



YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM IN THAILAND: ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Phalinrada Authaisa

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,
Mahasarakham Buddhist College, Mahasarakham, Thailand
Author Corresponding Email: phalinrada.aut@mcu.ac.th

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Abstract: This paper explores the significance of youth volunteerism in Thailand and its role in promoting social change. Through case studies of youth-led initiatives, such as environmental conservation projects, education programs, and digital activism, the paper highlights the impact of volunteerism on community development and personal growth. The benefits of youth volunteerism include the enhancement of leadership skills, civic engagement, and sustainable development efforts. The paper also discusses the challenges faced by youth volunteers, such as limited resources and balancing academic responsibilities, and proposes strategies for expanding youth volunteerism through educational support, digital platforms, and leadership training.

Keywords: Youth volunteerism, social change, civic engagement, community development, leadership skills

1.Introduction

Volunteerism refers to the voluntary engagement of individuals in activities aimed at improving their communities and society at large, often without financial compensation. In Thai society, the concept of volunteerism is deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions, particularly through the influence of Buddhism. The Buddhist practice of "merit-making" (การทำบุญ), which involves doing good deeds for others, is a central tenet that has fostered a spirit of volunteerism in Thailand for generations (Swearer, 2010). This cultural foundation has made volunteerism a significant aspect of Thai community life, particularly in rural areas where people often come together to support temples, schools, and local initiatives.

Globally, there has been a growing trend in youth volunteerism, with young people increasingly participating in community service and social activism. This global shift is mirrored in Thailand, where Thai youth are becoming more involved in volunteer activities, particularly through school-based programs and non-



governmental organizations (NGOs). The rise of social media has also played a crucial role in mobilizing youth for volunteerism, as it provides platforms for raising awareness and organizing community projects (Bennett, 2012). Youth volunteerism in Thailand has been particularly impactful in addressing social issues such as environmental conservation, education, and poverty alleviation.

The role of youth in social change and community development is increasingly recognized as vital. In Thailand, young people are seen not only as beneficiaries of social programs but also as active agents of change. Youth volunteers contribute to community building by engaging in activities that foster social cohesion, promote sustainability, and address the needs of marginalized groups. Their energy, creativity, and willingness to take initiative make them valuable assets in shaping a more equitable and sustainable society (Rossi, 2011). As a result, youth volunteerism has emerged as a powerful tool for both personal development and broader societal transformation in Thailand.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of youth volunteerism in Thailand, focusing on how it contributes to social development and community well-being. Specifically, the paper aims to examine the ways in which volunteerism fosters social engagement and leadership among Thai youth. By highlighting successful youth volunteer initiatives and analyzing their outcomes, the paper seeks to understand the broader implications of youth involvement in volunteer work for Thai society. Additionally, the paper will assess how volunteerism provides opportunities for personal growth, allowing young people to develop skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

Moreover, the paper will examine the challenges and opportunities that exist in promoting youth volunteerism, particularly in the context of modern Thailand. By addressing the barriers to participation, such as lack of resources or accessibility, the paper aims to offer solutions that can enhance the role of youth in community service and social change. Through this exploration, the paper will underscore the importance of fostering a culture of volunteerism among young people, not only as a means of addressing immediate social issues but also as a way of developing responsible and engaged citizens.

Youth volunteerism in Thailand is a key driver of social change, offering opportunities for personal growth, community development, and fostering civic responsibility among young people. By engaging in volunteer activities, Thai youth not only contribute to addressing pressing social issues but also cultivate skills and values that prepare them for leadership roles in their communities. As Thailand continues to face challenges related to inequality, environmental degradation, and social cohesion, empowering the next generation through volunteerism is essential for building a more just and sustainable future.



2. The Role of Volunteerism in Thai Society

2.1 Historical and Cultural Perspectives on Volunteerism

In Thailand, volunteerism has deep historical and cultural roots, primarily driven by the influence of Buddhism and traditional social values. Temple activities (e.g., organizing festivals, assisting monks, and maintaining temple grounds) have long been a central form of community engagement and voluntary service. Many Thais believe that supporting the community, particularly through temple-related volunteerism, brings merit (บุญ), an essential component of Buddhist practice (Swearer, 2010). This sense of duty toward others, especially within one's community, is reinforced by Thai cultural values that emphasize collective responsibility and social harmony (Mulder, 2000).

Volunteerism has traditionally been informal, with families and individuals contributing their time and resources to support local projects, help neighbors in need, or respond to emergencies. In rural Thailand, the concept of reciprocity (ช่วยกัน) underscores volunteerism; when a person offers their help, it is understood that the community will support them in return. This has fostered a culture where volunteerism is seen not as an extraordinary act but as an integral part of community life (Rajadhon, 1961).

2.2 Volunteerism as a Tool for Social Development

Volunteerism in Thailand has evolved into a critical tool for social development, addressing a wide range of issues such as poverty, education, and environmental conservation. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a significant role in formalizing volunteer activities and engaging both local and international volunteers in efforts to uplift marginalized communities. For example, NGOs have initiated programs focused on improving rural education by organizing volunteer teachers and establishing community learning centers (DeJaeghere, 2009).

The Thai government has also recognized the potential of volunteerism to support national development goals. Various government initiatives, such as the Village Volunteer Program, encourage local citizens to engage in community service, promoting health, education, and disaster preparedness (Simpson, 2006). These efforts highlight how volunteerism is leveraged as a means of addressing socio-economic disparities, improving infrastructure, and fostering sustainable development.

Moreover, volunteerism is instrumental in addressing environmental challenges in Thailand. Programs led by both NGOs and government agencies, such as reforestation projects and community-led waste management initiatives, rely heavily on volunteer efforts to combat environmental degradation. Volunteers, particularly youth, have been central to these initiatives, helping raise awareness about sustainability and mobilizing communities to take action.

2.3 The Rise of Youth Volunteerism

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the participation of Thai youth in volunteer activities, reflecting a global trend of younger generations becoming more socially conscious and engaged. Youth volunteerism in Thailand is often driven by a desire to contribute to social change, develop leadership skills, and create a positive impact on their communities. Educational institutions, particularly universities, play a crucial role in promoting volunteerism among young people by incorporating community service programs into their curricula and encouraging participation in extracurricular volunteer activities (DeJaeghere & Tamang, 2011).

The rise of social media and digital platforms has further amplified youth volunteerism. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have been instrumental in mobilizing youth for various causes, from organizing charity events to launching environmental campaigns. These platforms allow young people to quickly disseminate information, rally support, and coordinate volunteer efforts across different regions (Bennett, 2012). The accessibility and reach of digital tools have made it easier for youth to engage in volunteerism, whether through online fundraising, virtual volunteering, or on-the-ground activities.

As a result, youth volunteerism has become a powerful force in addressing social issues in Thailand, from raising awareness about climate change to supporting community development projects. Youth are increasingly seen as agents of change, capable of contributing innovative solutions to longstanding challenges and shaping the future of their communities.

3. Motivations for Youth Volunteerism

3.1 Personal Growth and Development

For many Thai youth, personal growth is a significant motivation for engaging in volunteer activities. Volunteering provides opportunities to develop crucial leadership skills, as young people often take on responsibilities that require them to manage projects, coordinate teams, and lead initiatives. These experiences not only build confidence but also help youth acquire communication and problem-solving abilities that are essential in both their personal and professional lives (Astin & Sax, 1998). Volunteering exposes young people to real-world challenges, teaching them how to navigate complex social issues and work collaboratively to find solutions.

In addition to leadership and skill development, volunteerism plays a central role in shaping young people's identities and values. Through volunteer experiences, youth often gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in society. By engaging with diverse communities and tackling various social issues, they cultivate a sense of empathy, responsibility, and commitment to the common good (Yates &



Youniss, 1999). These formative experiences can significantly influence young people's career choices, their engagement with civic duties, and their long-term involvement in social activism.

3.2 Social and Cultural Influences

Social and cultural influences also play a critical role in motivating youth volunteerism in Thailand. Family and community expectations often encourage young people to participate in volunteer activities, as volunteerism is seen as an integral part of contributing to the well-being of society. In many Thai families, especially in rural areas, there is a strong tradition of helping one's community, and young people are expected to follow this cultural norm. This sense of collective responsibility fosters a culture where volunteerism is a shared value (Rajadhon, 1961).

The influence of peers, schools, and universities is another key driver of youth volunteerism. Educational institutions often promote volunteerism through community service programs, extracurricular activities, and university-run volunteer organizations. These programs not only provide structured opportunities for youth to engage in volunteerism but also create a supportive environment where students encourage one another to participate. Peer influence plays a significant role, as young people are more likely to engage in volunteer work if they see their friends and classmates actively participating in such activities (Feldman et al., 2015). Additionally, university programs often tie volunteerism to academic credit or scholarships, further incentivizing participation.

3.3 Altruism and Civic Responsibility

Altruism and a sense of civic responsibility are strong motivators for Thai youth to engage in volunteer work. Many young people feel a deep-rooted sense of duty to contribute to the betterment of their society, and this sense of obligation is often informed by Buddhist teachings. In Thailand, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of merit-making (การทำบุญ), which encourages individuals to perform good deeds to accumulate merit for spiritual and personal benefits. Volunteering is seen as one of the many ways to make merit, and this religious belief significantly influences the motivations of Thai youth to give back to their communities (Swearer, 2010).

Moreover, youth in Thailand often view volunteerism as a way to contribute to societal well-being and address the needs of marginalized communities. Whether it's helping to alleviate poverty, support education, or participate in environmental conservation efforts, young people feel a moral obligation to act. This sense of civic duty is further reinforced by civic education programs in schools that promote the idea of active citizenship, encouraging youth to engage in activities that contribute to the greater good (Glanville, 1999).



4. The Impact of Youth Volunteerism on Social Change

4.1 Addressing Community Needs

Youth volunteerism in Thailand has played a critical role in addressing community needs, particularly in marginalized and underserved areas. Many youth-led volunteer initiatives have made a significant impact on various social issues, such as improving rural education, organizing environmental clean-ups, and supporting healthcare in remote regions. For example, student groups from universities often travel to rural provinces to establish educational programs for children, focusing on literacy, basic math, and life skills. These programs have helped bridge the educational gap for children in areas with limited access to quality schooling (DeJaeghere & Tamang, 2011).

Additionally, youth volunteer efforts have been central to environmental conservation initiatives. In collaboration with local NGOs, youth volunteers have organized community-based projects such as beach clean-ups, reforestation efforts, and waste reduction campaigns. These initiatives not only address immediate environmental issues but also raise awareness about the importance of sustainability within local communities (Simpson, 2006). Youth volunteerism also supports marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities and low-income families, by providing essential services such as food distribution, healthcare outreach, and housing support. Through these efforts, youth volunteers help to alleviate the challenges faced by these communities and empower them to improve their quality of life.

4.2 Promoting Civic Engagement

Youth volunteerism plays a pivotal role in promoting civic engagement by fostering a sense of civic responsibility and encouraging participation in democratic processes. Through volunteer activities, young people gain a deeper understanding of societal issues and develop a commitment to making positive changes in their communities. Volunteerism acts as a stepping stone for youth to become actively engaged in civic and political life, often inspiring them to participate in social movements and advocacy work.

For example, youth volunteers who are involved in environmental or human rights causes frequently become advocates for these issues, organizing campaigns, participating in protests, and engaging with policymakers. The hands-on experience gained through volunteer work gives them the skills and confidence to contribute to policy discussions and advocate for changes that benefit society as a whole (Bennett, 2012). Moreover, volunteerism encourages young people to engage with democratic processes, such as voting and community organizing, thereby fostering a generation of informed and active citizens who are committed to shaping their country's future.

4.3 Building Sustainable Communities

Youth volunteerism is increasingly recognized as a driving force for sustainable development projects, contributing to the creation of sustainable communities across Thailand. Many youth volunteer initiatives are focused on long-term development goals, such as environmental conservation, social enterprises, and community health projects. By participating in these efforts, young people not only contribute to addressing immediate community needs but also help lay the groundwork for future sustainability.

For instance, youth-led social enterprises that focus on economic development in rural areas have provided employment opportunities for local residents while promoting eco-friendly practices. These enterprises often involve producing goods using sustainable methods and reinvesting profits into the community for education, healthcare, or infrastructure development (DeJaeghere & Tamang, 2011). The long-term impact of these projects can be seen in the enhanced economic resilience of communities, improved environmental health, and the empowerment of local populations to continue pursuing sustainable practices.

In addition, youth volunteers play a crucial role in spreading awareness about sustainable living practices, such as reducing plastic use, conserving water, and supporting local agriculture. By engaging in sustained volunteer involvement, young people help build communities that are better equipped to face future challenges, from environmental degradation to economic instability. Their contributions to these causes demonstrate how youth volunteerism is essential for promoting both social equity and sustainable development.

5. Challenges Facing Youth Volunteerism in Thailand

5.1 Limited Resources and Support

One of the most significant challenges facing youth volunteerism in Thailand is the lack of resources and institutional support for volunteer programs. Many youth-led initiatives and community service projects struggle to secure the necessary funding to maintain their activities, limiting their ability to grow and sustain long-term impact. Volunteer programs often rely on small donations, ad-hoc fundraising, or personal contributions from volunteers themselves, which can restrict their scale and reach (Simpson, 2006).

Moreover, institutional support for youth volunteerism, particularly from schools, universities, and government agencies, is often insufficient. While there are some initiatives that promote volunteerism, many lack the infrastructure needed to provide consistent support for volunteer efforts. Without adequate resources, it is difficult for youth-led projects to invest in materials, transportation, and training, all



of which are essential for successful volunteerism. This resource scarcity presents a significant barrier to achieving long-term success and sustainability in volunteer efforts, especially in rural or marginalized communities where additional support is most needed.

5.2 Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessibility and inclusion are also major challenges that hinder the expansion of youth volunteerism in Thailand. Marginalized or rural youth, in particular, face significant barriers in accessing volunteer opportunities. Many volunteer initiatives are concentrated in urban areas, making it difficult for rural youth to participate due to transportation issues, lack of awareness, or limited outreach. Additionally, youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds may not have the time or financial resources to engage in volunteer work, especially when faced with family or work obligations (DeJaeghere & Tamang, 2011).

Inclusivity in volunteerism is another important issue. While volunteer programs aim to engage youth from diverse backgrounds, there are often barriers that prevent full representation of all groups. For instance, ethnic minority youth or those from disadvantaged backgrounds may feel excluded from mainstream volunteer opportunities due to language barriers, cultural differences, or perceptions of not "belonging" in these spaces. Ensuring that volunteer programs are inclusive and representative of all segments of society is crucial for creating equitable opportunities for all youth to engage in social change efforts.

5.3 Balancing Academic and Volunteer Responsibilities

For many Thai youth, balancing academic commitments with volunteer work is a considerable challenge. The pressures of succeeding in school, coupled with family responsibilities, often leave little time for volunteerism. Many students are hesitant to take on volunteer projects because they fear it will detract from their studies or impact their academic performance negatively. In some cases, students face pressure from their families to prioritize academics over extracurricular activities, further limiting their ability to participate in volunteer efforts (Yates & Youniss, 1999).

One solution to this challenge is the integration of service-learning programs into educational institutions. Service-learning combines volunteerism with structured learning outcomes, allowing students to earn academic credit while engaging in meaningful community service. These programs enable students to develop both academic and civic skills, offering a more balanced approach to managing education and volunteerism (Astin & Sax, 1998). By embedding volunteerism into the educational curriculum, students can participate in volunteer activities without sacrificing their academic responsibilities, fostering a deeper connection between learning and social engagement.



6. Strategies to Promote and Sustain Youth Volunteerism

6.1 Strengthening Educational and Institutional Support

One of the most effective strategies to promote and sustain youth volunteerism in Thailand is to integrate volunteerism into school and university curricula. By incorporating service-learning programs into educational institutions, students can earn academic credit while participating in meaningful volunteer activities that align with their studies. These programs not only help students develop civic responsibility but also enable them to apply their academic knowledge to real-world problems, fostering both personal growth and social awareness (Astin & Sax, 1998). In addition, extracurricular programs that promote volunteerism outside of the classroom can provide students with more flexible opportunities to engage in social service.

Collaboration between NGOs, schools, and universities is crucial for creating structured volunteer opportunities. Schools can partner with NGOs to identify community needs and organize volunteer initiatives that align with educational goals. Universities, in particular, can serve as hubs for volunteer activities, offering students access to resources, networks, and mentorship to help them plan and implement successful volunteer projects. These partnerships can help ensure that youth volunteerism is well-supported and sustainable over time, as both educational institutions and NGOs provide guidance and resources to facilitate ongoing volunteer efforts (DeJaeghere & Tamang, 2011).

6.2 Utilizing Social Media and Technology

In today's digital age, social media and technology are powerful tools for promoting youth volunteerism and increasing engagement. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can be used to raise awareness about volunteer initiatives, share success stories, and mobilize young people to take action. Social media allows organizations to reach a wider audience and provides a space for youth to connect with causes they are passionate about. Through online campaigns, volunteer programs can gain visibility, attract new participants, and build a sense of community among volunteers (Bennett, 2012).

Additionally, developing online volunteer platforms can make it easier for youth to find volunteer opportunities that match their interests and availability. These platforms can serve as a hub where NGOs, schools, and community groups post volunteer openings, and youth can sign up for causes that resonate with them. By making volunteerism more accessible and convenient through technology, organizations can tap into the potential of digitally engaged youth, encouraging more widespread participation in volunteer work.

6.3 Providing Training and Leadership Development



To ensure the success and sustainability of youth volunteerism, it is essential to provide leadership and project management training for youth volunteers. Many young people are eager to contribute to their communities but may lack the skills or experience to organize and manage volunteer initiatives effectively. Offering training programs that focus on leadership development, communication skills, and project planning can empower youth to take on more significant roles within their volunteer organizations, allowing them to lead projects, manage teams, and make a lasting impact (Astin & Sax, 1998).

Furthermore, establishing mentorship programs where experienced volunteers or professionals guide younger participants can be an invaluable resource. Mentors can offer advice, share their experiences, and help young volunteers navigate challenges in their projects. This kind of support not only enhances the effectiveness of volunteer initiatives but also fosters personal and professional growth for youth, preparing them for future leadership roles in both volunteerism and their careers (Simpson, 2006). By providing training and mentorship, organizations can cultivate a generation of skilled, motivated volunteers who are capable of driving social change.

7. Case Studies of Successful Youth Volunteer Programs

7.1 Case Study 1: Environmental Conservation Project

In one notable example of youth-led volunteerism, a group of university students in Thailand organized an environmental cleanup and reforestation project in a rural province severely impacted by deforestation and pollution. The project involved mobilizing local youth and community members to clear waste from natural areas, plant native tree species, and educate the community about sustainable environmental practices.

The long-term impact of the project was significant, not only in terms of restoring the local ecosystem but also in fostering a sense of environmental stewardship among the community. The reforestation efforts contributed to the restoration of local biodiversity and improved soil and water conservation, while the waste cleanup reduced pollution and improved public health. Additionally, by engaging local youth and community members in these activities, the project helped instill a sense of ownership over the environment, leading to sustained efforts to maintain the area's ecological health (Simpson, 2006).

7.2 Case Study 2: Education and Literacy Program

Another successful example of youth volunteerism in Thailand is an education and literacy program organized by a group of high school students in a rural village. The program was established to address the lack of resources and qualified teachers in the area, which had led to low literacy rates among children. The youth volunteers



organized after-school tutoring sessions for primary school students, focusing on reading, writing, and basic math skills.

Over time, the program yielded positive outcomes for students, who demonstrated marked improvements in their literacy levels and academic performance. Many students who participated in the program were able to transition to higher grades with greater ease and confidence. The program also evolved, expanding to include life skills workshops and career counseling for older students. This evolution was driven by the youth volunteers' ongoing commitment to addressing the educational needs of the community and their ability to adapt the program based on feedback from students and parents (DeJaeghere & Tamang, 2011).

7.3 Case Study 3: Social Media and Youth Mobilization

A third example of impactful youth volunteerism in Thailand involved a social media campaign to raise awareness about human trafficking and mobilize youth to take action. The campaign, led by a group of university students, utilized platforms like Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information about human trafficking, organize events, and promote volunteer opportunities with local NGOs working on the issue.

The campaign was highly successful, reaching thousands of young people across the country and encouraging them to participate in awareness-raising events such as marches, workshops, and online discussions. Through their use of digital platforms, the youth volunteers were able to amplify the impact of their initiative, bringing national attention to the issue of human trafficking and connecting young people with organizations where they could contribute their time and resources (Bennett, 2012). The campaign demonstrated how social media can be a powerful tool for mobilizing youth and creating meaningful social change.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Summary of Key Points

Youth volunteerism in Thailand plays a pivotal role in driving social change by addressing community needs, promoting civic engagement, and building sustainable communities. Through case studies of youth-led initiatives, such as environmental conservation projects, education and literacy programs, and social media-driven activism, it is evident that youth volunteers have a significant impact on both local and national levels. The benefits of engaging youth in volunteer activities extend beyond immediate community improvements, as volunteering also fosters personal growth, enhances leadership skills, and encourages a sense of civic responsibility.



among young people. Youth volunteerism helps cultivate a generation of leaders who are equipped to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

8.2 Future Outlook

The potential for expanding youth volunteerism in Thailand is vast, especially with increased support from educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the government. Integrating volunteerism into school and university curricula through service-learning programs, alongside the use of digital platforms to engage and mobilize youth, can help sustain and grow volunteer initiatives. Additionally, providing more resources, training, and mentorship for youth volunteers will empower them to take on leadership roles and continue driving social change. By fostering a culture of volunteerism, Thailand can ensure that future generations remain committed to addressing societal challenges and contributing to the development of a more equitable and sustainable nation.

8.3 Body of Knowledge

The body of knowledge surrounding youth volunteerism emphasizes its critical role in fostering personal growth, community development, and civic engagement. Research suggests that volunteerism not only helps youth develop leadership skills, communication abilities, and problem-solving capacities, but also shapes their identity and values, encouraging a commitment to social responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998). Additionally, youth volunteerism has been shown to promote social cohesion and address societal challenges, particularly in areas like education, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation (Simpson, 2006). In Thailand, youth volunteerism is deeply influenced by cultural values such as Buddhism's concept of merit-making, which motivates many young people to engage in community service (Swearer, 2010). Furthermore, technological advancements and the rise of social media have amplified the reach of volunteer initiatives, allowing youth to mobilize quickly for various causes and contribute to social change on a larger scale (Bennett, 2012). These findings highlight the importance of supporting and sustaining youth volunteerism through institutional frameworks, training, and mentorship, to maximize its potential in driving long-term social impact.

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