An Exploration of Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystems in Thailand and Myanmar

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Abstract: **Background:** Although the social enterprise ecosystems in Thailand and Myanmar are at different levels of development, they share common challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that the sector lives up to its potential of helping these countries fully achieve their Sustainable Development Goals.
Research objectives: The aim of this research is to identify common issues that social entrepreneurs in Thailand and Myanmar are facing within the ecosystems they operate in, and thus recommend specific actions that institutions of higher education in Thailand and Myanmar can take to support these ecosystems develop.
Research design and methods: This research utilised desk-based secondary research from existing country reports, and primary research in the form of online surveys and focus groups with different stakeholders such as social entrepreneurs, local government officials and educators.
Results: We identified several common challenges that social enterprises in these two countries face which include the centralisation of key ecosystem actors, lack of funding access, poor impact measurement and misconceptions of the sector as a whole among stakeholders.
Conclusions: As a result of the research findings, we have provided several policy recommendations to higher education institutions wishing to engage and support their local social enterprise ecosystems.
Keywords: social enterprise, social enterprise ecosystem, higher education institutions, entrepreneurship, Thailand, Myanmar
JEL Codes: I23, L26, L31

1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, Thailand has made remarkable progress in social and economic development, moving from a low-income to an upper-income country in less than a generation with strong gains along multiple dimensions of welfare (World Bank, 2022). However, the county still faces many challenges in striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals such as growing inequality, an ageing population, low social mobility, education inequality, and environmental degradation (Sachs et al., 2021). Myanmar, by contrast, has experienced a very different economic and social development curve. Decades of military rule came to an end in 2015 with the election of a democratic government and resulted in significant economic growth and an almost halving of poverty levels (World Bank, 2022). However, the military coup of 2021 and the

impact of the covid-19 pandemic have left the country far behind its regional peers in terms of achieving meaningful progress on the sustainable development goals (Sachs et al., 2021).

Although Thailand and Myanmar are at different levels of development, there remain common challenges such as growing inequality, demographic shifts, low social mobility, education inequality, and environmental degradation that need to be addressed to ensure these countries fully achieve some of the Sustainable Development Goals. These challenges have led to an increasing interest in the use of social entrepreneurship to address these pressing issues within Thailand and Myanmar's societies by delivering both social impact and economic benefit.

While Social Entrepreneurship may be an economic reality in many Asian countries such as Thailand and Myanmar, it usually applies to small businesses struggling to make money with no prospect to grow. Social entrepreneurs either do not know that they are social entrepreneurs or have no knowledge on how to scale their business to make a real impact on society. Additionally, social entrepreneurship may not be a desirable career path for young people, which is partly due to the scarce educational offerings in higher education institutions. Innovative, disruptive business ideas need to emerge to not only tackle the societal challenges in the countries, but also to give students the possibility to acquire skills needed by the labour market to allow them to play an active role in society and achieve personal fulfilment.

This paper aims to answer two main research questions. Firstly, what specific issues are social entrepreneurs in Thailand and Myanmar facing within the ecosystems they operate in, and secondly, what specific actions can institutions of higher education in Thailand and Myanmar take to support these ecosystems' development. To answer these questions, we firstly assessed the situation of social entrepreneurship in both countries. Secondly, with an understanding of the ecosystems within which they operate, we identified which challenges are common to both countries through a GAP analysis and then identified specific actions institutions of higher education in Thailand and Myanmar can take to support these ecosystems.

The information for this research was gathered from six universities in Thailand and Myanmar that are partners in an Erasmus+ Capacity-building project titled 'Strengthening innovative social entrepreneurship practices for disruptive business settings in Thailand and Myanmar' (STEPUP). This research utilised desk-based literature reviews from existing country reports, and primary data collected from surveys and focus groups conducted by the six project partners with different stakeholders such as social entrepreneurs, local government officials and educators.

The first section of this research paper presents a comprehensive literature review of previous studies of the social enterprise ecosystems of Thailand and Myanmar. Next, the research methodology is presented as well as an overview of the tools and materials used to gather the information. The section on results will present the findings and highlight the key areas of interest to the reader and finally, the conclusion will present concrete actions that we recommend higher education institutional actors take to address the gaps identified in the research.

2. Literature review

In this section, we will address some of the most recent/relevant literature that discusses social entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE), and will focus on the cases of Thailand and Myanmar. This is not intended to be a complete meta-study on social entrepreneurship ecosystems, but a brief exploration of this topic in support of our more focused exploration of the Thailand and Myanmar cases. Therefore, we will first explain what social

entrepreneurship (SE) and entrepreneurship ecosystems (EE) are and how they might come together, and then explore some of the studied countries' reports.

Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is an area that is still being studied and has different meanings, but for the purpose of this paper, we will use the definition of Klimas and Wronka-Pośpiech (2022, p. 37), which explains it as a "process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyse social change and/or address social needs". The pivotal moment for the appearance of social enterprises is often connected with dissatisfaction with the global priorities that are destructive to social well-being, and governments that lack effectiveness in solving social challenges (Roy & Hazenberg, 2019). SEs, therefore, have a mission to diminish or resolve social and/or environmental disparities, just like charities and NGOs, while at the same time being profitable companies. However, the rule of the social enterprise is that you can scale up and maximise profit as long as it is a consequence of the social or environmental development you're creating; it is not about wealth accumulation (Hartigan, 2006). According to Dwivedi & Weerawardena (2018), a social entrepreneurship organisation comprises six dimensions, the most important of which is effectual orientation and the second one being social mission, which means that a company needs to be economically viable in order to deliver social value. This type of business model bridges "the gap between the world of business and the social world" (Garcia-Jurado, Perez-Barea & Nova, 2021, p. 10) and can be seen as a hybrid organisation with a connection to innovation and systems thinking that create social value (Mair & Martí, 2006).

(Social) Entrepreneurship ecosystems

In general, entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE) are made up of a variety of actors, including those from the public and private sectors, institutions, and society, as well as entrepreneurs and others who are much more specialised, like incubators and accelerators (Bouncken & Kraus, 2021). They are interconnected regionally and serve the purpose of increasing local entrepreneurial performance (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). However, the entrepreneur who – through EE – creates new opportunities is the one who has a primary place in the EE and is the fundamental actor in establishing and sustaining the ecosystem (Klimas, Patrycja & Wronka-Pośpiech, 2022).

There is no substantial literature on SEE that provides a clear definition of it, since social entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial ecosystems have been studied separately. However, relationships between the two can be seen (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020), and in one recent country report from Thailand, the SEE is already addressed (British Council, 2020) through the identification of players that are SE oriented. The other two country focused reports used in this review, don't address EE specifically to social entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, in another older report on Thailand (IDB, 2016) social enterprises are related to innovation ecosystems, and therefore, the supporters are also for both, social and "conventional" enterprises. The country report of Myanmar (ANDE, 2019) shows a snapshot of an even broader entrepreneurial ecosystem that attends to all small and medium enterprises, and it addresses social enterprises as a "type" of business within this arena. These differences between the two countries might be related to the fact that in Thailand there is a more developed context for social enterprises, while in Myanmar, it is still in its infancy.

Social enterprises, as well as B-Corps, community-based enterprises, cooperatives, and similar organisations, tend to arrange themselves already connected to several stakeholders, approaching more holistically the impact and value creation, taking into consideration partners, beneficiaries, and customers alike. Given their effectual orientation, their entrepreneurial behaviour will focus on using the resources available to them, such as networks (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). This behaviour difference, however, focuses on the entrepreneur themself. In regard to supporting organisations, differences can also appear. For instance, financial investors for social enterprises are different from the ones from regular enterprises because they focus on impact investment, which is made by the private sector to obtain social and financial gain (Ashoka, 2015). Governments can only influence SEE through the development and enhancement of policies and programs, however, there is proof that entrepreneurship policies can boost economic growth as a requirement for creating jobs and reducing poverty (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020).

According to the British Council report (2020), SEs need the support of three other groups of organisations:
– Enabling organisations, such as incubators, accelerators, and support programmes
– Finance organisations, such as impact investors, and other funders
– Educational organisations, such as higher education institutions, research institutes, and support organisations, like collaborative hubs or labs to connect students with entrepreneurs for instance.

As part of the ecosystem, we can also consider the SEs themselves and local communities. Collaboration between enterprises with a focus on exchanging knowledge and support strengthens the system. Bigger corporations can also take part in the SEE when they intend to transit to an SE business model, however, this is a delicate situation, since they might be motivated to do so out of institutional pressure or tax relief (Doherty & Pichawadee, 2021).

The SEEs in Thailand and in Myanmar

According to reports by the British Council (2020), IDB (2016), and ANDE (2019), the organisation of SEEs in Thailand and Myanmar seems to be growing organically over time with the rise of these business models, as well the rise of innovation and entrepreneurship in both countries.

Thailand has a long history with social enterprises, and the SEE has developed dynamically in the country, especially after 2009 thanks to the influence of the British Council. It is estimated that the number of SEs is over 120.000. However, because not all SEs are registered that way the real number is unknown (British Council, 2020). This can reflect a deficit of common understanding, education, as well as regulation regarding SEs. Nonetheless, there's an increasing involvement from the Thai government, and more policies and legal frameworks have been developed. There's also growing interest from the private sector in supporting SEs. More recently, seeing the risks of co-optation from big corporations, SEs founders created the Social Enterprise Thailand Association, with the intention to keep the sector heterogeneous and focused on its transformative aspects (Doherty & Pichawadee, 2021).

According to the ANDE (2019) report, Myanmar has a growing entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem. However, there's not yet a specific one related to SEs, which is still considered part of the bigger picture of entrepreneurship. Social enterprise structures are still not part of the enacted Myanmar Companies Law 2017. Also, "there is currently no official legal definition of what constitutes a 'social enterprise' in Myanmar" (Terzieva, Mahajan & Schulte, 2022, p. 154). Given the fast technological growth and smartphone adoption rate of the last

years, more organisations are looking to make finance more accessible with new financing tools and platforms (Cheney, 2017), however, the future of the country is still uncertain, especially since the military coup in 2021, and there are questions regarding how SEEs can continuously develop and what their needs are.

For both Thailand and Myanmar, investments in bridging the gap between universities, social entrepreneurs, and the community can help these SEEs thrive further (Terzieva, Mahajan & Schulte, 2022). However, there is still limited research on what strengths and weaknesses SEE has in each country from the perspective of the actors in the system, and what are the opportunities for their flourishing.

Gaps in the literature about SEE have not been addressed in this literature review, since the purpose of the latter was to outline some concepts that help understand the context of the countries that are being studied. Here were addressed two main concepts, social enterprise, and entrepreneurial ecosystems, and we aimed to create a bridge between them, using the studied countries' reports available. There is not sufficient SEE literature to create a more detailed analysis. However, that opens up opportunities to further explore and analyse literature and case studies of diverse countries/contexts for comparative and/or cultural analysis. We identified in our focus groups with SE practitioners and experts that terminologies that are used in Europe in regard to this subject are sometimes different than the ones used in Thailand and Myanmar, for instance, and that some organisations in one country are more pivotal for the development of the SEs than in the other. This last issue relates to the study of Alvedalen & Boschma (2017), in which the complexity of entrepreneurial ecosystems is addressed. It argues that this framework needs to be analysed with a network approach, looking into not only what actors are in the system, but also what are the relationships between those actors.

3. Research design and method

In this section, we will present the methodology and activities taken to answer the research questions. To be able to achieve the research aim of identifying concrete actions that higher education institutional actors can take to address and support the further development of their social enterprise ecosystems, we firstly answer the question of what the current situation of social enterprises in Thailand and Myanmar is. Once we understand the ecosystems within which social entrepreneurs operate in each country, we can attempt to answer the second question of which challenges are common to both countries by completing a gap analysis and finally identify specific actions institutions of higher education in Thailand and Myanmar can take to support these ecosystems develop.

To fully understand the social enterprise ecosystems in Thailand and Myanmar, a two-pronged approach was undertaken. Desk-based research of existing sources was conducted to develop a detailed picture of the current situation in both countries. The ecosystem was analysed by focusing on six key actors who can have a significant influence on its success: Educational Institutions, Government, Social Entrepreneurs themselves, Funders, Local communities, and Enabling Organisations.

Furthermore, to effectively analyse the status quo of the social enterprise ecosystem in Myanmar and Thailand, we deemed it important to take account of multiple stakeholders' voices. Therefore, the second prong of the approach was to employ a focus group discussion method that allows participation from different stakeholders who are highly involved with the development of social enterprises in both countries. The objective of the focus-group discus-

sion was two-fold: to assess the current situation of social enterprises in Myanmar and Thailand and to identify opportunities and challenges faced by these organisations.

To achieve the above objectives, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were utilised in this study.

Primary data was collected through focus group discussions at each of the six partner universities who were chosen for their geographic location to ensure as complete coverage of the regional ecosystem landscape as possible. The Thai partners comprised Payap University (Northern Thailand), Prince of Songkla University (Southern Thailand), Burapha University (Central Thailand) and Mahasarakham University (Eastern Thailand). In Myanmar, the two partner universities comprised the University of Mandalay (Northern Myanmar) and the National Management Degree College (Central Myanmar). In total 42 participants from 35 different external stakeholders of social entrepreneurship in Myanmar and Thailand including government experts, enabling organisations, industrial associations, academics, and social entrepreneurs were involved in the focus group discussions (Table 1).

Table 1. University Focus Groups in Thailand and Myanmar

University Name/ Country	#	Stakeholder Organisation	Category of Ecosystem Actor
Burapha University (BUU) / Thailand	7	• Department of Industrial Promotion, Ministry of Industry • Agarwood Farmer Group • Takhiantia Community Enterprise • Thai Beverage, Learm Singha Local Smile Community • Chantaburarak (SE) Co., Ltd	• Government • Social Enterprise • Social Enterprise • Enabler • Social Enterprise
Mahasarakham University (MSU) / Thailand	9	• Mahasarakham Provincial Agricultural Agency • University Industry Cooperation Center (UIC-MSU) • Mahasarakham Provincial Agricultural Extension office • Krenid Healthy Snacks • Khaeila Banana Flour • Evergreen Food • Indigo Phesanai	• Government • Education • Government • Entrepreneur • Entrepreneur • Entrepreneur • Entrepreneur
Payap University (PYU) / Thailand	6	• Buddy Homecare • Ban Dek Foundation • STEP CMU	• Social Enterprise • Social Enterprise • Education
Prince of Songkla University (PSU) / Thailand	6	• Office of Agricultural Extension and Development • Songkhla Provincial Agriculture and Cooperatives Office • Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives • SME Development Bank of Thailand (HatYai Branch) • Student Entrepreneur Development Academy (P-SEDA), PSU Science Park • Business Incubation Centre (PSUBIC) • Farmer Market Manager	• Government • Government • Funder • Funder • Education • Education • Social Enterprise
National Management Degree College (NMDC) / Myanmar	7	• Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department, Yangon • Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs' Association • Social Enterprise Development Association Myanmar • Dana Facility Myanmar • YK Collection • Myanmar Youth Empowerment Opportunities	• Government • Enabler • Enabler • Social Enterprise • Social Enterprise • Education

University Name/ Country	#	Stakeholder Organisation	Category of Ecosystem Actor
University of Mandalay (UM) / Myanmar	7	• Mandalay Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry • Myanmar Coffee Group Co. Ltd. • Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, • Nature Myanmar (Palm Leaf Tableware) • Cooperative University, Sagain • Proximity Designs Social Business • United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	• Government • Enabler • Government • Social Enterprise • Education • Social Enterprise • Enabler

The above participants were chosen based on agreed upon the following selection criteria:

1. Should have experience within the field of social enterprise/social business/social entrepreneurship
2. Should be stakeholders within the social enterprise ecosystem

Qualitative data was gathered from pre-arranged questions and discussion points to gather the participants' opinions, attitudes, and ideas on social entrepreneurship in Myanmar and Thailand. The focus group moderators were all given an interview guide to ensure consistency and to mitigate some of the known issues surrounding focus group discussions such as disagreements and irrelevant discussion which can distract from the main focus of the research.

The focus group discussion was comprised of four sections:

Section 1: Definition

A common presentation was developed to ensure consistency around an agreed definition of social entrepreneurship. As part of the development of this research report, the STEPUP project consortium partners agreed on the following definition of social entrepreneurship to be used. "Social Entrepreneurship is the process of applying innovative business models to address social problems (for people and communities) by generating both profit and purpose. Social Entrepreneurship creates long-term value and achieves sustainable impact for society and the connected ecosystem."

Section 2: Online Survey

Participants were then asked to complete an online survey to generate quantitative data on the participants' perceptions of the state of social enterprises in both countries. The survey was based on questions taken from a 2019 study conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2019) which surveyed 45 of the world's biggest economies as ranked by the World Bank to find out which countries are creating the best environment for social entrepreneurs. The online survey asked respondents to rate the following 12 statements based on common challenges social business face: The questions are shown below and focus on 6 key areas (government support, sector attractiveness to skilled staff, availability of financing, public understanding, social entrepreneur's ability to make a living and the sector's momentum as a whole). A total of 55 respondents completed the survey.

1. Conditions are favourable for social entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses in Myanmar/Thailand
2. Government policy supports social entrepreneurs in Myanmar/Thailand
3. It is easy for social entrepreneurs to get grant funding in Myanmar/Thailand
4. It is easy for social entrepreneurs to access investment (debt and/or equity) in Myanmar/ Thailand

5. Social entrepreneurs can access the non-financial support they need (e.g. financial, legal and technical advice; access to markets and networks; coaching, mentoring and training) in Myanmar/Thailand
6. It is easy for social entrepreneurs to sell to the government in Myanmar/Thailand
7. It is easy for social entrepreneurs to sell to business in Myanmar/Thailand
8. It is easy for social entrepreneurs to sell to the public in Myanmar/Thailand
9. It is easy for social entrepreneurs to attract staff with the required skills in Myanmar/Thailand
10. The public in Myanmar/Thailand understands what social entrepreneurs do
11. Social entrepreneurs can make a living from their work in Myanmar/Thailand
12. Social entrepreneurship is gaining momentum in Myanmar/Thailand

Section 3: Analysis

Participants were asked to jointly develop a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of their region/country in terms of their view of the state of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Section 4: Recommendations

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis and the aspects discussed in the previous sections, participants were asked to discuss and answer the following questions:
1. What is important to be developed in your region/country in order to promote Social Entrepreneurship?
2. What is urgent to be developed in your region/country to increase the impact of Social Entrepreneurs / Social Enterprises?
3. Who are the most important stakeholders that can help in developing the social enterprise ecosystem?
4. What past efforts in social entrepreneurship have been made in the region/country?
5. Did these efforts have any economic, social and/or environmental positive impacts in your region/country?
6. Are there any current government policies, regulations or initiatives that promote social enterprise in the region/country?
7. At a local, provincial, or national level, are there any private initiatives that promote social enterprise in the region/country?
8. At a local, provincial, or national level, are there any planned (public/private) initiatives that you´re aware of? This refers to initiatives that are not implemented yet but are planned to be designed/developed.
9. What are the sources of funding that are available to social enterprises? either public or private.
In summary the overall process of collecting and collating all of the above primary and secondary data required for the comparison of the ecosystems in Thailand and Myanmar followed the below research methodology:
1. A literature review of available online and offline literature
2. Six focus groups with a set of guidelines to ensure comparability of the data generated.
3. A questionnaire to gather data on the focus group participants' perceptions of the state of social enterprises in both Thailand and Myanmar.

4. Institutional Status-quo reports that included typologies of social enterprises, key actors, regulatory environment, impact measuring and common challenges.
5. Two country reports (Thailand and Myanmar) collated from step 4, to provide an overall view of the state of Social Entrepreneurship in those countries.
6. The country reports were then compared by the research team to firstly summarise the state of social entrepreneurship in Thailand and Myanmar and secondly to highlight the similarities and differences between the two ecosystems using a GAP analysis.
7. Based on the above findings, the research provides recommendations to higher educational institutions and policy makers on possible capacity-building activities.

4. Findings and Discussions

Survey

The results from the survey on attitudes towards the ecosystem environments in Thailand and Myanmar are presented below.

The opinions of the respondents in both Myanmar and Thailand were mainly positive (70% and 57% respectively) with regard to the conditions social entrepreneurs face when starting and growing their enterprises (Figure 1). However, given the economic and political situation in Myanmar, it is to be expected that 14% of respondents had a negative outlook versus only 5% for Thailand.
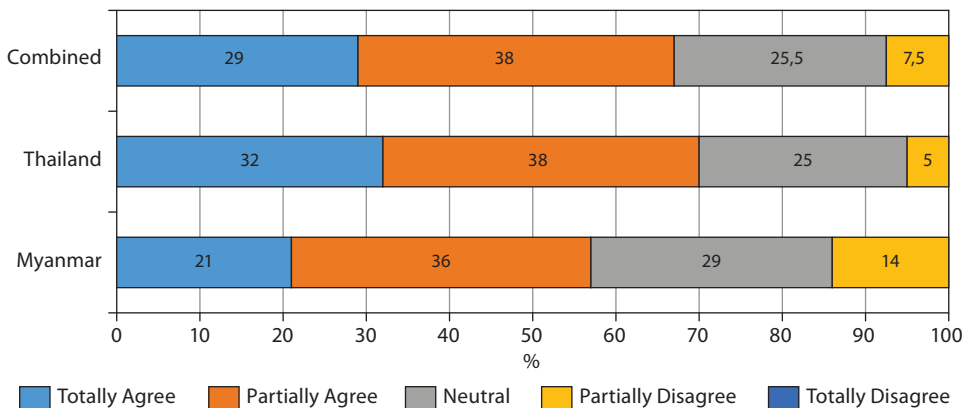
Figure 1. Opinions about favourable conditions for social entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses in Myanmar and Thailand

Respondents in Myanmar had a very different opinion from those in Thailand on the statement regarding government support (Figure 2) for social enterprises with 79% either totally or partially disagreeing as opposed to Thailand, where 72% totally or partially agree. This could be since Thailand has a government agency, the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion (OSEP) charged with developing the ecosystem while Myanmar does not.
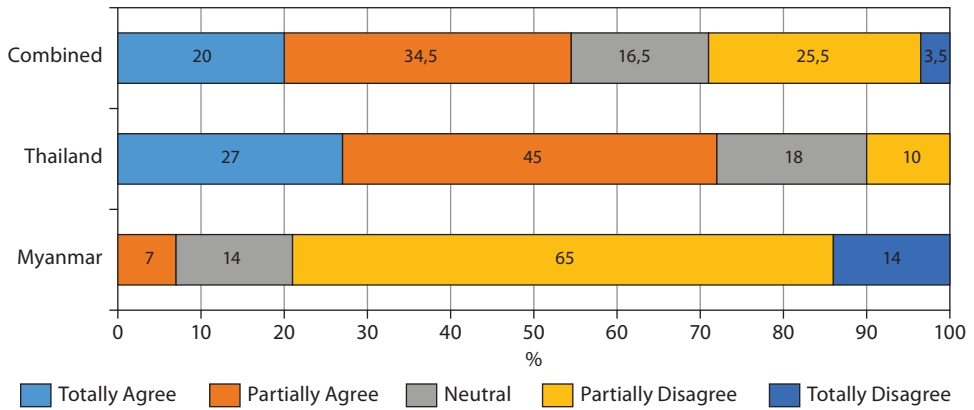
Figure 2. Opinions about government policy supporting social entrepreneurs in Myanmar and Thailand

Given the more mature nature of Thailand's national social enterprise ecosystem, it is to be expected that 43% of the Thai respondents had a favourable opinion to this statement on access to grant funding (Figure 3) compared to only 14% in Myanmar.
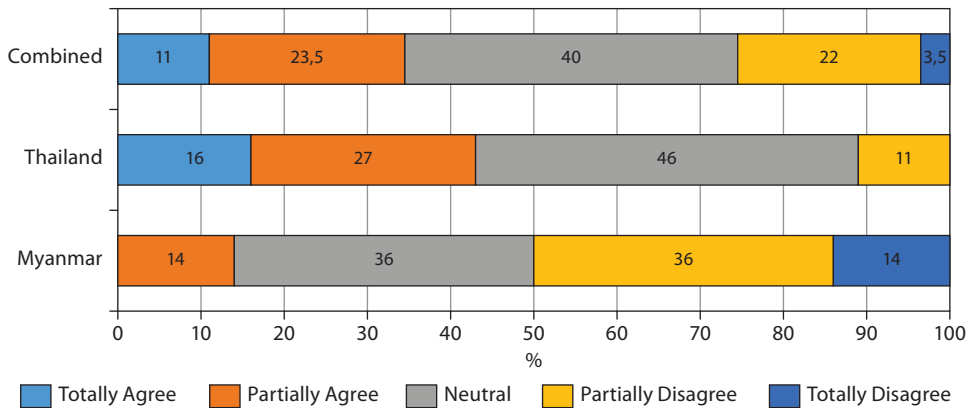

Figure 3. Opinions about easiness for social entrepreneurs to get grant funding in Myanmar and Thailand

As with the previous statement on grant funding, respondents in Thailand (45%) had a more favourable opinion of access to investment funding (Figure 4) as opposed to just 14% in Myanmar. This difference can possibly be explained by the fact that Thailand has a more developed and regulated financial market.
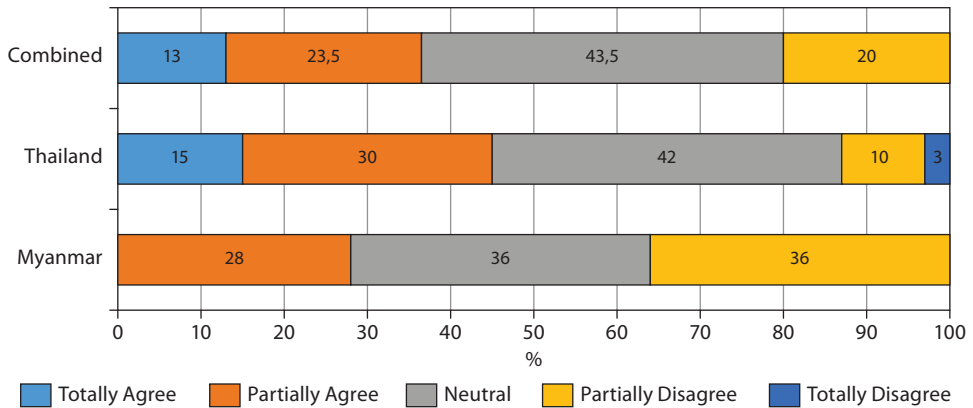
Figure 4. Opinions about the easiness of for social entrepreneurs to access investment in Myanmar and Thailand (debt and/or equity)

Overall, respondents in both countries had a neutral opinion (51%) of this statement regarding access to non-financial support for social enterprises (Figure 5). However, Thai respondents still had a more positive outlook with 45% either totally or partially agreeing while in Myanmar it was only 21%.
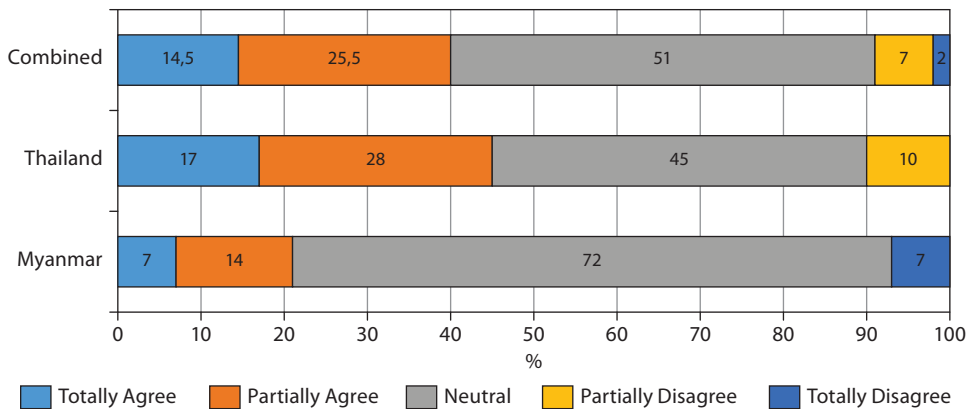

Figure 5. Opinions about social entrepreneurs' possibility to access the non-financial support

In terms of the ease of social enterprises selling to their governments on B2G contracts (Figure 6), no respondents in Myanmar agreed with the statement and the vast majority either totally or partially disagreed (78%). Thai respondents had a very different outlook with 34% either totally or partially agreeing and over half (53%) remaining neutral. With the OSEP charged with developing the ecosystem as well as the Thai government's long-standing focus on community enterprises through the OTOP program (One Village, One Product), there are many opportunities for Thai social enterprises.
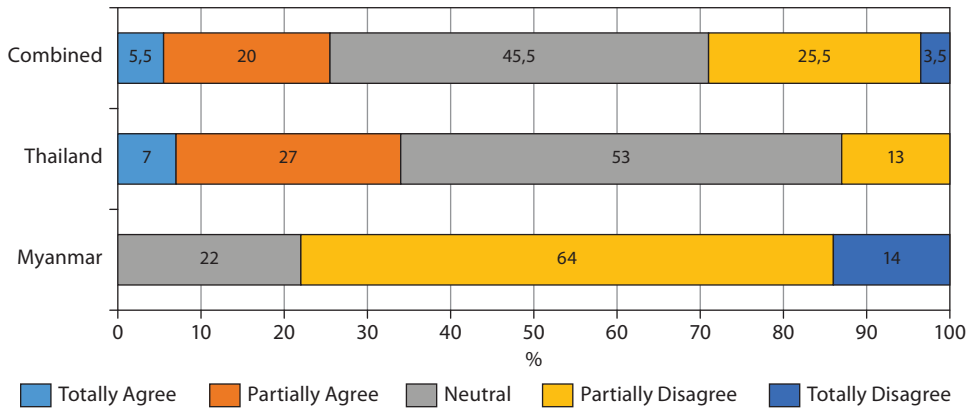
Figure 6. Opinions about the ease for social entrepreneurs to sell to the government in Myanmar and Thailand

The results of this statement on selling to other businesses (Figure 7) are not too dissimilar from Thailand to Myanmar with many respondents choosing neutral. However, Thai respondents were more favourable overall with 45% compared to 28% in Myanmar.
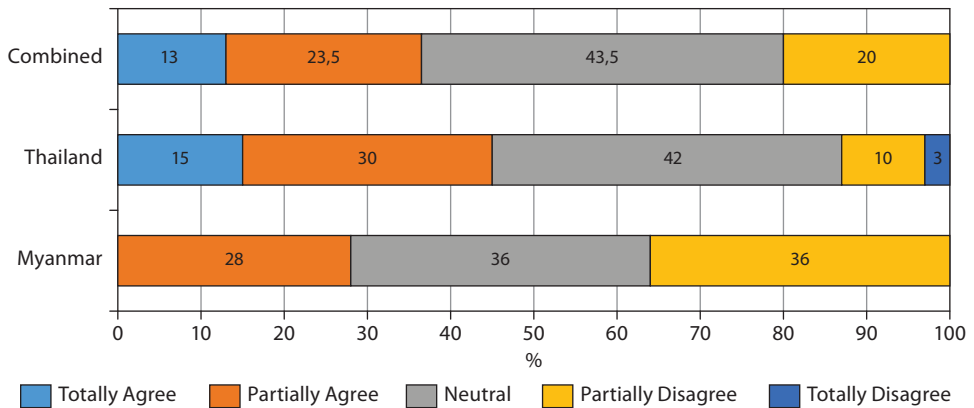

Figure 7. Opinions about the ease for social entrepreneurs to sell to businesses in Myanmar and Thailand

In both Thailand and Myanmar around a 1/3 of respondents choose neutral when reflecting on the ease for social enterprises selling to the public (Figure 8). However, while 47% of respondents in Thailand either totally or partially agreed with the statement, only 28% did in Myanmar. This may be due to the longer history of social enterprises in Thailand and other government policies that have promoted community enterprises.
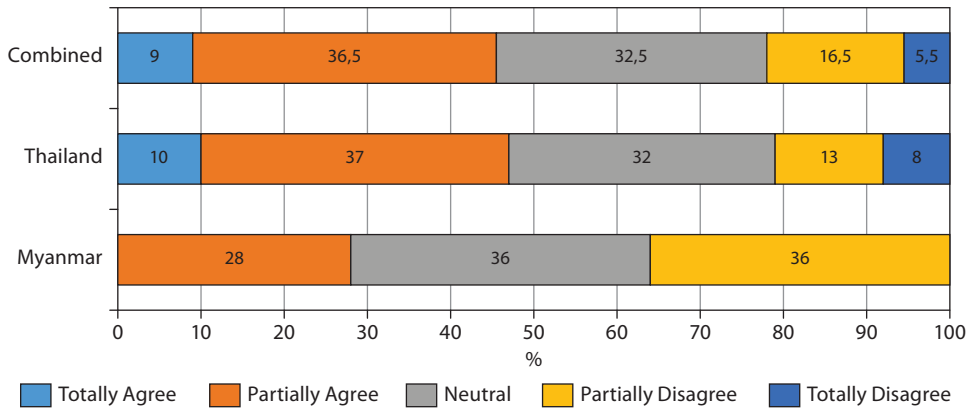
Figure 8. Easiness for social entrepreneurs to sell to the public in Myanmar and Thailand

Respondents in both Myanmar and Thailand had a less positive outlook on the availability of skilled staff in their countries (Figure 9) with 79% in Myanmar and 60% in Thailand answering either neutral or partially disagree. This may well be related to the fact that many social enterprises are linked to non-profit community-based and grassroots organisations which traditionally have not focused on income generation activities.
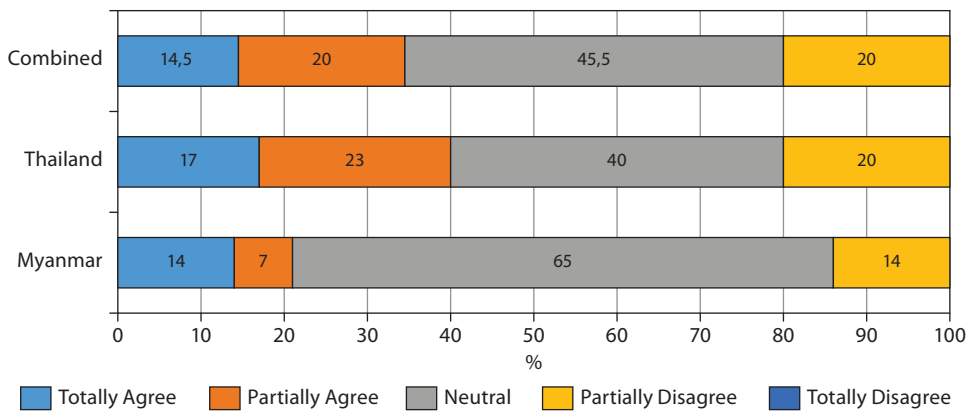
Figure 9. Attracting staff with the required skills in Myanmar and Thailand by social entrepreneurs

From the responses to the statement regarding the public's understanding of what social entrepreneurs do (Figure 10), it seems that there is a need for more effective communication, especially in Myanmar, where most respondents (57%) answered either partially or totally disagree.
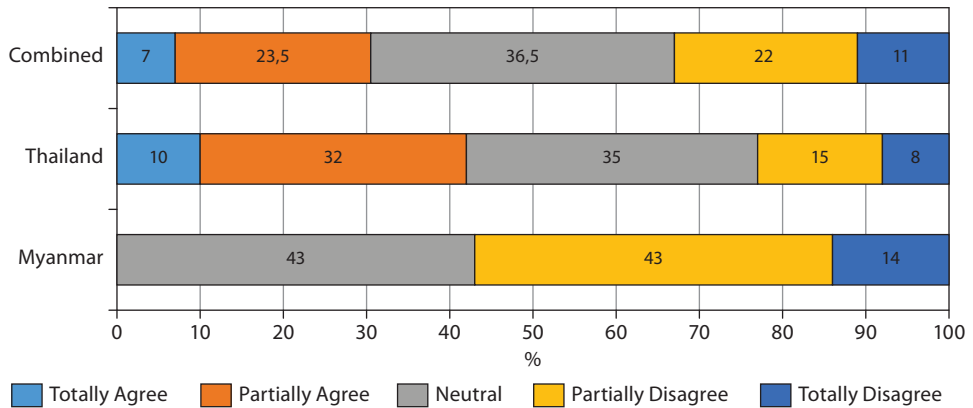
Figure 10. Opinions about the general public understanding of what social entrepreneurs do in Myanmar and Thailand

The answers to this statement regarding the ability of social entrepreneurs to make a living from running a social enterprise (Figure 11) were overall positive. 64% of respondents in Myanmar and 52% in Thailand either partially or totally agreed with the statement. with no one totally disagreeing and only 11% combined expressing partial disagreement.
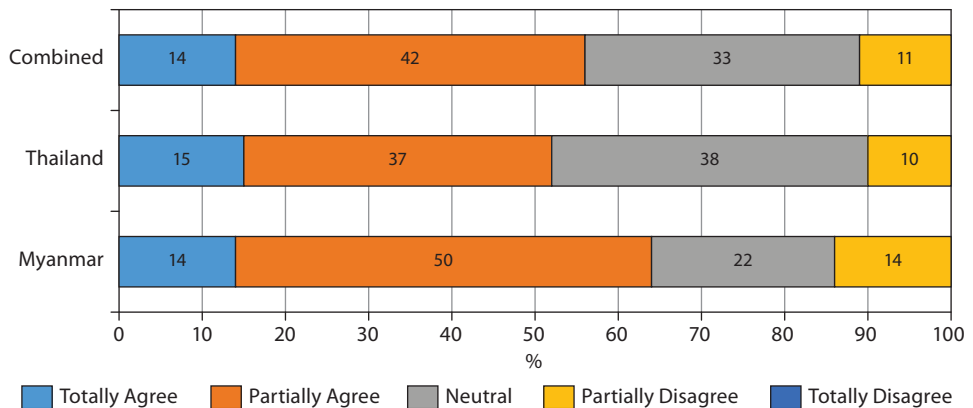

Figure 11. Opinions about the possibility of social entrepreneurs making a living from their work in Myanmar and Thailand

Overall, the answers to the statement on social entrepreneurs being able to make a living from their work (Figure 12) were positive (70%). However, in Myanmar, just 43% agreed with the statement. As mentioned already, this seems to reflect the different stages of development of both ecosystems.
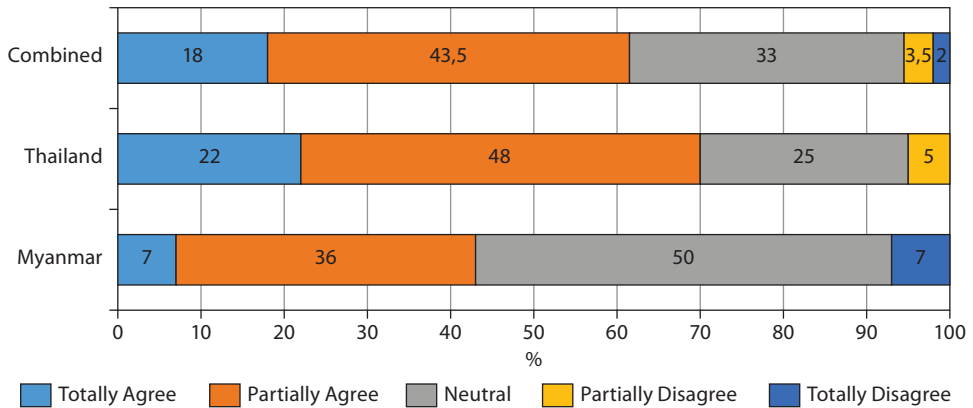
Figure 12. Opinions about the gaining momentum by social entrepreneurship in Myanmar and Thailand

As can be seen from the above survey results, there was general agreement (Either agreeing to the statements of feeling neutral) among the participants that the conditions in both countries are favourable for social entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses and that the social entrepreneurship movement is gaining momentum. However, there remain significant challenges such as access to funding (Q.3 and 4)), skilled workforce (Q.9), support ecosystem (Q.5) and a clear understanding of what social enterprises are among the general population who make up SEs target customers and beneficiaries (Q.10).

Focus Group Discussion

Each of the group discussions at the six partner universities developed their own SWOT analysis. These were then collated in two country SWOT reports which the researchers then analysed for common issues and developed the following common SWOT analysis of the social entrepreneurship sectors in Thailand and Myanmar was developed using the institutional and country reported data.

As can be seen from the above SWOT Analysis, there exist many areas within the two ecosystems that are viewed as strengths and opportunities by participants from both countries including the role SEs already play in community development, innovation and creativity among the new generation of social entrepreneurs, a developing social entrepreneurship educational sector as well changes in customer buying behaviours, benefits from government policy focusing on attaining the SDGs and an increasing awareness of stakeholder capitalism and responsibility of "big business".

However, these strengths and opportunities are potentially being undermined by a general lack of understanding of SEs even within ecosystem actors limited business knowledge and skills within the social entrepreneur community, especially those linked to NGOs or foundations, and a concentration of networks and supporting actors in the major cities (Bangkok/ Yangon) of both countries.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis

Strengths (Common to Both Countries)	Weaknesses (Common to Both Countries)
• Social enterprises already play an important role in community development • Availability of distinctive and unique raw products and natural resources • Innovation and creativity among new generation of social entrepreneurs • Developing social entrepreneurship educational sector	• Lack of understanding outside the SE ecosystem of the role of social enterprise (e.g. CSR vs. SE) • Differing definitions of SE at the local, regional, or country level • Limited business knowledge and skills within the social entrepreneur community, especially those linked to NGOs or foundations • Limited product development know-how • "Mission Drift" and related conflict when NGO/Foundation transition to social enterprise business • Lack of transparency in financial management • Limited capability to access available funding (cost/skills/knowledge) • Often products sold by SE lack quality standardisation (pity-buy) • Limited measurement of social impact • Concentration of networks and supporting actors in major cities (Bangkok/Yangon)
Opportunities (Common to Both Countries)	Threats (Common to Both Countries)
• Change in customers buying behaviours as a result of Covid-19 (more online purchasing, etc.) • Cooperation/exchange with global social entrepreneurship projects/partners • Promotion of value adding through story-telling and product/service uniqueness • Government policy to attain the SDG's may lead to a larger role for SEs • Increasing awareness of Stakeholder capitalism and responsibility of "big business"	• Difficulty to obtain information about government support (policies, rules and regulations for SEs are unclear) • Multistep and complicated loan approval process (condition requirement/guarantee system/risk assurance) • Lack of an integrated collaboration between public sector agencies • Covid-19 pandemic and resultant loss of income for SEs (especially in a related industry such as tourism) • There is no appropriate skilled workforce

From the results of the Social Entrepreneurship survey, SWOT analysis, Focus Group Discussions and Literature Review, the key common challenges facing the social entrepreneurship ecosystems in Myanmar and Thailand can be summarised as follows:

1. In both the primary and secondary research outcomes, a lack of required skill sets by both the social entrepreneurs and business founders, as well as employees, is seen as a major cause for concern. Many of these social entrepreneurs come from the non-for-profit arena and do not always have background business knowledge in finance, marketing, product development and human resource management.

2. Funding for Social Enterprises is either limited or somewhat difficult to access, takes up significant resources to apply for and manage and comes with conditions that are not always in line with the founding entrepreneurs' vision or philosophy. Crowdfunding can be a valuable channel for social enterprises to raise capital in a far more innovative and cost-effective way, especially for those enterprises distant from metropolitan areas. Although there are already crowd-funding portals available (taejai.com in Thailand and kiva.org internationally), many Social Enterprises are either unaware of them or feel they lack the digital skills and knowledge to use them.

3. It is difficult for social entrepreneurs to obtain information about government support (policies, rules and regulations for Social Enterprises are unclear) and there is a lack of integrated collaboration between public sector agencies
4. There is a lack of understanding outside the Social Enterprise ecosystem of the role of social enterprise and the differentiation between their work and that of corporate social responsibility initiatives. There is also a lack of a common understanding of what exactly a Social Enterprise is. Even in the case of Thailand, which has a legal definition as part of the Social Enterprise Act 2019, there are different working definitions within the ecosystem actors and at the local, regional, or country level.
5. Many social enterprises in Myanmar and Thailand currently have no specific framework in place to measure their impact. Reasons given for this have included the lack of time and resources as well as a lack of knowledge to implement impact assessment.
6. The major social ecosystem actors in both Thailand and Myanmar are concentrated in the main cities of Bangkok and Yangon respectively and the majority of support services, training programs, incubators and accelerator programs are based there. This concentration means that there is a lack of support for regional social enterprises who cannot access these services.

5. Conclusions

Our research was aimed at identifying the common challenges that social enterprises in Thailand and Myanmar face and so provide policy recommendations to higher education institutions wishing to engage and support their local social enterprise ecosystems.

To address the challenges presented in this research paper, we recommend the following actions be undertaken by Higher Education Actors involved in supporting the development of social enterprise ecosystems in both countries.

*   Higher Education Institutions, especially those located in secondary cities and provincial areas in both Thailand and Myanmar should develop resource hubs for social enterprise practitioners and engage stakeholders from all sectors to tackle social issues. This can be achieved by facilitating interactions across various sectors such as policy makers, practitioners, academia, funders, and the public to promote and support social enterprises and other positive social impact initiatives.
*   Higher Education Institutions need to develop new and innovative programs, courses and degrees that will link students with social enterprise actors through internships, work-placement, cooperative education, etc.
*   Higher Education Institutions should offer capacity-building activities in the form of workshops, seminars and programs that utilise tools such as the Social Business Model Canvas, the Value Proposition Canvas, Theory of Change and Social Return on Investment, etc., to develop both the skills of the entrepreneurs and also aid in the viability of the social enterprise itself through a rigorous framework of business feasibility study. Moreover, to ensure the sustainability of the social enterprises, these capacity-building activities need to be continuous, and involve long-term coaching and mentoring of the participants. In addition, a train-the-trainer program should be developed to ensure a multiplier effect and to increase the number of participants able to benefit from the training.
*   Higher Education Institutions also need to serve as champions of the sector by raising awareness with the public, government agencies and the business world of both the idea

of social enterprise and the potential solutions social entrepreneurs can develop to address the challenges societies face in Myanmar and Thailand.

In light of our findings on the challenges these two social entrepreneurship ecosystems face, further research of some of these issues seems worthwhile. We identified a general lack of skills among practitioners, but more work needs to be done on the specific skills required in order to better understand the types of capacity-building training HEIs can offer. In addition, there is still sparse information on the overall level of involvement of Thai and Myanmar HEIs in the provision of degree programs, specific courses or short programs related to the development of future social entrepreneurs. Having a more complete picture of current or future educational offerings by these HEIs will support the development of future programs.

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Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

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Published by Cracow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland