Silver Winners | Category: Ecosystem Development

Bangkok Metropolitan Council (BMC) & Talat Phlu Metropolitan Police Station & Thammasat Business School

Dignity by Design: How Thammasat Business School (TBS) connected Learning, Livelihoods and Opportunity in Thailand's Silver Economy

Thammasat Business School's Talat Phlu initiative demonstrates how carefully designed education, research and local partnerships can strengthen livelihoods while respecting the knowledge and independence of older workers.

Talat Phlu is a historic commercial neighbourhood in Bangkok's Thonburi district. Its food stalls, family-run shops and local services remain central to the area's economic and social life. Older workers sustain many of these businesses, retaining their independence and contributing to their community. The project included a broad range of participants over the age of 45, from people in mid-career to those continuing to work well into their seventies.

FAMILY BUSINESS

Many of Talat Phlu's food stalls and family businesses are sustained by people continuing to work in later life.

For these workers, employment was first and foremost a source of income. However, the economy around them changed rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online marketplaces, delivery applications, digital payments and social media increasingly shaped how customers interacted with local businesses. A business could remain trusted within its neighbourhood yet become far less visible in a marketplace organised through screens and platforms.

Local vendors brought knowledge developed over decades: how to prepare food, understand customers and sustain a business on thin margins. The project, therefore, started from what participants already knew, rather than treating them as people whose skills had become obsolete. The challenge was to connect this local wisdom with new digital skills, markets and forms of work.

Talat Phlu became a prototype site of Thammasat Business School's wider Ready Senior Project: *Life Long Learning and Future Skills Development System for Thailand's Silver Economy*. The school's Ageing Business & Care Development Centre implemented the Talat Phlu initiative between July 2021 and June 2023, with support

from the National Research Council of Thailand and the Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council.

Across Talat Phlu, 628 people from 317 enterprises and service activities participated in learning activities. From this wider group, around 30–40 local vendors and entrepreneurs were selected for more intensive support, including coaching, branding and product development, and digital market access.

TBS brought together community participants, public agencies, businesses and civil society organisations to connect learning with new income opportunities. In doing so, the project reflected two longstanding responsibilities of the School: providing high-quality education and placing academic expertise at the service of society.

Design Around Real Lives

Most participants depended on daily income and could not leave their businesses for lengthy courses. The project, therefore, began with ecosystem mapping and action research by surveying approximately 200 local people to understand the community and to shape the design of the course. Then, the interviews were conducted with community stakeholders and managers from ten public- and private-sector organisations to identify the skills and characteristics they looked for when employing older workers.

Participants helped shape both the content and delivery of the programme. Their feedback influenced the subjects taught, the pace of sessions and the level of individual support. Progress was monitored through pre- and post-training assessments, participant feedback, follow-up interviews and observation of how new skills were applied.

Twenty-four modular courses were delivered in hybrid formats, usually in local markets and community spaces. They included practical training in video production, TikTok Shop and TikTok LIVE, money management, product development, branding and packaging, and foundational care skills.

TALAT PHLU

Talat Phlu was selected as the prototype site after community research and ecosystem mapping.

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Learning Across Generations

A distinctive feature of the programme was its intergenerational collaboration. Supported by faculty members and alumni, TBS students worked with selected participants on areas such as branding, product redesign and digital market access, and helped develop the Facebook-based job platform. Caregiving workshops were delivered by nurses and private-sector specialists, resulting in new skills that met local needs.

Students had to adapt what they knew about business and digital communication to the realities of market stalls and family-run enterprises, while drawing on participants' knowledge of their customers and community. Older workers, therefore, brought existing knowledge to the process while developing new capabilities.

"Even at 90, if my brain still works, I will keep learning and teaching others. Why would I just sit and do nothing?"- Participant, Talat Phlu Project qualitative evaluation interview, Ageing Business & Care Development Centre, Thammasat Business School, 2023

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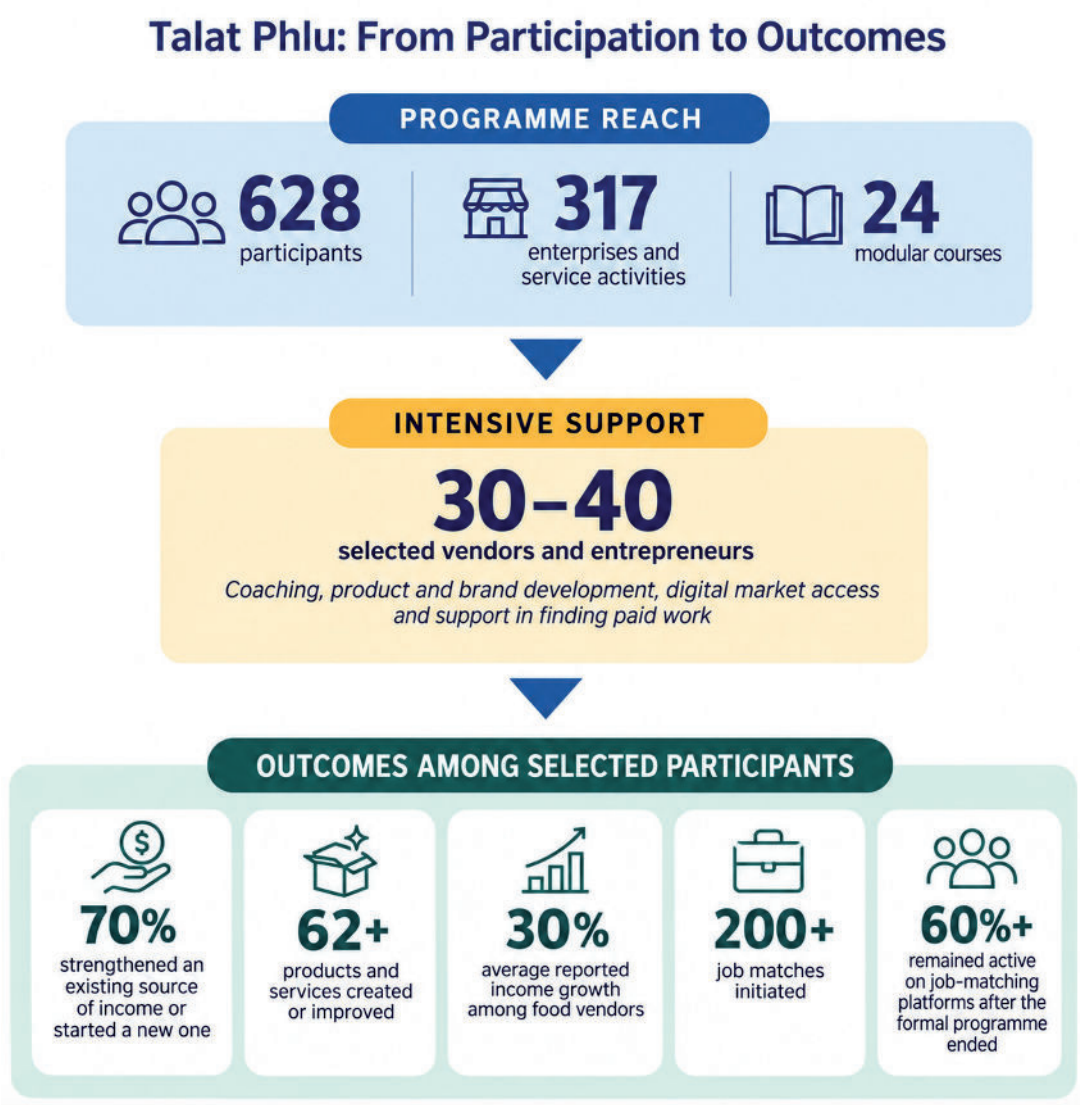
From Learning to Opportunity

Training is not enough. New skills matter only if people have opportunities to use them to earn income. TBS therefore worked with community leaders, public agencies, businesses and civil society organisations to connect participants with customers and income opportunities.

Two platforms—the LINE group "Talat Phlu Hard-Working People" and the "Talat Phlu Care" Facebook page—supported information sharing and job matching in caregiving, senior companionship, household support and delivery services. More than 60% of the selected cohort remained active on the job-matching platforms and continued to receive recurring work after the formal programme ended.



Work, worth and evidence of change

Among the selected group of around 30–40 vendors and entrepreneurs, approximately 70% strengthened an existing source of income or began a new income-generating activity. Food vendors reported average income growth of around 30%. Although these income figures were mainly self-reported, they were accompanied by visible changes in packaging, branding, pricing, customer reach and the use of digital sales channels.

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Examples of Packaging & Branding Development During the Project

Product 1: Before

Product 1: After

Product 2: Before

Product 2: After

The group created or improved at least 62 products and services, including packaged foods, household services and community-based care. Some vendors joined delivery platforms such as Robinhood and LINE MAN for the first time, reducing their dependence on walk-in customers. Other vendors improved their product presentation or developed branding that made their businesses easier to recognise. One food vendor used digital marketing to secure advance orders and expand production, making her income more predictable.

The project also opened routes into new types of work. One participant, who cannot read and has sight in only one eye, moved into cleaning and senior-companionship work and continues to receive recurring assignments through a local project contact.

Across the selected group, more than 200 job matches were initiated from 2023 onwards. Participants also reported greater confidence in learning new digital and occupational skills. Some moved into different forms of work; others reached new groups of customers by offering new services. Together, these changes helped participants retain their independence, diversify their sources of income, and remain active in family and community life.

What Talat Phlu shows

Talat Phlu raises a wider question: who are business schools designed to serve? Universities are organised around degree programmes and formal institutions, but their research, students and professional networks can also address challenges far beyond the campus.

The lesson for business schools lies in the role Thammasat Business School chose to play. It began with the realities of the community, adapting learning around participants' work, and building relationships that connected new capabilities with customers and paid roles.

Talat Phlu shows what is possible when a business school begins by recognising the knowledge and practical skills already present in a community, then connects them with new tools, markets and forms of work. The challenge is to create conditions in which the existing knowledge of older people can continue to generate income as markets change. Meaningful social impact begins by recognising the value already present in a community—and designing around it.

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