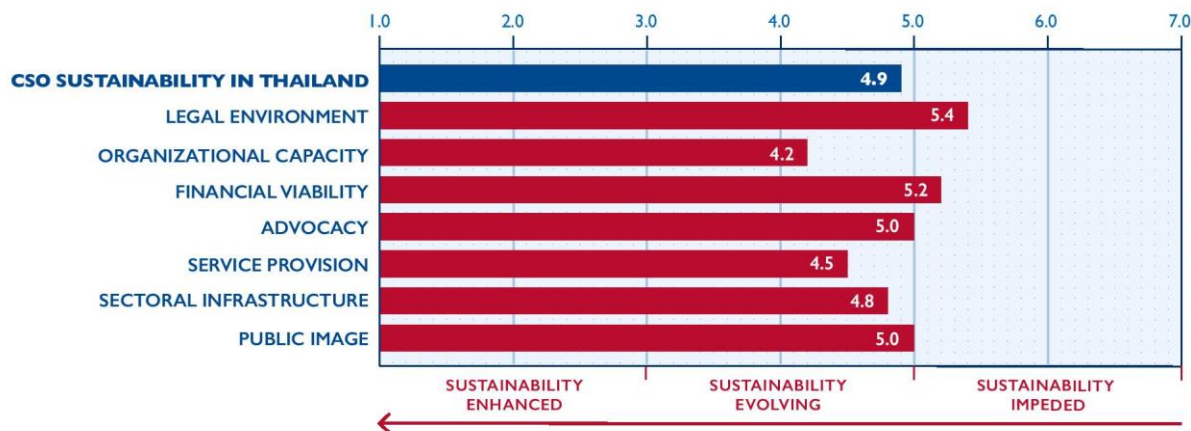


# THAILAND

Capital: Bangkok  
Population: 68,615,858  
GDP per capita (PPP): \$17,900  
Human Development Index: High (0.755)  
Freedom in the World: Not Free (31/100)

## OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.9



The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), a military junta, continued to rule Thailand in 2018, despite the commitment of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha to end the now four-year military rule. Section 44 of the 2014 interim constitution allows the prime minister to exercise absolute power without accountability or oversight. The 2017 constitution endorses the continuation of this power. General elections were scheduled for March 2019, fueling the emergence of new political parties, such as the Future Forward party and the Commons party, that are comprised of various civil society activists, academics, and younger people seeking to bring democracy back to Thailand.

Thailand achieved greater economic growth in 2018, with gross domestic product (GDP) increasing at a rate of 4.2 percent. This growth has been achieved largely through government-supported development projects that are in line with the twenty-year National Strategic Plan (2017-2036), which aims to improve Thailand's business environment and long-term economic performance. High levels of tourism in 2018 also contributed to economic growth and an increase in domestic private spending and investments.

The conflict in Thailand's Deep South between the insurgent group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) and the Thai authorities continued in 2018, although there were some promising developments. In February, the MARA Patani, a pro-dialogue umbrella organization uniting six insurgent groups, nearly reached an agreement with Thai authorities on a ceasefire zone, but the Thai authorities ultimately refused to conclude the agreement. In October, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir and Thai Prime Minister Chan-o-cha held discussions on increasing their cooperation on security issues such as terrorism, extremism, and transnational crime, and Mahathir committed to help end the violence in the South. According to news sources, in November BRN stated it had "slowed down its military operations as it is pursuing the political way."

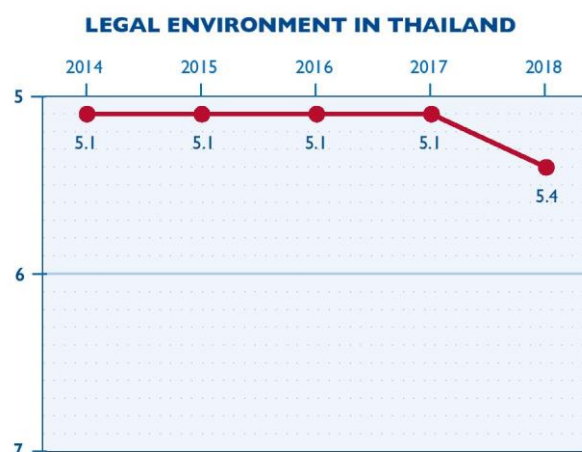
The ongoing political issues undermined CSOs' ability to operate in 2018. The government suspected some CSOs of being part of the separatist movement in the Deep South because they were led by Malay Patani people and are focused on issues such as torture and peace talks, and therefore subjected them to heavy surveillance. For example, military officers visited human rights defenders who reported human rights abuses and state violence in the Deep South. Human rights defenders also faced criminal charges in 2018. For example, a former human rights specialist at CSO Fortify Rights was criminally charged for sharing on social media the organization's film about fourteen migrant employees who reported labor rights abuses by Thammakaset Company.

CSO sustainability in Thailand deteriorated in 2018, with declines noted in all dimensions. The legal environment was especially challenging—state harassment dramatically increased and CSOs continued to experience barriers to registration. CSOs had less access to funding, which also resulted in a deterioration in their organizational capacity, with most CSOs struggling to retain staff. The diminished financial and human resources, together with increased state harassment and NCPO obstruction of CSOs' activities, also led to a deterioration in service provision. CSOs' ability to engage in effective advocacy decreased as the NCPO largely operated without transparency and

obstructed numerous advocacy campaigns. Sectoral infrastructure weakened as intermediary support organizations (ISOs) and CSO resource centers struggled to offer services that CSOs could afford. Finally, the government’s efforts to monitor media and prosecute those who spread information that is critical of the government reduced CSOs’ media coverage, resulting in a weaker public image.

Thailand’s CSO sector includes various types of organizations, both registered and unregistered. Foundations are the most common type. In addition, there are international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), associations, clubs, social enterprises, community-based organizations (CBOs), and grassroots movements. The CSO sector works on a wide range of issues including land tenure, community rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, women’s empowerment, and labor rights. In addition, many CSOs aim to enhance the rights and welfare of various vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, peasants and farmers, migrant workers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons, sex workers, people living with HIV, persons with disabilities, children, and the elderly. There is no reliable data on the number of registered or unregistered CSOs in Thailand in 2018. However, according to a report by the Ministry of Interior covering the period between October 1, 2016 and March 31, 2017, there were approximately 27,000 foundations and associations operating in the country.

## LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 5.4



Thailand remained under military rule in 2018, and Section 44 of the 2014 interim constitution, the 2017 constitution, and NCPO Orders continued to limit the ability of CSOs to operate.

An increasing number of human rights activists, journalists, and other members of civil society were harassed, charged, and imprisoned under various legal provisions in 2018. A number of laws and regulations are used to restrict civil liberties. NCPO Order No. 3/2015 on the Maintenance of Public Order and National Security allows “peacekeeping officers” to search and detain individuals up to seven days without a warrant and prohibits political gatherings of more than five persons. The Computer Crime Act (CCA) authorizes the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society to order the removal of

“false content” online, which often includes information that criticizes the junta or monarchy. The Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the State of Emergency authorizes warrantless detention for more than thirty days and prohibits the publication and distribution of information that may cause panic. Other laws used to restrict civil liberties include the Public Assembly Act, Penal Code Section 116 on sedition, and Criminal Code Section 326-333 governing defamation. In 2018, 400 charges were brought against over 260 persons under these laws. In January 2018, for example, sixteen people protesting against the construction of a coal-fired power plant in Thepa, Songkhla province were charged under the Public Assembly Act, and in May, the police detained leaders of a pro-democracy, anti-junta protest under NCPO Order 3/2015. The high number of charged persons is attributed to the increased number of pro-democracy protests and calls for elections by civil society actors.

In view of the upcoming elections in March 2019, the government decriminalized the political assembly of more than five persons through NCPO Order No. 22/2561 in December 2018. However, the order also stipulates that “it does not impact the prosecution of cases, proceedings, or actions according to the announcements and orders carried out prior to the nullifications made by it,” which indicates that prosecutions initiated prior to NCPO Order 22/2561 will continue.

Lèse majesté, defined as insulting, threatening, or defaming a member of the Thai monarchy, continues to be a crime under Section 112 of the criminal code. However, King Vajiralongkorn has instructed the Chief Justice and the Attorney General to bring an end to prosecutions invoking Section 112 and to not allow it to be used as a political tool. No new cases of lèse majesté were prosecuted in 2018, and several ongoing cases were dismissed. Despite this promising development, other laws such as Penal Code Section 116 and the CCA continued to be used to punish criticism of the monarchy.

Companies also used the law to suppress human rights activists through long and expensive judicial processes. For instance, in October 2018, Thammakaset Company, a Thai-owned poultry farm in Lopburi Province, filed criminal defamation charges against a former Burmese migrant employee for speaking out against labor abuses. The company also brought thirteen criminal and civil cases against fourteen migrant workers and human rights defenders who denounced its labor practices.

INGOs working on human rights were especially impacted by Thailand's restrictive legal environment and were vulnerable to harassment. INGO staff members—both foreign and local—report that the government views them as threats to peace, public order, and/or national security, and as foreign representatives. Several foreign employees working for INGOs were denied work permits or were heavily questioned by immigration officials.

Media organizations were also subjected to state harassment in 2018. For example, media channel Peace TV and talk programs Tonight Thailand and Wake Up News were temporarily shut down and forced off the air due to non-compliance with laws and regulations which prohibit the spread of information critical of the military government and the monarchy.

Laws governing CSO registration are not implemented in accordance with their provisions. According to the law, a CSO may register as a foundation with the Ministry of Interior if it works for the public benefit; its board of directors includes at least three Thai nationals; it provides a bank statement with a balance of at least 200,000 Thai Baht (about \$6,000); and it does not contradict the law, good morals, or national security. However, even when these requirements are met, CSOs can experience difficulties. Registration officials often reject CSOs in Southern Thailand because they perceive organizational names as “misleading.” Rejected organizational names include the Malay word Patani, which refers to the Muslim Malay minority in the South and which registration officials associate with the separatist movement. Registration is also often denied to CSOs working on human rights issues. For example, Amnesty International's Regional Office was unable to register with the Ministry of Labor during the year, reportedly because Thai board members of Amnesty International Thailand, which is registered as a local CSO, are perceived as political activists.

Laws do not directly limit the scope of CSOs' activities; however, CSOs' activities are restricted through the enforcement of the laws mentioned previously that impact assembly and expression. In addition, according to the Civil and Commercial Code, CSOs can be inspected at any time, and government officials are authorized to enter offices and request documents to examine whether CSOs' operations comply with laws and regulations. In 2018, the government increased its monitoring of CSOs working on issues such as peace and natural resources. CSOs operating in Southern Thailand and working on politically sensitive issues such as peace, land, and natural resources prefer not to register in order to avoid inspections by state authorities. According to the Civil and Commercial Code Section 131, the government can dissolve a CSO if its operations are considered to be against public morals or a threat to public order or national security.

In July 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Bill on Social Enterprises Promotion, which was then submitted to the National Legislative Assembly (NLA). Once approved by the NLA, the Bill must be signed by the King and published in the Government Gazette to become law. The Bill will govern social enterprises, as well as businesses, foundations, and associations focusing on community development, social and environmental issues, and narrowing the income gap. Under the Bill, the government plans to establish a fund to promote social enterprises. Individuals investing in social enterprises will also receive tax deductions on their invested amounts.

Registered CSOs are able to apply for tax-exempt status; however, most CSOs are unfamiliar with the process. Under the Revenue Code, individuals and corporations that donate to foundations and associations can receive tax deductions, at a maximum of 10 percent of income for individuals and 2 percent for corporations.

CSOs are allowed to accept funds from domestic and foreign donors, engage in fundraising campaigns, and earn income. If a foundation makes a profit, the profit is taxed at a rate of 1 percent.

Legal assistance for CSOs is lacking, although demand for it is high. Pro bono lawyers mainly operate in cities, making it especially difficult for CSOs in rural areas to access legal help.

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## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.2

The organizational capacity of CSOs decreased slightly in 2018 as CSOs faced increased difficulty retaining human resources.

Due to the NCPO's restrictive activity in rural areas, some CSOs struggle to build strong relationships with their beneficiaries. For example, in the Deep South, the government strictly monitors organizations, causing local communities to avoid collaborating with them.

CSOs in both Northern and Southern Thailand working on the rights of indigenous peoples have close relationships and trust with their constituencies, enabling them to better understand and effectively address their constituencies' needs. Most grassroots organizations and environmental defenders act to address the challenges, needs, and demands of their beneficiaries, which are often villagers or rural communities.

Most CSOs have clear mission statements, but only a few have the capacity to develop strategic plans and they often experience challenges in implementing them. Due to a lack of resources, CSOs often depend on project-based grants and follow donor requirements rather than their own strategic plans to guide their work.

In 2018, various CSOs in Northern, Northeastern, and Southern Thailand experienced increased staff turnover and difficulty maintaining personnel due to declines in funding. For example, as a result of funding difficulties, volunteers comprised 80 percent of the staff of a network of twenty-one CSOs in the South, compared to 70 to 75 percent in previous years; the network preferred to remain unnamed. Because volunteers often make a poor living on the side and the work for CSOs in the South is challenging both physically and mentally, they often quit to earn income elsewhere. The mental health of staff has also declined, causing staff to resign and thereby impacting CSOs' organizational capacity. This issue is especially prevalent among small CSOs with limited resources in which staff members tend to hold multiple positions. On the other hand, INGOs in Thailand have sufficient core funding and staff. In addition, they often have adequate human resources practices and can utilize professional services.

Most national and local CSOs also lack internal management structures. Many CSOs, especially CBOs and grassroots movements, do not have human resources and accounting systems in place.

Most CSOs, both in urban and rural areas, have internet access and use it in their work to some extent. Larger CSOs with more resources have greater access to information and communications technologies (ICT) and have offices and computers, whereas grassroots organizations use personal mobile phones to communicate with others in their networks through apps such as Facebook and LINE. In 2018, the availability of technology for CSOs increased as companies like Microsoft and Oracle offered free tools and services to CSOs as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. However, most CSOs, especially those outside of Bangkok, are unaware of these initiatives.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN THAILAND



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## FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.2

The financial viability of CSOs in Thailand declined slightly in 2018 as CSOs experienced increased difficulty in accessing funding and therefore had fewer resources to assist communities in need. This challenge was especially acute for CSOs in rural areas with limited resources and staff capacity to identify funding opportunities. For example, staff of the Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand had difficulty understanding and completing donor forms.

Since Thailand moved from a lower-middle income to an upper-middle income country in 2011, foreign donors have shifted their priorities to poorer countries. Thai CSOs thus are more dependent on domestic sources of funding, which were difficult to access in 2018.



Various ministries provide funding to CSOs. For example, in 2018 the Ministry of Culture awarded funding to ten CSOs for cultural projects, such as music for the blind and awareness-raising of the monarchy's cultural value. In general, however, the Thai government appeared hesitant to fund CSOs in 2018. After the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth), a major donor to many CSOs working on health-related issues, misappropriated government funds in 2015, the government froze its funding for CSOs. In 2018, the government resumed funding CSOs, but imposed more rules and regulations on CSOs receiving such funds, particularly through ThaiHealth. In addition, in contrast to previous years, the government did not provide ThaiHealth with funds from the 2 percent tax on alcohol and tobacco in 2018. There is no system to evaluate

CSOs' effectiveness in implementing government-funded projects.

Furthermore, in 2018, the government threatened CSOs and their supporters over funding, something that had not been experienced in previous years. For example, police and military officers threatened to reduce the budget of a university in Northeastern Thailand if it collaborated with CSOs, and they warned lecturers and students not to engage in protests and political activities. The increased threats over funding are linked to the government's view that certain CSO activities—such as protesting development projects and demanding multi-stakeholder approaches and impact assessments before implementing projects—conflict with economic development and national security.

CSOs also experienced increased difficulty accessing foreign funding in 2018. Major foreign donors in Thailand include USAID, the Canadian Embassy through its Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), the British Embassy through its Magna Carta Fund, and the Embassy of Japan. Japanese assistance under the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) Scheme significantly declined in 2018. The GPP Scheme supported four projects worth 8 million Thai Baht (about \$255,000) in 2018, compared to eight projects worth 19 million Thai Baht (about \$606,000) in 2017. CBOs in rural areas face special challenges, including a language barrier as donors typically correspond in English. Furthermore, CSOs working on sensitive issues such as reproductive health and LGBTI rights have noted a flux in support from foreign countries depending on different administrations.

According to AIDSPAN, an independent watchdog of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund), the Global Fund provided \$38 million to the Ministry of Health and the Raks Thai Foundation for Thailand's HIV funding requests for 2018 to 2020; some of the funds received by Raks Thai Foundation will be distributed to local CSOs. Although Thailand had planned to fully transition to domestic funding for HIV-related projects by 2017, various stakeholders expressed concern that domestic funding was insufficient and that the government sought to deny HIV prevention services to key populations, especially homosexual men.

CSOs continue to struggle to raise funds from the public. Based on their Buddhist beliefs and the negative image of CSOs as adversaries of the State, Thai people prefer to donate to temples instead of CSOs. Some corporations have partnered with CSOs as part of their CSR initiatives, but such partnerships remain challenging due to conflicting approaches and working strategies. Furthermore, many companies seem to conduct CSR initiatives to enhance their reputations through philanthropic initiatives rather than to achieve social or environmental change through meaningful engagement with CSOs.

CSOs in Thailand also try to generate their own resources. Although fundraising is permitted, in June 2018, an INGO decided to shut down its fundraising campaign because of reactions on social media containing hate speech and threats to its staff. Besides fundraising, CBOs in Northeastern, Northern, and Southern Thailand—particularly those comprised of indigenous groups and informal workers—sell items, such as clothing and textiles. While democracy activists in Southern Thailand have established small businesses to generate income, they often lack the knowledge and experience required to run successful businesses. In 2018, earned income among CSOs increased slightly as more organizations began to establish social enterprises.

Generally, CSOs do not have financial management systems in place. In particular, small CSOs, CBOs, and grassroots movements lack accounting systems and procurement guidelines. Most of them only employ basic bookkeeping, which they generally maintain on paper rather than electronically.

## ADVOCACY: 5.0

CSOs' capacity to carry out effective advocacy decreased in 2018. The NCPO increasingly operated without transparency, making high-level decisions without public consultations. In 2018, the Thai government passed at least sixty-five laws, including NCPO Orders; of those, only nine draft laws were presented for public hearings and consultations. For example, laws concerning politically sensitive issues, such as the Eastern Special Zone Development Act B.E. 2561 (2018) which focuses on economic development, were not open to public participation.

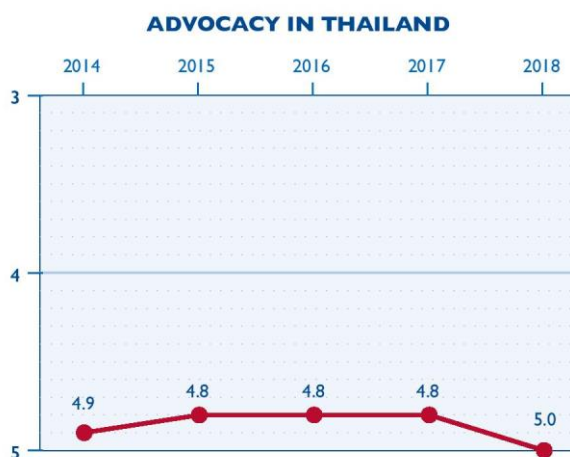
Even when public hearings are organized to gather public input on draft legislation or policies, CSOs report that their comments and recommendations are not incorporated into the final versions. In 2017, for example, the government, in collaboration with Manushya Foundation, held four regional dialogues to consult with local communities to ensure that the National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights (BHR) would address their needs. However, the government did not incorporate the recommendations provided during these dialogues into the final NAP in 2018, which fueled doubts on the extent to which the recommendations were genuinely considered.

Government actions often directly discourage CSO advocacy. In January 2018, a group of activists organized the We Walk campaign, in which protesters marched 450 kilometers from Bangkok to Khon Kaen to raise awareness of the negative effects of the NCPO's rules and regulations on land tenure, food sovereignty, and health, and to demand public participation in policy making and respect for human rights. Security officers tried to stop the march, and eight protesters were charged under NCPO Order No. 3/2015, which prohibits political gatherings of more than five persons. In May 2018, authorities prevented around 100 members of P-Move grassroots network from joining a peaceful protest in Bangkok by halting their buses at checkpoints. In addition, three P-Move leaders were arrested.

CSO input often conflicts with government interests. While CSOs aim to enhance public participation and human rights, government priorities are often focused on maintaining control and national security and enhancing economic growth. For example, in the case of the coal-fired power plant in Songkhla Province, the government prioritized economic growth over the rights of communities living in the area. Only supporters of the plant were engaged in the environmental impact assessment for the project, and the community at large was not informed of the negative impacts the power plant could have on their livelihoods and the environment. The Songkhla-Pattani Network against the Thepa Plant complained about the flawed process to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) and organized a hunger strike to demand the shutdown of the plant. These efforts initially appeared successful as the Ministry of Energy signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the network in February 2018, in which it promised to undertake a new environmental impact assessment. In March, however, the Ministry of Energy signed a contradictory MOU with supporters of the power plant, the Songkhla Residents for Sustainable Development, promising to stick to the findings of the older assessment.

Despite these obstacles, CSOs continue to carry out advocacy campaigns to shape the public agenda. Various campaigns in 2018 aimed to stop or delay government-supported development projects and to call for elections. In general, these campaigns and movements are organized informally and led by grassroots and local CSOs.

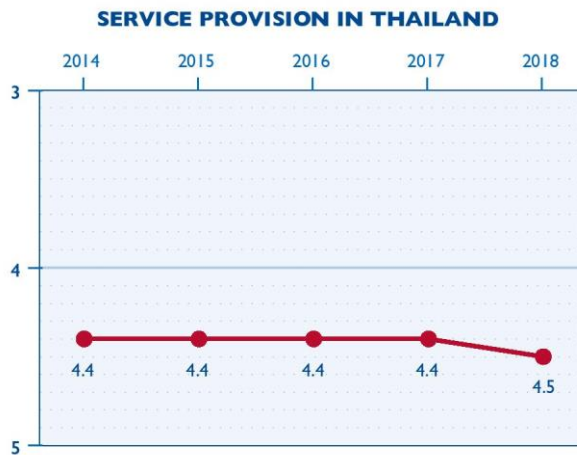
Social media has made engaging in advocacy somewhat easier, but the effectiveness of social media for advocacy is impeded by government monitoring of social media and laws such as the CCA that empower the government to deem any negative or critical information as "false information." For example, in February 2018, a human rights



activist was charged under the CCA, Section 14(1), for demanding free and fair elections in a Facebook post. Media channels and political opposition parties are also monitored under this provision. In April 2018, a local magazine editor was charged for publishing an image of ancient kings wearing face masks to highlight the problem of air pollution, and in September, two members of the Future Forward Party, an opposition party, were charged for spreading “false information” about the military. NCPO Orders No 97/2014 and No 103/2014 also prohibit media outlets and individuals both on traditional and social media from distributing information regarded as “malice,” “false information,” or with an “aim to discredit” the junta.

In general, CSOs do not lobby for the reform of specific CSO laws. In the current environment, CSOs fear that any such efforts could make the situation for CSOs more difficult.

## SERVICE PROVISION: 4.5



In 2018, CSO service provision worsened slightly. Due to decreased funding, CSOs struggled to maintain the expertise, capacity, and resources required to respond to the needs and priorities of their beneficiaries. In addition, even though the government recognizes the important role of CSOs in service provision, in practice the government obstructed the delivery of CSO services.

CSOs in Thailand offer a wide variety of services. These include shelters for victims of domestic violence; access to safe abortion; health facilities for sex workers; advancement of the rights of LGBTI persons, indigenous peoples, and migrant workers; emergency relief; community empowerment; legal assistance; human rights advocacy and education; research; and capacity building. CSO services mostly respond to the needs and priorities

of communities, such as the adverse effects of development projects on communities; land tenure issues; discrimination against the LGBTI community; and human rights abuses of migrant workers. For example, the CSO Migrant Workers Federation aims to build a coalition of groups and individuals to enhance migrant workers’ rights, and provides migrant workers with free legal counsel, education on labor rights, and information on the Thai judicial system.

However, CSOs often do not have the required expertise, capacity, and resources to fully address their beneficiaries’ problems. In July and August 2018, in Chayaphum Province in the Northeastern part of Thailand, the Court of First Instance found fourteen land rights defenders guilty of trespassing and destroying a National Park area, even though they rightfully owned the land and lived in the area before it was declared a National Park area. Accordingly, the villagers required legal assistance and financial resources. However, the organization supporting them, the Isaan Land Reform Network, did not have the needed expertise or resources. In other cases, CSOs cannot effectively respond to beneficiaries’ needs because CSO personnel are subject to harassment, especially in the Deep South. For example, in 2018, military officers harassed CSO personnel in Southern Thailand working on peace and natural resources through arrests, surveillance, detention in “re-education” camps, and judicial harassment. As a result, CSO employees sometimes hesitate to assist community members.

Furthermore, CSO services are not always equally accessible by all. For example, women in rural areas might need to travel several hundred kilometers to access clinics that provide safe abortions discreetly, as abortion remains illegal in Thailand. Lastly, as CSO work in Thailand is challenging and activists are exposed to many risks, activists have experienced declining mental health, decreasing the effectiveness of service delivery. For example, in 2018, LGBTI activists reported feeling suicidal, due to society’s judgments about their identity and activism, and the lack of access to mental health treatment.

Services are typically funded by donors, and CBOs and grassroots movements are funded by larger local CSOs through sub-granting schemes. CSOs mostly provide their services free of charge as their beneficiaries are generally community members with little income and are unable to pay for such services.

Even though the government recognizes the important role of CSOs in service provision and has requested more CSO participation in national development projects as laid out in the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021), in practice there is limited government recognition of and support for CSOs. Depending on their thematic areas, the government often perceives CSOs as opponents. For example, in Northeastern Thailand, the government obstructed the work of CSOs assisting communities facing adverse impacts of government-supported development projects; and in Northern Thailand, CSOs working on community rights have been subject to increased restrictions from the NCPO. In both cases, service delivery has been reduced as a result.

## SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.8

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector weakened in 2018.

Only a few CSO resource centers and ISOs—such as NEEDeed and Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI)—operate in Thailand. In 2018, CSO resource centers and ISOs offered more technical support and trainings. In addition, companies provided free capacity-building activities as part of their CSR initiatives. For example, Microsoft and Oracle provide free products and licenses to CSOs, though few CSOs are aware of these opportunities. However, CSO resource centers and companies still only have the capacity to support a small portion of CSOs in Thailand. For example, in 2018 NEEDeed was able to assist only five to ten CSOs, most of which were located in

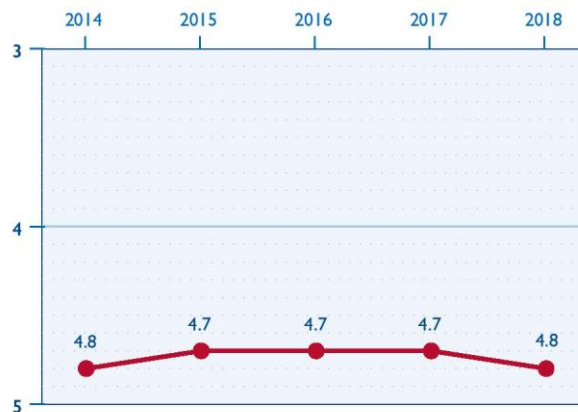
Bangkok, in part because it faced challenges offering its services at an affordable price. Many Thai CSOs, especially those located outside of urban areas, do not know about the existence of or have access to ISOs and CSO resource centers. For example, according to CSOs working on community and land rights in Southern and Northern Thailand, there are no ISOs and CSO resource centers in their areas. CSOs also receive some support from other CSOs. However, this support is limited and only covers specific topics, such as conducting internal monitoring and evaluation, or fulfilling reporting requirements to donors.

CSOs have access to trainings provided by local scholars, lawyers, partner organizations, and other experts covering various topics such as capacity building, leadership, advocacy, human resources, and legal knowledge. However, these trainings mostly take place in Bangkok and are fee-based. Therefore, mainly Bangkok-based CSOs with sufficient funding benefit from these trainings. CBOs in Northeastern Thailand have difficulty attending trainings in distant locations as many CSO members face travel restrictions or are monitored, intimidated, and harassed by the government through judicial means and house visits.

In order to support local and grassroots organizations, various CSOs in Thailand sub-grant funds received from international donors. In 2018, Manushya Foundation provided 3.8 million Thai Baht (about \$121,000)—sourced from various donors such as the embassies of Canada and the United Kingdom and Internews — to several marginalized communities.

CSO networks remained the principal channel of CSO support and in 2018, various intersectional and inclusive CSO networks were established or became newly active. For example, the Thai BHR Network was established in 2017 but became active in 2018. This network includes human rights defenders, researchers, academics, community leaders, and CSOs that aim to ensure that communities are central to government policies with respect to business and human rights. The We Fair Welfare Network, established in 2018, consists of thirteen health-related organizations that aim to reduce wealth and social inequality through the promotion of progressive policies to reform the welfare system. In other parts of Thailand, CSOs collaborated less prior to the national election. For example, in Northern Thailand, CSOs were not united in 2018 due to political conflicts between CSOs and community members who supported the government and those who opposed the government.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN THAILAND

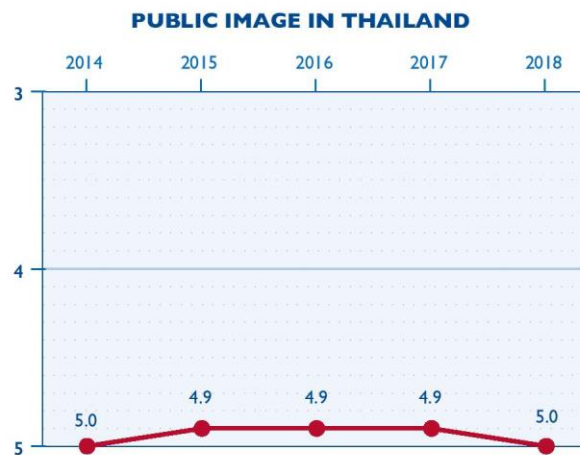




There are coalitions around peacebuilding, but many cannot engage openly. The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a regional organization working on peacebuilding in Southeast Asia, including in Thailand's Deep South. Local CSOs working with the Minority Rights Group International also undertake projects contributing to peacebuilding.

In 2018, CSOs engaged in multisectoral partnerships. For instance, corporations partnered with CSOs as part of their CSR initiatives, and the government aims to involve CSOs in national development plans. In 2018, Charoen Pokphand Foods PLC and the Labor Rights Promotion Network Foundation established the Labor Voice joint project, which aims to improve migrant workers' quality of life, prevent unfair labor practices, and promote awareness of Thai labor law protections among migrant workers. As part of the project, 960 migrant workers were trained on labor regulations and welfare. The partnership will continue in 2019, and a Labor Voices Hotline will be set up to promote fair labor practices within Charoen Pokphand Foods. Nevertheless, multisectoral partnerships remain challenging due to conflicting understanding of fundamental concepts, practical approaches, and working strategies. Corporations hold the economic power and perceive themselves as facilitators and decision makers in projects, while CSOs believe that corporations should not interfere in projects, even though they are providing the funding. Furthermore, companies often seem to engage in CSR initiatives to improve their public image rather than support the activities of CSOs. Therefore, CSOs treat funding from corporations with suspicion.

## PUBLIC IMAGE: 5.0



The public image of CSOs worsened in 2018. As more human rights defenders were charged under restrictive laws in 2018, journalists increasingly self-censored and the media provided less coverage of CSOs out of fear that the government would also consider them as opponents. In Northern and Southern Thailand, the media has been unwilling to cover the concerns of indigenous communities. On the other hand, CSOs in Southern Thailand in Songkhla province working on community and land rights are the main sources of information for media channels.

In 2018, the government discredited human rights activists in the media several times. For example, in October, Thailand's Army Chief stated that people who criticize the monarchy may be thrown into mental

asylums instead of prison. He noted that "insult and disrespect mostly comes from people who have mental disorders."

The perceptions of the public, businesses, and the government towards CSOs vary greatly depending on the nature of CSOs' work. Welfare-based CSOs, such as those providing assistance to persons with disabilities, children, and women, generally have positive perceptions. On the other hand, CSOs focused on politically sensitive issues, such as assistance to communities affected by government-backed development projects, are viewed as disruptive or even threats to national security. Businesses in particular disfavor CSOs that advocate against business activities that may have harmed communities. In Southern Thailand, however, the public perceives such CSOs positively because they directly help communities. With few exceptions, the government generally perceives CSOs as adversaries, and staff working with some INGOs are even perceived as "enemies of the nation." Moreover, such organizations have received messages from Thai citizens containing hate speech and threats on their social media page. In 2018, a CSO promoting legal abortion also received negative comments on its website.

In 2018, CSOs made various efforts to promote their image and activities. For example, indigenous women's groups have promoted their image and raised public awareness of their issues and activities through Indigenous Voices in Asia, a media showcase. Further, abortion clinics began to promote their activities and image through their websites. CSOs also have developed relationships with journalists based on the issues they cover. However,

due to media self-censorship, journalists are often extra cautious about the information they report. Given the self-censorship of traditional media, CSOs increasingly use social media to promote and implement their work.

CSOs abide by internal codes of conduct or core values that are drafted during the establishment of their organizations. However, most CSOs, especially those working on politically sensitive issues, do not take steps to be transparent in their operations, as this would increase their risk of government monitoring and restriction. CSOs also typically do not produce annual reports, as most lack sufficient resources and staff.

***Disclaimer:*** *The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.*