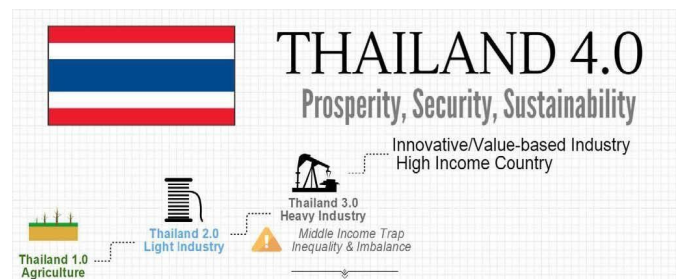


## Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC)

Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor is a strategic plan under an economic model of Thailand 4.0. This plan has further developed from Eastern Seaboard Development Programme (ESDP) that had begun about 30 years ago. Its aim is “to turn Thailand's major provinces to the immediate east of Bangkok into a hub of high tech industries, innovation and logistics as well as a regional gateway for trade and investment. (Phuangketkeow, S., 2020).” The three eastern provinces included in this strategic plan are Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao. These provinces surrounded the Gulf of Thailand with a total area of approximately 13,000 square kilometers (Dunseith, B., 2018).



Since the military intervention in May, 2014, the government wanted to accomplish the 20-year National Strategy goal that was pursued back then; therefore, Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor is the main plan under Thailand 4.0 to improve Thai economy to another level (Phuangketkeow, S., 2020). The government has stated 15 major investment projects under Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor plan including: U-Tapao airport and aircraft maintenance, Sattahip commercial sea port, development of Laem Chabang port, development of Map Ta Phut port, develop a high-speed eastern rail route, develop double-track railways through the eastern provinces, expand highways and motorways, develop next generation automotive vehicles with focus on battery and electric vehicles, develop aviation and smart electronics, advanced in petrochemical and bio-economy, promote and facilitate tourism in eastern provinces, develop eastern provinces into a global business hub, create new cities to support a surge in eastern population with focus on inclusive growth, strengthen public utilities (Dunseith, B., 2018). Making future industries the main component of economic growth and boosting the income status of Thai people are the main reasons behind the government's implementation of EEC (Chantanusornsiri, W., 2019).

According to (Eastern Economic Corridor Office), “The Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand (EECO) is a vital public agency aiming to encourage investment, uplift innovation, and advanced technology in Thailand for the future generation. We are the business facilitator that adds value across the entire project lifecycle and coordinates closely and proactively with other public authorities and private sectors to ensure the success of the projects.” People are still concerned with what the Eastern Economic Corridor Office stated in its website. They are not sure if they would receive anything in return by sacrificing their lands due to land grabbing. Many criticisms have been made because of the aim, process, and future outcomes that the plan might lead to.

People in the areas are concerned about the environment in the area. The government promised the local people that the projects would be clean and environmental-friendly. However, it has been seen that there are chemical leaks in some of the developing areas. In which people are not satisfied with the process because it is not closely monitored by the people responsible for the projects and that it could worsen the environment (*Environmental fears as EEC plans rushed*, 2018). Moreover, as stated by the local people, “We also worry about the impacts on our way of life, as we do not see any development and promotion of...agriculture and fisheries, which are the livelihoods of local people, in the EEC plan. We do not even see how we can get involved in the EEC development (*Environmental fears as EEC plans rushed*, 2018).” Local people that are affected in the area are in doubt because they do not think that the investment projects’ outcomes would give them any participation.

Thailand’s Eastern Economic Corridor could make an economic boom to Thailand’s future because of its development in high tech industries and innovation in the Eastern areas. Although criticisms have been made, the environmental issue and the lack of public participation remained unsolved.

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