



## From the Past to the Future: a Milestone of Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University in Sustainable University

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**Abstract.** This paper presents a milestone of Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University in sustainability. The university was founded in 1954 with the concept of Village College. The purposes of the establishment were to provide educational opportunities for students and to solve the lack of teachers in distant areas around Thailand. The college trained teachers and practiced some skills to be community developers. Nowadays, the university is still on the pathway of sustainability. The university provides educational opportunities for all through degree programmes. Furthermore, the university has promoted the MCRU Credit Bank System for lifelong learning so that people of every background can participate in classes. As part of the community, the university cooperates with local communities to improve the quality of life and increase household income. For research and innovation, the university encourages academia and students to create projects focused on solving community problems. These projects impact society in all aspects, especially, good health and well-being. For the future, the university announces a five-year plan to demonstrate the direction of a sustainable university. The university improves curricula based on social dynamics and trains students to be global citizens. However, the decrease in new enrolment will be a new challenge. It affects the university's income also decreases. Therefore, it challenges the allocation budget to develop students and provide outreach projects. Moreover, the local communities also face the aged society, and this new challenge should be aware from all institutions. From this condition, the university is the partnership with communities to tackle these challenges and settle sustainability.

**Keyword:**

Sustainable University, Managing Education and Research

### 1. Introduction

Education is a significant key to human development. The human force has trained at each level to impact societies in all aspects. In 2015, the United Nations Organisation (UN) adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to improve the quality of life around the

world. According to 17 goals of the SDGs, Goal 4 Quality Education seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.[1] The relations between education and other goals, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (2018) states that education has relationships with other development sectors, which is close to well-being. [2] This is because education serves as an implementation for human development that supports sustainable development. [3]

University is one of the formal institutions that provide degree programmes for practicing people. As a tertiary institution, it supports human development in their interested fields and these are related to other sustainable goals. For example, a degree programme in medicine will train students to be doctors and after graduation, these doctors will provide medical services. University also encourages academic staff to undertake research projects to find and present new knowledge. These projects have advantages in quality life improvement. Moreover, high education institution becomes a sandbox of sustainable development. For example, the university can set up a clean energy system such as solar energy, and reinstall saving energy applicants to cover the whole area. This can be a lesson learnt for communities at every level.

Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University is a small higher education institution located in a rural area in Ratchaburi province. The university was founded in 1954 namely Chombueng Village College. The purposes of the establishment were to provide a degree in education for students from distant areas around Thailand and to master important skills for community development. In 1970, the village college transformed into Muban Chombueng Teacher College. The Teacher College sought to train students to be teachers specifically because the government wanted to enhance professional teachers for schools around the country. However, the Teacher College extended to provide degree programmes related to other fields such as science, liberal arts, and general management. This led to transformed of Muban Chombueng Rajabhat Institution in 1992 for clearly understanding and proving postgraduate programmes for higher levels. In 2004, the Rajabhat Institution transformed into Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University.[6]

Rajabhat University has been a part of educational development since its establishment.

The university not only teaches students to be specialists in their fields, but it also develops research projects and innovation for community development. Moreover, the university cooperates with local people to launch projects to improve the quality of life in local areas. The university has the vision to be a sustainable university for all so, it sets a strategic plan to achieve this goal. This paper will present that the university has a long journey of sustainable development specifically educational development. The university seeks to manage to teach and learn for all and launch research and innovation for community development.

## **2. Village College: The Sustainability before the Sustainable Development Goals**

Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University founded named Chombueng Village College. The idea of a village college originates from the village institute in Turkey. Between 1937 and the mid-1940s, village institutes were educational implementation to transform the Turkish countryside. Furthermore, the village institutes were to tackle poverty and improve peasants' lives. [4] Kocak and Baskan present that the village institutes were applications toward to

lifelong learning approach which is important for the education system. This is because the village institutes provided individuals with all-significant skills for a qualitative life.[5]

For Chombueng Village College, the purposes of the establishment were to provide a degree in education and develop human capacity for communities. At that time, distant areas around Thailand faced a lack of teachers in schools. This led to the foundation of a village college and recruit students from rural areas to continue a degree. The curriculum is designed for five years to train students to be teachers. Following the idea of a village institute, the curriculum also practices significant skills for students that were useful for them after graduation and back to their hometown. According to this curriculum, graduates were both teachers and community developers when they came back to their hometowns.

Sixteen years after its foundation, the village college transformed into Muban Chombueng Teacher College. The Teacher College provided specifically certificate programmes in education which are Certificate of Education and Certificate of Higher Education. These sought to pursue teachers to be more specialists. However, since 1985, the Teacher College has not only provided a degree in education but also trained students in other programmes such as science, liberal arts, and management science. This led to a misunderstanding that graduates from the Teacher College were only teachers. Consequently, the teacher college transformed into Muban Chombueng Rajabhat Institution in 1992. The Rajabhat Institution continued undergraduate programmes and started postgraduate programmes. The latest change is to transform into Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University in 2004. The university continues the purposes of the establishment and manages to gain more high-quality education with revised curricula and promoting outreach projects for academic transfer.

From 1954 to the present, the university trains students to be valuable human resources for sustainable development. Especially, in the education system, alumni are educational specialists such as teachers, school directors, educational directors, and academic staff. These alumni create an impact on social improvement by providing teaching and learning for the young generation. Furthermore, alumni in other fields increase the impact on other development such as economic growth, health, and well-being. In this way, the university is a part of sustainable development by a mission of education institution before the announcement of the SDGs. Nowadays, the university has promoted a mission of sustainability by guaranteeing quality education and launching new projects related to the SDGs.

### **3. On the way to sustainability: Lifelong learning and Community Development**

Recently, Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University offers 38 courses for undergraduate degrees, 7 courses for postgraduate degrees, and a graduate diploma course. These courses seek to create students' identity as "Responsibility, Lifelong Learning, and Professional". SDG 4 will settle lifelong learning for all. This has led the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation to launch a policy on lifelong learning through the National Credit Bank System. As a result, Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University announced the Regulation for Teaching and Learning of the Credit Bank System in 2019. Under this regulation, the university opens its doors to the public, allowing them to register for participating classes and earn credits after completing the course. These credits do not expire, so people can collect them to complete the minimum required credits for degree

programs. Moreover, the university encourages faculties to create short courses for people to develop new skills, which can help increase their household income.



Figure 1. a short course by the Science and Applied Science Centre

A new role of the university is local community development. Outreach projects are launched to improve people's lives in Ratchaburi province. The university initiates and cooperates with local people to solve and develop local communities in all aspects which are related to the SDGs. For economic growth, the university develops short courses to upskill and reskill people in communities. For example, the Science and Applied Science Centre has developed a short course on cultivating and processing mushrooms. The centre transfers knowledge to cultivators, enabling them to adapt to a new career and earn extra income. For education, the university encourages academic staff to train teachers in local schools. Furthermore, a project on the environment seeks to conserve plant genetics and collect a database of biodiversity for transferring knowledge about life on land. All of these projects seek to settle sustainable communities.



Figure 2. Students and their project receive an award in Thai Innovation Day

The university encourages academic staff to develop research projects based on the community's issues. For example, the university undertook a research project on the Development and Enhancement of the local economy through multicultural capital by participating with local communities based on the concept of local conservation: a case of the Huaykrabok community, Banphong district, Ratchaburi province in 2022. In this project, the

university cooperates with local people to enhance the local economy by adopting the benefit of a multicultural community. Moreover, the university also signed an agreement with 14 networks in this community to run the research project and continue a project for a sustainable community. This led the community to be a best practice and lesson learnt for community development from an economic perspective.

Additionally, the university's students create innovation to serve society. The university encourages academic staff to support and advise their students for developing innovations that will be products for the public. For instance, the Faculty of Science and Technology support students to design a model of a wheelchair for the disabled and the elderly. This wheelchair is made from an old general wheelchair in a hospital and student generates it by controlling it with an embedded system via smartphone. This project will develop wheelchairs provide to hospitals and underrepresented groups. Moreover, the university has a significant project of soft skills development through the social engineering process. This project will train students to be social engineers for local communities because students will design projects based on community. With all of these initiatives, the university researches and transfers knowledge related the sustainable development which is a benefit for the university itself and its communities.

#### 4. Tackle Future Challenge with Sustainable Direction

The university continues the intentions of the foundation. The university not only provides educational opportunities at degree levels but the university also settles the demonstration school for early childhood and secondary students. In the future, the demonstration school will extend primary classes to cover education at all levels and to practice undergraduate students in education for trial teaching and internship. Furthermore, the university improves curricula based on social dynamics, for example, the General Education subjects are revised and updated new subjects for students especially the concept of voluntary and community development.

The university designs the five-year strategic plan based on social dynamics to reinvent and develop to be sustainable university and digitalise data on the cloud system. These will improve the educational standard and increase the quality of teaching and learning to support lifelong learning. The university through the Office of Academic Resources and Information Technology and the Research and Development Institute develops the self-learning platform, the MCRU MOOC, in which university students and the public can access classes through the online system.

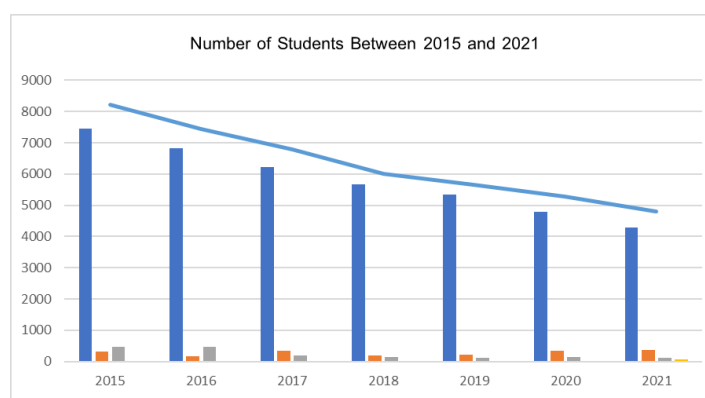


Figure 3. A Graph on University Students in All Level Between 2015 and 2021

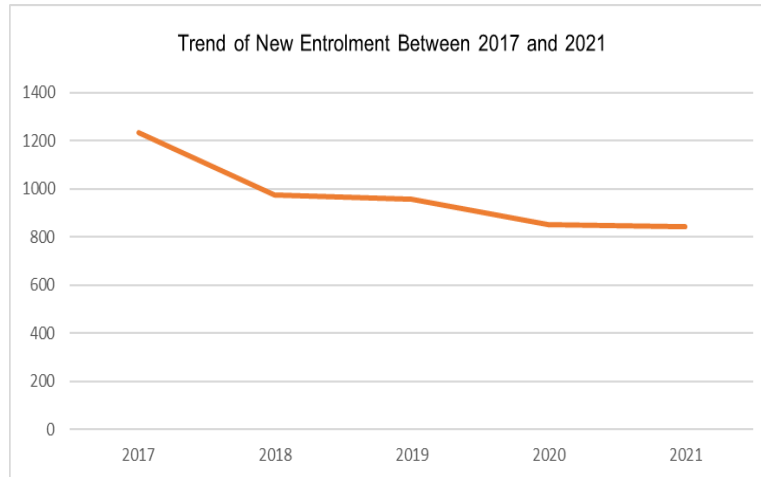


Figure 4. A Graph on New Enrolment in Undergraduate Programmes between 2017 and 2021

However, the university faces a new challenge which is the decrease in new enrolment. Figure 3 presents a decrease in the total number in each level between 2015 and 2021 and Figure 4 demonstrates a steady decline in first-year undergraduate students from 2017 to 2021. The decline in students affects the university budget because the government allocates the budget by calculating the headcount of students and the university's income also relates to the number of tuition fees from students. It is a domino effect when the university seeks to launch projects to improve teaching and learning and promote new outreach projects for community development because of the lower and limited budget. The university will have the grant project to reinvent and reorganise by guaranteeing education quality assurance. The university will prioritise allocating the budget for internal projects and outreach projects

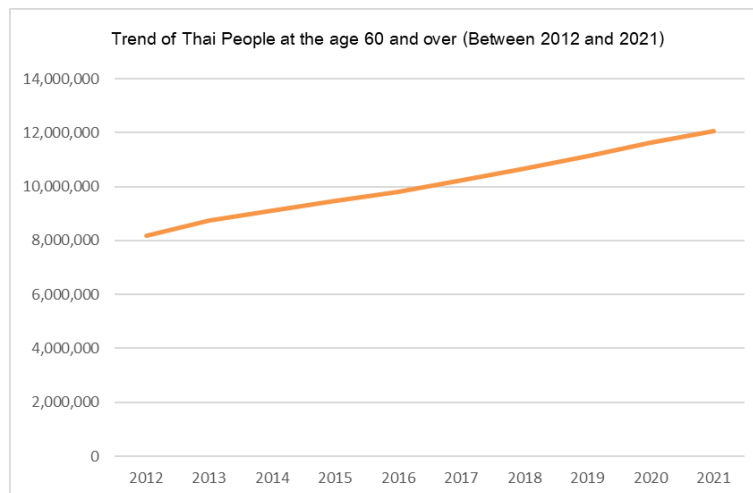


Figure 5. a graph on Thai people at the age of 60 and over

For the community, demographic change is a new challenge. According to World Health Organisation's definition, an older person is over 60 years of age. Figure 5 shows an increase in Thai people over 60 years of age. This leads the university and local communities to initiate projects to improve the elderly lives. For example, the elderly school project seeks older people in the Chombueng district to participate in activities with others and promote

their mental health. From the strategic plan, the university with its partners will initiate projects which are especially health services for the elderly, for instance, Thai traditional medical services will take care of them in an alternative way and provide innovation for serving the communities. In the future, the university will be ready to handle new challenges in volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity world and the post Covid-19 period this is because the strategic plan tries to prepare the university to tackle these challenges and also is a think tank for local communities with the sustainability idea.

## 5. Conclusion

Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University is a part of the sustainability before the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals. The university continues to provide educational opportunities for all. In the past, the university as the village college recruited students from distant areas around Thailand to practice being teachers in their hometowns. These students also were community developers because they were trained in significant skills for development. Moreover, after the transformation to the university, it maintains to purposes of the establishment and extends classes to cover all educational levels, for example, the early childhood demonstration school and the demonstration school.

The Sustainable Development Goals pursues educational opportunities for all especially supporting lifelong learning. The university has a background in village institute that is academic practice and skills preparation for community developers. The concept is toward lifelong learning so the university belongs this concept since its foundation. For providing educational opportunities, the university has settled the MCRU Credit Bank System to support lifelong learning. Moreover, the university supports self-learning through the online platform, the MCRU MOOC, which students and the public can access. On the sustainability journey, the university encourages academic staff to launch research projects that are an area-based approach to solving and developing local communities. Furthermore, academic staff supports students to create innovation to serve local communities and the university endorses students to work with local people to improve their local areas.

For the future direction, the university has a five-year strategic plan to reinvent and digitalise the institution. The university has a great vision to be a sustainable university for local communities. Although the university faces a decline in students, the university tackles this challenge by updating curricula and reallocating the budget for impact projects. The local communities have demographic changes that become aged societies. The university cooperates with local people and other institutions to launch projects for knowledge transfer about health and well-being. The university can handle future challenges because the strategic plan sets the future direction for sustainability. The university continues the purposes of the establishment and develops outreach projects to achieve the vision. The university will be sustainable and also be a part of local community development for sustainability.

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