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Thailand: Population

In different parts of the world, multiple different countries face challenges whether it be economic, political, or social. But it is never too late to find a solution that would improve the countries that are in need. Thailand is one of the numerous countries that are facing economic problems. According to “sarahfunky.com”, Thailand is a Southeast Asian country that is known for its tropical beaches, royal palaces, ancient ruins, and ornate temples displaying pictures of Buddha. But despite the positive aspects of the country, Thailand continues to face issues within its economy, one of those issues being overpopulation. According to “www.britannica.com”, Overpopulation is a situation in which the number of individuals of a given species exceeds the number that its environment can sustain. According to “arctis.com”, Thailand’s typical family is about 3.1 members per household with a few additional relatives. According to “foodbycountry.com”, the diet of the citizens usually consists of rice, beef, chicken, pork, seafood, and vegetarian dishes. “<https://wenr.wes.org/>” stated that the education system in Thailand is currently affected due to political instability and a rapidly growing population, but the overall education system is fairly well. In addition to that, they generally have a good quality of healthcare. But their biggest issue is their rapid population growth.

Thailand has made progress in social and economic development over the last four decades. It went from a low-income country to an upper-income country in less than a decade. It was also successful with the reduction of poverty. However, they still faced a big problem with their now rapidly growing population. The typical farm size in Thailand is restricted because of its rapidly changing economy. According to the World Factbook, the crops grown on the farm consist of rice, sugarcane, cassava, fruit, cashew nuts, corn, tobacco, cotton, cocoa, peanuts, soybeans, medical plants, dairy, fishery products, and fresh flowers. Not only do they grow many crops, but they also raise animals such as cows, chickens, pigs, buffalo, sheep, and goats. According to “factsanddetails.com”, Agricultural practices, such as farming, raising buffalo along with other animals, using their own methods to protect their crops, and trading goods are performed by those who live in Thailand. Each of these factors could be negatively affected by population growth. Some of the barriers to improve agricultural productivity include population growth, faltering economic growth due to those in poverty, falling agricultural prices, and ongoing droughts which are all barriers facing the typical family in Thailand. According to “www.worldbank.org”, it stated that “over 80% of the country 7.1 million poor live in rural areas...an additional 6.7 million were living within 20% above the national poverty line and remain vulnerable to falling back into poverty. Poverty is expected to decline at a slower rate in rural areas as agricultural prices are not expected to be high in recent years.” Although there are barriers to agricultural productivity and other factors such as poverty, there aren’t any barriers to employment at the living wage and to accessing food markets and adequate nutrition.

Thailand’s rapidly growing population affects food availability, agricultural productivity, and household income. If the economy continues to grow rapidly, agricultural productivity may not be able to keep up with the population growth, which will eventually lead to a challenge with food availability in order to

feed everyone in the economy. According to “www.worldbank.org”, “...growth could become less inclusive as growing disparities in household income and consumption can be seen across the lagging regions of Thailand.” Overpopulation is due to an increase in traffic, poverty, air pollution, and water pollution. There are simply not enough resources to support everyone. The rapidly growing population affects the families in Thailand because due to the population growth, the unemployment rate had increased and the number of homes had decreased. Along with that, the birth rate had increased while the death rate decreased, which contributed to the population growth if more people were being born than those who passed away. In recent times, the population levels in Thailand are increasing, however, the population growth rate is decreasing. This is because the birth rates are now very low in Thailand, which is 1.53 births per woman. This was due to the result of Thailand’s family planning program. According to “context.org”, it stated that “Thailand once faced a population growth rate as daunting as that of other developing countries...as a result of a far-reaching family planning effort-...Thailand has gained impressive control over its growth rate. The use of contraceptives among married couples has increased from 15 to 70 percent, and in 15 years Thailand's population growth rate has been cut in half, from 3.2 percent to 1.6 percent.” Although the program helped to lower the growth rate, it resulted in the birth rates dropping too low for the population to continue growing. According to “reuters.com”, it stated that “Birth rates have dropped sharply from more than 6 children per woman in 1960 to 1.5 in 2015...Thailand’s 2015 birth rate of 1.5 per woman is below 2.6 births in neighboring Cambodia and 2.1 in Malaysia. Health experts say the birth rate needs to be 2.1 to keep a population growing.” In addition to that, the website stated that “some blame a hugely successful free-condom campaign in Thailand in the early 1990s as a factor that has reduced the birth rate.” That free-condom campaign was a product of Thailand’s family planning program that made the birth rates drop. But now Thailand is facing the consequences because the birth rates dropped too low, which means that Thailand could possibly face a huge population decline. Even though Thailand had an overpopulation issue, they cannot allow their population levels to drop too low. Therefore, instead of getting people to stop having children, they are trying to encourage people to have children so that their population level could start to grow. But there is a possibility that the population growth may eventually level out on its own, as long as there is a good balance between Thailand’s death rates and birth rates. They should also consider minimizing the number of stateless people they are allowing to stay in the country. If the country is successful in lowering the growth rate to a sustainable amount, it would create a more controlled environment for everyone, as well as possibly opening up more opportunities for the citizens. This includes giving jobs to those who are unemployed and simply providing housing, better living conditions, and better education.

According to Worldmeter, Thailand’s current population is 69,818,431 and continues to increase as the years go by. According to “unhcr.org”, more than 23,000 stateless people have been granted Thai nationality in the last four years as the Southeast Asian nation seeks to end statelessness by 2024. There are currently 438,821 stateless people in Thailand. But the government in Thailand approved changes to their citizenship laws that could make 80,000 stateless persons eligible for citizenship. This change would help to decrease the number of stateless persons within the country and could also help to control their rapidly growing economy. Half of Thailand’s people do not have citizenship and make up a great amount of Thailand’s stateless population. They migrate from different parts of the world in search of jobs and many other things to improve their lifestyles. Most stateless persons in Thailand come from areas where

national borders have changed. The article found on "thegeopolitics.com" stated how a person may be born in the country but are not given citizenship due to their parents' place of origin. As young people and students within the country who were stateless, they were being bullied for not having an identity. As adults, they were only allowed to work in low-class jobs. In order for a person to gain citizenship, they had to go through a lot of paperwork which meant that only those who were educated were able to navigate through the procedures of applying for citizenship. Some stateless people belonged to "hill tribes", living in distant areas with restricted access to information about nationality procedures or those who lived without registration or identity documentation in the past. Due to the huge amount of refugees and displaced persons in Thailand, the population is growing more and more. If the population was more controlled, agricultural productivity, poverty, and those unemployed wouldn't be such a problem. Overall, new laws need to be set in place to limit the number of stateless people allowed in the country and the procedures for citizenship need to be less complicated so that it is easier for people to apply.

Aside from population growth, Thailand's water quality is also affecting its economy. The water quality is an issue because it is dealing with water pollution. If the water quality is bad, the population would most likely decrease because people would die of dehydration or may get sick from drinking the dirty water. In addition to that, they may migrate somewhere else with clean water which would reduce the population. But as stated before, it is never too late to find a solution. The State Enterprise Policy Committee would improve state-owned enterprise governance and much more to help Thailand with its rapidly changing economy. IFC invests in sectors such as agribusiness and infrastructure. They also work with financial institutions and many other things to help Thailand.

As a solution to help Thailand's economy, the government could consider making a law that limits the number of members a family could have in order to control the population. According to Britannica, the central government of China enforced a one-child policy in the late 1970s and early '80s that was meant to reduce the growth rate of China's huge population. At first, families were encouraged to have no more than two children, but preferably one. However, there was a stricter demand for families to only have one child per household but that requirement was not consistent across the country. The policy resulted in a general reduction in China's fertility and birth rates after 1980. The fertility rates declined and dropped below two children per woman in the mid-1990s. Although China managed to reduce its population growth rate, there were consequences that came along with that. One consequence of the one-child policy was that the country's sex-ratio became skewed when there became more males than females in the country. This is because Chinese households typically prefer to have sons because the males inherit the family name and are responsible for taking care of their elderly parents. But when families were restricted to having one child per household, giving birth to a female became very undesirable which led to a rise in female abortions and an increase in the number of females in orphanages or who were abandoned. Those who were placed in orphanages were adopted by families in the United States or other countries, which also resulted in fewer females in China. Over time, there became a wider gap between the number of females and males in China which resulted in fewer females available for marriage. This means that they would not be able to have any more children, which would eventually result in a drop within the population.

Another consequence of China's one-child policy was that the number of elderly people had increased due to a drop in birth rates and a rise in longevity. This became an issue because most senior citizens rely on their children to take care of them, however, there were fewer children being born to support them. In addition, the one child-policy resulted in an estimate of hundreds of thousands to several million children being unreported or hidden from the authorities after their parents already had their first child. Most of those children were undocumented as well as faced hardships in obtaining education and employment. The one-child policy soon ended in late 2015, allowing all families to have two children. Although the one-child policy resulted in multiple consequences in China, Thailand may be able to avoid some of these consequences. Firstly, the gender gap in China was a result due to the preference of Chinese families. Families in China preferred to give birth to males because they expected their sons to take care of them when they became elderly. Because of the one-child policy, those families only had one chance of giving birth to a son, simply because having a son was more desirable in China. It was their own personal preference. However, if they gave birth to a daughter instead then they would abort the female, send them off to orphanages, or simply abandon them. Those who were in orphanages were later adopted by families in the United States or other countries, taking away the number of females residing in China. Therefore, Chinese families played a role in why the gap between males and females was so big. Although it is not impossible, Thailand may not have to face the same consequence. This is because families in Thailand value both males and females for different reasons, which could possibly mean that they wouldn't choose to neglect their child based on their gender. According to "factsanddetails.com", it stated that "Although a preference for having sons has been documented elsewhere and it is particularly strong in the Chinese-Thai families, both sons and daughters are valued for different reasons. While the son's potential ordination in the Sangha can accumulate merit for the parents, a daughter is viewed as being reliable and dependable..." With that being said, both males and females serve their purpose in Thailand. This means that the chance of there being a huge gender gap between males and females within Thailand may not happen, however it isn't impossible.

Similar to China, Thailand also depends on their children to take care of their elders. "Reuters.com" stated, "Together with China, the country has the highest proportion of elderly people of any developing country in East Asia.." Another website, "culturalatlas.sbs.com", stated that "a sense of duty and responsibility towards the elderly is expected, and members of the family are often required to abide by the advice and requests of their elders. Thai children are expected to look after their parents in their old age." In order for Thailand to balance out the proportion of their elders with the rest of the population, families need to be able to have children freely. Thai families consist of a nuclear family, which is a married couple with typically two or three kids and possibly an additional family member such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles, etc. With that being said, Thai families have a reasonable amount of members within their households. Therefore, there may be no reason for a one-child policy or anything of the sort because if the number of members is cut any shorter, it may result in a population decline, which wouldn't be good for the country. Instead, it would be best to not tamper with Thai households. This would not only avoid population decline but would also balance out the elderly proportion. Most importantly, it was stated that Thai birth rates have dropped significantly. However, they have dropped too low which would stop the population from growing, and again, would lead to a population decline. In order to solve this issue, the Thailand government would need to give Thai families more financial

stability and possibly figure out a way to give employees a higher income without having them work so many hours. This would allow families to be more comfortable with having children which would eventually start to raise the birth rates to a healthier amount. According to 'reuters.com', "Thailand's cash bonuses and tax incentives for people with children have done little to boost births but analysts said they weren't generous enough to prompt Thais to have more children. They didn't cover the real costs of raising a child." The website went on and stated, "Various reasons have been put forward to explain the falling birth rate in Thailand, from higher living costs and work commitments to the shift of the population away from farms, where big families are needed, to urban centers...Now many are thinking that it is a burden to have children, unlike in the past when children were important to the family...people feel they need material possessions first before starting a family...nowadays people want to be ready first. They feel they must have a house, a car, first before having a child...people nowadays work more so they have fewer children."

In other words, Thai families need a sense of stability before raising a child. To help with that, the Thailand government needs to be more considerate of the costs of raising a child while also allowing parents to be able to provide other essentials for the rest of the family. If families are not making enough money while also having their time consumed by their jobs, there is simply not enough money or time to be put into giving birth to a child. Therefore, financial stability is definitely needed and the work hours need to be shortened so that Thai families have more time to raise a child. In addition, pay wages need to increase, or else the cost of living would have to decrease. On the other hand, if there is a policy restricting the number of children a family is allowed to have, Thailand may definitely face the consequences of some children being unreported or hidden from the authority after their parents already met their maximum of the number of children they are allowed to have. As stated before, most of those children in China who were put into that situation were undocumented and faced hardships in obtaining education employment. Thailand already has an issue with undocumented people living within the country as well as issues with education and employment. If this were to become an issue, Thailand would be adding to the problem with the number of stateless people in the country and it ultimately wouldn't help with trying to solve their population issue. As a solution, Thailand would be better off either not restricting the family sizes or restricting them to a reasonable amount. Thai families already have a reasonably sized household, but if a policy similar to the one-child policy has to be put in place, it would be suggested to increase the limit to at least two or three children, even though this is a typical family size already. The family would then only consist of two or three children for every household, along with the parents. Also, instead of restricting the number of children or in addition to restricting the number of children, the government could also prohibit any additional family members from residing in the home. This would not only satisfy Thai households but would also prevent a population decline as well as decreasing their chances of having to deal with more undocumented people within the country. If a child were to be born past the limit, they could possibly still be allowed to identify as a resident of Thailand so that it does not create a bigger issue than what Thailand is already facing. However, that may be taken advantage of and could possibly go against the purpose of the policy to begin with.

Aside from possibly restricting family sizes, the government could figure out a way to increase job opportunities to help those unemployed. The community could help with agricultural productivity and start recycling to help improve the quality of their water or could open a new business to provide jobs for

those unemployed. Also, the government could set laws or something of the sort that would not allow people to stay in Thailand if they are not citizens or they could create something so that it is easier for those who are stateless to be eligible for citizenship (which is already being implemented by the government). Those who are stateless should apply for citizenship, otherwise, they cannot stay. Thailand already has a population problem as is, which would affect other factors in its economy as well. It wouldn't be fair to use up their resources for those illegally staying in the country. As for the typical family, they could also start to recycle to improve water quality and limit the number of members in their household to help prevent overpopulation.

Overall, it is never too late for a change. Challenges are only temporary and may not be easy to solve but it's not impossible. Thailand has improved its economy in the past when they faced a challenge in poverty and although it may still be apparent, it is not as bad as it used to be. With that being said, there is a possibility that Thailand's rapidly growing population could be controlled if the country takes the right steps to help reduce it. Currently, the National Spatial Development Plan is a 50-year plan that focuses on economic potential zones, growth development, and linkage to ASEAN countries. The strategic position gives priority to urban balance increase and urban cluster development promoting secondary agriculture centers to gain more strength. As a solution, the number of family members in each household could be reduced. That would mean slowing down the birth rates but at a healthy rate. Another solution would be to help those who are poor to escape poverty. Improving education and giving people more economic opportunities would also help to reduce fertility and population growth. With the reduction of the population, Thailand's economy would be back on track.

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