Centre for SDG Research and Support · Thammasat University

[SDSN THAILAND PUBLIC FORUM 2026 · ENABLING TRANSFORMATION BEYOND 2030]

Strengthening Thailand's Knowledge, Policy and Institutional Foundations for Transformation

Eleven years of SDG progress, its structural limits, and three proposals

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SDG Move: Centre for SDG Research and Support

A research centre at the Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University, linking knowledge on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with policy and collective action

Tracking SDG status

Monitors Thailand's SDG progress and publishes analysis through SDG Updates and SDG Insights

Area-level indicators

Develops the provincial SDG Index with Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI)

Science–policy dialogue

Convenes dialogues on the post-2030 agenda with SDSN Thailand and government agencies

01

Thailand's SDG status over 11 years

Three sources, four confidence levels, six challenge clusters

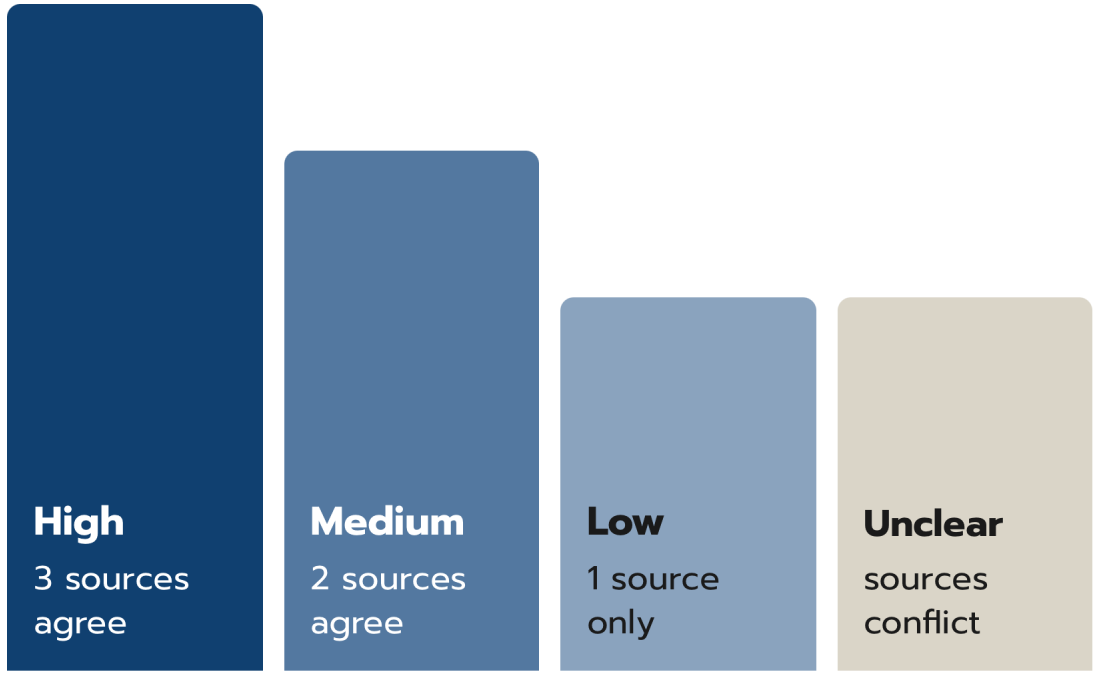
Reading status across three sources

VNR 2025
Voluntary National Review (VNR) · Royal Thai Government

UNESCAP
UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific · SDG Progress Report

SDR 2026
Sustainable Development Report (SDR) · SDSN

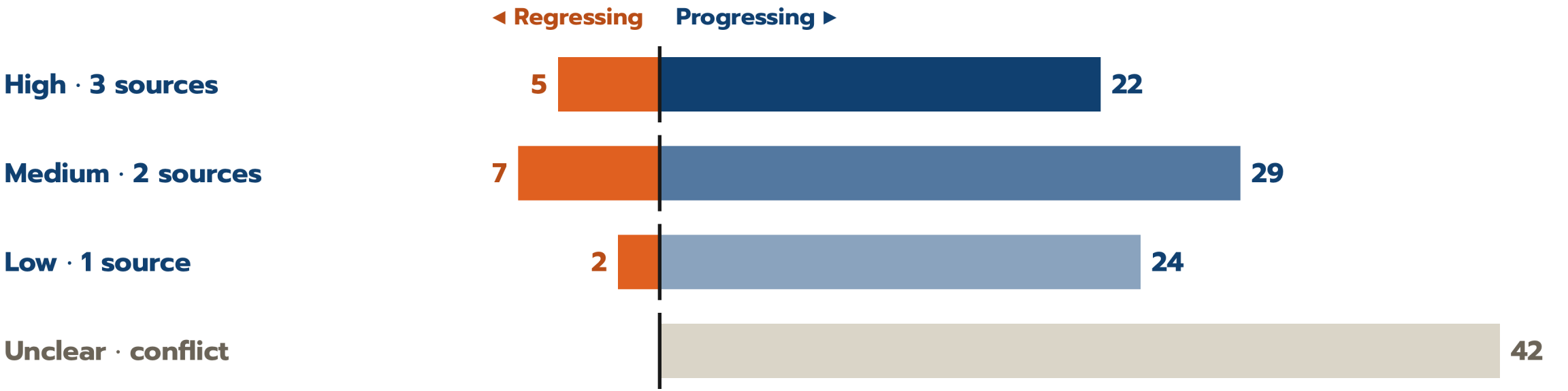
Confidence in each target's direction



Caveat: VNR and UNESCAP partly share underlying data, so agreement between those two carries less weight than agreement with the SDR.

Targets by direction and confidence level

163 targets have data in at least one source · 55 in all three · 79 in two · 29 in one



High-confidence regression: **3.9** pollution deaths · **8.1** per-capita growth · **11.6** urban air quality · **17.1** government revenue · **17.2** official development assistance

Unclear: 24 clear and 18 partial conflicts · Source: SDG Move ·

Target status by Thailand's challenge clusters

Cluster	Regressing	Conflicting	Progressing
1 Fair and sustainable economy	**8.1** 8.9 12.c 17.11 17.13	7.2 8.10 10.1 10.4	**7.1 7.3 9.5 9.c** 7.b 8.3 8.6 9.a 12.6 12.a 12.b
2 Health and well-being	**3.9**	–	**3.2 3.3 3.6 4.1** 3.a 3.c 4.4 4.5 4.a 4.b 4.c
3 Agriculture and food	**11.6** 2.a	–	**2.1 2.4 14.4** 2.3
4 Ecosystems	11.7 (one source)	–	**6.3** 14.6 15.2
5 Governance	**17.1 17.2** 17.17	16.5 16.10	**5.5 16.2 16.3 16.9 17.8 17.18** 16.a 16.b 17.6 17.12
6 Disasters	11.5	–	11.b

Basic services, outside the six clusters, progressed clearly: **1.1 1.2 6.2 11.1** 1.3 1.4 6.1 10.2 10.3 10.a 10.c

02

Why some targets are not progressing

Integration, the economic and fiscal base, and the national research plan

18 targets not progressing, by type of problem

7 Cross-sectoral outcomes — integration explains these

- **3.4** Non-communicable diseases
- **3.9** Pollution deaths
- **11.5** Disaster losses
- **11.6** Urban air (PM2.5)
- **12.c** Fossil-fuel subsidies
- **13.2** Climate in policy
- **15.5** Biodiversity

8 Economic and fiscal base — integration explains little

- **8.1** Per-capita growth
- **8.5** Decent work and pay
- **8.9** Sustainable tourism
- **9.b** Domestic technology
- **17.1** Tax revenue
- **17.2** Official development assistance
- **17.11** Exports
- **17.13** Macro stability

Borderline (3) · **2.a** agricultural investment · **17.17** partnerships · **3.b** vaccines and medicines

Linked: revenue falls (**17.1**) while fossil subsidies continue (**12.c**) and pollution deaths rise (**3.9**)

Agency outputs versus system outcomes

Why sources disagree on 24 targets

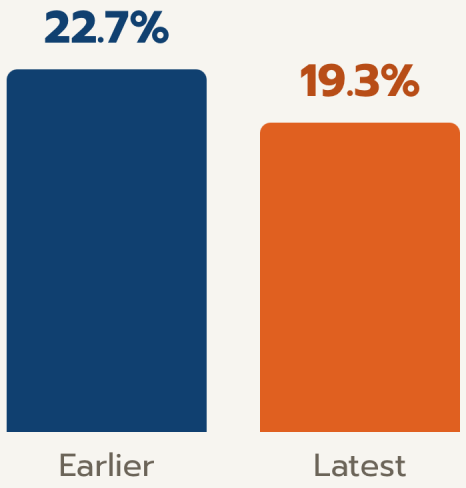
9 Outputs up, outcomes not	7 Volatile ODA flows	5 Different sub-indicators	3 Other

7.2 Renewable energy

VNR installed capacity rose

UNESCAP renewable share of final energy use fell

SDR flat



12.5 Waste reduction

VNR overall waste management improved · **UNESCAP** municipal recycling rate fell · **SDR** no trend

16.6 Effective institutions

VNR public-service outputs improved · **UNESCAP, SDR** satisfaction and process speed worsened

ODA = official development assistance · Source: SDG Move, Thailand SDG Conflicts ·

What government and international reports say

Thailand VNR 2025

"greater coherence is still needed across horizontal policies among ministries and agencies"

SDR 2026 · government survey

SDGs appear in the budget narrative, but no budget lines are tied to them

The supreme audit institution does not yet audit SDG delivery

OECD 2025

"traditional siloed governance structures continue to pose challenges"

Limit of the argument

The Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) works across agencies with its own budget. Smoking fell from 22.5% to 18.2% (2001–2014), yet overweight kept rising.

Integration is part of the explanation, not all of it; it should be read together with economic and fiscal factors.

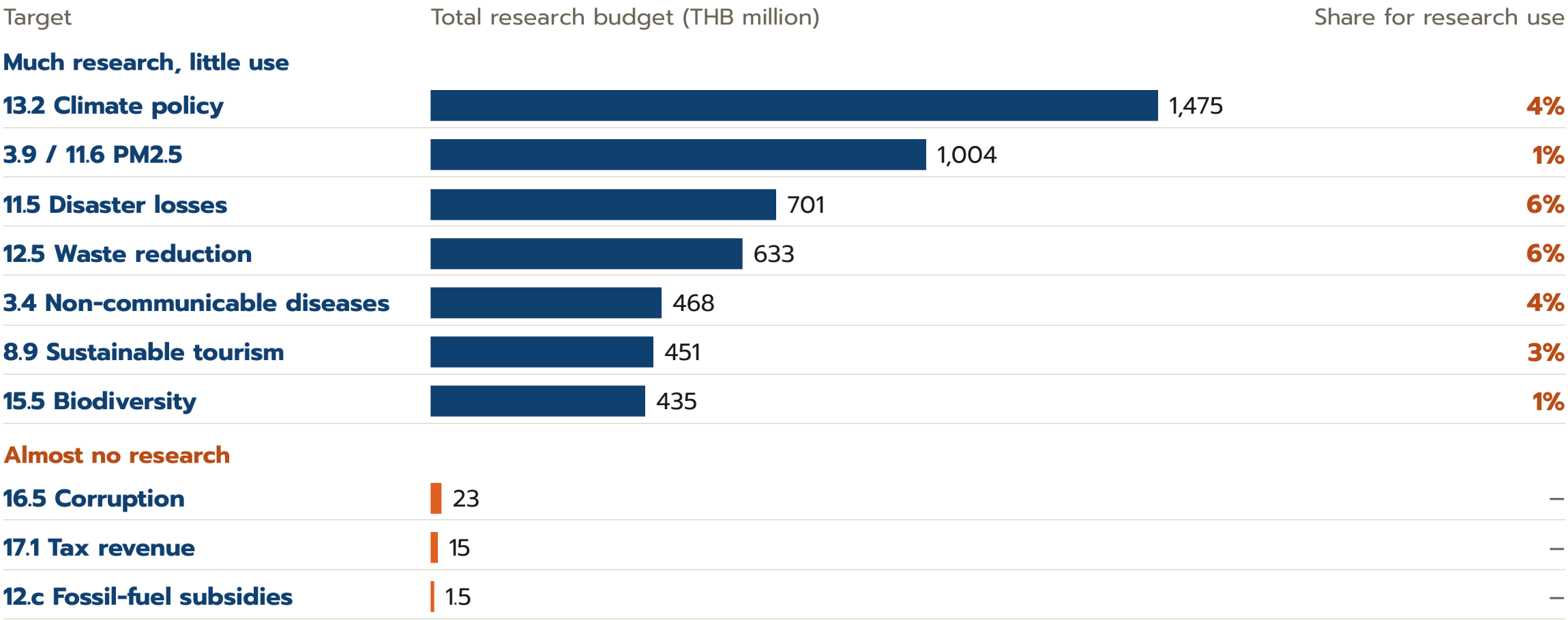
SDG status against the SRI Plan 2023–2027

The National Science, Research and Innovation Plan (SRI Plan) has 4 strategies and 25 programmes, and targets a top-35 SDG Index rank. Thailand ranks 43rd in 2026.

	In the SRI Plan	Not, or weakly, in the SRI Plan
Progress	Poverty (P11) · Agri-food (P2) · Health (P1, P10) · Energy (P4) · Digital (P5) · Cities and disasters (P13, P16) *Knowledge may have supported progress*	Education **4.x** · **5.5** women leaders · **6.2** sanitation · **16.9** birth registration · **17.18** statistics · **3.6** road safety *Progress came through other mechanisms*
Regress	**Low uptake** · PM2.5 (3.9, 11.6) · 11.5 · 16.5 · 12.5 **Time lag** · 13.2 · 7.2 · 3.b · 9.b **External shocks** · 8.9 · 8.1 *Knowledge-use problem or time lag*	**17.1** · **1.a** · **12.c** · **17.2** · **17.11** · **17.13** · **8.5** · **17.17** Weakly covered: 3.4 · 15.5 *Knowledge gap: fiscal policy and governance*

P = SRI Plan programme · Sources: SRI Plan 2023–2027; SDR 2026 ·

Research funding for regressing targets, 2020–2026



Keyword-search estimates · Source: NRIIS via nlp.tsri.or.th ·

03

Three policy proposals

Strengthening the knowledge, policy and institutional base for transformation

A regular science–policy–society interface

The science–policy–society interface (SPSI) needs a standing work cycle, a budget and a clear policy client, at national and area level

National level

SDSN Thailand and SDG Move

SDG status reporting and policy dialogues with government, such as the Beyond 2030 series

Area level · a province or a cross-provincial landscape

With TSRI

Provincial SDG Index and a research-utilisation mechanism for area action (Area Need, phase 4)

With IHPP

International Health Policy Program (IHPP), through Health Assembly resolutions

Research on regressing targets is plentiful but little used: the interface needs continuous funding and an annual status report to policymakers

A larger role for academia and civil society

Non-state actors are more flexible, freer to speak, and can link work that government splits across agencies

Actor	Targets	What it moved
Thailand Clean Air Network	**3.9 · 11.6**	52 organisations; 24,000 signatures for a Clean Air Bill (Jan 2022)
BioThai Foundation · Thai-PAN	**3.9 · 12.4 · 2.4**	About 686 groups; ban on paraquat and chlorpyrifos from 1 June 2020
ThaiHealth	**3.a · 3.4**	Own budget from a 2% surcharge on alcohol and tobacco taxes; cross-agency tobacco control
Baan Mankong · Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI)	**11.1**	97,672 households, 1,903 communities, 76 provinces (2004–2016)
Royal Project Foundation · Mae Fah Luang Foundation	**15.2 · 2.3**	Opium output from over 200 t to under 2 t · Doi Tung forest cover 28% to 77%

Caveat: royal foundations have unique resources and status and are not directly replicable; Doi Tung figures are the foundation's own.

Conditions for a larger non-state role

Independent funding

Follow the ThaiHealth model: revenue set by law, not by the annual budget round

Seats that carry weight

The National Committee for Sustainable Development (CSD) has 36 members. Its non-state seats go to research institutes and business bodies; none to civil society, youth or local government.

Youth and private-sector subcommittees (17 Jan 2022) have not worked continuously.

Start small

Begin in selected areas, issues or agencies, then scale up on the lessons learned

Thailand already gives non-state actors some seats. The next step is to give those seats budget, authority and a regular work cycle.

Sources: SDG Move, SDG Insights (2020); CSD meeting 1/2022 ·

Let SDG status steer strategic planning

1 Assess status

Three sources, with confidence levels, every planning cycle

2 Map against plans

Place targets on the 2×2 of status and plan coverage

3 Adjust funding

Knowledge gaps get new research funds; low uptake gets research-use funds

4 Review

Check next cycle whether targets changed status, then repeat

PHASE 1 · STI SYSTEM

Next SRI Plan, TSRI and the Programme Management Units (PMUs)

PHASE 2 · PROVINCES

Provincial and cluster development plans, starting from the provincial SDG Index

Preliminary observations for development

1. Thailand progressed where a single ministry can deliver. Where it did not, part of the cause is weak integration and part is a weaker economic and fiscal base.

2. Some regressing targets have almost no research; others have plenty, but little of it is used.

3. Thailand needs a regular science–policy–society interface, funded non-state seats with real authority, and SDG status that sets plans and budgets, starting with the STI system.

Draft for discussion · Asst. Prof. Chol Bunnag · SDG Move, Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University