

THAILAND PREMIERE LEAGUE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CLUBS' VIEWS ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING: A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WILLINGNESS TO ACT, CONCERNS AND COLLABORATIONS

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Abstract: *This qualitative research was designed to discover the views regarding global warming among six Thai professional football clubs in the Northeastern of Thailand (Isan) including Buriram United (BRUTD), Ubon United (UBUTD), Khon Kaen FC (KKFC), Nongbua Pichaya FC (NBPFC), Sisaket FC (SSKFC) and Udon Thani FC (UDFC). All of them are playing in T1 and T2 of Thailand Premiere League (TPL), the top two highest football league in Thailand. Four club's presidents and two clubs' representatives were examined using an in-depth interview that covered global warming awareness, willingness to act, concerns and collaborations needs to run green project anti global warming effects. The result revealed that Thai Isan professional football clubs are available to contribute their role as leaders to carry green projects to mitigate the effects from global warming problems in nine dimensions coming with some concerns and supportive collaboration needs. It also showed that there is a significant relationship between nine willingness activities to act, concerns and collaborations which could be a key encouragement and discouragement for the clubs to run their green project campaigns in the near future. The idea to form Isan TPL Football Clubs Connections for Global Warming has been discussed positively among all target clubs.*

Keywords : *Thailand football clubs, global warming, willingness to act, Isan football clubs*

INTRODUCTION

Global warming is one of today's most concerned and common issues in any field of human activity. Many global warming impacts can occur from a variety of cause, both natural and human induced. [1] Football has no exception and has been tried to be a part to reduce global warming situations as we can observe that Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) has been engaging with its stakeholders, with Local Organising Committees, fans and other institutions since the 2006 FIFA World Cup to raise awareness on climate action, and measure, reduce and offset its carbon emissions. FIFA responds intentionally the UN's development of the Sports for Climate Action Framework to raise awareness and action to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement for climate protection. [2]

The agreement from the most important football organization like FIFA has encouraged this research committed in a small part of the world to discover views about Global warming situations of six professional football clubs in the northeastern region of Thailand, whose well-known local name is Isan.

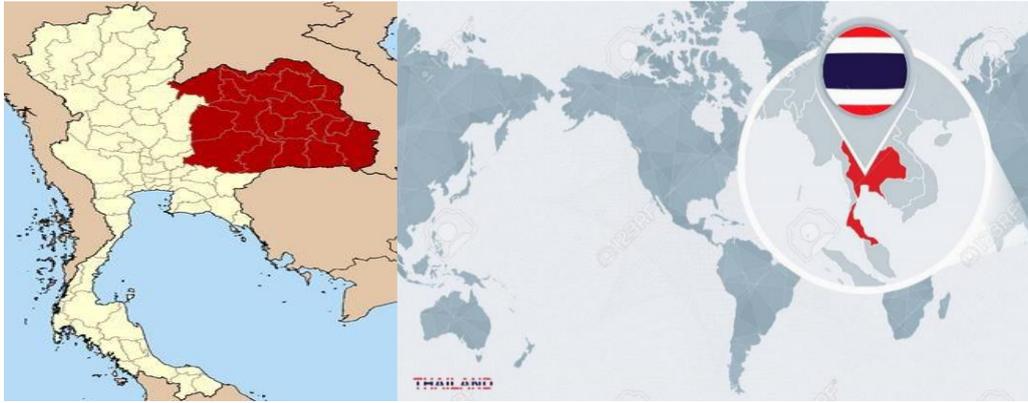


Fig 1: Northeastern of Thailand or Isan Location

(Source: https://www.123rf.com/photo_103119010_stock-vector-world-map-centered-on-america-with-magnified-thailand-blue-flag-andmap-of-thailand-abstract-vector-.html)

Isan is the biggest region of Thailand where consists of 20 provinces with the registered population of 21,989,477. [3] and now day by day Isan community is getting affected by global warming bad impacts we have not occurred before such air pollution PM2.5¹ that affects every daily life activity or severe drought that hits Isan farmers on their agricultural activities and becomes harder to predict. Summer is not summer or winter is not winter anymore. Not only Isan region is affected by climate impacts but also other parts of the country has been suffered by worst flood and more powerful storm than before. Global warming is expected to cause major changes in climate- from causing drought in some regions to causing severe storms in others. [4]

According to The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, global warming will have major impact on Asia and India is at high risk amongst the Asian countries Efforts to decrease negative global situations must be taken as early as possible to create awareness about it. [5] we're going to have to come together to work on solutions that should not base on the capitalist logic of return on investment. [4] worldwide cooperate collaboration have to be done. We can be more optimistic with this issue anymore.

Global warming including climate change issues are not a problem for only a country but it has become a global responsibility of all humankind that need a combined collaboration from every section including sports. Consequently, the discussion on the environmental impact of sports, whether played or watched, has two objectives: "to reduce the ecological footprint of sports activities and to exploit the popularity of sports to raise environmental awareness in general" [6]

For this innovative idea about encouraging people to engage in environmental issue, it is very interesting to know that Thai football clubs are motivated to take action as a leader among their fans to handle this matter. Football clubs could be a powerful choice to raise awareness of global warming among fans [3] or could play an important role as a medium on educating people about global warming or environmental matters. It is very important to create combined as well as individual awareness to help climate and to improve global warming situations. [4]

Based on the statistics registered in the Football Association of Thailand (FAT) in 2013, the numbers of Thai spectators of football increased approximately 23% between 2010 and 2012. [7] Football nowadays is the most watched sport in Thailand. Thailand Premiere League (TPL) is the highest professional football competition of the country which consists of four different rankings from TPL1 to TPL4 (its acronym T1 to T4). Our target clubs are located in Isan region. The numbers of club's followers have been increasing day by day.

This research examines the relationship between the Isan football club's views, the willingness to act the concerns and the collaborations that might be significant affects to carry out green projects to raise awareness among football spectators and other related personal groups. As far as I know from literature review and the interview, there are no available studies on the global warming issues cooperating with football clubs in Thailand that try to draw general awareness and encourage them to take actions on global warming issues . The result of the study could be a role model for Thai football business to generate positive

¹ PM 2.5 is particulate matter 2.5 microns and below. Those are small particles floating in the air.

environmental behaviours among Thai football spectators, stakeholders, sponsors and related organizations around the country.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used qualitative methodological approach to investigate Thai-Isan Premiere League professional football club's views about their willingness to act, concerns and collaboration needs. The key informants were six professional football clubs in the Northeastern of Thailand which were Buriram United (BRUTD), Ubon United (UBUTD), Khon Kaen FC (KKFC), Nongbua Pichaya FC (NBPFC), Sisaket FC (SSKFC) and Udon Thani FC. (UDFC) Four club's presidents and two representatives were examined using an in-depth interview. Purposive sampling technique was applied to all key informants. The interview was done at clubs' CEOs office on different dates that they were available during October 2018 to January 2019.

Field observation in form of participant and non-participant observations also was used in this research to achieve data in all dimensions. The research team attended to the match day of all target clubs. Before and after games the stadium observations was done, inside and outside, to observe spectators behaviours during the games and the clubs' match day management. We also observed relevant environmental equipment such as trash, public relation posters and signs, green space, types of bulbs, parking, shops or vendors, etc. The mentioned observations served to find related activity about global warming or environmental issues that the clubs have provided. Then, data from interview and field observation were analysed comparatively to find reliability of data.

Data from in-depth interview was an audio recording and it was arranged for a transcription form in Microsoft Word Program, and was prepared for qualitative analysis by the ATLAS.ti program. Data collected was also analyze by assigning quotations, coding, classifying and networking. Once the data was ready for analysis, content analysis method was implemented to interpretation to find relationships between clubs' willingness to act, concerns and collaboration needs to be able to proceed green projects.

CLUB'S VIEWS AND AWARENESS ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING

Awareness is a vital factor to start to improve something. From the data collected in the interview, all club's CEOs has shown positive awareness to global warming situations and the clubs will be available to share their participation for the global warming mitigation. Their crucial awareness has confirmed an important role of professional football clubs as a big part to lead their fans to engage in clubs' campaign about global warming and environmental issues.

BRUTD has shown very strong awareness because they had planned to celebrate their 10 years clubs' establishment by launching green projects, but they still needs supportive collaboration from city municipality for more knowledge in environmental campaigns and academic supports from university or academic institutions in order to design more interesting environmental activities. With this collaboration they strongly believe that public awareness about global warming will be increased considerably as his following quotation,

...I think the coming year we have do something about global warming or environmental issues. I think if we run the Green Stadium project, it will not only for a garbage separation we have to conclude something more to raise awareness for public in general as well. Actually it's an issue for everyone and it's at hand...(interview on December, 11, 2018)

KKFC president's opinion confirmed shortly but clearly his awareness to global warming issue.

...Whatever we do or wherever we are, global warming is relevant to us...(interview on November 30, 2018)

NBLPFC president also reflexed her own consideration about how we can heal the world and football clubs' participation could be a key part to encourage fans to engage in helping the world together.

...For the overview I think we can see awareness about this issue everywhere to make our world better, to relieve global problems. However, for football business it will be something more attractive for multitude of people. Here there are football fans with passion. It's something like when we are a big fan of television actors but in different view. I am referring to sport view. It will be a crucial part to make a trend about global warming and everyone will agree with what we do...(interview on October 26, 2018)

Self-awareness of clubs' CEOs is very important as a role model. These quotations of awareness show us that football business is ready to be an important part in helping the world. Profit from business can be returned by clubs' participation. Football clubs want to prove that they can do something more than only football issue.

Regarding awareness, clubs' sponsors, stakeholders, relevant institutions and public in general need to understand how global warming problems is going to affect them and what can they do to cope, starting with understanding what is causing global warming and what effects it has in order to figure out solutions and implement them. [8]

CLUB'S WILLINGNESS TO ACT

Based on the data collection with six key informants, all clubs agreed that in the beginning of Thai football business they mainly focused on the business purpose trying to win trophies in order to obtain recognition from fans to reach a financial stability. What mentioned was already an old-fashioned style business because nowadays environmental issue has involved football to share responsibility to help the world because football is one of the most effective as well as popular media to communicate to their supporters.

Their attitudes correspondence to this environmental issue and they all are available to act according to seven willingness's in various dimensions which will be described in the following dimensions.

1. Environmental orientation for fans

Almost every club mentioned that a major idea to encourage fans to raise awareness about global warming effects is providing them an environmental knowledge. The most effective periods to draw best public attention should be done on match days in the stadium in order to generate understanding among people who love football. BRUTD² club's policy representative stated as below,

"I think our club will contact with universities or local administrative organizations to provide an orientation in front of the stadium. It could be a small activity booth on behalf of the club inviting fans to join. This can be a collaboration between club and university to share their expertise "

(interview on December, 11, 2018)

Another interesting point that a club suggested was that schools or educational institutions should educating children about global warming. Most importantly efforts must be taken to teach school children about global warming and climate changes due to it more extensively. [9]

2. Public relation

Providing public relation or announcements is one of the most available willingness of all clubs. They are more flexible to transmit environmental issue through their media, mainly on club's facebook page. Clubs' facebook is the best communication channel with fans. Some clubs have more than one million followers in facebook such as Buriram United whose page reaching more than 1,500,000 followers. Some clubs also still use clubs' websites but is not as popular as facebook due to an easier access where all types of comments are easily done. An important reason for the flexibility of clubs to contribute public relation is they don't have to pay anything for doing public relation or if pay is very little amount. They already have available resources to publish announcements, apart from facebook, such as LCD screen in the stadium or free spaces to stick posters inside and around stadiums including assign the club's MC to communicate to fans during the 15 minutes when the game pause as the following SSKFC's representative statement,

"We will ask our MC to make an announcement to gain fans collaboration who attend the stadium about taking their garbage after finish eating in order to help global warming situations, this is what we are doing right now. Mainly, what we can help most is public relation"

(interview on November 24, 2018)

3. Energy saving

² The club who wins 6 times the highest Thailand Football championship and the actual champion for this season. The club is recognized the best and the most famous football club in Thailand as well now.

Each club focused on LED lamp in the stadiums. BRUTD, SSKFC and UBUFC had already installed LED in stadiums under a football licensing regulation for the highest league (last two clubs played in the highest league few years ago) They said LED saves a lot of electrical cost monthly although the first installment required a high budget.

Although NBPFC, whose recent home stadium is a property of city municipality, is having their own stadium constructed for more than 20% and LED lamp system will be ready for the installation. We can observe from the president's quotation below

"In term of light, we are in urgent case to use normal light in the Municipality Stadium and light capacity is not enough, so we still don't use LED lamps but when we move to our own stadium LED installation is in stadium plan. However, it not the same as solar energy because there are very few clubs in the world using solar energy, very little indeed or almost not. The light system must be very effective to be able to use it. Using LED will help us to save monthly electricity cost up to 40% but to install it is expensive but it is good for global warming issue." (interview on October 26, 2018)

In term of energy saving, another noticeable familiar habit found in the data collection is fans share vehicle to attend the match especially fans from villages or others districts in the province. They own the simple carpool culture to share cost for fuel with the car's owner. Most of them are friends or they know each other very well. The clubs are proud with this original idea that we can find at least in Isan region or probably spreading out for the whole country. Driving cars is considered one of the behaviours as cause of global warming. [10]

4. Garbage management

Garbage or waste from football is similar to general waste generated from sport events whose category is still not a major of solid waste. According to United Nation Economics and Social Commissions for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP) (2000), waste generated from sport events mostly are food waste, paper, plastic and glass.[11]

BRUTD mentioned various times about garbage management in their green project. Its intention is to create a Green Stadium to celebrate their 10 years' anniversary of club's establishment. The green program will be developed in many environmental dimensions and garbage management will be the first preference of all green activities as the club's representative stated,

"our preference in this Green Project is about garbage management and also green space creation" (interview on December, 11, 2018)

BRUTD probably is only one club where any kind of food or beverage package are prohibited to bring into stadium on match day

He also gave following statement referring to an initial process of the garbage managements,

"We will start giving an education for children in our Youth Academy, making them know how to separate garbage correctly into its classifications. Now we are buying new versions of bins" (interview on December, 11, 2018)

Recently few clubs provided different colour bins for recycling. Base on the interview and the observation around stadiums, most of bins are still for mixed waste y some areas provide waste bag in grandstand without separation and no recycling possibility. The current waste management process by the football clubs in the Thai Premier League still lacks proper management. [12]

Moreover, UDFC's president showed his interest in doing garbage management in the new stadium in the upcoming season, what he said is the following,

"For now we are using stadium of the Institute of Physical Education Udonthani and as I mentioned before because of the limited space what we indeed can do is providing bins. Just only doing that the space is almost not enough, but when we move to the stadium of the Sports Authority of Thailand, located in Udonthani, I am going to have garbage separation done because we have a lot of space." (interview on November 3, 2018)

5. Plastic reduce and green products

From the interview, plastic waste was categorized in the first ranking of all wasted generated from football spectators. Spectators buy food and drinks from shops and vendors around stadiums and get automatically plastic bags or foam as packaging. Plastic bags and foam are the main material used as container for food and beverages in the match day. NBPFC promised that the plastic reduce policy will be implemented in its new stadium but has to come together with awareness of the merchandise, as the president said.

“Regarding plastic bags, if we do run the campaign but it will not be effective 100%. The knowledge orientation and mutual comprehension (between club and merchandise) are needed and then we will see the response. About global warming, what we had done firstly is a public relation through activities. Secondly, we asked spectators and merchandise around the stadium to reduce using any plastic packaging” (interview on October 26, 2018)

To run the plastic campaign UDFC will need to contact its sponsor for collaboration and product support, as the following quotation of the president,

“To start the campaign, I am supposed to talk to our main sponsor LEO. Normally they support us in term of budget and products. If they increase the support, we will ask for products such as paper recycle cups or any non-plastic utensils such as spoons, paper dish or chopstick. I think it could be possible but let me try to talk to them first” (interview on November 3, 2018)

In relation to green products, BRUTD showed the strongest willingness to contribute the production of cloth bags until the ideal products like team kits made from recycled plastic

“Regarding global warming issue, actually I think that Thai people perceive it a lot and I think everyone realize that using cloth bag can reduce plastic. We have plan to produce it (cloth bag) and sell it in our shops so that it can be reused various of time, not a single use and throw it away anymore. If there is anything we can do, we will. For example, about team uniform I have seen that Nike used plastic to produce uniforms but if we have to do the same as Nike we have to consider about the cost that could be higher and cause higher price for buyers as well. Probably we can make it real in the upcoming years. It is a good idea. I will raise this to the club’s president” (interview on December, 11, 2018)

For plastic reduce, there are well-known English football as Tottenham Hotspur whose new launched policy is fighting with plastic packaging. The club is showing the practical awareness by prohibit single-use plastics in its new stadium with the aim to eliminate plastic straws, stirrers, cutlery and all plastic disposable packaging of these items. [13]

6. Green space zone

Willingness regarding green space is positive. KKFC and UBUFC had the same point of view using plants and trees to maintain their home stadium green because of lack of space to open new green zone surrounding stadiums. As we can observe from following KKFC president’s speech,

“What we can do for taking care green space is field maintenance and plant trees as much as we can. Trees can give you oxygen make your football stadiums good place. It is not only good for football players but also for the community nearby” (interview on November 30, 2018)

Confirming the same idea by UBUFC president,

“In this case, we have been trying to make our stadium green as much as possible. As you can now around our stadium, it is surrounded by plants and trees” (interview on January 24, 2019)

It is noteworthy that trees and plants has a strong influence not only making the stadiums green but also generating pure oxy gen directly to stadiums and the zones nearby. In addition, greening bare areas with trees, plants, grass and decorating streets with trees on the side could greatly boost the carbon stocks of the city. [14] Both clubs ‘stadiums are located in the centre of the city.

NBPFC has no problem in green space because the stadium location is quite far away from city centre and are surrounded by big numerous trees. It’s very suitable to do any kinds of physical activities. UDFC owns a very distinctive program for green space as the club’s president said below,

"We organize an annual football tournament for other districts in Udon Thani and the district football teams who are the winners will be given by a budget to build or to reform parks in their districts. I consider this is our participation in building green space from football business" (interview on November 3, 2018)

A variety of ideas was demonstrated to complete the same target for a preferable environment for football players and spectators. Green space is useful for the overall surrounding area. It can mitigate high temperature during day before the match begin in the evening and being a rest zone for fans before match.

7. Budgeting for global warming campaign

Every clubs are delighted to grant budget to fans or any institutions to run global warming or environmental activities on behalf of the clubs. Some of them needs ideas from the public due to their time and staff limitation. KKFC's president showed his supportive speech as below,

"No problem, you can count on me and not only global warming issue that I am ready to support but also woman and disabled issues as well. It helps a lot if we have someone who is a communicator for distribute information" (interview on November 30, 2018)

SSKFC also highlighted the idea as he stated below,

"For the budget support, we are definitely do it but we have to consider case by case about their implementation. If they take their project seriously we have no problem to grant the budget" (interview on November 24, 2018)

Although the positive budgeting availability from clubs are found, nobody accesses this information or show interest to ask for the financial supports from the clubs. From relevant study revealed that less than 1% of spending used in climate or environmental mitigation and adaptation activities. [15] The clubs should promote to have this availability accessible to the public.

CLUB'S CONCERNS AND COLLABORATION NEEDS

The study demonstrated clubs' concern focusing about the lack of public orientation about how to create and raise awareness global warming and environmental impacts among fans. Many of football spectators still have little understanding or lack of awareness about the future impacts of global warming to their life.

Club's CEO mentioned that they will be available to respond positively to any measures to share responsibility about global warming but the result will be not effective enough if they do it alone. It must be a responsibility for everyone and more specifically relevant organizations or stakeholders which are government, FAT and TPL, sponsors, city municipality, educational institutions, university and public participation.

The collaboration from other sectors will be an important key to run this campaign successful especially from academic institutions focusing on higher educational institutions who can share expertise related to this issue to the clubs. Agreeing to the previous research in similar field claimed that relevant institutions should provide supportive techniques and knowledge waste prior to separation in order for the FAT or TPL to develop guidelines for football clubs. [12]

The collaboration of clubs' sponsors is also essential. Some key ideas have to be approved by sponsors. The agreement or disagreement from sponsors influence directly to clubs' green projects. Small size clubs still depend on a big financial support from sponsors and not have enough power to negotiate in some projects they want to carry out.

The most significant factors that coincidence in the relationship are vision and policies from government, FAT and TPL in environmental issue. If these powerful organizations show their positive vision and seek for responsive law and policies to the issue, the existing concerns would be transform to big opportunities to make green projects possible and effectively.

Regarding stadium possession, some clubs are still renting stadiums from city municipality or from Institute of Physical Education as their home stadium. Any important or beneficial decision have to be raised up for agreement and approval. It is one of club's concerns if they want to implement green projects in the stadium such as public relation and energy saving. There are costs for installation that need mutual negotiation for possible budget share.

Moreover, the relationship figure shows that almost every concerns has something related to collaborations. We can assume that concerns and collaboration depends on each other. This association between them affects significantly to various willingness to act, either supportive or opposing.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

From the research result, at least we have known that Isan professional football clubs have favourable views and serious concern for the global warming problem and have shown their awareness to act in various ways. Clubs' awareness and initial ideas for global warming are impressive. The ideas to introducing green projects are positive just waiting for make them real. The clubs believed that the clubs' influential popularity could lead fans to collaborate. The concept is similar to a business objective when selling club's products.

Regarding CSR activity, it is a requirement for club's licencing to offer CSR. Clubs organize various CSR projects annually, but almost all projects still focus on football teaching to kids or providing a sport equipment donation to schools in the countryside. None project really related to environmental matters. In reality for now, FAT still has no green measure at all. It's time for Government, FAT and TPL to revise some proactive policies to encourage football clubs' participation in environmental issue.

The problem found for this moment is the current policies for sporting events in Thailand still lack proper incentives, rules, regulations and environmental awareness of solid waste management among the related institutions, especially by the FAT and the TPL. [12]

Isan football clubs confirmed that they are ready to implement policies and adopt them to their environmental management. Even though some clubs showed compromises to respond to their local environment by their own before any policy from FAT or TPL ready. CSR by football clubs in global warming issue could be a good start that can raise more public awareness.

In addition, every club target for this research appreciated the invitation to form *Isan TPL professional Football Clubs Connections for Global Warming* in order to seek the common strategies and techniques to run green projects systematically and sustainably. The funding to start this project will be supported by all clubs target. KKFC, UBUFC and SSKFC suggested that this research leader should collaborate with relevant bigger organizations to be able to make this environmental project possible and this pioneer idea will be a role model for all football clubs around the country. Thus, the further study about this clubs connection will be very interesting.

From the interview data and field trip observations, I am strongly convinced that six Isan professional football clubs are able to launch a great cooperate collaboration by sharing their green projects, having the same criteria to maintain their business friendly with environmental matters.

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