

# **Poverty in Thailand**

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Lecture 27

**Like cancer, poverty is not a single disease.  
It is a scourge with many symptoms and causes.  
And it is for that reason that, also like cancer, it is so difficult to eradicate.**

# Outline

1. Poverty incidence and growth
2. Rural vs. urban poverty
3. Farm prices and poverty
4. Inclusive growth
5. Nonmonetary aspects of poverty:  
Undernourishment and cognitive ability

# 1. Poverty incidence: *1962-1990*

|      | Aggregate poverty | Rural poverty | Urban poverty |
|------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1962 | 57.0              | 61.0          | 38.0          |
| 1975 | 31.4              | 36.2          | 12.5          |
| 1990 | 17.0              | 20.5          | 5.3           |

Aggregate poverty is the percentage of the total population whose income fall below poverty line (held constant over time in **real terms**).

The poverty picture looks different upon thresholds set by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The latest study by the ADB on poverty in Asia set the poverty line at **\$1.25** based on purchasing power parity. **The World Bank's poverty threshold is \$2 a day**. The threshold of poverty is higher for the World Bank.

# Rural Poverty





# Rural Poverty



# Village Children stunt by poverty as parents leave for Bangkok



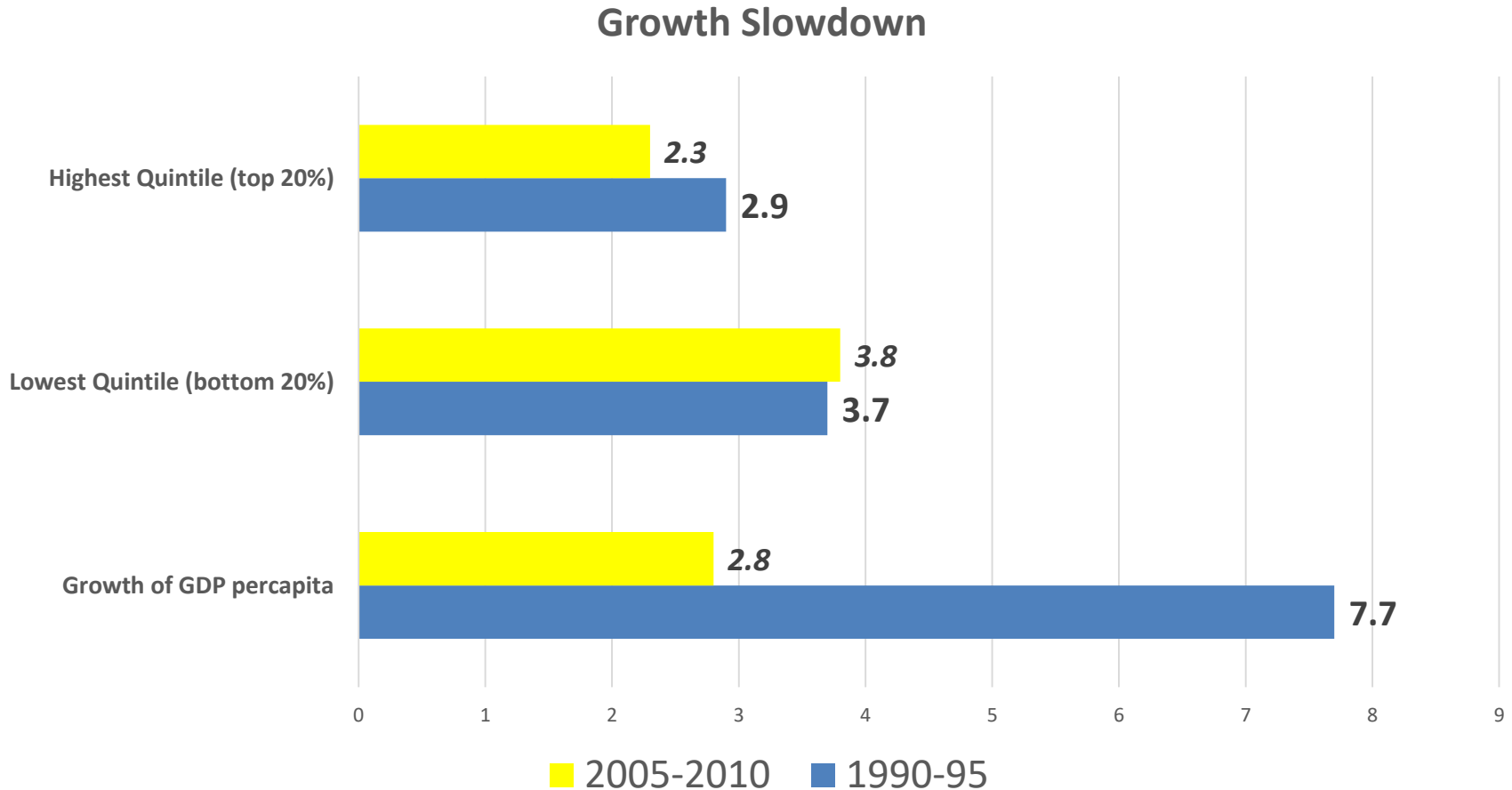
# Urban Poverty

## A slum in Central Bangkok



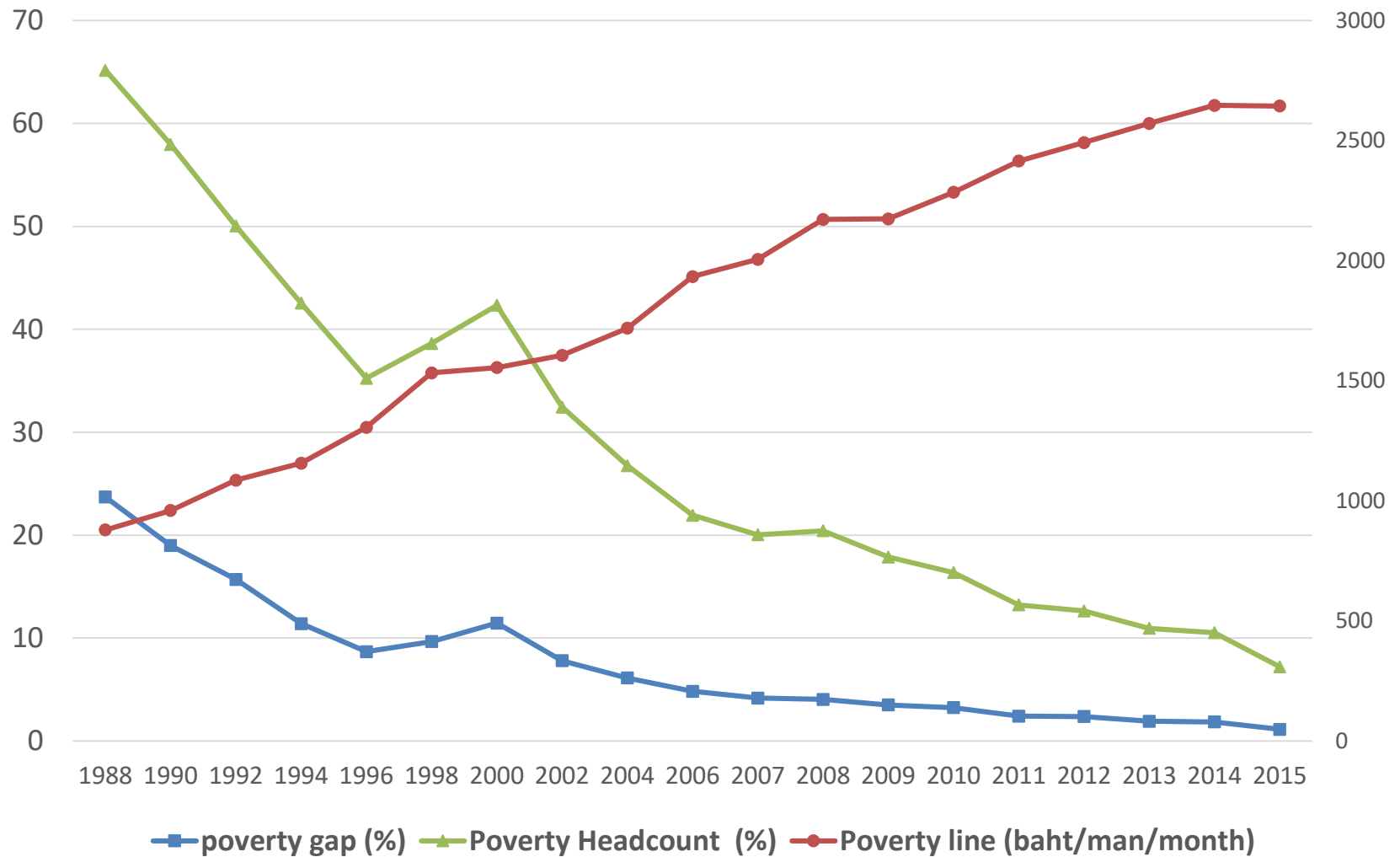


# After twenty years of Thailand's economic development: Growth rate of income per capita slowed down (1990-2010)



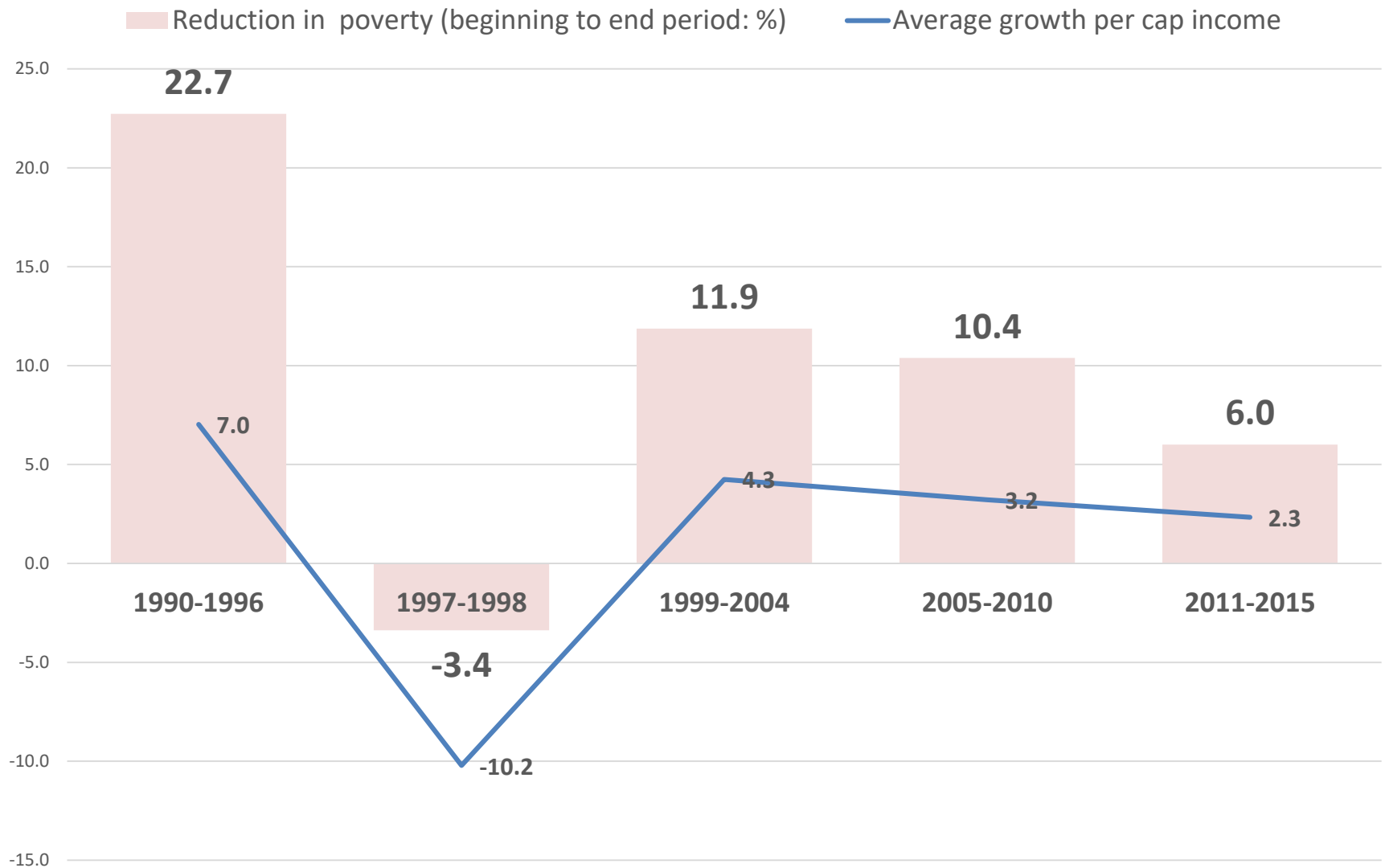


## Declining Poverty



The poverty gap is the percent of the difference between the poverty line and consumption expenditures of the poor)

## Poverty Reduction and Income Growth



## But income poverty is just a part of the whole story

All these numbers seem to differ but have one thing in common. They are all based on monetary measures, revealing income or expenditure poverty.

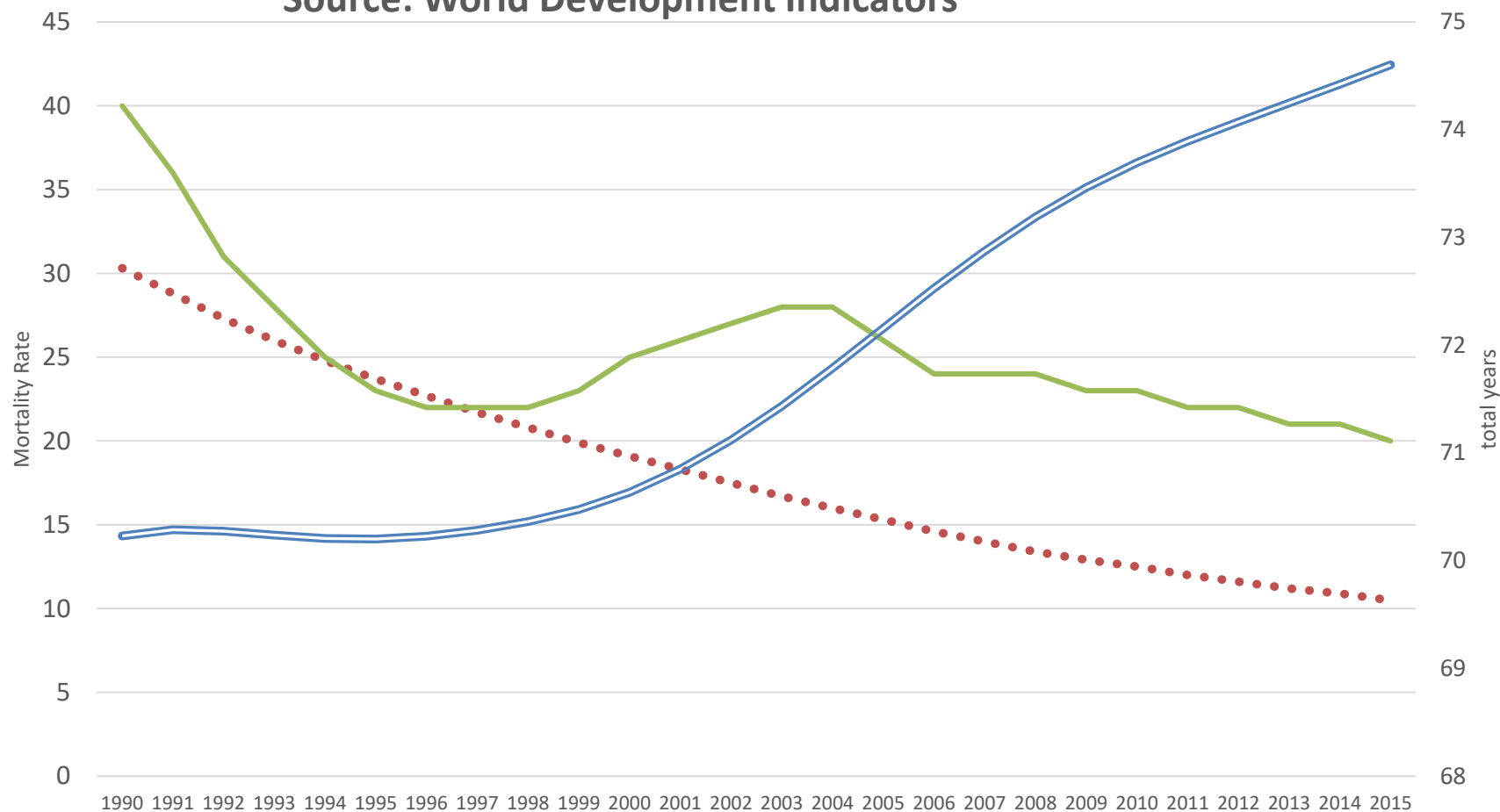
Why does this matter?

The figures only tell part of the story. They do not reflect other forms of poverty and the many overlapping disadvantages experienced by the poor, such as:

**Malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of electricity or limited access to schooling, let alone qualitative aspects such as empowerment and participation.**

# Mortality and Life expectancy

Source: World Development Indicators



- Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)
- Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)
- Life expectancy at birth



# Growth and poverty reduction: A positive correlation

- Large reductions in absolute poverty incidence in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines over the period from 1960s to 1999 were related to high rate of economic growth ( Peter Warr, 2000).
- In Thailand, the income share of the bottom 20% is correlated with the GDP growth.
- ***Hence, growth is good for the poor.***

## Favorable impact of growth: poverty alleviation

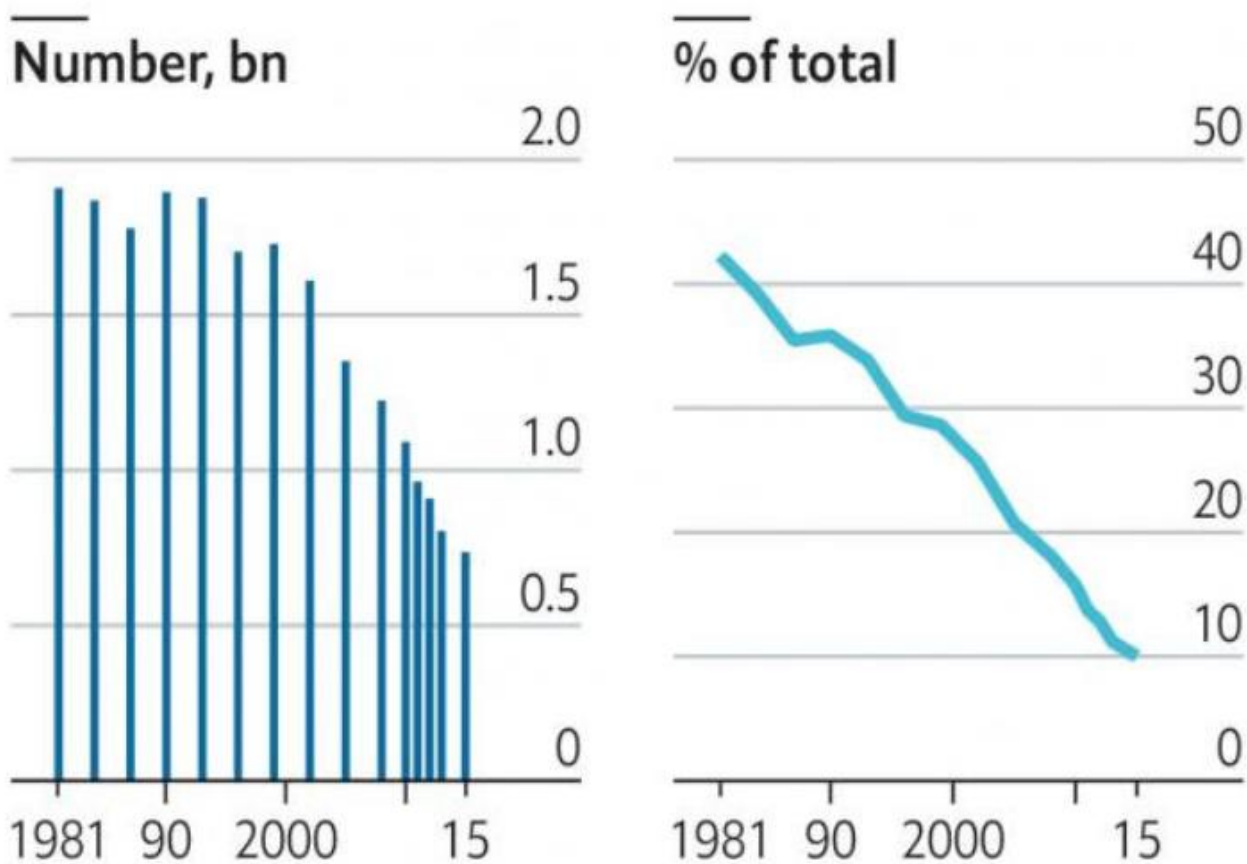
- High growth years were followed by a drastic reduction of the number of the poor.
- The percentage of the poor, i.e. people who live below poverty declined from 32 % in 1988 to 11% in 1996.
- ***When growth rate fell below the trend growth path*** in 1982 and 1986, poverty alleviation in subsequent years was not as effective as during the boom years.
- During the financial crisis in 1998, the percentage of the poor rose to 13%.

## **A poor result: poverty**

In 1992 the United Nations designated October 17th the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. As a day, this lacks the obvious appeal of International Jazz Day (April 30th), World Television Day (November 21st) or International Mountain Day (December 11th). And you will probably be able to walk down the street today without tripping over somebody hunched over the latest World Bank poverty numbers. But that is a pity, because the numbers are worth celebrating. In 1993 just over a third of people worldwide were extremely poor. At the last count, in 2015, one in ten were. There are various reasons for the drop, including better agricultural technology and less awful government in Africa. But the big reason is China. Since the first international poverty day, the proportion of people in the world's largest country who are afflicted by extreme want has fallen from 57% to below 1%. Three cheers for that.

## Penury progress

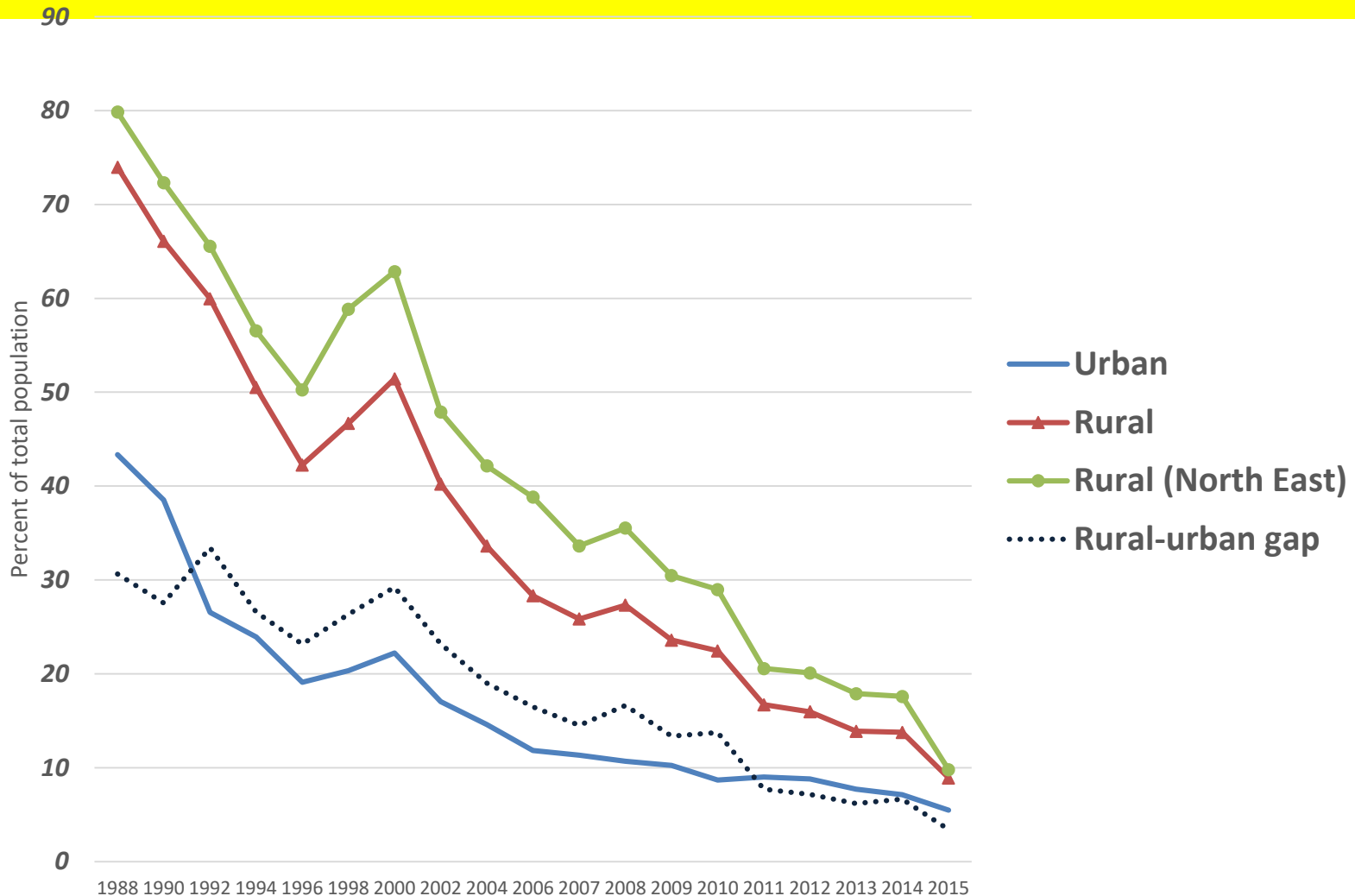
World, people living on less than \$1.90 a day\*



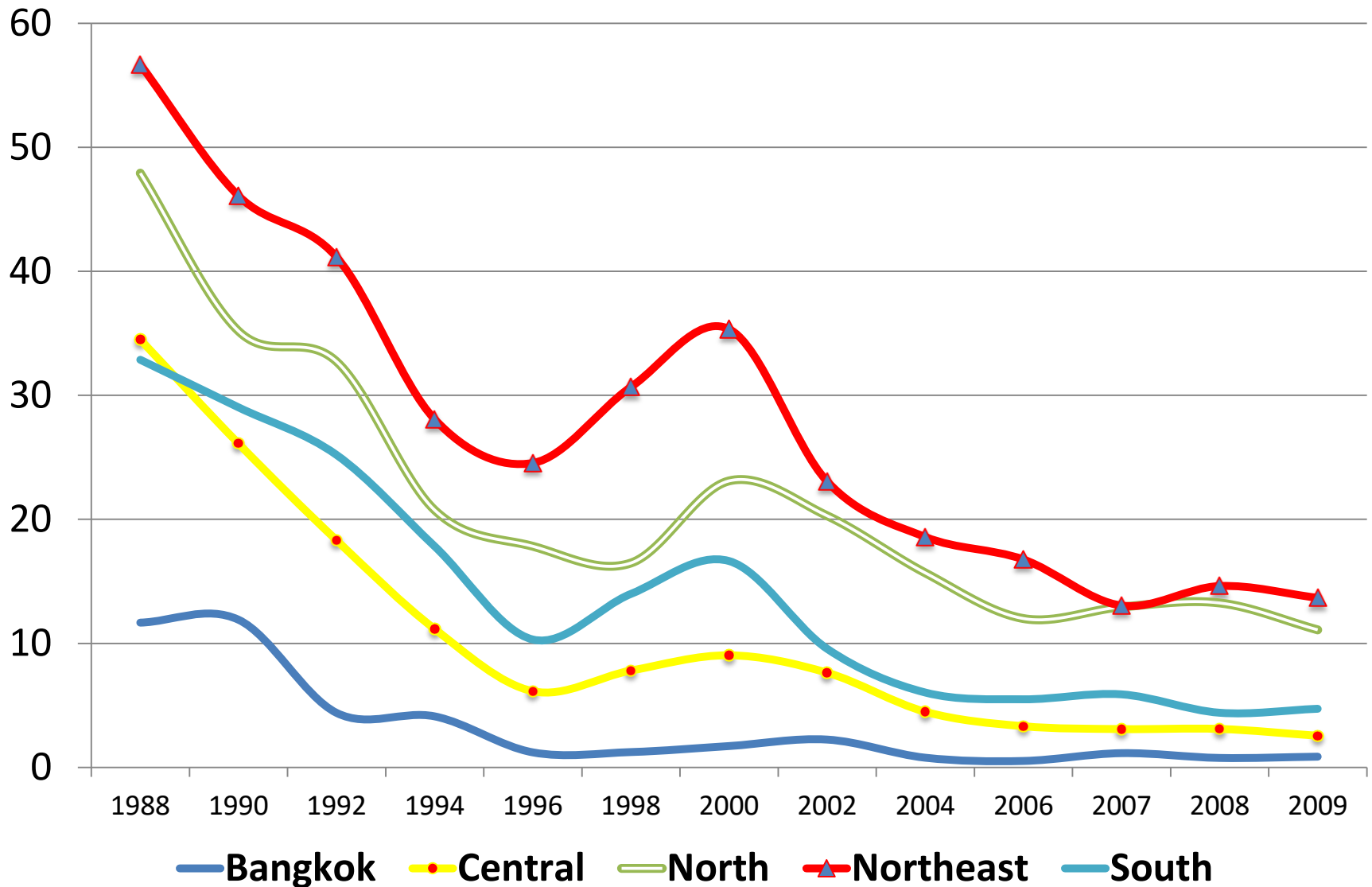
Source: World Bank

\*2011 prices at purchasing-power parity

## 2. Urban vs. Rural Poverty



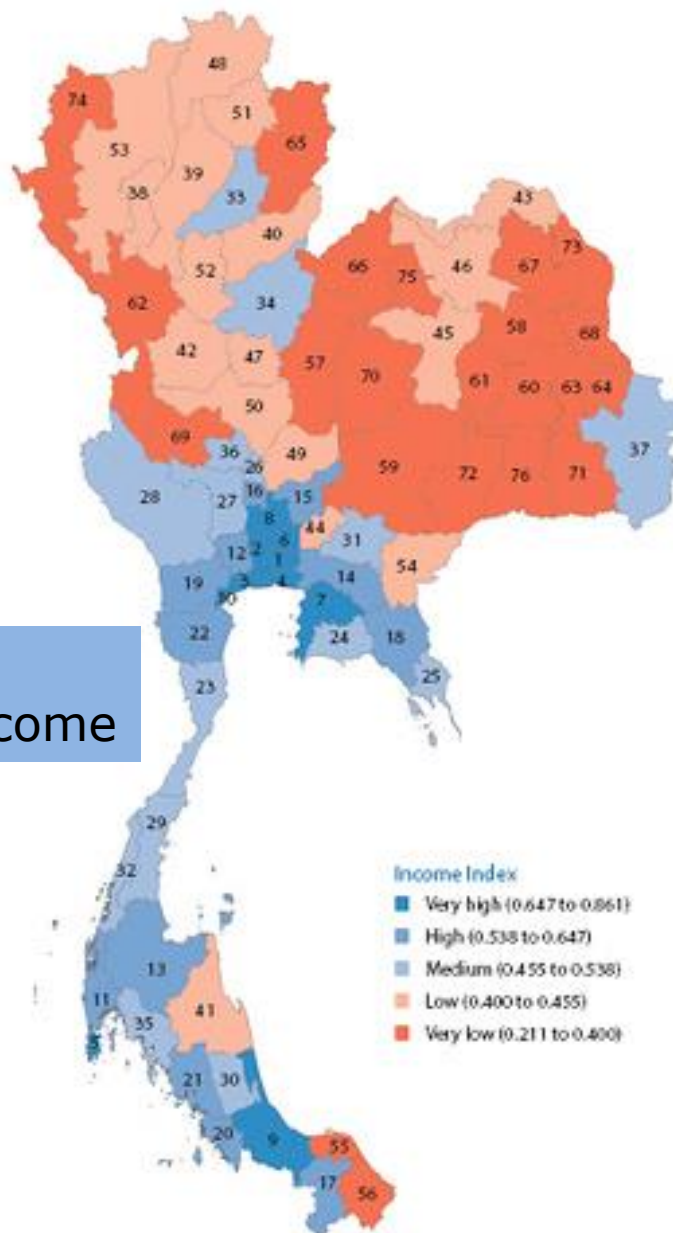
## Poverty by Region (% of the poor)



Source: NESDB



Dark blue  
Very high income



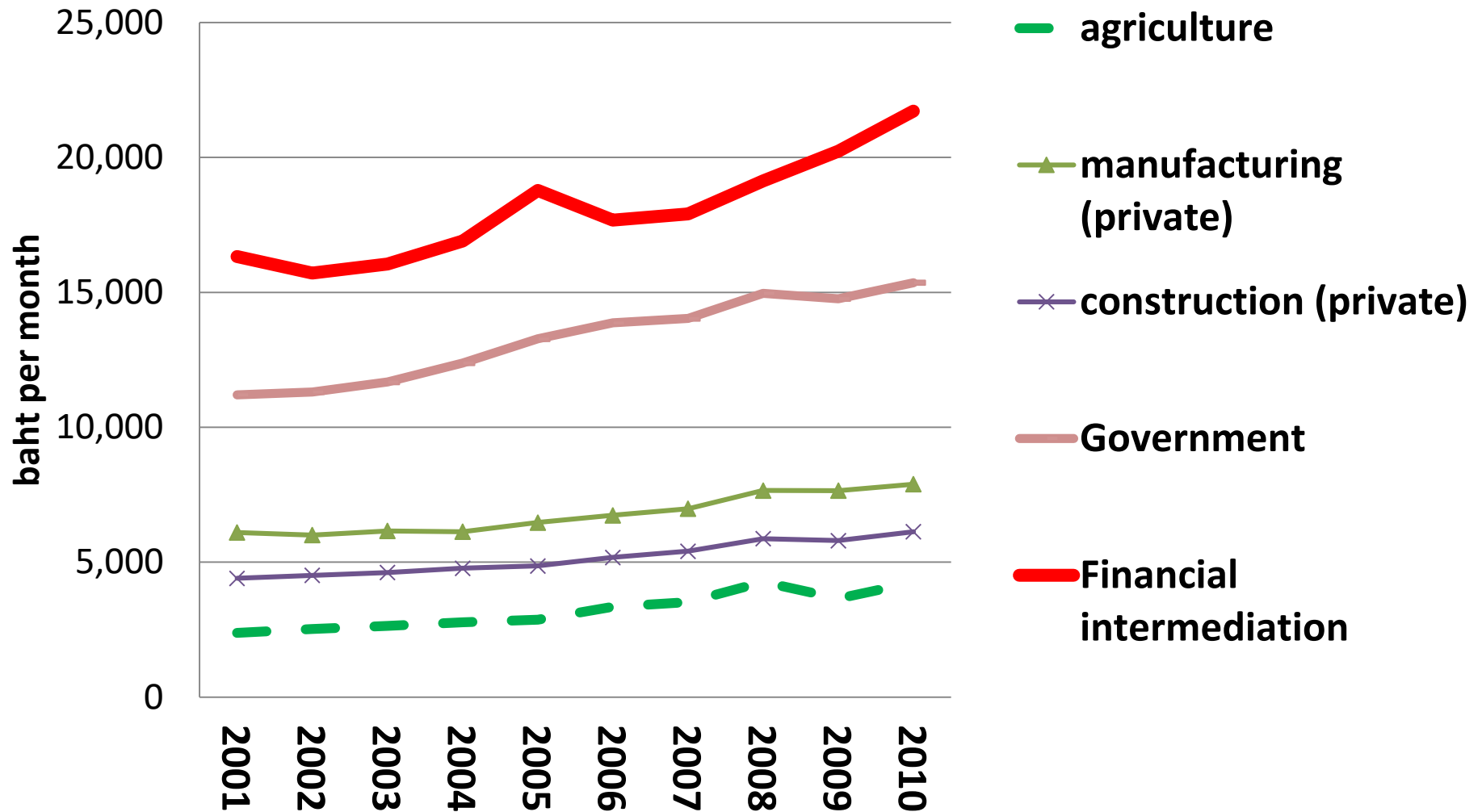
## Rank

- 1 Bangkok
- 2 Nonthaburi
- 3 Samut Sakhon
- 4 Samut Prakan
- 5 Phuket
- 6 Pathum Thani
- 7 Chon Buri
- 8 Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya
- 9 Songkhro
- 10 Samut Songkhro
- 11 Phangnga
- 12 Nakhon Pathom
- 13 Surat Thani
- 14 Chachoengsao
- 15 Saraburi
- 16 Ang Thong
- 17 Yala
- 18 Chanthaburi
- 19 Ratchaburi
- 20 Satun
- 21 Trang
- 22 Phetchaburi
- 23 Prachuap Khiri Khan
- 24 Rayong
- 25 Trat
- 26 Sing Buri
- 27 Suphan Buri
- 28 Kancharaburi
- 29 Chumphon
- 30 Phatthalung
- 31 Prachin Buri
- 32 Ranong
- 33 Phrae
- 34 Phitsanulok
- 35 Krabi
- 36 Chai Nat
- 37 Ubon Ratchathani
- 38 Lamphun
- 39 Lampang
- 40 Utharadit
- 41 Nakhon Si Thammarat
- 42 Kamphaeng Phet
- 43 Nong Khai
- 44 Nakhon Nayok
- 45 Khon Kaen
- 46 Udon Thani
- 47 Phichit
- 48 Chiang Rai
- 49 Lop Buri
- 50 Nakhon Sawan
- 51 Phayao
- 52 Sukhothai
- 53 Chiang Mai
- 54 Sa Kaeo
- 55 Pattani
- 56 Narathiwat
- 57 Phraechaburi
- 58 Kalasin
- 59 Nakhon Ratchasima
- 60 Roi Et
- 61 Maha Sarakham
- 62 Tak
- 63 Yasothon
- 64 Amnat Charoen
- 65 Nuan
- 66 Loei
- 67 Sakon Nakhon
- 68 Mohasarakham
- 69 Uthai Thani
- 70 Chaiyaphum
- 71 Si Sa Ket
- 72 Buriram

Dark orange:  
Very Low income



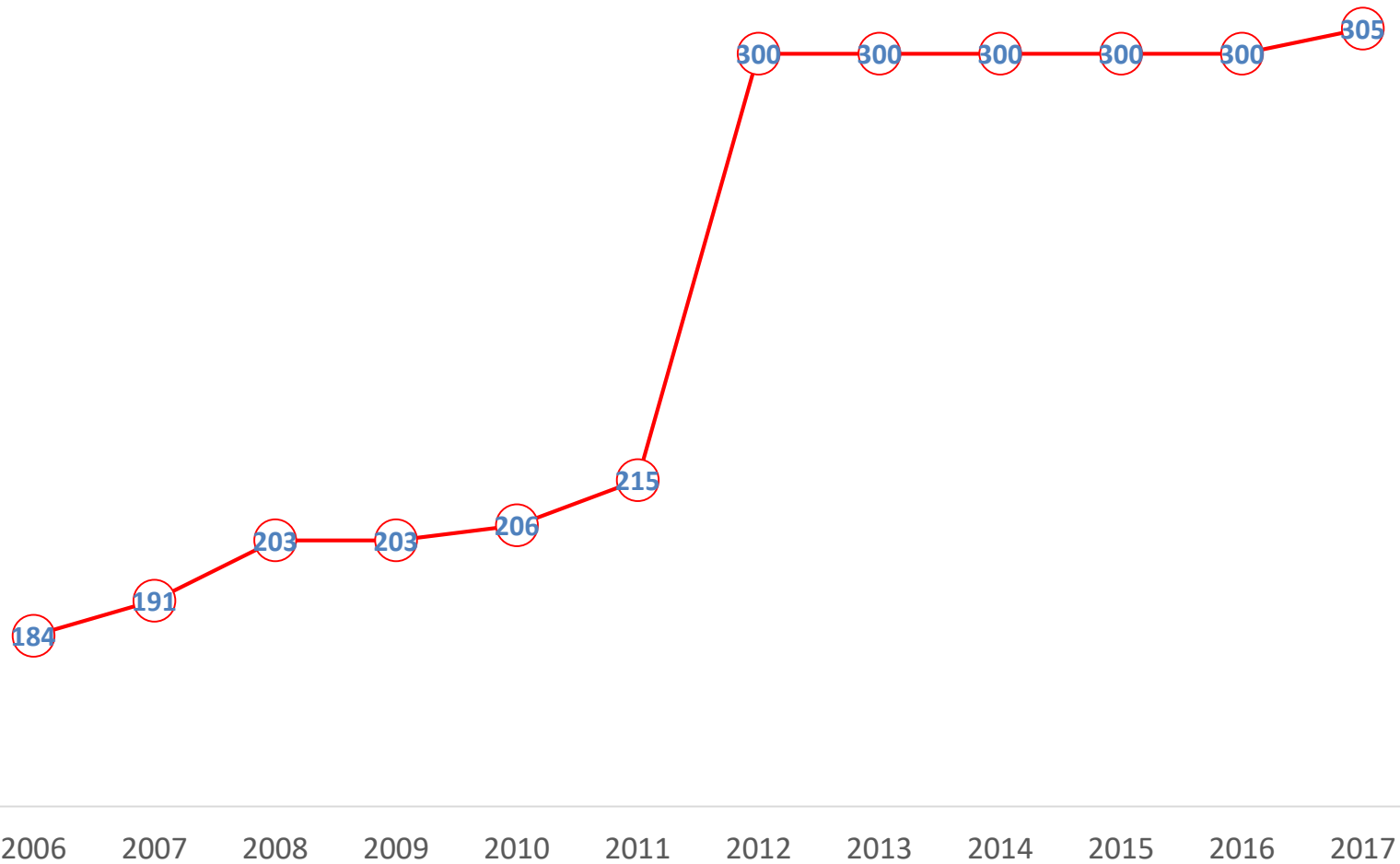
## Limited upward mobility: From low to high income (productivity)



## ***Principal sources of income for the poor***

- The poor earn income from their own assets (i.e. their labor, which are largely unskilled)
- Agricultural land (not as important as labor)
- Economic development that increases the ***demand for labor*** and land raises the income of the poor and consequently reduces the poverty incidence.
- ***Import substituting industrial policy*** does not advance the welfare of the poor since it does not significantly increase the demand for the principal resource which they own—unskilled labor.

## MINIMUM DAILY WAGE



# Debt and Minimum Wages

- In April **2016**, UTCC conducted a survey on workers who earn less than 15,000 baht per month (1,212 respondents)
- The average debt per household was 119,062 baht, the highest level in eight years.
- ***Loans from unorganized (informal) markets*** represented 60% of debt.
- The debt incurred mainly by daily expenses, vehicles, and residential property purchases.
- **The study recommends daily wage to make them afloat is 356 baht.**
- On January 1, 2017, the daily minimum wage was raised from 300 baht to 305-310 baht across the country.
- The minimum wage is supposed to provide a living wage for a family with two children.

# BoT regulations

## Loan-to-Income ratio: credit cards

| Income range  | Loan-to-income Ratio |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 15,000-30000  | 1.5                  |
| 30,000-50,000 | 3.0                  |
| 50,000        | 5.0                  |

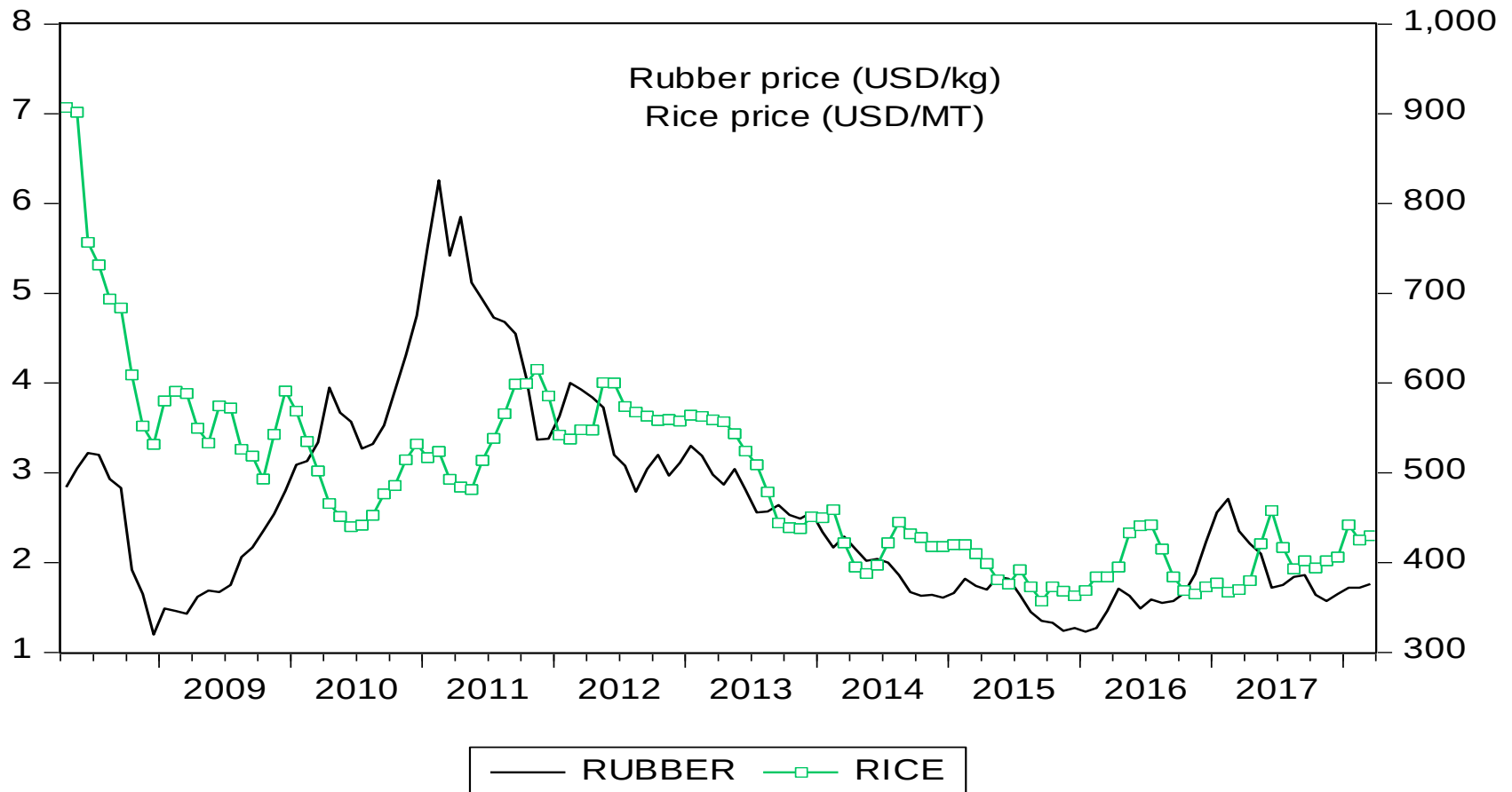


# Minimum Daily Wage: 325 baht



# 3. Farm prices and poverty

## Global commodity prices





DESPAIR: A rice farmer in Ayutthaya's Bang Sai district takes a break from her routine work in the fields. Like most other farmers, she is in a financial predicament due to farm debts. (Photo by Pattanapong Hirunard)

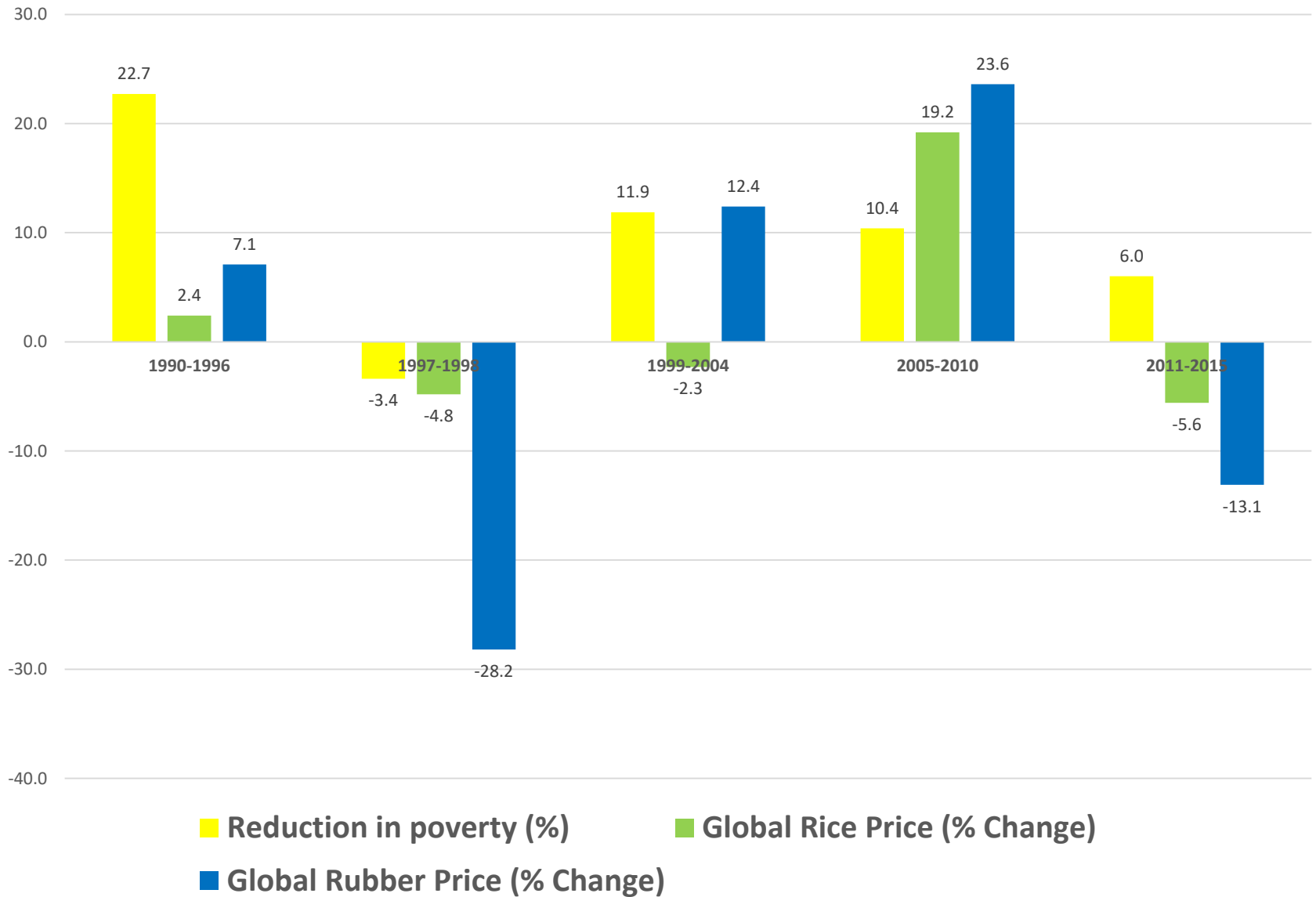
# Commodity Prices and poverty reduction

- Between the periods 1990-1996 and 2005-2010, both global prices of rice and rubber were favorable to Thai farmers.
- The speed of poverty reduction was strong. On the other hand, commodity slumps during the period 1997-1998 and the period 2011-2015 resulted in a decelerated the poverty reduction.
- Most of the time, prices of rice and rubber moved in tandem.

# Commodity Prices and poverty reduction

- However, between 1999-2004, they moved in opposite direction.; Rubber price went up by 12.4 % and the rice price went down by 2.3%. Yet the poverty continued to decline by 11.9 %, thanks to the high export prices of maize and tapioca during the same corresponding periods.
- Indeed, poverty reduction depends partly on the strength of commodity prices.

## Global Commodity Prices and Poverty Reduction



## What do farmers get when the food prices go up?

Spend *more* on inputs, therefor they earn *less* from selling farm produces

- All input costs — water, fertilizer, seeds, machines, labor and fuel — have gone up, while prices obtained for the final produce have not risen commensurately.
- Withdrawals of subsidies by public authorities has further aggravated the burden.
- This has made farmers with small land holdings unviable.

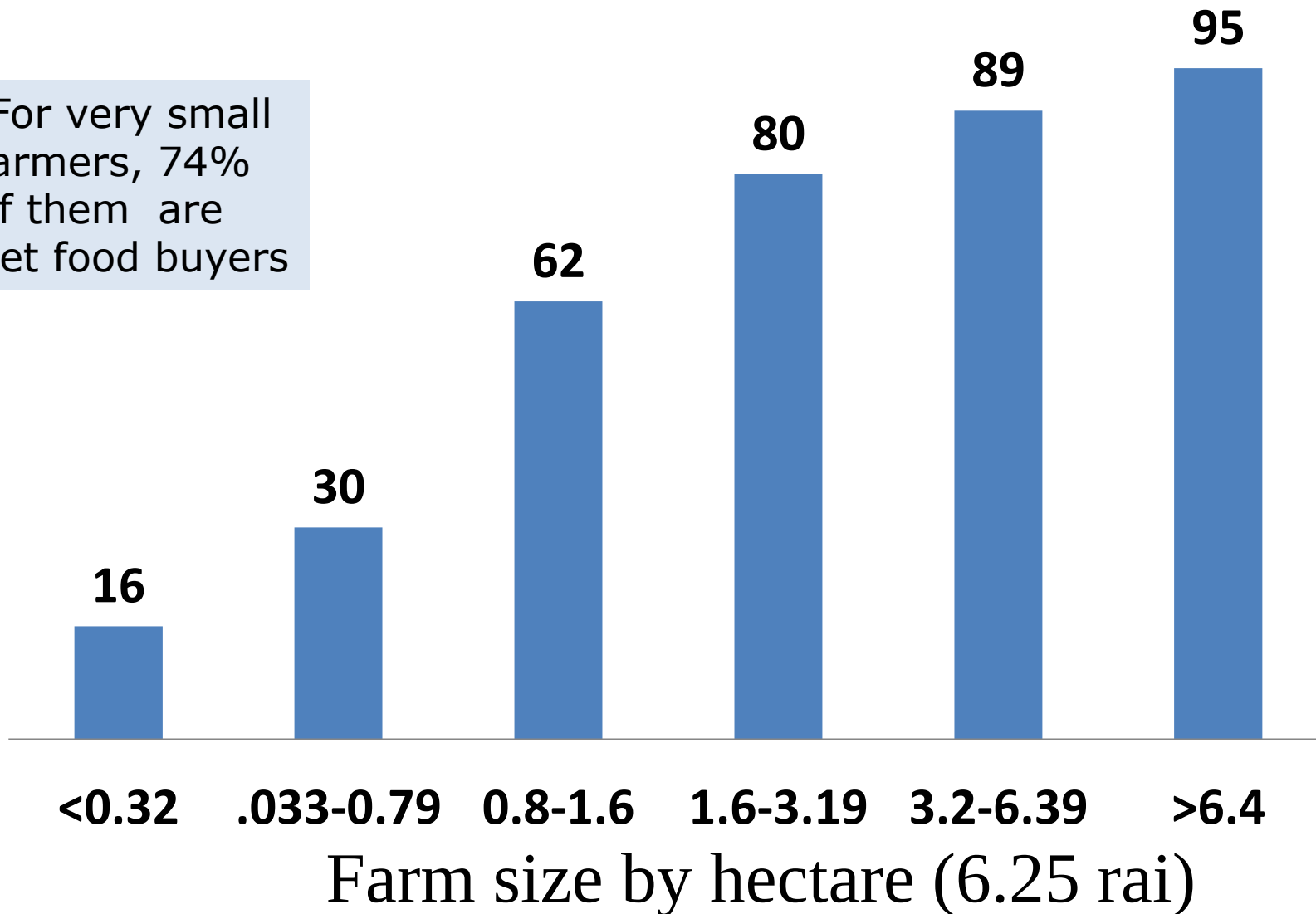


# Large vs. small farmers

- The food price crisis affected the small and marginal farmer, and less severely, the medium one.
- **Large farmers are thriving during the food crisis in 2008.**
- Income inequality does exist in rural areas where farm sizes are not evenly distributed.

## Thailand's net food sellers ( % of total household in each farm size)

For very small farmers, 74% of them are net food buyers



# Why large land-holders do well while the smaller ones fail?

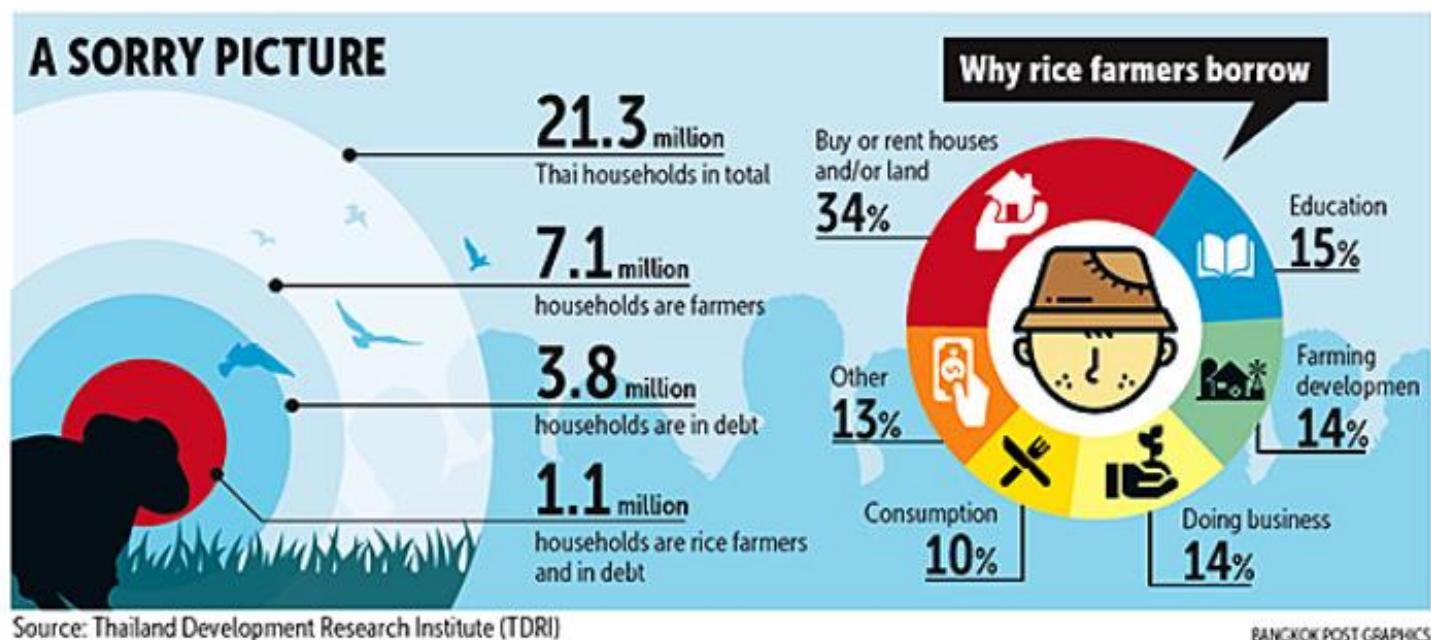
- Big farmers have a large area under cultivation, yielding more marketable surplus and they can bargain for more remunerative prices for their produce.
- Small holders have low production (due to less area) and, thereby, less marketable surplus.
- Their transactions costs (i.e., transporting grains to markets, lacking storage barns ) are also very high.
- Large farmers also have access to credit, extension, technology, which the small holders do not.
- *Should farmers switch from paddy to other crops?*

Farmer debt, most incurred by rice farmers, rose from 2.4 trillion baht in 2016 to 2.8 trillion baht as of last year, according to the National Statistical Office (NOS).

Among 3.8 million debtors with state-funded loans, 1.1 million of them are farmers, according to the NOS.

Last August, hundreds of rice farmers gathering in front of commercial banks and the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) demanded help.

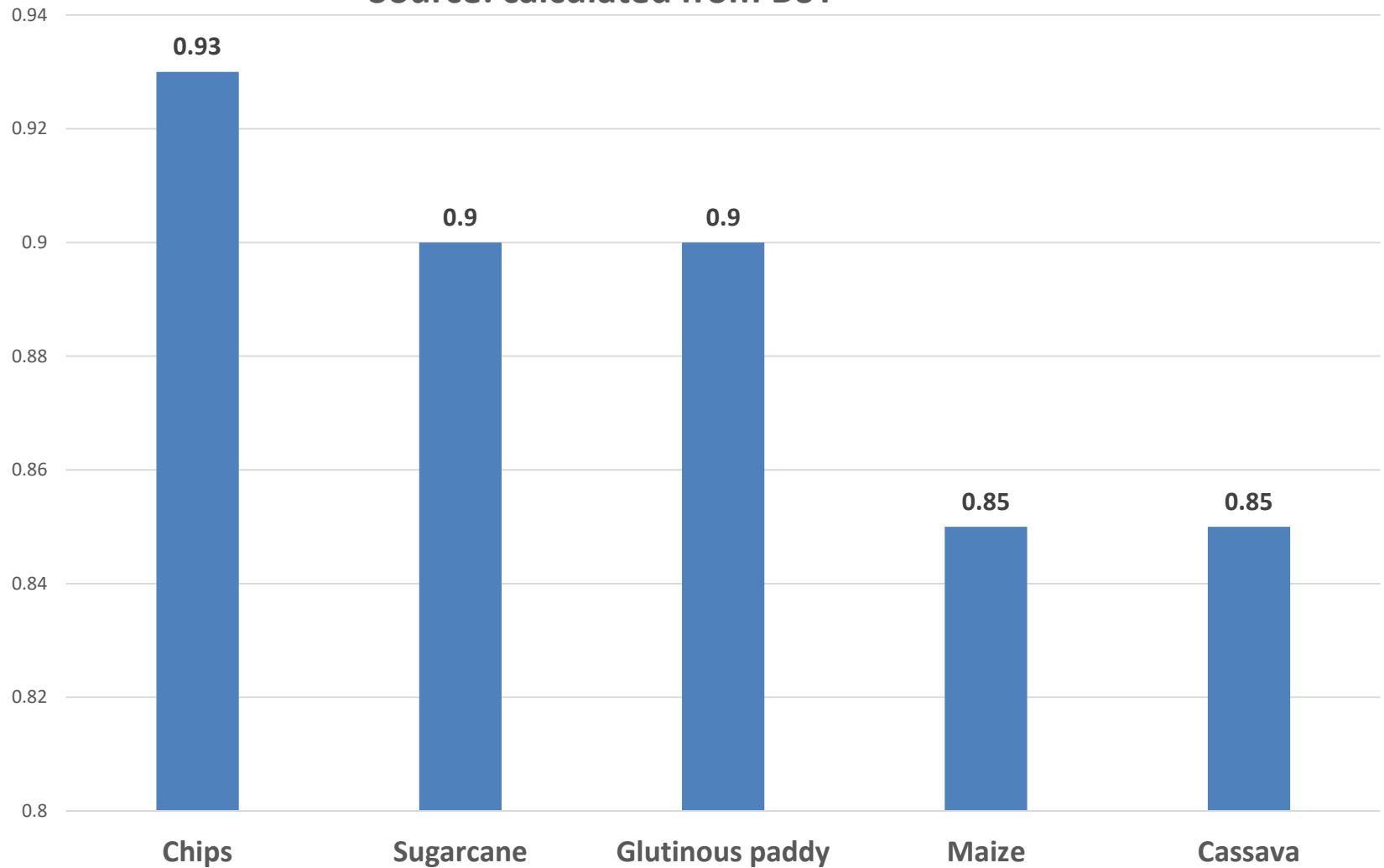
The government granted them debt relief, with an interest hair-cut.



But the bigger question is how to tackle farmers debt so it disappears for good.

## Correlation Coefficients of Jasmin Paddy Prices 1992-2016

Source: calculated from BoT



# Eradicating hunger in Thailand by 2018

- Between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people going hungry in the developing world fell by nearly half, from 23.3% to 12.9%. Absolute numbers fell, too, by 216m.
- Unlike many of the 169 targets set for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, ending hunger and malnutrition by 2030 is both laudable and atypically specific.
- None of which makes this easier to achieve, as a progress report published today by five UN agencies will reiterate—especially against a backdrop of a changing climate.
- By 2018, our economic czar (Deputy Prime Minister: Dr. Somkid) announced that there will be no poverty in Thailand.

## *Climate change* can hamper world's poverty reduction

- But poverty also depends on how we deal with the problem of climate change.
- Ever-harsher droughts and floods will undermine efforts to grow enough food for the 795m who remain undernourished, plus 2bn extra mouths that demographers expect by 2050.
- At the same time, agriculture accounts for 21% and rising of global greenhouse-gas emissions.
- More crop fields means fewer forests, which absorb planet-heating carbon.



# Not feeding the world

Population at risk of hunger\*, m

■ 2010    ■ 2050 (without climate change)  
            ■ 2050 (with climate change)



\*Based on availability of food energy relative to requirements

Source: IFPRI

## 4. Inclusive Growth

- Economic growth must generate employment, reduce poverty, and mitigate inequality: Inclusive growth.
- **Virtuous cycle of growth** can reduce poverty through increasing employment with rising productivity.
- Growth may not help the poor due to segmented labor markets and labor immobility.

# Neo-Liberal View on Growth

- **World poverty and income inequality fell over the past two decades** due to rising density of economic integration across national borders (One of the deep determinants of economic development).
- Over the past 20 years, the number of people living on less than \$1 a day has fallen by 200 million.
- With 38% of the world's population, China and India *shape* the world trends in poverty and inequality.

# Anti-globalization view:

## A counter argument for trade

- According to this view: World poverty and inequality have been **rising** not falling due to force unleashed by globalization.
- There is **no** systematic relationship between openness and poverty reduction (True, false, or uncertain in the case of Thailand?).
- If so why have Vietnam and Myanmar opened their economies to FDI and trade?

## Anti-globalization view on development policy

### The role of visible hand and government intervention

- To promote equality, market rules which are in favor of the rich should be lessened, **more non-market influence** on resource allocation to counter the tendency of free market should come into public and political attention.
- More visible hands, ***less invisible foot***.
- Thaksin's 30 baht universal health care program
- PCOC ( 500 baht per head for the poor, welfare cards—free goods and transportation for the 11 million poor) and a lot more to come as new year gifts in 2018.

# Invisible foot

- Joseph Berliner once called the “Invisible Foot,” the neglected counterpart to Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hand.”
- Young firms make a substantial direct contribution to creating jobs.
- Yet they can also make an indirect contribution to job creation by forcing incumbent firms out of their defensive crouch and into a fight to retain and gain market share.
- Consumers will also stand to benefit from this kick of the invisible foot as competition forces down prices and gives rise to entirely new products and services.

# A.K. Sen

- Amartya Sen in his famous book, ***Development as Freedom*** (2000), asserts that poverty must be seen “as a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely low income”.

Poverty represents more than a low standard of living; the national poverty line does not capture the other vital and **multiple dimensions of necessities** required by the poor.

# The role of the Thai government's spending

- Since public spending on education, health, welfare services can mitigate the plight of the poor,
- Thailand's public spending on health and welfare increased gradually during the past three decades, from 1.2% of GDP to 2.4% during 1997-2000.



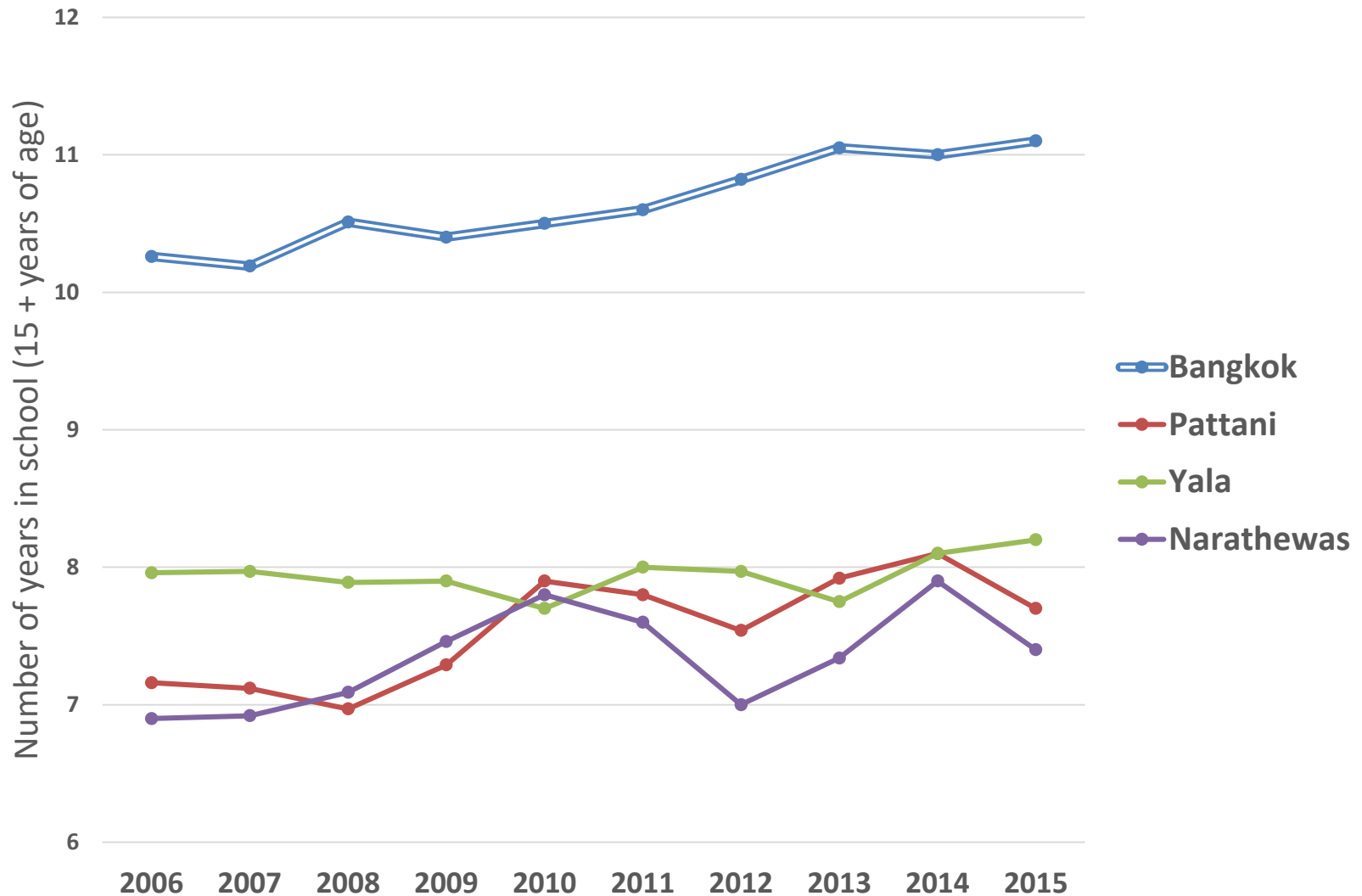
Average years of Thailand's total schooling in 1990: 5 years  
This is absolutely shocking!

|                           | 1990 | 2009 |
|---------------------------|------|------|
| Youth (Aged 15–24)        | 7.2  | 10.6 |
| Male                      | 7.0  | 9.8  |
| Female                    | 7.5  | 11.4 |
| Adults (Aged 25 and over) | 4.6  | 6.6  |
| Male                      | 5.0  | 6.9  |
| Female                    | 4.1  | 6.2  |

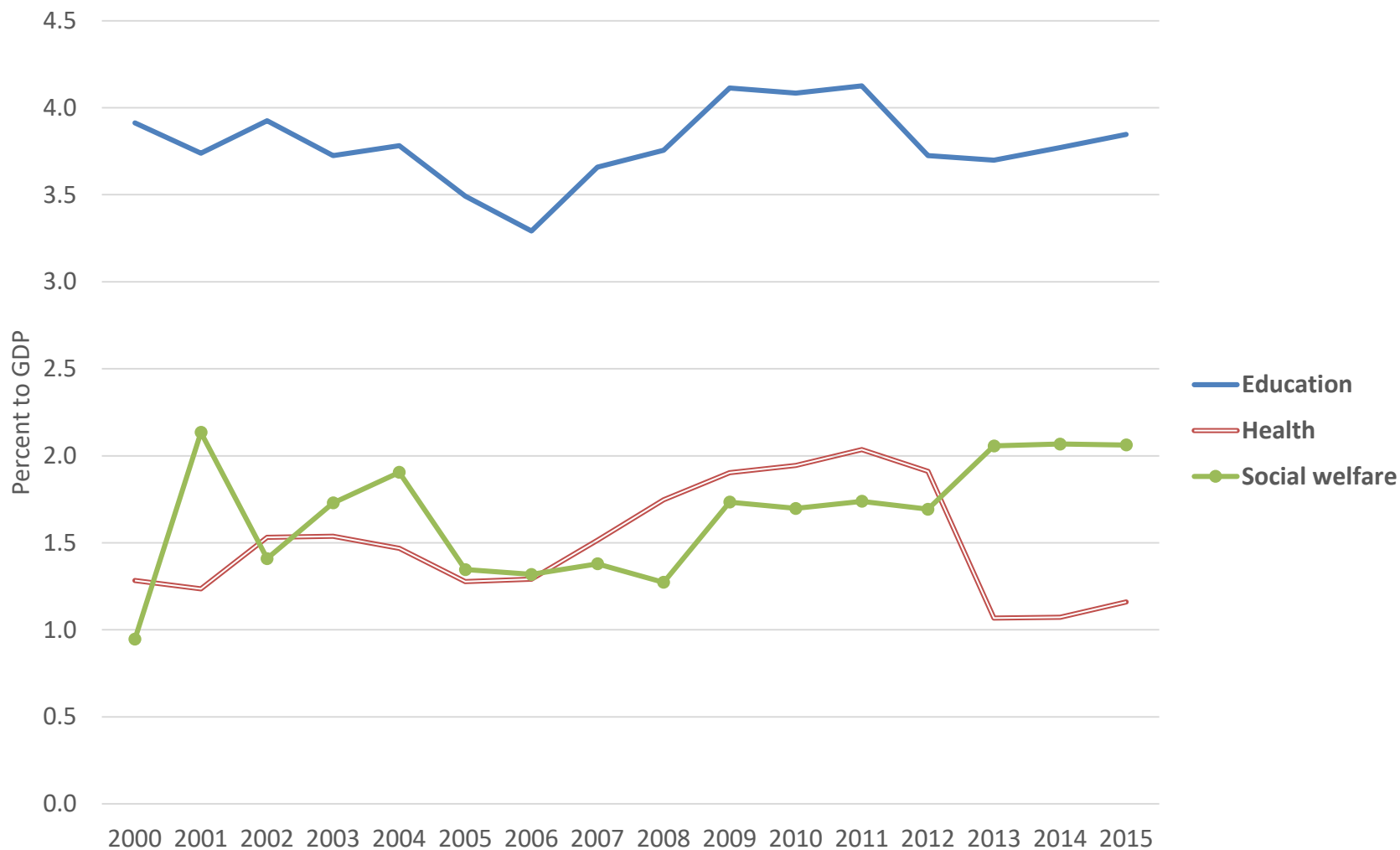
(Too late to re-tool)?

(low cognitive ability for  
Those who are now 55 years old plus)

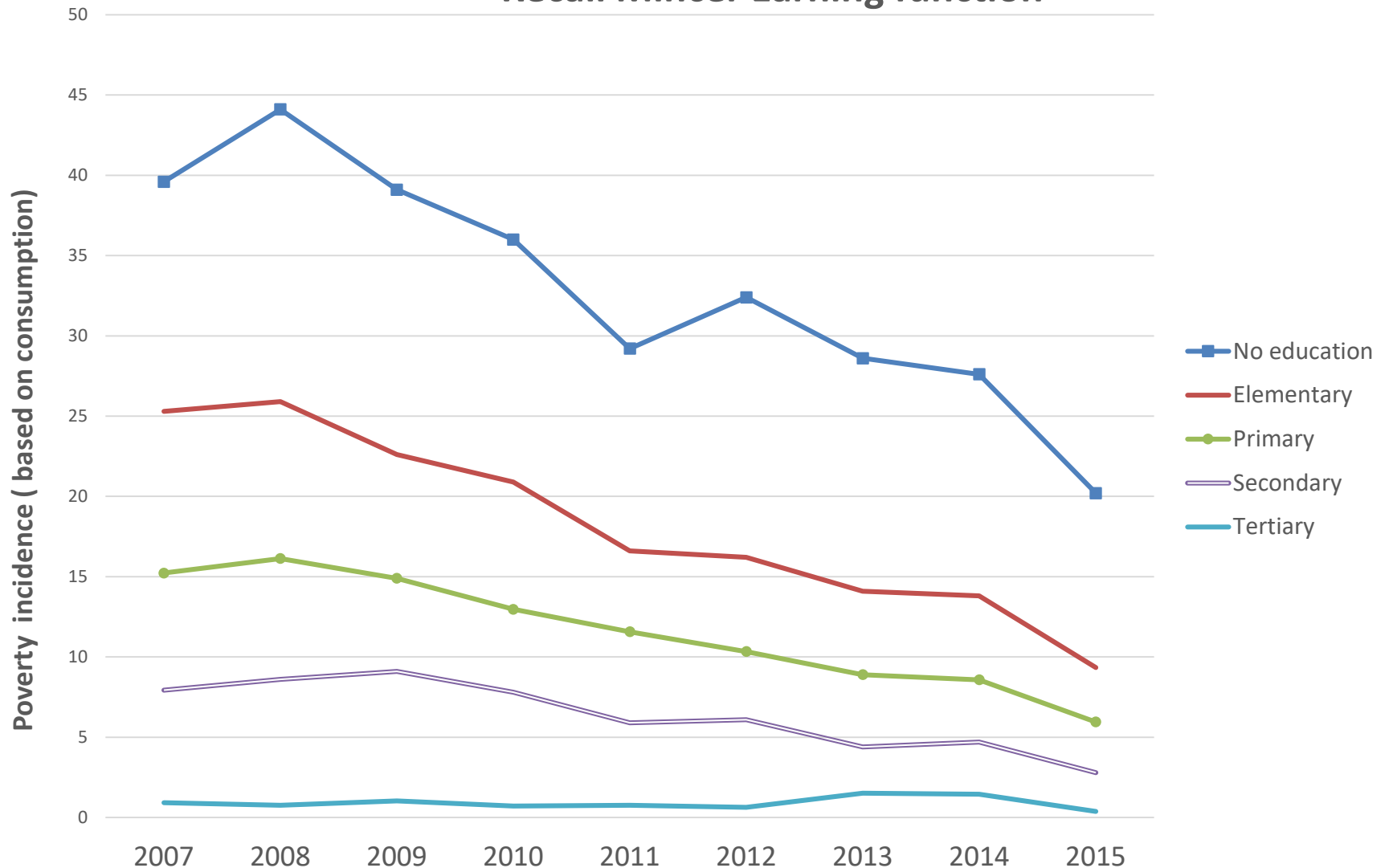
## Schooling in Contrast: Bangkok and the Deep South



## Public Spending on Human and Health Capital

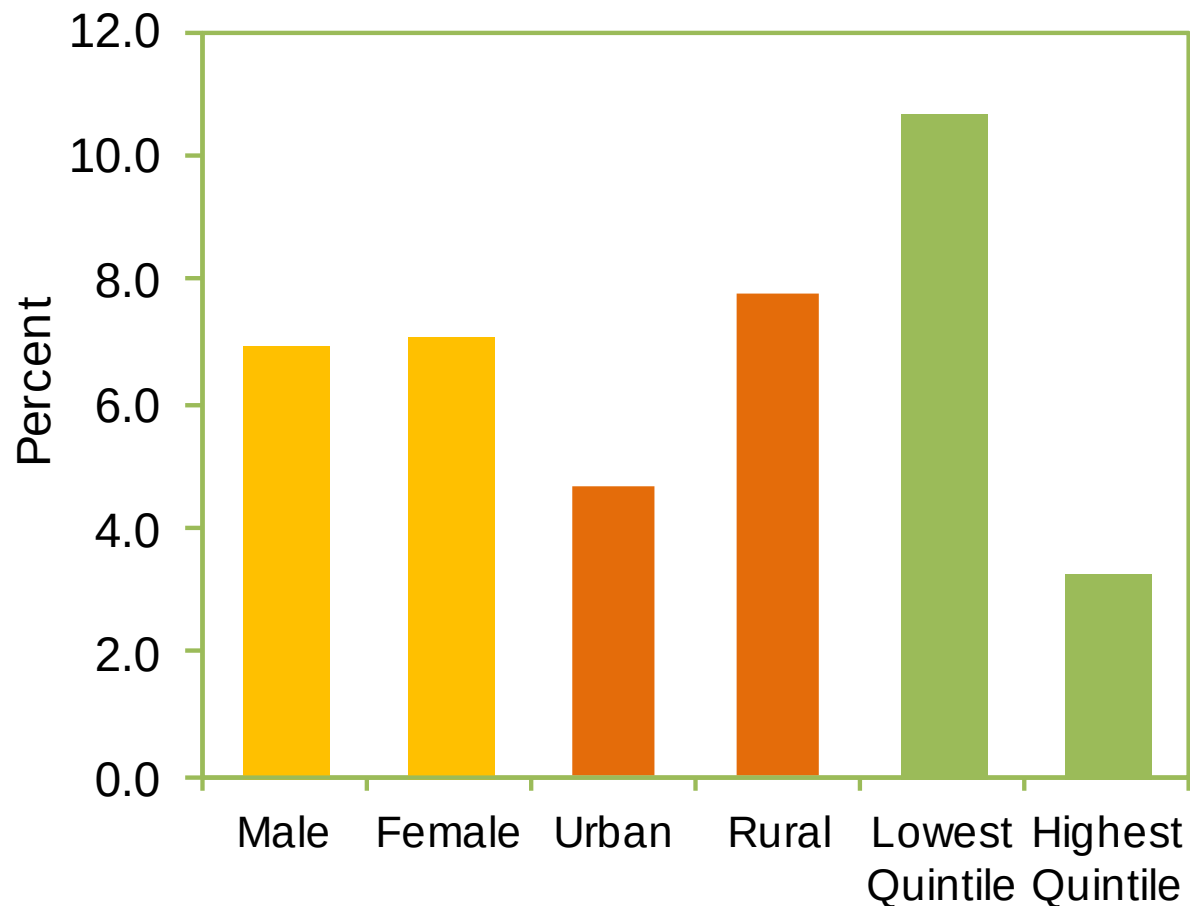


## Education attainment and poverty: Whole Kingdom Recall Mincer Earning function



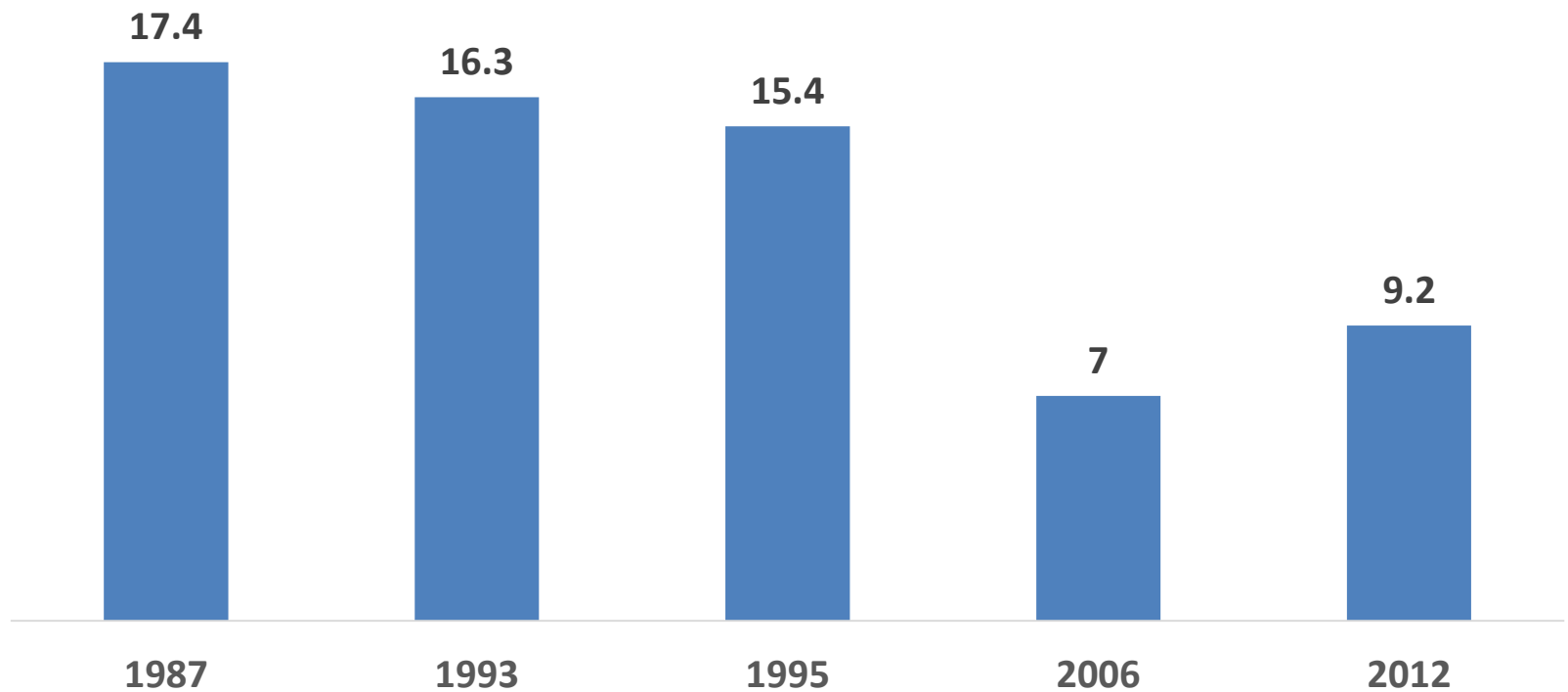
## 5. Non-monetary aspects of poverty

**Children under five – Underweight, 2006**



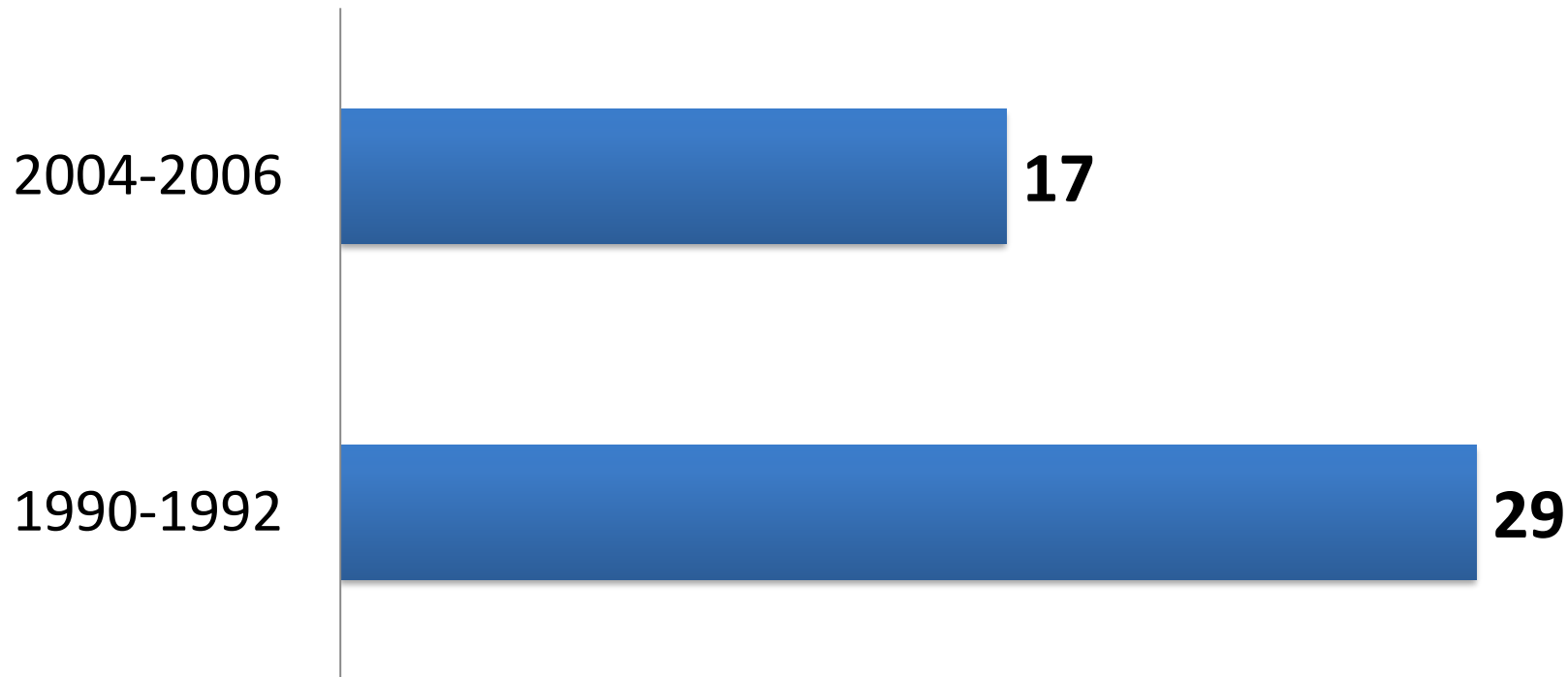
The stark contrast  
Between the rich  
And the poor, between  
Urban and rural area  
Not much of gender  
inequality though.

**Prevalence of Underweight  
weight for age (% of Children under 5)  
Source: NESDB**



The degree of undernourishment in Thailand has declined since the last three decades, due to rising income level

**Prevalence of Undernourishment  
(% to total population)**



# The first five years of our lives are extremely important

- Nutrition *in utero* (before birth) and in infancy may set the stage for the chronic disease burden that an individual will face in middle age
- Childhood health may also have significant effects on economic outcomes in adulthood.
- Collectively, a set of childhood health measures can account for a large fraction of the explained variance in employment and social status.



# Cognitive abilities

- **Cognitive abilities** are **brain-based** skills we need to carry out any task from the simplest to the most complex.
- Cognitive skills have more to do with the **mechanisms of how we learn, remember, problem-solve, and pay attention** *rather than* with any actual knowledge.



# Non-cognitive abilities

- Non-cognitive abilities include: A set of attitudes, willpower, behaviors, and strategies that are thought to underpin success in school and at work, such as motivation, perseverance, and self-control.
- These non-cognitive abilities attribute to wage premium.
- Taller workers receive a substantial ***wage premium***.
- More recent research argues that cognitive abilities explain the height-wage relationship.

## “Height, Health, and Cognitive Function at Older Ages” Anne Case and Christina Paxso (AER: May 2008)

- There are many reasons why height may be associated with better cognitive function, health, mental health, and activities of daily living at older ages.
- Height *is a marker of early childhood health* and nutrition, both of which affect cognitive development.
- Together, childhood environment and cognitive development affect educational attainment and school achievement and, later, occupational choice.

## “Height, Health, and Cognitive Function at Older Ages” Anne Case and Christina Paxso (AER: May 2008)

- All of these may in turn affect health and cognitive function in old age.
- **Education is thought to be protective of health status**, in part through the role that education (or the level of abstract reasoning that accompanies education) plays in supporting *adherence to medical protocols*.

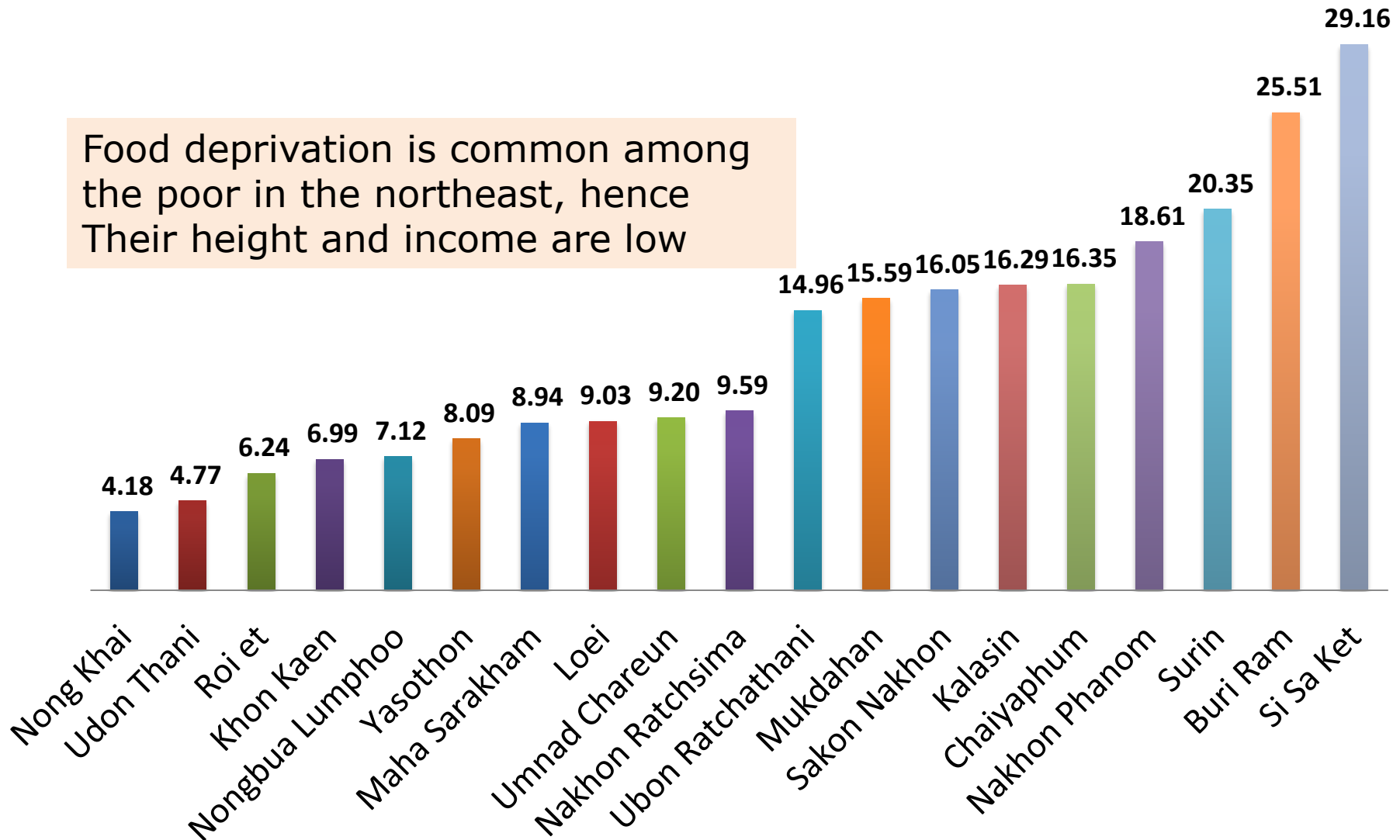
**If you are tall, most likely your cognitive and non-cognitive ability will also be high, and so will your salary**

- Using data from Britain's National Childhood Development Study (NCDS), they show that taller children have higher average ***cognitive and non-cognitive*** test scores, and that each aptitude accounts for a substantial and roughly equal portion of the stature premium.
- Together these abilities explain why taller people have higher wages.

# Poverty in the northeast

% of people living below poverty line in 2007

Food deprivation is common among the poor in the northeast, hence Their height and income are low



# Review Questions

- How did global economic crisis *affect* poverty in Thailand?
- How were the poor affected by the current commodity price collapses?
- What were be the impact of the growth slowdown (2014-2016) on poverty in Thailand?