

## **Pilot Project X Playground: A Learning and Market-Testing Space for the New Generation of SEs, Powered by Academia and the Private Sector**

*Banpu Champions for Change Year 14: "Ignite & Grow Together" creates a dynamic platform for new SEs to develop business concepts, exchange knowledge, and connect with investors.*

In an era where people expect more from businesses than just profits, the Social Enterprise (SE) emerges as a powerful model. While the concept is still often misunderstood in Thailand—sometimes confused with volunteer work, local OTOP initiatives, or non-profit organizations—an SE is, in fact, a serious business venture with social problem-solving at the very core of its mission. It is more than just "considerate thoughts" or the "passion of the kind-hearted," but rather a sustainable business model designed to strategically balance economic goals with social progress.

Although these SEs still face policy limitations and the lack of a fully supportive ecosystem, new generation of entrepreneurs don't wait for the perfect conditions to arrive. They are taking action now, viewing "social impact" as a key performance indicator for their business, on par with profit.

Therefore, collaborative support from the government, private sector, and academia is crucial. Providing a platform for this new generation to hone their entrepreneurial skills is essential to ensuring their ventures can thrive and create lasting change.

### **A Local Movement Where the New Generation Drives Social Change in Local Communities**

The drive for social enterprise is no longer limited to urban centers or established business leaders. The movement is now expanding to the locals, empowering individuals within local communities to take the lead.

Assistant Professor Dr. Phutip Meethavornkul, Assistant Dean for Social Engagement and a Professor at the Faculty of Business Administration for Society, Srinakharinwirot University (SWU), explains, "Over the past two to three years, we've seen a 10-15% rise in applications to our Social Enterprise program from high school students in local communities. They arrive with a clear objective: to leverage the SE model as a tool to solve problems in their own hometowns. This phenomenon

highlights a significant shift. The younger generation from these communities is moving beyond simply identifying problems to actively seeking the skills needed to solve them.”

This transformation is taking root in the classrooms of SWU, the only institution in Thailand offering a comprehensive bachelor's degree program in Social Enterprise. The curriculum equips students with business fundamentals like marketing, finance, and accounting, alongside modern brand-building skills such as storytelling. Crucially, every subject is framed within the real-world context of social, economic, and environmental challenges.

The program culminates in a final-year “Pilot Project,” where students design and launch their own SEs. This goes far beyond a theoretical model, as students must enter the field, design, test, and iterate their ideas, engage with stakeholders, and demonstrate their venture’s real-world viability and its capacity to generate income and create measurable social impact.

"I believe that the more we provide spaces for the new generation to experiment, take action, and unleash their ideas, the more new SE entrepreneurs we will see emerge. They will become a vital force in driving the grassroots economy and sustainably solving local problems." **Phutip** adds.

### **Encouragement and Networks are Key for SEs**

Drawing from his extensive experience, Dr. Phutip explains that primary causes of SE failure are dual pressures of dwindling funds and declining morale. He emphasizes that a robust, like-minded community is essential for providing both guidance and support, contributing to a stronger overall SE ecosystem. We must reshape public perception of social enterprises as sexy, disruptive, dynamic, and innovative as startups, until they become an integral part of the community. The public can play a powerful role by supporting their products and services, as the success of these ventures creates a positive ripple effect. By empowering enterprises that tackle issues like poverty, it is the same as investing in a healthier economy, a more stable society, and a sustainable environment for us and future generations. However, he cautions that this support must be paired with high standards. Holding these businesses to high standards and providing honest feedback is crucial for their genuine development and long-term success.

**Banpu Champions for Change – A Space Safe Enough to Experiment and Challenging Enough to Grow**



For 14 years, Banpu has supported social enterprises through its Banpu Champions for Change (BC4C) project. The initiative is built on the conviction that SE entrepreneurs are key to fostering a robust local economy and effectively addressing the distinct social challenges unique to each community.

Now in its 14th year, BC4C continues under the theme "Ignite & Grow Together," expanding its roadshow activities to major cities in four key regions: Chiang Mai, Songkhla, Khon Kaen, and Bangkok. The program aims to identify promising SEs in local communities—those with the ideas and passion but lacking a dedicated "playground" to bring their concepts to life.

BC4C is far more than a workshop. It is a hands-on incubation program providing comprehensive training. Participants learn everything from business fundamentals—such as cost analysis and accounting—to systematic social problem-solving, including how to form hypotheses and measure social impact. The program also provides seed funding for market testing, and each team is guided by dedicated mentors—themselves experienced SE entrepreneurs—who offer expert advice and partnership throughout the entire journey.

"This year, we have seen a significant increase in interest from emerging SEs in local communities. The program attracted 51 applicants from 14 provinces across the North, Central, Northeast, and South, with an average age between 20 and 30. The social issues they are most passionate about addressing include local economic resilience, employment for the disadvantaged, education, and both physical and mental health. This trend demonstrates a growing belief among local youth in the power of the social enterprise model as a sustainable solution for the challenges in their communities."  
— Rattapon Sukhunthee. Head of Corporate Communications at BANPU Public Company Limited.

Follow the journey of the new social enterprises selected for the "Banpu Champions for Change: BC4C" Year 14 program, under the concept "Ignite & Grow Together," on the Facebook fan page: [www.facebook.com/banpuchampions](https://www.facebook.com/banpuchampions), by phone at 087-075-4815, or via email at [banpuchampions@gmail.com](mailto:banpuchampions@gmail.com).

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## About Banpu

Banpu Public Company Limited is a versatile energy company, operating across three core groups of businesses – energy resources, energy generation, and energy technology – with operations in Thailand, Indonesia, China, Australia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Japan, the United States of America, and Vietnam. The Company leads a responsible and sustainable energy transition by balancing reliable, affordable and sustainable energy.

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