

GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY FROM THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative research aims to investigate the operational processes and success factors of social enterprises in the context of agricultural development in Thailand. The study synthesizes practical guidelines to enhance the promotion of agricultural social enterprises. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Key informants consisted of 50 purposively selected individuals, including social enterprise committee members, social enterprise group members, and representatives from relevant government agencies, private organizations, and relevant communities. Four case studies of agricultural social enterprises with varying profit-sharing models were analyzed using content analysis. The research findings revealed that the operations of social enterprises in agricultural development involve creating shared concepts among group members, developing farmer groups to become entrepreneurs, and building upon organic farming systems to generate income for communities. Success factors involved with the promotion of social enterprises include knowledge development, community participation; member relationships contribute to efficient operations because social enterprises focus on internal processes, which affect their operations or members and group management. The proposed guidelines for promoting agricultural social enterprises encompass three key phases: (1) Initial Development focuses on setting social missions and goals based on local contexts and sufficiency economy principles; (2) Operational Strengthening includes developing production processes, participatory management, and organic certification; and (3) Strategic Expansion involves building cross-sectorial collaborations, farmer networks, and sustainable marketing mechanisms. This study offers practical implications for policymakers, local leaders, and development practitioners to enhance agricultural social enterprises as a mechanism for inclusive, community-based, and sustainable rural development in Thailand.

Keywords: Social enterprise; economic development; agricultural development; farmer; social entrepreneur management

1. INTRODUCTION

Social enterprises in Thailand are businesses that sell goods or services. They operate and use profits to develop society or the environment to achieve sustainability by running their businesses to have balanced outcomes in line with social goals and narrowing the gap between groups of people in the capitalist system (Saatci & Urper, 2013). Enterprises of these types not only promote local employment but are also active in developing communities and serving social needs in each local context (Chell et al., 2010). The objectives are to address social and environmental issues, stimulate local economy, and maintain the equilibrium between economic goals, social goals, and environmental goals (Chantararnamchoo, 2020). The social enterprise is, therefore, an important instrument that generates social impacts, especially among the disadvantaged, as well as structural changes among other social organizations. Furthermore, the Social Development Plan (2023–2027) aims to develop small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to increase product distribution opportunities, strengthen the local market system (Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council [NXPO], 2023). National development has been steered according to the National Economic and Social Development Plans and the sufficiency economy principles in parallel with the sustainable development goals (SDGs), ultimately leading to economic growth while maintaining a healthy environment (Thongthanakul, 2020). The goals are value-added innovation, processed agricultural products, promoting culture and distribute income to the communities, and the grassroots economy (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council [NESDC], 2022). Moreover, sustainable agriculture is an approach to agricultural practices that seeks to meet present food production needs while preserving and enhancing natural resources for future generations. It goes beyond simply maximizing yields and profit and instead focuses on long-term environmental, economic, and social sustainability (Powrel & Mishra, 2023). Social enterprises in other countries, such as those in Japan and England, have had significant influence because their operations are clearly and solidly structured, and these receive strong support at all levels. A survey in countries successfully operating social enterprises revealed that social enterprises are essential in improving the economic status and well-being of society (Achavanuntakul et al., 2018) as these nations can use the profits to build a healthy social enterprise ecosystem.

Nevertheless, in Thailand social enterprises that help farmer groups, which play an essential role in the country's development, still have poor status, relying on informal funding sources and household debt due to economic difficulties and labor migration from rural to urban areas (Department of Agricultural Extension, 2013). On the other hand, the number of small-scale farmers has decreased due to poverty caused by bankruptcies in the agricultural sector, so they turn instead to the industrial sector. Farmers have become farming wage laborers on land that used to be theirs, causing changes facing poverty from economic, social, and political injustice (Sakhonwasee, 2020). Social enterprises play a pivotal role in agriculture by addressing social, environmental, and economic challenges within the sector, with their unique approach of combining business models with social and environmental missions. A key role those social enterprises play in agriculture is to actively promote and execute sustainable farming practices. They support agro-ecological methods, organic farming, and other ecologically beneficial practices and contribute to long-term sustainability and environmental protection by prioritizing practices that reduce chemical inputs, safeguard soil health, and encourage biodiversity (Powrel & Mishra, 2023).

The development of social enterprises in Thailand still lacks support from various agencies due to unclear role enhancement of relevant agencies, as well as limitations in funding, markets, technology, and absence of linkage mechanisms for effective implementation. The study of guidelines for promoting social enterprises remains context-specific, particularly in agricultural development. Although there are examples from foreign countries that are beneficial for development in Thailand, they cannot be fully adapted to the Thai context due to the diversity of activities (Tiamboonkit, 2016). Existing studies often focus on broad frameworks for social enterprise promotion but lack an in-depth examination of operational mechanisms, critical success factors, and strategies tailored to the agricultural sector in Thailand. The unique challenges faced by smallholder farmers, such as limited resources, reliance on traditional practices, and market constraints, are underexplored in the context of social enterprises. Additionally, while successful agricultural social enterprises in Thailand do exist, systematic analysis of their practices and contributions to sustainable development has not been thoroughly conducted. This gap underscores the importance of developing localized guidelines and actionable strategies to effectively support social enterprises in strengthening smallholder farmers and advancing sustainable agricultural practices. The present study aims to address this gap by investigating the operations of social enterprises in the agricultural sector, identifying factors contributing to their success, and synthesizing guidelines to support their development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The concept of social enterprise

The concept of social enterprise encompasses businesses that focus on generating revenue from the sales of goods or services, the primary goal being to solve the problems of, and to further improve, the community, economic, society, and the environment. The profits generated by a social enterprise will be returned to society, in the form of social activities or job opportunities for the disadvantaged (National Reform Council, 2015). Thailand defines legal status and registers social enterprises in two categories: 1) social enterprises that do not share profits with partners or shareholders, with all profits from product sales helping the underprivileged, and 2) social enterprises that share profits with partners or shareholders, distributing profits to shareholders not exceeding 30%, and the remainder used to employ specially promoted individuals (Social Enterprise Promotion Act B.E. 2562, 2019). It also promotes management in the form of social entrepreneurship to develop products or respond to environmental problems, and as goals for natural resources, social organizations, and innovation networks (Lertklai et al., 2019). The goal is to grow social and economic operations with the two key factors of social missions from organizational theory: to serve the reasons for their existence and to change according to social needs (Chamnanlertkit, 2014). These can be applied to building sustainable society, community capital, and using technology and innovation to upgrade agricultural product quality (Office of Agricultural Economics, 2019).

2.2 Current situation and operation of social enterprises in Thailand

Through its policies, the government wants to strengthen the country by promoting the economy and employment. It also aims to provide farmers the opportunity to process agricultural products and to add more value products. These are the foundation of social enterprises that the government wants to support, while the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and Office of Social Enterprise Promotion work together in order to create the economic and social benefits at the community level, as per the given goals (Chulalongkorn Hospital, 2020). While the growth of Thai social enterprises is still limited when compared to that of other countries, there is also a lack of systematic support to build the potential in terms of research development, product innovation, and social impact measurement, as well as tangible sources of funding to expand the results more widely from the problems of working capital, legislation, and policies to promote social enterprises in specific contexts (NXPO, 2023). At present, there are still not many registered social enterprises in Thailand, although there has been progress in operation by integrating cooperation with all sectors; a strategic plan from the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion for 2023 includes Strategy 1: Social Enterprise Potential Development (SE Potential Development); Strategy 2: Development of a data system for social enterprises (Data Governance); Strategy 3: Promotion of market mechanisms and social investment (Market and Impact Investment); Strategy 4: Promotion of the strength of the social enterprise ecosystem (SE Ecosystem); and Strategy 5: Development of mechanisms and integration of cooperation to promote social enterprises (Collaborative Partnerships). These strategies will help inform policies and guidelines for operations to be used as a framework management efficient operations (Office of Social Enterprise Promotion, 2023).

2.3 International experiences in social enterprise development

The growth of social enterprises has begun to expand around the world, causing many countries to begin to enact laws to supervise and support and promote groups of individuals and organizations that deserve to be promoted to have the ability to compete in both domestic and international trade, and to create opportunities for groups of people in society to be self-reliant, including promoting innovations that will create social change (Office of Social Enterprise Promotion, 2023). In the Asian region there is a keen interest in the concept, especially in Japan, South Korea and India. Most of them are social groups, established as organizations whose activities benefit society, the environment and culture, help low-income people to help themselves, and help disadvantaged groups rather than seek profit for personal benefit (Channew et al., 2022). The management mechanisms that drive social enterprises in different countries are varied, largely due to the level of interest in the government policies and the progression of the related regulations and would establish specialized agencies to work, in collaboration with the driving mechanisms of the entrepreneurs; for example, in the United Kingdom, a driving mechanism of civil society was established by a network of social enterprises called Social Enterprise UK (SEUK); this network played an important role in creating social support trends. On the other hand, in countries that did not have dedicated agencies, mechanisms mostly came from the movement of social entrepreneurs that came together, such as the Singapore Social Enterprise Association (SEA), Philippine Social Enterprise Network (PhilSEN), Social Enterprise Alliance Malaysia (SEA), Social Venture Hong Kong (SVHK). The aforementioned organizations assumed the primary roles of arranging the learning activities for the network members and creating public awareness (National Reform Council, 2015).

2.4 The concept and guidelines for agricultural development

The process from the concept of the country's development focuses on the philosophy of a Sufficiency Economy. This direction intends to distribute the benefits of economic progress thoroughly. This idea has further led to the ideas of preserving natural resources and nature, improving the quality of human life, and engaging in a sustainable economy that does not cause any impact on the ecosystem (Singhalert & Jongwutiwes, 2018). The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives aims to develop the agricultural sector by focusing on farmers as the center of development and emphasizing the efforts to drive policies to implementation and developing a strong farmer institution, encouraging farmers to become expert agriculturalists, in terms of production, processing and marketing, using the principles of marketing and production, in combination with the use of technology and innovation, in order to produce products of better quality (Office of Agricultural Economics, 2019). Meanwhile, the 20-year Strategic Plan, the Strategic Development Plan, and the National Reform Program, as well as building sustainable growth on Green Economy, to develop stability in agriculture in an environmentally friendly manner, to take action to solve the social problems of Thailand, and to drive the social entrepreneurship promotion strategy. The government also encourages agricultural social enterprises that aim to solve agricultural problems, focusing on helping small-scale farmers to be self-reliant while allowing middle-sized and commercial-sized farmers to further grow into professional agriculturalists (Masiri, 2020).

2.5 The guidelines for developing social enterprises

The United Nations has established Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), regarding emphasizing inclusive, transformative, and integrated development that aligns with the development of social enterprises. Essentially, Goal 8 is intended to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all by upgrading technology and innovation, promoting entrepreneurship and the growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and promoting local culture and products. Furthermore, Goal 9 aims to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, develop efficient industries that use eco-friendly resources, upgrade quality infrastructure that supports economic development and well-being, and diversify domestic technology, research, and innovation (SDG Move, 2018). There are also studies on the operational social enterprises, compliance with the main goals of social enterprise operations whose concepts are derived from conducting community business, starting from production, marketing, and services of social enterprises (Tsai et al., 2013). In addition, Rotjanawong and Khongmalai (2018) explored the factors related to promoting social enterprises. They discovered that external factors are driving factors for social enterprises through their cooperation with government agencies and the private sector, whereas internal factors affect operations in both planning and management. These impacts have led to positive changes in propelling the development of social enterprises, core missions, and supporting missions to be guidelines for further promoting social enterprises and community economy.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using a multiple-case study approach to gain in-depth understanding of agricultural social enterprises in Thailand.

3.1 Case study selection, participants and sampling

Four agricultural social enterprises were purposively selected based on the following criteria: (1) registration with the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion (OSEP); (2) active operation in agricultural development for at least three to five years; and (3) demonstrated impact on local economic, social, and environmental outcomes. The cases included both non-profit-sharing models (Mab Ueang Social Enterprise and Sampran Model Social Enterprises) and limited-profit-sharing models (Angkul Social Enterprise and So Good Social Enterprises).

A total of 50 key informants were selected through purposive sampling across the four case studies. Participants were grouped as follows: Group 1: Social enterprise committee members with at least three years of experience ($n = 9$), Group 2: Social enterprise group members with at least three years of experience actively involved in operations ($n = 19$), Group 3: Representatives from relevant government and private agencies with at least one year of involvement ($n = 10$), and Group 4: Representatives from community who had participated in activities with at least one year the enterprises ($n = 12$).

3.2 Data collection method

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The questions were developed based on the research framework derived from the literature review and were designed to be flexible, allowing adjustments according to situational contexts. They were organized into categories and arranged in a logical

sequence to comprehensively address the research objectives. Focus group discussions were also conducted to encourage key informants to express their opinions and suggestions regarding guidelines for social enterprise development. The guiding questions were prepared in advance, arranged in categories, and validated by experts to ensure content relevance and alignment with the study objectives. Triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the collected data.

3.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to uncover underlying themes within the interview data by coding, categorizing, and organizing the content, enabling the integration of multiple perspectives and data sources. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, focusing on familiarization, coding, theme development, and refinement.

Thematic content analysis was applied to identify patterns, relationships, and emerging themes related to the operations and success of social enterprises, while content analysis emphasized interpretation and was particularly effective for analyzing diverse qualitative data (Schreier, 2012). Preliminary analysis was conducted to identify key points for synthesizing findings in alignment with the research objectives and conceptual framework. All data points were coded according to context, operational processes, conditional factors, and guidelines for social enterprise promotion. The data were then categorized, and the relationships among categories were analyzed with supporting explanations, leading to the development of guidelines for agricultural social enterprise promotion. Finally, the researchers evaluated and interpreted the findings through contextual and cross-case analyses to compare similarities and differences and identify links data to the development for agricultural social enterprise.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Office of The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences), Mahidol University. All participants provided informed consent, and the research adhered strictly to ethical guidelines regarding confidentiality, voluntary participation, and use of data solely for academic purposes.

4. RESULTS

The results of investigating the operations of social enterprises in agricultural development for each case study are presented below.

Mab Ueang Social Enterprise started from creating a new way of life by applying the sufficiency economy principles to increasing economic value alongside driving lifestyles from the Khok Nong Na Model (mound, marsh, and rice field). Its operations are based on applying King Bhumibol the Great's philosophy to develop products, focusing on participatory management to develop the enterprise. Factors driving the operations are from networking of farmer groups. This social enterprise has established guidelines to promote operations developing success to the local area from farming through changing ideas.

Sampran Model Social Enterprise began from its passion for hotel guests to consume chemical-free vegetables. The social enterprise began developing organic farming systems until it founded Sook Jai Market to sell organic products. Its initial phase was to organize training for farmers interested in organic farming to develop their farmlands. Factors influencing the operations are founded upon the promotion of learning processes of group members. It has established guidelines to promote training processes from upstream to downstream, from production to develop products, thus making the group self-sustainable.

Angkul Social Enterprise grew its entrepreneurial activities from developing rice husks and grey sedge plants (*Lepironia articulata*) into drinking straws, promoting the use of local resources to generate income for small-scale farmers. Its operations are based on the concept of reducing plastic use and sustainably preserving ecosystems in community areas. Factors influencing the operations arise from gaining support government to produce products resulting in the new innovation of producing straws. It has guidelines to promote the straw production process to achieve quality and promote the use of available resources in the community alongside social development.

SoGood Social Enterprise was initiated as a group of producers and distributors jointly selling organic vegetables. Its operations are based on developing agricultural products in various areas and promoting organic farming practices for farmer groups. Factors influencing its operations arise from developing into an organic farming network that receives support from government and market opportunities. It has determined some guidelines to encourage farmers to change their ways of thinking to introduce organic farming and encourage establishing groups of small-scale farmers.

Overall, with regard to the four case studies mentioned above, it was found that the operations of social enterprises in agricultural development involve a social mission to achieve the same goal of wanting to improve the quality of life of farmers, create networks, and enable farmers become social entrepreneurs

doing business for the community, and to develop organic farming systems and the environment that can respond to social impact goals. From data reported in interviews, most representatives from communities support social enterprises, out of which local people were given job opportunities and a source of additional income:

We can sustain our lives while doing something useful for society, helping solve environmental issues. The village's environment has improved. Farmers' quality of life is also improved. They earn more money to support their households. We help them reduce their expenses, develop the local area, and promote the use of locally available resources in our products while ensuring zero pollution. (Informant no.1, representative from communities, personal communication, January 6, 2022)

These social enterprises have marketing plans for product sales and public relations, with each group having main areas to sell agricultural produce and goods. Therefore, although social enterprises create different concepts or operational processes, they have the same impact on the promotion of social enterprises in agricultural development, thus resulting in community economic development and organic farming systems, and ultimately the development of farmers and people in the community. Collected testimony for groups mostly focused on producing products made by orders while trying out new ideas, in order to gain more customers:

Regarding the marketing, we develop the processed products. We create many products, some of which have never been created by villagers. We create innovations, with a focus on variety. Then we teach the production methods to farmers and villagers and help them find a market to sell their products. (Informant no.2, social enterprise committee member, personal communication, March 19, 2022)

Success factors related to promoting social enterprises in agricultural development include external factors: for example, government support is a necessary factor in promoting and developing social enterprises that need funding from government agencies for product development production processes to develop organic farming standards, and markets for selling products, including learning processes to develop products and farming areas. Moreover, network development is necessary factor that promotes social enterprises as it leads to group formation and agricultural product networks, participation in organic farming training, promoting more creation of production networks, and links from the central area to other areas. Reported interview data of a social enterprise committee member concerns the focus on creating a network and creating a relationship between people in the same area and community so they may share their knowledge:

Everything is inter-related as if they are all linked within the same chain. As we create the people, the jobs, the teams, and the knowledge, we also create networks of so many interlinking members, such as the agricultural product network. Besides the crops produced at the Center, our networks in other provinces also deliver their products to us, including rice, vegetables, and other plants. We always have plenty of everything. (Informant no.3, social enterprise committee member, personal communication, September 20, 2022)

This study also discovered internal factors; in particular, community participation is an important internal factor in promoting social enterprises and farmers to do activities with the community to develop products, society, environment, and create value for local vegetables. This includes community in various activities, such as production and processing, and product development. This leads to changes in the way of thinking exchange of learning and experience between members, and creates motivation to promote community development together. Social innovation development involves the creative design of new products that benefit society, the economy, and the local community. That is, the development of agricultural products as per customers' demands creates unique innovations to attract consumers' attention using local wisdom in growing the produce and using scientific processes to develop environmental-friendly products, which has received awards for the national innovation that combines various engineering technologies and applies the leftover natural materials as raw materials. Considering answers to the questions given, 6 out of 9 participants proposed the development of products or agricultural products as per helping the environment and creating value to the local plants:

The team works with outsiders, professors, researchers. We research and develop the rice stubble straws before producing the Krajood straw, in order to help the society and environment. This is our social mission. We received the award for our innovation in 2020. Our effort encourages people to care more about the environment and creates value to the leftover material and normally useless plants, that is, rice stubble and Krajood plant, which are abundantly available. (Informant no.4, social enterprise committee member, personal communication, January 6, 2022)

It is worth noting that both internal and external factors are important. Internal factors help make operations within the group more efficient, leading to positive changes, while external factors drive social enterprises along with government agencies and the private sector.

Guidelines for promoting social enterprises in agricultural development were found to be divided into three phases:

First, the initial phase of development into social enterprises includes creating concepts and defining social missions with operational goals to develop social enterprises toward agricultural development. This involves surveying the local context of the community and using sufficiency economy concepts to develop social enterprise that will enable farmers to be self-dependent, have enough resources for consumption, in living according to the three principles of moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. This stage also includes defining plans to develop social enterprises for agricultural, starting from production processes and supporting farmers and people in the community to introduce organic farming practice by pointing out the benefits of organic farming. In this phase, they also develop cooperation to create awareness about social enterprises for communities, which leads to the formation of small-scale farmer groups engaging in developing social enterprises.

Second, the operational and development phase of social enterprises involves internal development of social enterprises. This can be achieved by using information technology to develop production processes by setting goals and creating knowledge from operational results and research to develop processing processes. They adopt participatory management to allow members to participate in operational processes. Training is organized to promote organic farming practices, developing organic certification standards for elevate the quality of agricultural products. It also includes product development and processing from local plants to create economic value in the area, and develop farmers to become social entrepreneurs. This can be achieved by supporting farmers to learn about management to enhance their potential and by developing a new generation of farmers through practice in actual areas.

Third, the management and expansion phase encompasses development of social enterprises with external cooperation. At this stage, social enterprise management processes are improved through the inclusion of experts from the District Agricultural Extension Office and local people working together to develop products. This activity requires collaboration with agricultural product network partners, organic farming networks in areas, and cooperation with the Community Development Office and educational institutions to develop farmers' farming plots into learning sources. They promote community markets together with the Provincial Industry Office to provide areas for selling agricultural products. These relevant parties also develop local products, local people, and nearby communities with community leaders, resulting in a network of communities. There is also support from government agencies for production factors and funding, private agencies or educational institutions for developing potential to enhance farmers' capabilities, and local agencies for supporting technology and knowledge transfer. The guidelines for promoting social enterprises in agricultural development in all three phases can be summarized and illustrated in Figure 1.

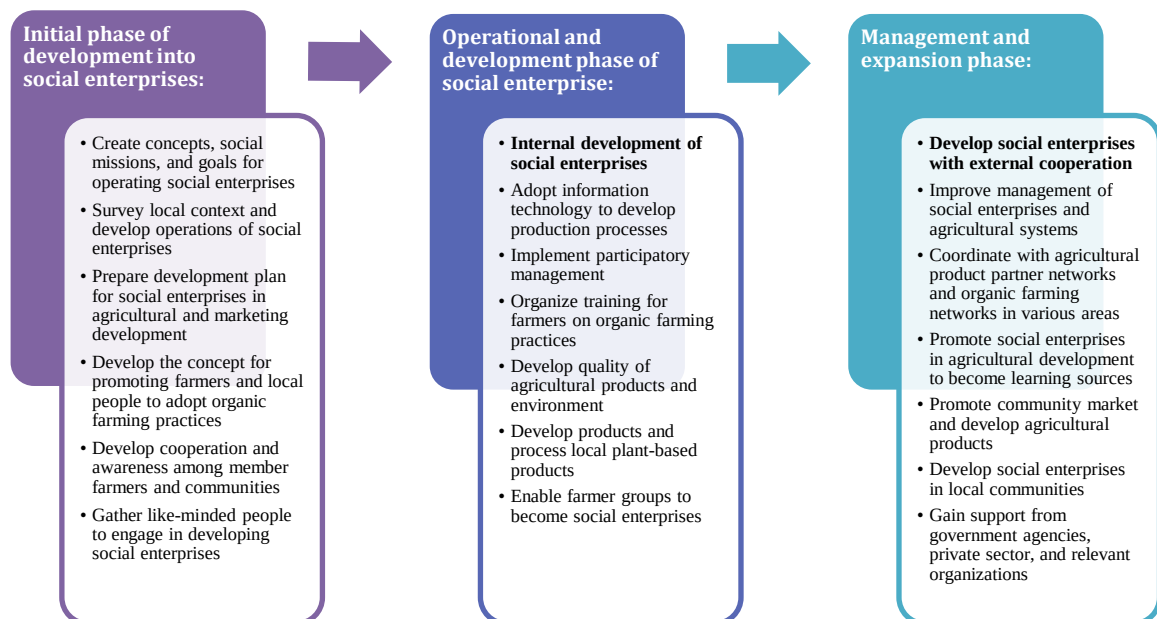


Figure 1: Guidelines for promoting social enterprises in agricultural development

5. DISCUSSION

Regarding the operations of social enterprises in agricultural development, according to data analysis, social enterprises develop products by considering target group needs and promote employment for sustainable economic development. In terms of concept creation, there must be process thinking from developing agricultural systems to develop society and environment. Therefore, social enterprises must have clear concepts. If the concepts are not clear, the business cannot survive, even if it is successful. Social enterprises create concepts by combining ideas (organization of ideas) that will lead to operational goals and social processes. This is consistent with Villis et al. (2013) who stated that social enterprises create concepts to define social enterprise goals to meet group and community needs. In social enterprise operations, concept creation will lead to clear guidelines for how the organization should operate (Creech et al., 2014). For production processes, social enterprises produce goods from nature utilizing standardized technology or using local wisdom by processing local plants into products that consider sustainability, and do not destroy the environment. This is consistent with the policy of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board [NESDB] (2018) which stated that product production processes must not cause adverse effects on health, society, or the environment, and must use local wisdom and technologies that are safe for consumers in production. In addition, it was found that social enterprises have operations that take into account social and environmental impacts by allowing people in the community to actively participate in solving environmental problems, such as using local wisdom of each community to produce fertilizers from natural materials. This is consistent with the policy of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council [NESDC] (2023) which stated that introducing sustainable development goals for development at the provincial level and provincial group level to drive sustainable development goals at the local level (SDG localization) results in higher economic productivity, upgraded technology, and leads to innovation. It was also found that the operational results of social enterprises in each case study have different methods. However, the impacts on social enterprise development are not different. The operational results affect the development of groups for the better. The profits are used to develop the organization's operations. From this perspective, it is an investment that generates returns to society and communities and creates occupational sustainability for farmers who have extra income in seasons when they cannot do agriculture.

Concerning related factors to promote social enterprises in agricultural development, as a result of data analysis, both internal and external factors influence the promotion of each social enterprise group differently. Regarding the important external factor of government support, it was found that social enterprises that share profits with partners or shareholders need government support in production to develop production processes and social marketing. On the other hand, social enterprises that do not share profits with partners or shareholders need government support to create networks with various organizations. This is consistent with the policy of the NXPO (2023) which reported that the government currently promotes entrepreneurs or students to learn about social business and access to consumer markets (B2C) and private markets (B2B), creating networks that participate in fundraising to enhance the potential of social enterprises concretely. Network development is one of the key factors that drive collaboration and link various factions and groups into a cohesive network. Network development also creates links between the concepts and perspectives toward the development of agricultural products, as well as toward attendance at training courses on organic farming, the exchange of knowledge, the development of products, the gathering of groups into a network of production, and the linking of different networks from the center to other areas. This finding is in line with Poolsawat et al. (2019), who remarked that the guidelines for promoting social enterprises must involve the development of a network of business collaboration, in order to arrange social activities. The operation of social enterprises promotes the creation of a local network within the community, where the social enterprises work with the local community to develop new products. The important network is the agricultural product network, with the goals of creating standards and ensuring the products' quality, in order to directly answer the demands of the consumers.

Regarding an important internal factor in terms of knowledge development, social enterprises promote farmers to learn about doing social business, management systems, and agricultural systems from the training. For instance, they encourage farmers to attend to sufficiency economy principles in agriculture and organic farming courses, to promote learning processes with the community and increase potential for farmers, resulting in a shared value. As a result, they can use the knowledge gained from training to develop into learning centers in their own communities together with people in the community areas. This is consistent with Kongprasertamorn (2013) who found that group members apply local wisdom in production, allowing groups to use community culture to extend knowledge and solve problems according to the National Economic and Social Development Plan in terms of economic and social opportunities and equality. It was

found that new social innovations development utilizes locally available resources to research and create new products. Social enterprises and the community engage social innovation development for the purpose of meeting social demands through the processes of experimenting and processing agricultural products with various methods help with the problem of oversupply. Moreover, founds that some of the social enterprises increase the value of their products by creating novel products which, in turn, expand their customer base to the people who like to try new things and also use local wisdom improve the agricultural systems; for example, due to the availability of local plants that vary from one area to another, they use different methods and raw materials to produce fermented bio-extracts from locally available plants, which can be adapted in other areas. This finding is in line with Chantaranamchoo (2020) who remarked that social enterprises require creativity and participation of the community, in order to create innovation that brings positive changes to society and promotes learning. And this finding is also in line with Sawasdee and Masae (2020) who remarked that the creation of appropriate social innovation which draws and uses social capital, natural capital, will create positive effects on the economy, society, and environment. It was also found that internal factors of knowledge development, community participation, and member relationships contribute to efficient operations because social enterprises are different from general companies in that they focus on social and environmental impacts, elevating the capabilities of social entrepreneurs who focus on participation with people in the community, resulting in changes in positive relationships of member farmers and expanding into agricultural product network groups.

It was also found that regarding guidelines for promoting social enterprises in agriculture propels the development of social enterprises resulting in developing organizations for society and community, and creating value for disadvantaged groups, communities, and the environment. Starting from groups of people with ideas to develop business for society and create local products and agricultural systems together, social enterprises have a way of thinking from organizational development under relationships linked to participation in developing agricultural plots areas. This is consistent with Mali (2014) who claimed that factors support participation according to context and area. Plans should be developed for production and participation of groups, developing products from local wisdom in each area, resulting in driving organizations along with society and community. Poolsawat et al. (2019) stated that social enterprise has been established and developed continuously until now. There has been a gathering of groups of people or business organizations interested in helping society and developing communities, resulting in guidelines for promoting the role of social enterprise. However, there are also informal groups that benefit from mutual exchange and learning, which may be suitable for groups that are not yet ready to develop into social enterprises. At the same time, if the group is formally formed, it will have the opportunity to receive support from various agencies and private organizations to expand market opportunities. Similarly, Supavitipattana et al. (2021) found that successful groups were those that combined both formal and informal purposes and expanded cooperation through networking to create strength and sustainability.

Establishing occupational groups also promotes the collaboration of community households and enhances their abilities in marketing and management. For social enterprises to grow, they should support member farmers to have core mission development, developing themselves from training to exchanging experiences. These activities will enable farmers to develop their own potential to become social entrepreneurs. There is knowledge and ability to invent and develop innovations that result in learning to develop the potential of groups. Distanont et al. (2019) noted the creation of economic value from participation of community and cooperation of various agencies. This is consistent with Lertklai et al. (2019) who stated that the concept of developing the potential of social enterprises is a social organization that is systematically linked to develop factors that are available. Well-managed, it will be a factor that enhances the potential of social enterprises effectively. Supporting mission development is vital. Social enterprises require cooperation and support from the government to create networks to develop farmers, develop markets, and provide funding to support initial operations.

The private sector plays a crucial role in developing technology to develop organic farming, improve product quality, and facilitate interested organizations to develop into social entrepreneurs more. This is consistent with Muangwichian (2018) who claimed that the forms and mechanisms of social enterprises in the third sector involve promoting and developing civil society as entrepreneurs but who lack business skills, thus requiring cooperation from many stakeholders and the private sector in supporting funding and management. Social enterprises support group members by providing spaces to sell products and offering management and technology support, which members may lack. This requires learning and assistance from relevant agencies come together to develop the community area, resulting in various development approaches or agricultural product networks. This is consistent with Sanprasert et al. (2020) who found that farmers who are members of the rubber farmer group are involved in the management of the group organization. They participate in learning about the group's management, which gives them a clear picture of

every operational process and have a better understanding of corporate group management. Moreover, Supavititpattana et al. (2021) stated that to become a community entrepreneur and to successfully develop a network of groups in the Bangkachao area, external support is a key factor that emphasizes the development of skills and innovation of the group.

Therefore, social entrepreneurs should plan their operations appropriate to the context to develop agricultural products, improve organic farming practice, and create networks in each area. This is because social enterprises help drive the economy for many countries. For example, South Korea and China determine different directions to support social enterprises, mostly depending on government policies and progress on laws and emphasis establishing special agencies to operate alongside social entrepreneurship mechanisms (Defourny & Kim, 2011). This requires a clear role of all relevant stakeholders in developing the quality of products that serve social needs and drive systematic changes in the business and agricultural sectors alike. They should be prepared to cope with challenges and changeable results from participation of community and connecting markets for small-scale farmers (Powrel & Mishra, 2023). Social enterprises are advised to adopt innovation in the agriculture sector for maximum efficiency and highlight social and context-based innovation to achieve sustainable development goals. Domestic and foreign organizations should both be given opportunities to participate in economic development. Support from many countries is still needed to develop social enterprises in agricultural development and promote community economy, so that farmers or disadvantaged people have better living standards and quality of life. Eventually, inequality, poverty, and ignorance will be lowered, and Thai people may have equivalent standards as developed countries. Particularly, they will be able to create productive resources, increase entrepreneurial capabilities and production linkages that enable less developed countries to produce goods and services, change structures, stimulate economic production potential, and increase the share of industrial employment and gross domestic product (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The operations of social enterprises focus on creating concepts that lead to shared goals, having management processes to develop farmers and promote organic farming systems. Internal factors related to promoting social enterprises include knowledge development, community participation, and member relationships. External factors influence the drive of social enterprises, especially cooperation with government agencies and the private sector. Guidelines for promoting social enterprises in agricultural development are defining goals that drive core missions of operations, developing a new generation farmers and creating agricultural product networks.

Recommendations from the research are the application of the results from social enterprise operations in agricultural development to farmers and community business entrepreneurs. There should be learning exchange forums about social enterprise development in provincial areas, focusing on participation to create agricultural product networks. This will create environmental factors conducive to developing the potential of social enterprises in Thailand by bringing local wisdom of agricultural knowledge from each area to create innovations, driving the economic growth with employment and income distribution to people in the community. All sectors should work together in finding ways to develop social enterprises to benefit farmers or disadvantaged groups. This can be applied in agricultural areas to develop small-scale farmer groups and promote organic farming and the formation of producer and processor groups of agricultural products. Knowledge about organic farming should be disseminated in various areas so that it becomes more beneficial. Relevant agencies should promote social enterprises by creating learning sources for organic farming and creating agricultural product networks. As a recommendation for social enterprise policies to further develop their business, there should be impact assessment by using the results in operations to develop social enterprises in agricultural development.

This study was limited to four case studies in Thailand, conducted in specific locations at a single point in time, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. However, the results remain applicable to similar contexts. Future research should cover a wider range of locations and time periods to provide more comprehensive and generalizable insights. It should also use participatory action research to expand the findings, encourage knowledge exchange, and increase community participation in studying the development of social enterprises. This approach would help create guidelines for social enterprise promotion that are well-suited to the social, economic, and environmental context.

DECLARATION

1. Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The author did not use generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in this wrote research article process.

3. Data availability statement

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4. Ethics statement

The research work involves samples; there approval of the ethics for the approved by Office of The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University (MUSSIRB). The certificate of approval number 2021/067.0706; date of approval 7 June 2021 and confirmed that informed consent was obtained from participants.

5. Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT)

Kasamaporn Pongprayong: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Visualization, Writing–original draft, Writing–review & editing

Uthaitip Jiawiwatkul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing–review & editing

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Nopporn Chantaranamchoo: Supervision, Writing–review & editing

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