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# **<sup>1</sup>The Roles of Human, Social and Cultural Resources in Adapting Livelihood Strategies to Meet Wellbeing Aspirations in Contemporary Thailand**

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## **Abstract**

*The adaptation of livelihood strategies is important if individuals and households in Thailand are to improve their living conditions and meet rising wellbeing aspirations in the context of population growth and increasing pressures on natural resources. Rapid changes in economy and society, and the development of physical infrastructure have enabled a considerable degree of flexibility in changing livelihood strategies at the local level, but it is important that other aspects of adaptation to development and change are considered. This paper draws on the research of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries research group in Thailand (WeD), and uses empirical evidence from comprehensive field studies in seven communities in both the South and Northeast Regions of Thailand. The research confirms that most rural and peri-urban households can no longer depend on a single economic activity and that 'pluriactivity' and diversification are increasingly common. While farming activities continue to provide an important foundation for livelihoods in rural and peri-urban communities, the trend for young household members to seek non-agricultural or 'modern sector' work outside their communities is increasingly evident. This trend provides important insights for our understanding of the dynamics of wellbeing in contemporary Thailand.*

*The research explores the resource profiles of households and individuals and identifies a number of key factors that differentiate them in the processes of adaptation to change. Social resources are important as these provide networks through which it is possible to make connections to and secure non-agricultural work. Additionally, strongly embedded social resources that appear in the form of strong ties with families and close relatives help in easing obstacles and hardship faced in some processes of livelihood adaptation. Human resource development is also highlighted as providing an important means of effectively adapting livelihood strategies to meet wellbeing aspirations. The educational improvement of young household members plays a significant role in them acquiring "good jobs" in the modern sector, as well as in broadening their opportunities for further learning for continued livelihood adaptation. However, it is also important to take account of the cultural dimensions of these processes. A good education is still highly regarded in much of Thai society and it can defer social status. As such, a 'good education' can be regarded as an important cultural resource in the context of change. But, cultural resources acquire their significance from their foundations in social values. These same systems of value affect a persons' decisions about what "to do" or "not to do" in the process of livelihood adaptation. The study indicates that decisions about what "to do" or "not to do" differ among different groups of people and this affects the ways in which they adapt to change. Differences in all of these resource dimensions, between regions, communities and household socio-economic categories are discussed and compared.*

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