially self-sustaining, funded solely by individual and commercial supporters within Thailand.

Championed by UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador for Thailand, His Excellency Anand Panyarachun, UNICEF Thailand's first direct mail fundraisers were launched in 1996. Thais immediately showed their generosity by donating short-term and long term. Some donors signed up in 1996 and continue to donate today, encouraged by the results they have seen UNICEF create in the lives of children. Many more have been supporters for a decade or more, such as Ongorn Silaphusith, who has donated for an incredible 15 years.

"Contributing to society begins with the desire to do so, according to our capacities," she says. "I provide as much financial support as I can without compromising my livelihood. Children in remote communities need help, but I cannot reach them as an individual. Reaching them requires an organization with resources and expertise like UNICEF. The Thai people can achieve whatever we want if we combine our resources."

In 2007, UNICEF's quest for self-sufficiency took another step forward with the launch of face-to-face fundraising in Thailand. This proved so successful that by 2010 all the organization's programmes were fully funded by Thai donors, while additional funds were raised for struggling children in other nations. The Thai public had proven its willingness to play its part internationally as early as 1986, when thousands ran in aid of UNICEF's "Sport Aid" campaign for countries in Africa. More recently, Thai donors have supported UNICEF emergency initiatives in Nepal, Turkey, Japan, Syria, Ukraine, and many more (see pages 50 and 51).

Thai businesses have also stepped up to provide support UNICEF's work in recent years, from small businesses to large corporations. As well as offering financial support, businesses such as Sansiri, Prudential Thailand and Prudence Foundation have often been intrinsic to advocacy efforts, such as helping us raise awareness of iodine deficiencies or the importance of early childhood development. This has gone hand in hand with practical efforts to deliver change, such as the compulsory iodization of salt, improved learning opportunities for young children, or child-safe spaces on construction sites.

Central Group is one of Thailand's largest and most respected businesses and a particularly long-standing supporter of UNICEF: it was 2001 when donation boxes first began to appear in its popular Tops supermarkets. This initiative alone has raised more than 40 million baht to improve the lives of disadvantaged children.

"We believe that businesses cannot grow sustainably if our society and community do not stride forward together," says Pichai Chirathivat, Executive Director of Central Group. "That's why Central Group became one of the first businesses in Thailand to initiate activities and campaigns for the good of society. We are proud of every collaboration with UNICEF, particularly initiatives like raising funds through the Teddy Blu range of products, mobile libraries that go to children in remote areas to help them learn through reading, and emergency fundraising to support children and families in desperate situations around the world. We want to continue this partnership long into the future."

For individual and corporate givers, one condition is essential for successful long-term relationships. Trust. UNICEF is transparent about the work it does with the funds it raises and communicates regularly with all supporters about the incredible impact they are having on children's lives. UNICEF is enormously proud of the support it has received within Thailand, and grateful for every single baht donated to help children.

"I believe that UNICEF follows through on its promises," Ongorn Silaphusith says. "That's why I support them. And I know that UNICEF has supported children for decades and will continue to do so. I would encourage everyone who wants to contribute to society and has the ability to do so to support UNICEF."









Left to right, top to bottom
Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, then leading Sansiri, visits child-safe space in construction camp with UNICEF Thailand. © Sansiri/2015
UNICEF Thailand and Central Group launching EatPlayLove campaign. © UNICEF Thailand/2020/Preechapanich
UNICEF Thailand and Prudential representatives celebrate partnership. © UNICEF Thailand/2023
The EatPlayLove bear singing with children at UNICEF Thailand and Central Group event. © UNICEF Thailand/2017/Preechapanich

UNICEF THAILAND'S IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD

Over the last two decades, Thai people have generously donated to UNICEF to help millions of children around the world survive and recover from devastating disasters including earthquakes, famines, typhoons, and deadly disease outbreaks.

What makes this doubly extraordinary is that 75 years ago it was Thailand which was in need, and UNICEF's work here was funded by overseas donors. Now, Thailand's remarkable progress has allowed its people and businesses to not only sustain the organization's work in the country, but also help others in their darkest hours.

Every baht donated is meaningful and has an impact, but some appeals stand out. One was the incredible generosity shown when Nepal was devastated by an earthquake in 2015. The Thai people donated an astonishing 77 million bahts to help UNICEF support orphaned, injured and traumatised children.

Through UNICEF, Thailand's people have contributed over the years to children around the whole world, but the countries in dark blue are where it has stepped up to meet emergencies. This is a map of Thailand's progress and of saved lives. It deserves to be a source of deep national pride, and UNICEF is thankful to every donor who made it possible.



This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.
Map designed by Pitiporn Huiworakul in 2023, based on mapping resources from www.freepik.com

STUDYING FOR SUCCESS

EVERY CHILD LEARNS AND ACQUIRES SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

If improved healthcare has been the foundation for Thailand's progress over the last 75 years, education has been the bricks it was built from. When UNICEF began its work in Thailand, most children dropped out of school at a young age, often after grade 4. UNICEF immediately began working with the Royal Thai Government on improving education and advocating for children to be kept in school longer. Since 2003, nine years of education has been compulsory and the majority of children complete grade 12. Education has lifted tens of millions of Thai children out of poverty, and the nation with them.

However, despite this progress, there is still much work to be done in 2023. While primary and lower secondary school enrolment is near-universal, in upper secondary schools it is still lagging at 74 per cent. Most children not in school are from disadvantaged groups. 29 per cent of children with disabilities don't go to school, and girls are less likely to receive an extensive education than boys. In addition, schools and curricula haven't fully kept pace with the pace of progress in the 21st century, and 40 per cent of young people don't believe their education properly prepares them for the job market.



Children studying together.
© UNICEF Thailand/2005/M.Thomas

Existing educational challenges were compounded by COVID-19 school closures affecting the learning of over 13 million school children. UNICEF stepped in to provide support during the pandemic, providing information as well as learning and play materials to vulnerable families while schools were closed. It also researched the impact of the pandemic on children's education, helping to steer the learning recovery agenda so that it prioritized those most adversely affected, such as through the provision of mother tongue-based education materials for children in ethnic minority communities.

Almost all children have returned to school in 2023, although there are concerns that a disproportionate number of children in remote areas may have stayed out. There is also concern that among the 300,000 disadvantaged children living under the poverty threshold, existing inequalities have deepened. Now the task is to help students catch up and receive a full education.

Although the Government is leading the way on educational reform, UNICEF is supporting it to develop and implement a new, inclusive curriculum with teachers skilled to teach in crucial modern subjects such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), digital competencies and workforce skills. UNICEF worked alongside partners to support the Bureau of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the improvement of its Education Master ICT Plan. UNICEF has also led on innovations including a One Teacher Network built on peer-to-peer learning for teachers in Thailand's southern, northern and eastern provinces. This has reached more than 5,000 teachers educating more than 200,000 children.

UNICEF continues to explore why vulnerable children drop out of education and support interventions to help them stay in school. In 2018, the Equitable Education Fund was set up after years of successful advocacy, with the goal of addressing inequities. The same goal drove UNICEF literacy campaigns such as 'A Book A Week' and 'Every Child Can Read', while its mobile libraries bring the joy of reading and learning to more than 100,000 children in remote communities.

Without a good education, children face a life of obstacles, affecting their future employment opportunities, income, health and chance to participate in society. With good education, however, they are primed to change their own lives and shape Thailand's future for the better. Every child deserves this chance. Thailand does too.

"With good education, children are primed to change their own lives and Thailand's future for the better."

The 1990s promised a new era for the world, with the collapse of the Soviet Union ending decades of Cold War tensions and holding out the prospect of a more peaceful and prosperous future. And indeed, for much of the decade Thailand continued its extraordinary economic growth based on exports, foreign investment and tourism, lifting millions more children and families out of poverty.

Unfortunately, this all changed in 1997 when the Asian Financial Crisis engulfed the region, presenting Thailand with its first major economic setback of the modern era. The crisis resulted in bankruptcies, soaring unemployment, and a sharp economic contraction. Austerity measures were imposed, and UNICEF stepped up its efforts to support the country's most vulnerable children and families, strengthening its health and nutrition programmes to meet the needs of those most affected. It also advocated for renewed efforts to keep children in education, at a time when many dropped out to support their families, while also working with the Government to strengthen social protection systems.

Another crisis Thailand faced was the increasingly alarming infection rate of HIV/AIDS. This reached a peak in 1991, when the prevalence of HIV in Thailand was estimated at 2.3 per cent, meaning that more than 1 million Thais were infected. If the rates had continued to climb, an even greater catastrophe loomed, and so UNICEF joined the Government and other partners in tackling the epidemic head on. The most valuable tool at the time was prevention through education, and UNICEF worked hard to support the Government in getting information to vulnerable groups. As a result, Thailand became one of the first countries in the region to reduce the rate of new HIV infections before antiretroviral medicines appeared.



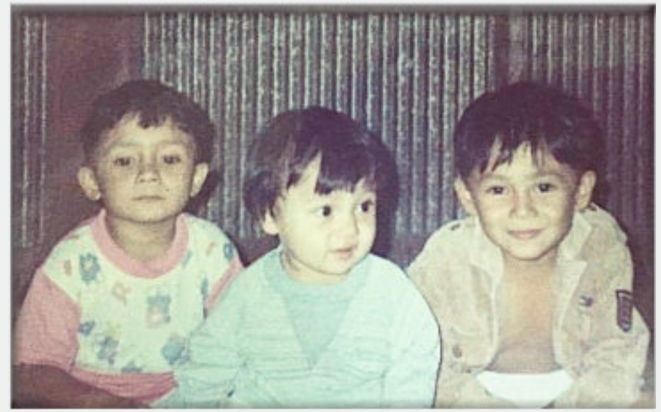
Students studying for a better future. © UNICEF Thailand/2009/Athit

Despite the challenges, the 1990s also saw many landmark achievements for Thailand's children. UNICEF had long advocated for an increase in free schooling for children, and in 1999 the Government legislated that all would be entitled to 15 years. Consequently, many more children from poorer families received a complete education and the opportunity of achieving a brighter future.

UNICEF had also advocated for Thailand to ratify the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in 1992 it did. This was no mere formality, but was a set of commitments to child rights that all future Governments would be held accountable for. It provided a powerful framework for further advances in child rights in the decades ahead.

1990s

CHILD OF THE NINETIES



sulaiman jehubong

Sulaiman Jehubong and childhood friends. Supplied by Sulaiman.

For each decade UNICEF has worked in Thailand, we will share the story of a child who grew up then. They were chosen to reflect Thailand's diversity, rather than provide a case study of UNICEF's work – although their lives have been shaped by the improved healthcare, education and opportunities we have worked towards.

Sulaiman Jehubong was born in 1992 in Pattani province. He grew up on the cusp of the new millennium, a testing time for Thailand. When he was a small child, the Asian Financial Crisis marked an end to the country's long economic boom. UNICEF worked across Thailand to help vulnerable families recover their livelihoods, and to try to prevent children like Sulaiman from dropping out of education.

Sulaiman did stay in school and lived with his grandfather, an Islamic religious leader. As a young boy Sulaiman studied the Koran before and after school. Despite a strict upbringing, his childhood was often joyful: "I hung out and played with girls, I could totally be myself and I felt safe. I was accepted by teachers and friends. I was a leader, and a good student. I was aware I was not like other boys but I didn't know what to call or label it."

Unfortunately, Sulaiman's adolescence proved more difficult. His life was impacted by violence due to unrest in his province and he faced personal turmoil, with the death of his father and struggles with his sexual identity. "During secondary school, my LGBT identity became clearer. I expressed myself more and had more friends like me." He increasingly experienced discrimination. Although development organizations organized outreach events in his school, Sulaiman's teachers rarely signed him up. He found solace in the Luuk Rieng Group, a local NGO dedicated to youth and peace, and participated in its community events. "I thought if the school won't choose me, I'll find my own place. And I gained a lot of experience from those activities. I was seen. I gained self-esteem."

The downside to Sulaiman's alienation from school was that he got poor grades, and subsequently went to a vocational school. This was when he decided to turn his life around, inspired by friends who were thriving academically. "I asked myself what I was doing with my life and decided to grow." He studied hard enough to win a place at a prestigious university and then found a position with Luuk Rieng, the same organization which had helped him as a child.

Luuk Rieng has helped Sulaiman further develop his confidence and discover a passion for working with people affected by violence or discrimination. He is accepted for who he is, even by relatives who were once violent toward him. "People around me see me as a good example. I was a good student, I graduated, I have a job, I take care of my family." He now tries to instil that self-belief and self-confidence in other young people. "I want to thank myself so much that I am who I am today. It was because of me that my life has been transformed."

HEALTH: THE FOUNDATION OF YOUNG LIVES

EVERY CHILD RECEIVES GOOD HEALTH, NUTRITION AND CARE

When UNICEF began its work in Thailand in 1948, health was its overwhelming priority. With millions of children malnourished or afflicted by preventable diseases, often at the same time, UNICEF's early years were dominated by enormous nationwide health and nutrition drives. The stories of some of these can be found on page 36, revealing just how devastating the situation was at the time.

Thankfully, much has changed. As the country has developed, the Royal Thai Government has taken over the leadership on national health matters, and UNICEF's role has become supporting the Government in emergency situations and advocating for improvements in healthcare for women and children. Despite Thailand's socio-economic development, disparities in health persist, and some groups – such as children with disabilities – still need more support.

Maternal and neonatal health has been a priority throughout the last 75 years. In its early decades, UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Public Health to improve midwifery, which was often unhygienic and unsafe, particularly in rural areas. UNICEF provided thousands of midwifes throughout Thailand with a Midwife Kit containing easily cleanable tools, soap, towels, and sterile gauze bandages, radically improving the safety of birth for both mother and child.

Now the emphasis has shifted towards early nutrition. With a growing awareness that proper feeding during the first thousand days of a child's life is crucial for cognitive and physical development, UNICEF works to promote breastfeeding and proper infant feeding practices, embracing innovations such as parent-targeted apps. It also advocated for a change to the law so that marketing of formula milk was restricted. This came into effect in 2017, and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys show that exclusive breastfeeding of infants is now on the rise, from 14% in 2019 to 29% in 2022.



Mother breastfeeding child.
© UNICEF Thailand/2022/Kongmuang

"Good healthcare is every child's right and the foundation on which a happier and better life is built."

Another related legal achievement of recent years was 2011's salt iodization law. Data from UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey confirmed widespread iodine deficiency in the population, which can lead to many serious health problems, with children highly vulnerable. UNICEF therefore advocated for all salt to include added iodine, and the Government passed this law, delivering rapid results.

Disease prevention is another priority. UNICEF has long supported Thailand's healthcare system in dealing with communicable diseases such as HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis. Vaccine programs have been established to combat preventable diseases, and the country's immunization rates now rival the best in the world, although UNICEF is now working to support those groups who are sometimes left behind, such as migrants or people living across Thailand's southern border. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF assisted the country's response by supporting improvements in healthcare facilities and distributing hygiene kits to vulnerable families. More can be read about UNICEF's efforts during the pandemic on page 68.

While substantial progress has been made on almost all fronts when it comes to child health, UNICEF will continue to work to ensure equitable access to quality healthcare services for all of Thailand's children. Overweight is a rising problem for some children, with the Department of health reporting that 1 in 10 children are obese. UNICEF will work with partners to tackle such challenges. Good healthcare is every child's right, and an essential starting point for a better and happier life.

Sukanya Saeyang, 20, and her infant in Chiang Mai province. They receive the Child Support Grant (see page 70) © UNICEF Thailand/2016/Thuentap



Girls in school © UNICEF Thailand/2008/Athit

In the 2000s, Thailand's resilience was truly put to the test. The country began the decade still recovering from 1997's Asian Financial Crisis. The Government worked to restructure the economy so that it could grow again, reducing reliance on exports and promoting domestic consumption and investment. The thriving tourism industry became even more critical to economic growth.

Tragically, 2004 saw the country hit by one of the greatest calamities in its history, the Indian Ocean Tsunami. The tsunami hit six coastal provinces and caused catastrophic loss of life and property, with over 5,300 confirmed dead, many missing, and thousands of children orphaned or separated from their families. The economic damage was devastating, with the tourism and fishing industries both decimated. Post-traumatic stress was prevalent among survivors coping with the shocking loss of family members and livelihoods.

The country united to provide support to those affected, and UNICEF stepped up to play its part, investing more than $11 million USD in recovery programmes. These included providing water and sanitation to families in temporary shelters and emergency education grants for newly orphaned children. In the years following the disaster, Thailand made valiant efforts to rebuild and recover by repairing infrastructure, restoring livelihoods, and implementing measures to improve tsunami warning systems and disaster preparedness. UNICEF provided support along with other partners.



Young athlete at event organized by Special Olympics and UNICEF © UNICEF Thailand/2016/Preechapanich

Socially, Thailand made significant strides forward. UNICEF's long-term advocacy for improved healthcare for all helped lead to the 2002 introduction of Universal Health Coverage, a milestone achievement. This would provide an invaluable safety net when the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 pushed many families back into poverty, meaning that they didn't lose out on healthcare as they lost their livelihoods. At the same time as the Universal Coverage Scheme was introduced, HIV medication was distributed through public health facilities, and the nation began to curb the epidemic, providing a global model for others to follow.

The decade also saw a growing awareness of social issues such as child exploitation and trafficking. These challenges spurred a greater focus on robust social policies and legal measures to protect vulnerable populations, especially children. These combined efforts laid the foundation for Thailand's ongoing journey towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

2000s

CHILD OF THE 2000S

FOCUS

RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF NATURAL DISASTERS



Boy rowing to Laksi Temple evacuation centre in Bangkok on a homemade bamboo raft during 2011 floods © UNICEF Thailand/2011/Athit

Thailand is vulnerable to natural disasters and has had to withstand many during the last 75 years. Whenever disaster has struck, UNICEF has stepped up to support the Thai people and Government, providing direct support and mobilizing international funding to aid emergency services and recovery. Two incidents which had a particularly calamitous impact both happened this century.

On December 26th 2004 the whole world was horrified by the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, one of the most tragic natural disasters in human history. Around a quarter of a million people died in 14 countries, with Thailand one of the worst hit. As the world witnessed the devastation and learnt thousands of children were orphaned or separated from their families, millions of people across the world wanted to do something to help. UNICEF helped put this generosity into action, working with the Government and multiple partners to provide support to those in need.

This coalition of partners, including the Government, international agencies and local communities, worked to provide medical supplies and helped to provide water and sanitation to traumatized children and families living in temporary shelters after millions were displaced. One of UNICEF's primary concerns in all disaster scenarios is the protection and welfare of children, so it also created child-friendly spaces where children could feel safe, play, and begin to recover from the trauma. UNICEF staff also helped to identify unaccompanied children and work towards family tracing and reunification.

Chayanit Wangdee was one of the UNICEF team on the ground during the crisis. "There were only 35 people working for UNICEF in Thailand at the time and we all had to pull together and work together, collecting evidence, helping organize emergency cash assistance, working out who needed help," she recalls. "We worked in shifts because it was so traumatic. I was almost crying. I saw a woman with empty hopeless eyes who had lost five of her children. We knew we had to help people like that."

Just seven years later, Thailand – still recovering from the tsunami - was again dealt a terrible blow when heavy monsoon rains submerged much of the country. The death toll was over 800 and millions of people were displaced. The flood caused widespread damage to the country's agriculture, infrastructure, and economy, with total losses estimated in tens of billions of dollars.

UNICEF again worked with the Government and international partners to mobilize resources for immediate support, providing tens of millions of hygiene kits, medical supplies, water purification tablets and "school in a box" kits to support children whose lives had been upended. Amidst the chaos of displacement, UNICEF worked to provide safe recreation areas and implemented a registration system to prevent child abuse or exploitation in evacuation centres.

"Climate action is one of UNICEF's top priorities in Thailand."

Crucial as immediate life-saving support is when disaster strikes, the bigger task is actually supporting the Thai Government and people to recover and rebuild in ways that ultimately strengthen communities. In both of the catastrophes above, and others before and since, UNICEF worked with the Government to maintain and re-establish education so that children who had already had so much taken from them would not also lose their future. Under the principle of "build back better", UNICEF also supported rebuilding infrastructure such as water and hygiene systems and restoring critical services that children rely on such as social protection, while working with families who had lost their livelihoods to re-establish themselves.

Given predictions that climate change will make natural disasters such as floods more likely, UNICEF is working with communities across Thailand on disaster preparedness. This includes gathering evidence on the extent of the challenges, raising awareness of disaster risks and teaching ways to mitigate them should they happen. It may not be possible to prevent all natural disasters, but we can learn from the past so that children and families are better placed to survive and to quickly recover. UNICEF has also placed climate action as one of its top priorities in Thailand, and will use all of its 75 years of experience working with local communities to help prepare them to overcome the challenges ahead.

PROTECTING THE FUTURE

EVERY CHILD FREE FROM VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

UNICEF's global mandate is "to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential." There is a reason that the word protection is so prominent: children are vulnerable, and if their rights aren't protected, including their physical and emotional safety, their childhoods will be damaged and they will find it much harder to thrive as adults.

Children experience many forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, often in the places they should be most protected, such their homes and schools. Violence against children can take many forms, including physical, emotional or sexual violence. UNICEF has worked closely with the Royal Thai Government and partners in the public and private sector to improve protections for children, but progress is never fast enough. UNICEF has worked hard to promote positive, non-violent parenting skills in Thailand and the prevalence of violent discipline at home has continuously decreased from 75 per cent in 2015 to 54 per cent in 2022. Yet the fact that more than half of Thai children still experience this violence is proof that much more must be done.



Anonymous child
© UNICEF Thailand/2011/Jingjai N.

"Child protection sits at the heart of UNICEF's work in Thailand."

UNICEF works towards the protection of all Thai children, but with a particular emphasis on those who are most vulnerable, especially children with disabilities, those who are migrants or stateless, or those who grow up apart from parents, such as in institutions. UNICEF's latest research reveals that more than 120,000 children are currently in institutions, which can have lifelong negative repercussions, and an urgent priority is trying to prevent this happening. This means working with the Government on alternative care policies that keep families together and developing a network of foster care that makes family-based care the norm. UNICEF advocates for an expanded social workforce to enable these policies, and the funding necessary to realize these goals.

While technology has benefited children's lives in many ways, it has also introduced new risks of sexual exploitation and abuse. Approximately 400,000 Thai children aged 12-17 are victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse each year, and less than three per cent report their experience to the police.

The situation can sound bleak, but there are also positive developments. UNICEF is supporting the Government to strengthen child protection systems for the prevention, surveillance of, and response to violence and exploitation, including online sexual abuse. UNICEF worked with the Government on the development of its second National Child Protection Strategy, which will be implemented from 2023 to 2027. UNICEF also ensured a national safeguarding policy was rolled out to governmental care centres and institutions.

When it comes to online risks, UNICEF works with public and private sector partners to prevent violence and promote digital literacy and resilience. It successfully advocated for the formation of the Thailand Safe Internet Coalition, led by the Government and including the major internet and mobile service providers. UNICEF also uses social media channels to raise awareness of risks and promote online safety.

Child protection can be technically complex and emotionally difficult for all those involved. But it's a matter of utmost important and urgency, which is why it sits at the heart of UNICEF's work in Thailand in 2023 and will continue to do so until every child can grow up safely and happily.

The 2010s were turbulent times for Thailand, with milestone achievements matched by unexpected new challenges. This was particularly true of 2011. The country achieved something historic when it officially became an upper middle-income country, a reward for decades of hard work by the nation and its people. However, the same year saw the worst floods in the country's modern history, a profound setback.

The 2011 floods killed hundreds, displaced millions and submerged fast swathes of central and northern Thailand, causing significant damage to homes, infrastructure, and agricultural land. UNICEF responded swiftly to support national efforts to protect children during the crisis, supporting educational continuity, and addressing the health and nutrition needs of the vulnerable.



© UNICEF Thailand/2022/Preechapanich

The move to upper middle-income status was rightly celebrated, but also shone a spotlight on long-standing inequalities, and the plight of those children and families left behind by progress. Thailand responded by making progress in social protection, supported by UNICEF. One achievement was the 2013 introduction of a birth registration system in all public hospitals, ensuring all children were registered and could receive services.

At the same time, the Government expanded social security and welfare provisions and improved healthcare access, with UNICEF providing technical support. The flagship achievement was the introduction of the Child Support Grant in 2015, a measure UNICEF had long advocated for, and which ensured lower income families with children received additional support. This was a powerful tool in reducing inequality and improving the lives of millions of children, and a shining symbol of how Thailand's progress over the decades could be used to benefit all its citizens.

UNICEF continued to provide support to Thailand's health, such as advocating for laws like the 2011 act requiring salt to be iodized or the 2017 law regulating the marketing of infant formula, as well as supporting attempts to extend vaccination coverage to the hardest to reach groups in remote areas. This would prove important, as the decade ended with 2019 and the reports of a troubling new epidemic in China called COVID-19. This proved a powerful reminder that for all of its considerable achievements, Thailand would continue to face challenges in the years ahead. UNICEF remained committed to helping the country overcome them in a way that put Thailand's children first, and the social protection systems put in place during the 2010s would prove invaluable in that ongoing effort.

2010s

CHILD OF THE 2010S



katanyouwuttichaitanakorn

Katanyou Wuttichaitanakorn in the present day. Photo supplied by Katanyou.

For each decade UNICEF has worked in Thailand, we will share the story of a child who grew up then. They were chosen to reflect Thailand's diversity, rather than provide a case study of UNICEF's work – although their lives have been shaped by the improved healthcare, education and opportunities we have worked towards.

Katanyou Wuttichaitanakorn was born in 2006 in Bangkok. By the time he completed primary school, he had already developed a powerful passion for wildlife and the natural environment. He decided he might thrive in alternative homeschooling outside the traditional public education system, studying alongside other children but with more opportunities to pursue his personal passions. His parents supported his decision.

"I am fortunate to have supportive parents and I know I was in a privileged position, receiving this education," he says. "I don't think child-centric schooling is for everyone, some of my school friends decided to go back into more conventional education. But for me, it gave me a chance to really explore my interest in photography and nature, and go on field trips."

Like many other young people of his generation, Katanyou is very concerned about climate change and damage to the environment. He is concerned that "huge construction projects can harm our environment, such as dams in forest reserve areas. As well as hoping that businesses will adopt more environmentally conscious practices he thinks schools should teach more on climate change and the impact of environmental pollution.

Even at 17, Katanyou is already doing his best to be a force for positive change. He has started giving lectures on the environment and is keen to collaborate with UNICEF, having learnt about the organization from his parents. "I wish we could help people learn and relate to climate change issues more, so they could improve their lifestyle to be more environmentally-friendly. Many people don't realize how these issues affect their everyday lives, animals and environment."

He also uses his passion for wildlife photography to make a difference, inspiring others to share his love for the natural world. He has honed his photography skills over the years, but often didn't make progress in competitions in Thailand. Nonetheless, he persevered and applied to the international Wildlife Photography competition run by the UK's Natural History Museum. He was named Young Wildlife Photographer of 2022 for his "extraordinary picture of a feeding Bryde's whale."

Like all young people, Katanyou's life was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic - though he believes less than most. The main challenges were seeing less of his friends and only able to go on photography trips under strict conditions. But he used the time to continue honing his skills for the future, taking photographs of wildlife around his house. "I don't consider myself successful yet, because I'm still being provided for by my parents," he says. However, he is determined to continue pursuing his passion by studying zoology in university, helping him to continue his growth as a champion for the environment and natural world.

FOCUS

OVERCOMING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On 13 January 2020, Thailand became the first country outside of China to confirm a case of COVID-19 infection, an early harbinger of both the country's vulnerability to the virus and its determination to identify and respond to it. The next two years would be dominated by COVID-19, as the country worked hard to contain the virus, treat those who were infected, and support an entire population battered by the economic ramifications of the first global pandemic in living memory.

The Royal Thai Government won international recognition for its swift introduction of strict measures including lockdowns, quarantines and travel restrictions. However, the economic toll on Thailand was even higher than in most countries, given that international travel largely ceased, shattering the country's enormous tourism industry. Many businesses closed, leading to widespread unemployment, particularly in heavily touristic areas like Phuket and Pattaya.

Children were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, as families with children were more likely to suffer financially, and their education was disrupted by school closures and other restrictions. UNICEF played a global role in responding to COVID-19, through prevention programmes, vaccine supplies, and multiple forms of support to vulnerable children, especially through remote learning opportunities and efforts to reopen schools safely. In Thailand, UNICEF worked closely with the Government and partners to support those families and children facing the highest risks.

By April of 2020, UNICEF had already mobilized resources from around the world and begun distributing critical supplies including 150,000 bars of soap and hand sanitizers to vulnerable children in Bangkok's most deprived communities. During the later waves, in 2021, UNICEF provided a total of 730,000 packages of life-saving supplies, hygiene supplies, medical equipment, learning kits and booklets to vulnerable families across Thailand, with education materials printed in multiple languages to reach as many people as possible. Throughout the pandemic, almost 15,000 of the country's most vulnerable children under 6 years of age were given "magic boxes" full of play and education materials to help them to continue to develop and learn even when unable to leave their home.



After a prolonged period of learning at home during school closures, children in Thailand returned to classrooms on July 1 2021. © UNICEF Thailand/2021/Kongmuang

Throughout 2020, 425,000 vulnerable individuals received targeted messaging on health and prevention, while the organization's COVID-19 content reached 60 million people on social media. UNICEF also conducted research into the plight of 80,000 of the most disadvantaged families and used its findings to successfully advocate for an emergency top-up to the Child Support Grant which reached 8 million recipients.

UNICEF then worked with the Ministry of Education to ramp up Thailand's national efforts to safely reopen schools as soon as possible, providing health and hygiene supplies, as well as safe school guidelines and teacher manuals. These reached 19,600 Early Childhood Development Centres and 38,000 schools, benefiting a total of more than 10 million children. UNICEF also directly supported the Ministry of Public Health by providing 640 life-saving oxygen concentrators to hospitals in critical outbreak areas, as well as other life-saving medical supplies.

"Children are still recovering from the pandemic, particularly as a result of learning loss caused by disruption to education."

Napat Phisanbut works as an Early Childhood Development Specialist for UNICEF and was one of many staff playing key roles during the crisis. "The COVID response really highlighted the fact UNICEF is there for the most vulnerable," she recalls. "We worked with all the key ministries dealing with public health, and saw that the Government was doing very well at educating the general Thai population, but more needed to be done to get information to vulnerable groups, such as migrants. We worked hard on creating information in different languages and saw that we had a massive role to play as these families were affected in so many adverse ways."

Ultimately, Thailand emerged from the crisis with a lower fatality rate than most countries, numbered 145th out of 238 countries by Our World In Data. However, every one of its over 34,000 deaths was a tragedy, and the country suffered enormously before the vaccines turned the tide on the pandemic, with an estimated 1.5 million people plunged into poverty as a result. Though the economy is rebounding and most of those left unemployed have returned to work, children are still recovering from the pandemic, particularly as a result of learning loss caused by disruption to education. Recent research reveals that almost every child has now returned to school, but that numeracy and literacy have been damaged by the disruption.

In the years ahead, UNICEF will continue to advocate for all of Thailand's children, particularly the most disadvantaged, to be prioritized so that they can recover from the pandemic without lifelong consequences.

SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR ALL

EVERY CHILD HAS A FAIR CHANCE IN LIFE, FREE FROM POVERTY

Thailand's economic success has lifted tens of millions out of poverty over the last 75 years, but it hasn't entirely eliminated it. As in all countries, some families fall behind and continue to struggle. The sad truth is that children are more likely to live in poverty than adults, and more vulnerable to its effects. In fact, one in every five Thai children live in multidimensional poverty, which means they face multiple disadvantages simultaneously, such as poor health, lack of education and inadequate living standards.

That's why an increasingly important part of UNICEF's work is advocating for child-focused policies and laws that protect the most vulnerable and have the funding needed to make them effective. UNICEF provides the Royal Thai Government with the evidence that proves why these policies are needed and what value they offer, as well as the expertise needed to design them to have the right impact. Social protection programmes which offer additional support to disadvantaged families - particularly through cash transfers - can help give every child an equitable chance in life. Though these programmes require investment, UNICEF provides technical support to the Government on funding, from potential sources to ways to connect different protection schemes for maximum efficiency.

In fact, social protection is more important than ever, as the country recovers from a pandemic which may have plunged 1.5 million people back into poverty. These



Three-month-old Monluck Saesong and her parents in Chiang Mai province. The family benefit from the Child Support Grant.
© UNICEF Thailand/2016/Thuentap

inequalities can be passed down for generations and have far-reaching economic, political and social consequences. The country's southern border provinces have the highest poverty rate, and rural areas are more disadvantaged than urban areas. Migrant families and children living with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to poverty and face a higher risk of violence, exploitation, trafficking and child labour.

Data is essential if these problems are to be understood and resolved. Every three years, UNICEF works with the Government on a nationwide survey reaching 34,000 households called the Thailand Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. It provides a detailed analysis of the situation of families and children across the nation which helps guide policies that reach them.

Robust evidence like this helped UNICEF make the case for the country's first Child Support Grant, which the Government launched in 2015. The Child Support Grant has reached more than 3 million beneficiaries in the last eight years, providing a lifeline to disadvantaged families which helped them keep their children educated and healthy. UNICEF is now working with the Government to expand coverage so it reaches all children under six, a move which has been agreed in principle and would be another landmark step towards a more equitable society.

UNICEF is also working with the Government on providing more support to children with disabilities. Of the country's 157,369 children with disabilities, many are not registered with the Government and don't receive the current Disability Grant, while – according to the 2022 National Disability Survey – 29 per cent don't go to school, many effectively locked out by stigma or health and accessibility issues. UNICEF is working with the Government towards having the Disability Grant increased and reformed to meet the needs of more children, and provided evidence to support this next step.

These policies aren't just the right thing to do, they also make good economic sense. Thailand is an ageing country, which means that supporting young people to grow up to fulfill their potential is crucial if the country is to fulfill its own potential. An investment in the earliest years of the youngest generation is therefore an investment in human capital and Thailand's very future.

"An investment in the early years of the youngest generation is an investment in Thailand's very future."

LEAVING NO YOUNG PERSON BEHIND

ENGAGING YOUTH

The lives of young Thais in 2023 are almost unrecognisably different from those in 1948, when UNICEF first opened its doors in the country. For most, quality of life has improved enormously. The majority of young people now benefit from a full education and complete grade 12 in school, unlike the youth of 1948. Almost all will survive to reach adulthood, compared to 1948, when more than 1 in 10 would die before the age of 5.

Yet progress always creates new challenges, and young people now face many new difficulties, including climate change, persistent inequality, and a growing mental health crisis. In an ageing society where families have fewer children, young people may feel more pressure than ever before, particularly as Thailand attempts to make the leap from middle-income to high-income status. As of 2023, 40 per cent of young people feel that their education isn't enough to help them compete in a challenging 21st century job market, and many feel their voices aren't heard.

As young people's needs have changed, so has UNICEF's work with them. Where once we provided services such as healthcare directly to children and young people, we now work to help the Royal Thai Government understand their needs and provide services that meet them. In support of these goals, UNICEF gathers evidence and takes action on challenges and risks young people face, such as education, adolescent pregnancy and mental health. This work recently led to UNICEF working with the Government on the development of an integrated Mental Health and Psychosocial Support plan for adolescents. The ultimate goal is an integrated model where all different sectors – including health, education and social welfare – work together seamlessly towards improved mental health, with a focus on prevention.

Driven by its determination to leave no child behind, UNICEF pays particular attention to those young people who face the greatest challenges. Creating opportunities for girls and young women is a core part of the organization's work. Young women make up a disproportionate amount of the 1.4 million of Thailand's youth who aren't in employment, education or training, and who often feel marginalized and demotivated. UNICEF works with partners within the Government to provide support to these young people through STEM learning, skills training, career guidance and psychosocial support.

UNICEF also believes that young people themselves must actively shape the services they use. It therefore works closely with youth organizations, policy makers and authorities to create spaces for young people to voice their opinions and influence decision-making that affects them. 56,000 young people have been polled or engaged in consultations shaping key policies such as Thailand's 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan. Young people make up the majority of UNICEF's 21,000 volunteers, who lead projects creating positive change in communities and in return gain new skills and confidence.

"One of UNICEF's core commitments in the years ahead is to create more opportunities for young people"

In 2021, UNICEF went one step further by launching a Young People Advisory Board in Thailand, giving 62 young people a role in systematically engaging with UNICEF and its partners in programming, decision-making and advocacy initiatives. In 2022 alone, the Board participated in 22 consultations helping shape national policy and worked with the Thailand Education Partnership - a public and private sector collaborative network committed to education reform - on a landmark youth forum.

The Board has also helped UNICEF create public campaigns that promote mental well-being and healthy lifestyles, and tackle stigma towards vulnerable groups. UNICEF's public campaigns harness the power of technology to reach huge audiences, such as the Every Day Is Mind Day mental health campaign, which was engaged with 21 million times online. Up to 18 million young users accessed information on sexual and mental health through the UNICEF-supported LoveCareStation and TeenClub online platforms.

One of UNICEF's core commitments in the years ahead is to create more opportunities for young people to engage in its work and make an impact in Thai society. This is an essential step in creating a greener, more resilient and inclusive Thailand.



I Am UNICEF volunteers with students from the Faculty of Political Science at Ubon Ratchathani University working with children of a community affected by flooding.
© UNICEF Thailand/2023/Preechapanich

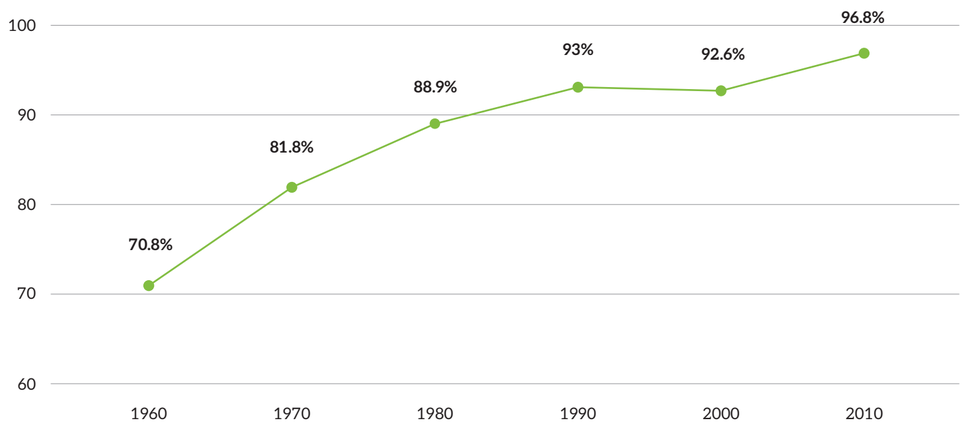
75 YEARS OF IMPACT

Below are a selection of key statistics which demonstrate the measurable progress Thailand has made over the last 75 years towards improving the lives of children, with support from UNICEF. We have only chosen areas where we have reliable national statistics stretching back 60 years or more.

This means that some key areas such as malnutrition are not included, due to historical data being more regionalized or measured differently, or rarely collected at all, such as in child protection.

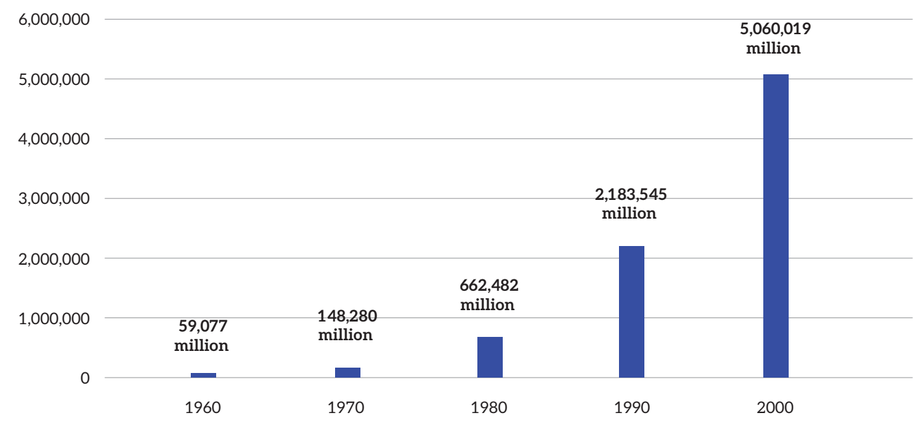
LITERACY RATES

National Statistic Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, provided to UNESCO: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/



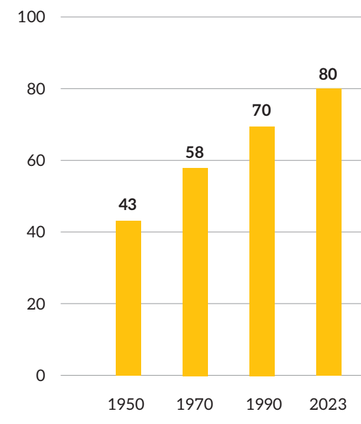
GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (CURRENCY = THAI BAHT)

National Economic and Social Development Council: https://www.nesdc.go.th/



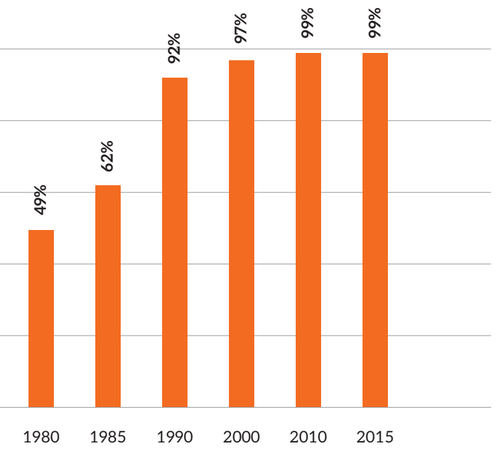
The above figures indicate Thailand's extraordinary economic growth across 40 critical years - a growth that continues to this day

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YEARS)



UN Data, https://data.un.org/

IMMUNIZATION RATE
(percentage of infants who received third dose of DTP vaccine.)

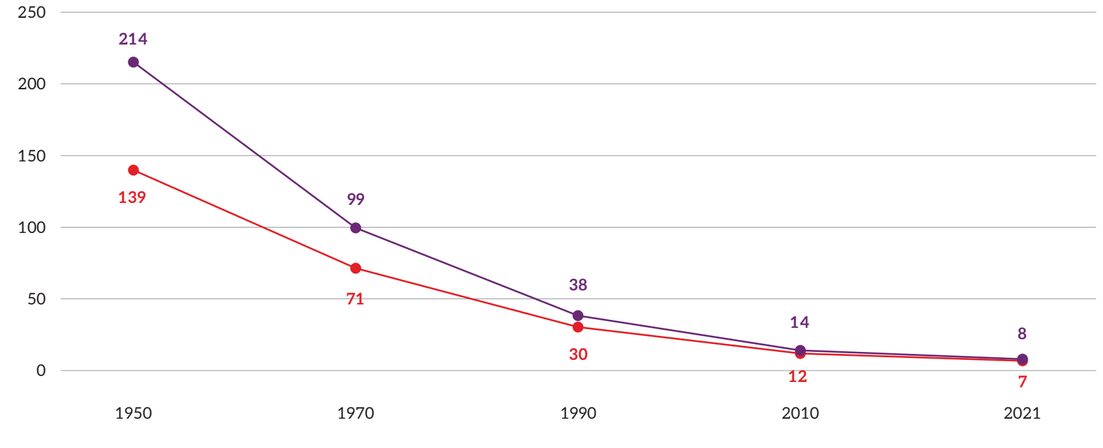


Note – when UNICEF first began working in Thailand, immunization was nearly non-existent, and developed rapidly over the next decades. The most reliable data, however, is recent. The DPT - diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus – vaccine has been shown as an indicator, though progress against other diseases such as measles is comparable.

UNICEF data, https://data.unicef.org/

INFANT MORTALITY
(chance of death between birth and one year, per 1,000 live births)

UNDER 5 MORTALITY
(death between birth and five years, per 1,000 live births)



UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation https://childmortality.org/data/Thailand

A UNICEF staff member bonds with a child. © UNICEF Thailand/2005/Mohan



Children in Mae Hong Son have fun meeting UNICEF's youth reading ambassadors © UNICEF Thailand/2016/Gratzer



CHILD OF THE TWENTIES

In 2022, 502,000 new children just like the one pictured were born in Thailand. By the end of the decade ahead, there will be millions of new lives across the country. Unlike the other Thais we have featured in these pages, their life stories haven't even begun. You can help write them.

Will they grow up in a society where hardship harms their ability to thrive? In a world where the difficulties young people face now – such as inequality, poor mental health, or the growing problem of climate change – haven't been addressed?

Or will their lives be ones of joy and fulfilment, where they are kept safe, given the support they need to overcome challenges, and the opportunities they need to contribute to a thriving and happy country?

UNICEF will continue working towards a future where every child in Thailand and around the world has the opportunity to live a better, happier life. We thank everyone who has already helped to improve the lives of Thailand's past and present children. Please join us as we strive to do the same for the children of the future. We are here for every child.

unicef
for every child

Young child @ UNICEF Thailand/Athit

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNICEF Thailand would like to thank everyone who made this book possible. Given that it is a history of our 75 years in the country, that includes every employee, volunteer and supporter who contributed to our work during that time. The same is true of all the partners, donors and collaborators we have worked with since 1948, and the successive Royal Thai Governments that provided crucial support to UNICEF's work throughout.

Special thanks go to UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador For Thailand, His Excellency Anand Panyarachun, for his enormous contributions throughout 27 years. We also thank Khun Nualphan Lamsam, UNICEF Thailand's new National Ambassador, for joining us on our journey and helping us to shine a spotlight on our 75th anniversary. In addition, we thank the Friends of UNICEF and other influential supporters, past and present, for contributing their time and expertise to our work improving the lives of children in Thailand.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to the creation of the book, including the Thai people who shared their stories of childhood and their life experiences to enrich these pages. The book was written by Jaime Gill, Communication Consultant, and designed by Pitiporn Huiworakul and printed by Thammada Press Publishing. The contributing team included Kyungsun Kim, UNICEF Representative for Thailand, Severine Leonardi, Deputy Representative, Rudina Vojvoda, Chief of Communications, Neal Kennard, Chief of Private Sector Fundraising and Partnerships, Kajorn Veerapong, Fundraising Specialist, Heamakarn Sricharatchanya, Communication Associate, Kongdej Keesukpan, Communication Specialist, Raksit Waropas, Communication Officer, Nattha Keenapan, Communication Officer, Nattaphon Chitsuksai, Communication Consultant, Sirinya Wattanasukchai, Communication Consultant, Peeraya Apirachkul, Communication Associate, Pichamon Ketkaew, Programme Associate, Tongchanok Sonsawangphol, Procurement Associate, Julia Behr, Contracts Specialist, Orapan Srimanotham, Senior Supply Associate, Puntita Sookchareon, Supply Assistant, Thanistar Kamtabnam, Supply Assistant, Nataliya Borodchuk, Social Policy Specialist, Sirirath Chunnasart, Adolescent Development Specialist, Chayanit Wangdee, Senior Programme Associate, Santi Siritheerajesd, Child Protection Specialist, Napat Phisanbut, Early Childhood Development Specialist, Rangsun Wiboonuppatum, Education Specialist, and Usa Rittapirom, Senior Executive Associate.



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for every child

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