

From vulnerability to precarity?

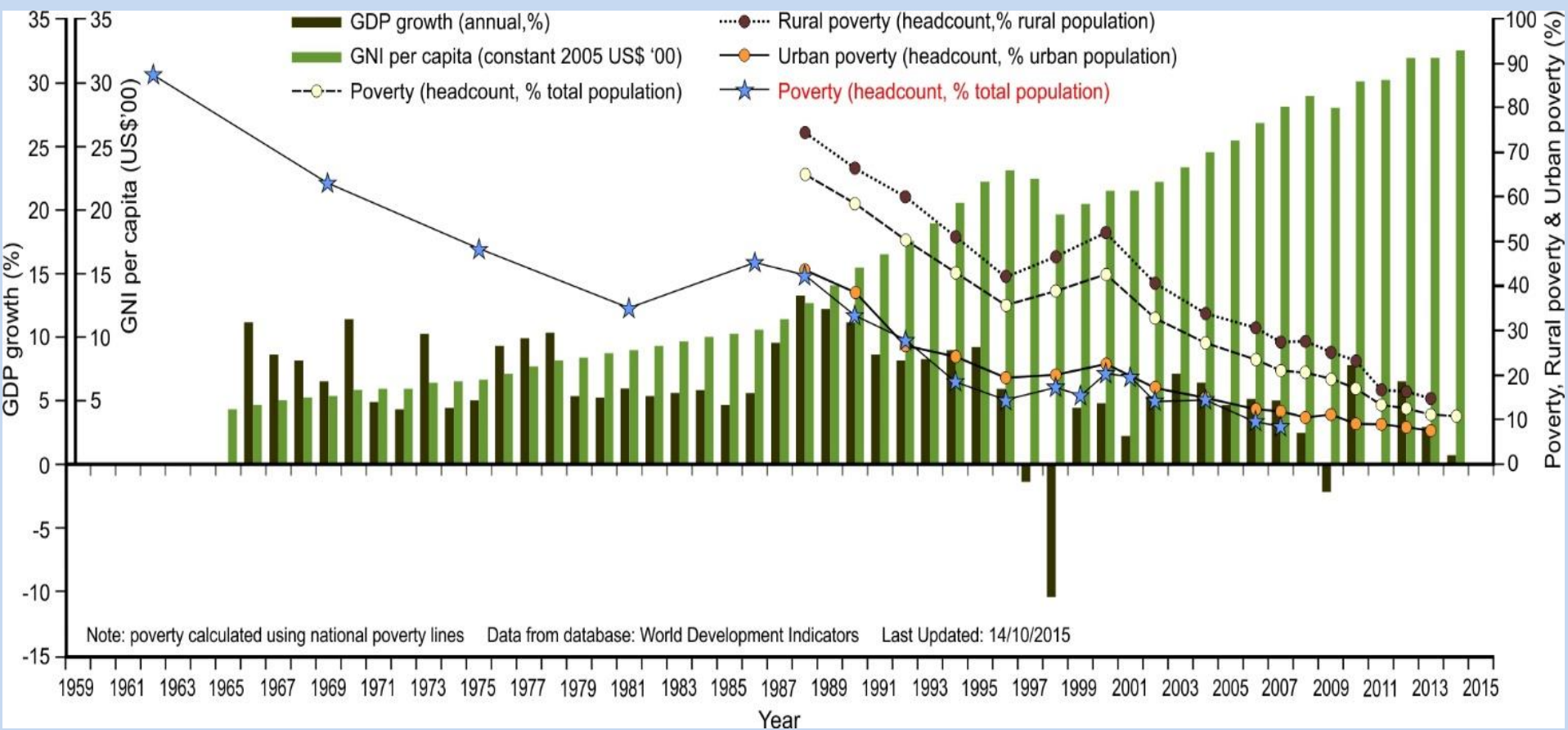
Rural lives and livelihoods under conditions of neo-liberalism

Jonathan Rigg

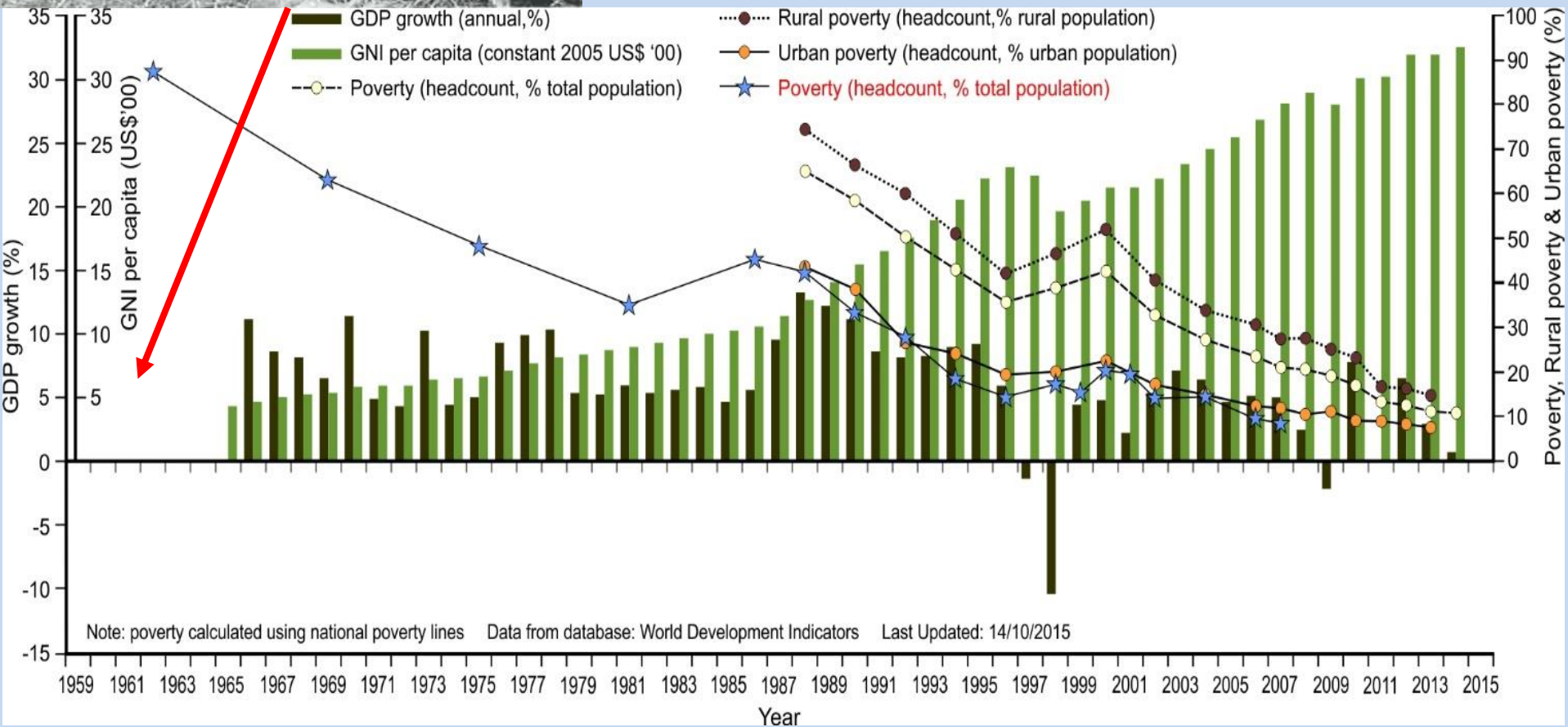
*Department of Geography and Asia
Research Institute*

National University of Singapore

Thailand's growth story, 1962-2015



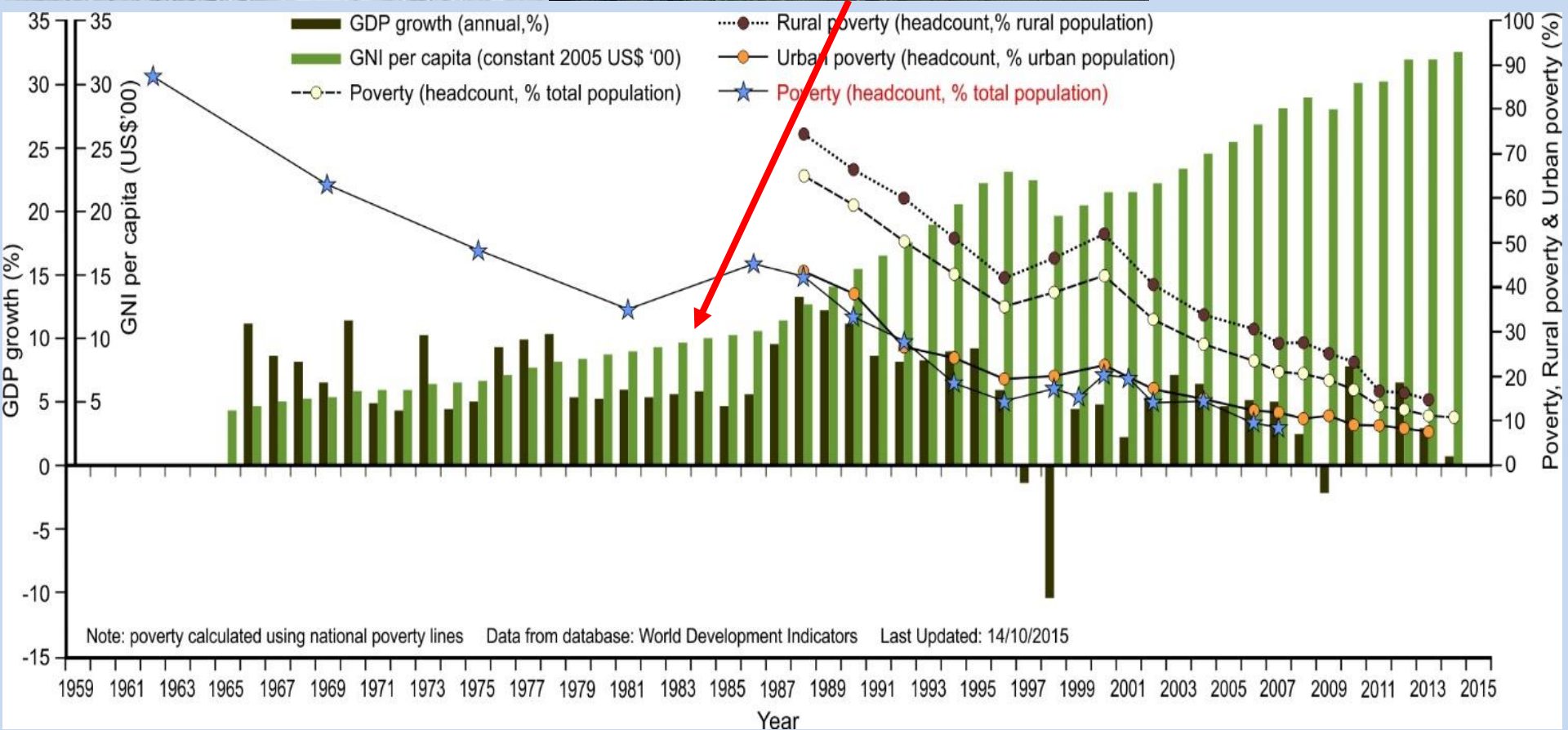
Moerman 1959-1961



Moerman
1959-1961



1982



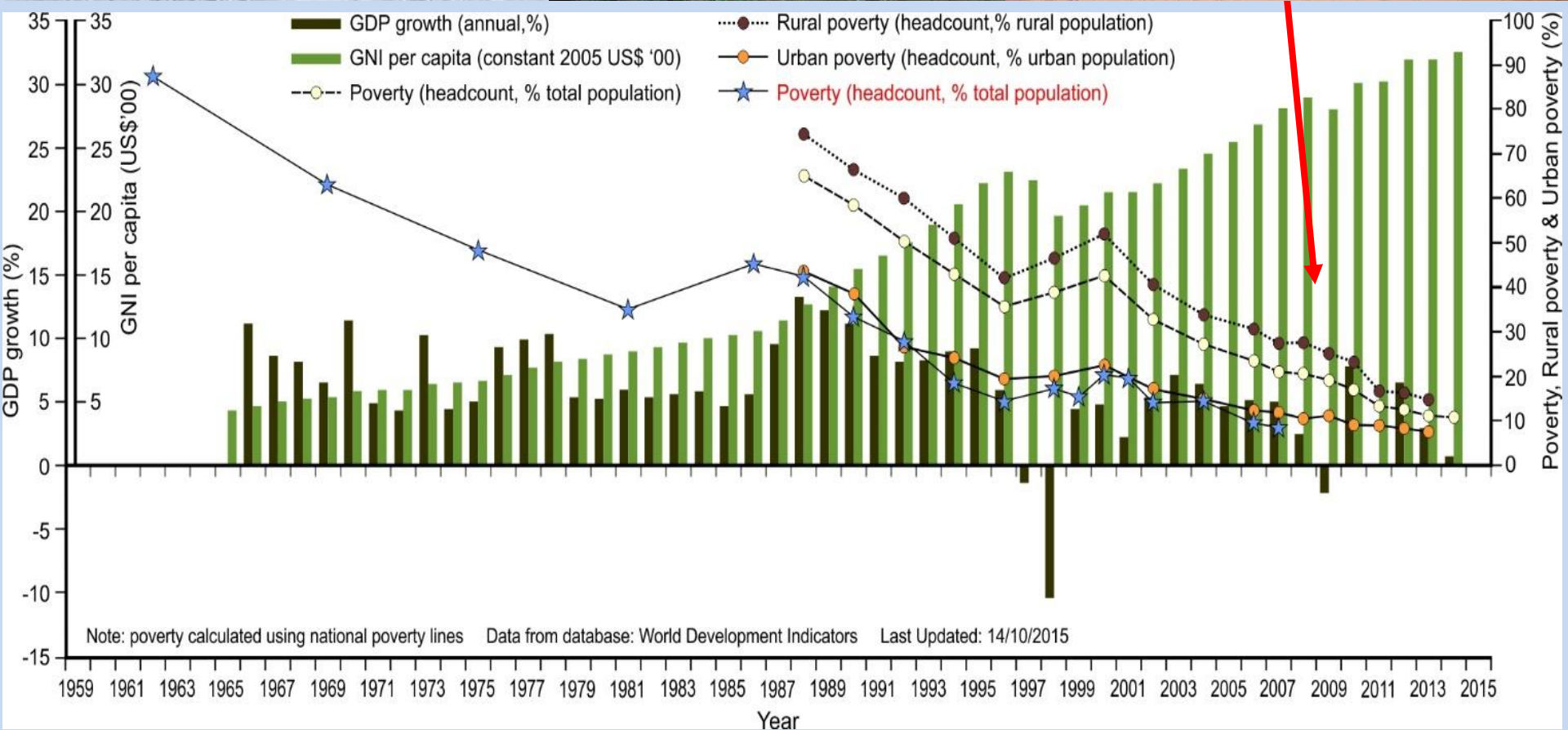
**Moerman
1959-1961**



1982



2008



**Moerman
1959-1961**



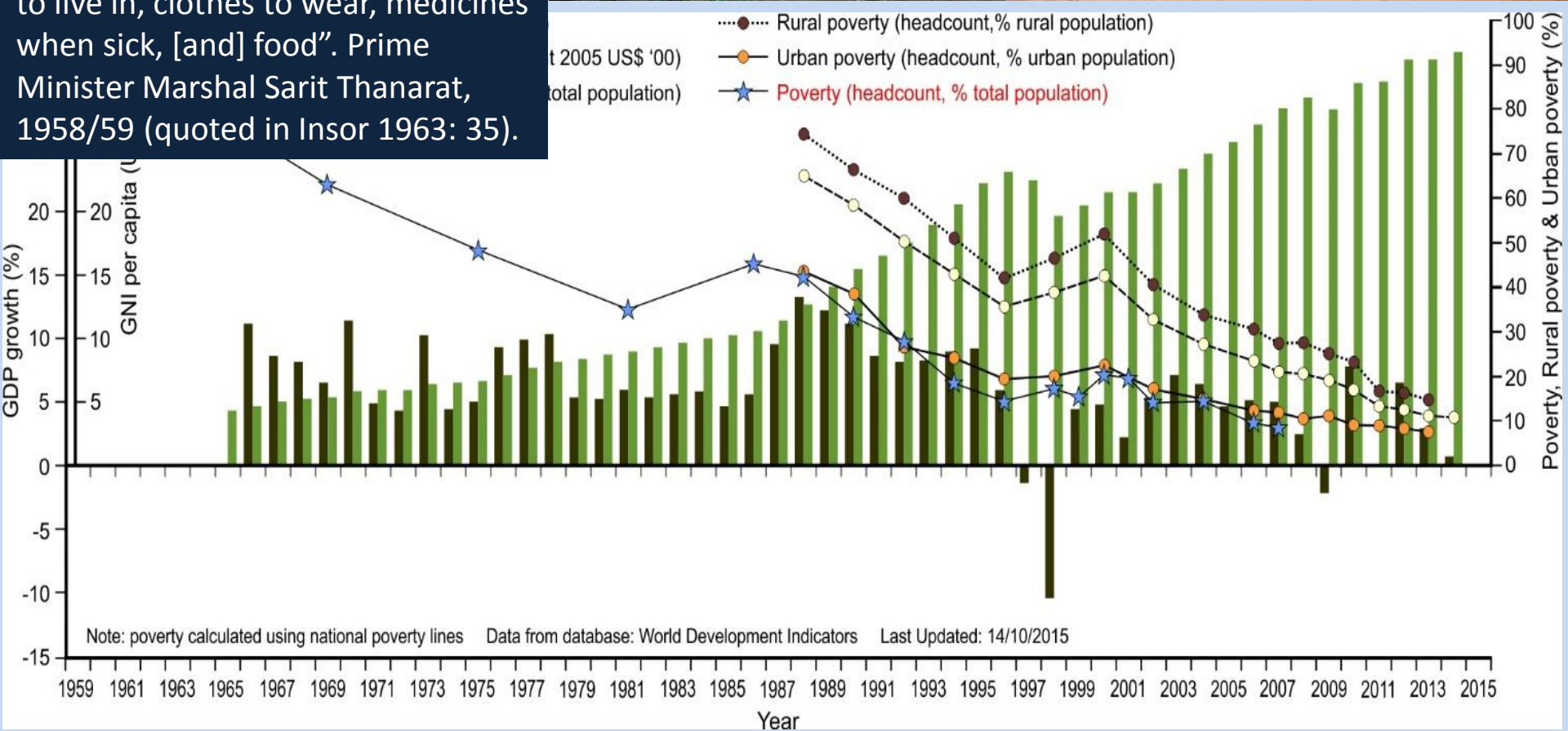
1982



2008



“The happiness of the people depends on four materials: a house to live in, clothes to wear, medicines when sick, [and] food”. Prime Minister Marshal Sarit Thanarat, 1958/59 (quoted in Insor 1963: 35).



**Moerman
1959-1961**



1982

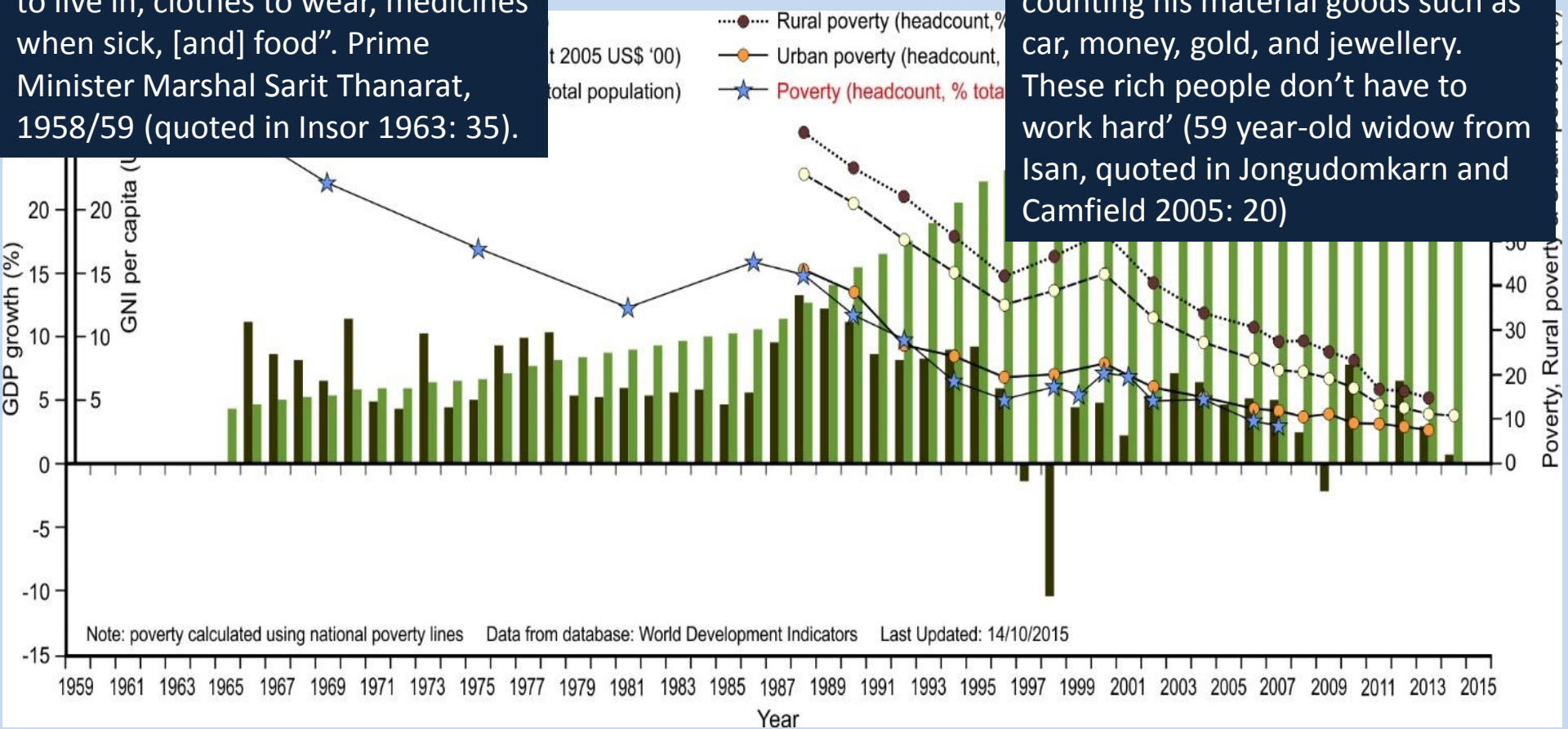


2008



“The happiness of the people depends on four materials: a house to live in, clothes to wear, medicines when sick, [and] food”. Prime Minister Marshal Sarit Thanarat, 1958/59 (quoted in Insor 1963: 35).

‘A happy man is a wealthy man. We know how happy a man is by counting his material goods such as car, money, gold, and jewellery. These rich people don’t have to work hard’ (59 year-old widow from Isan, quoted in Jongudomkarn and Camfield 2005: 20)



**Moerman
1959-1961**

'Traction'

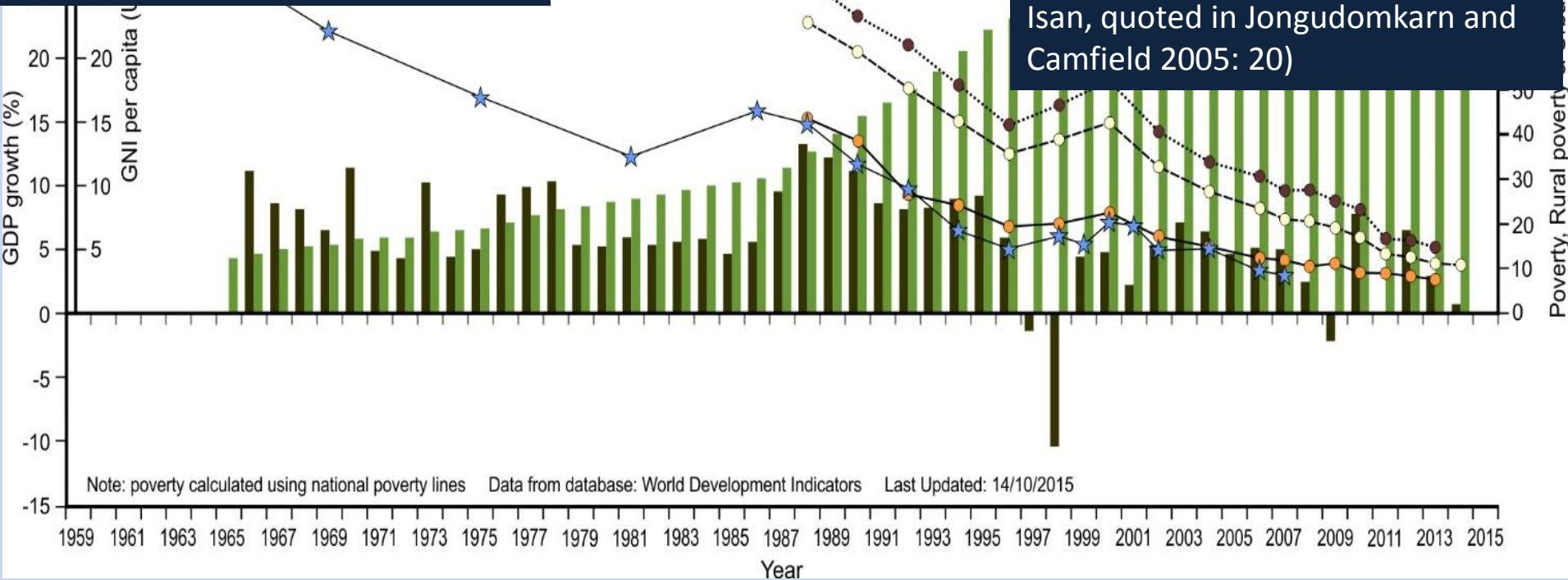
1982

2008

'Friction'

"The happiness of the people depends on four materials: a house to live in, clothes to wear, medicines when sick, [and] food". Prime Minister Marshal Sarit Thanarat, 1958/59 (quoted in Insor 1963: 35).

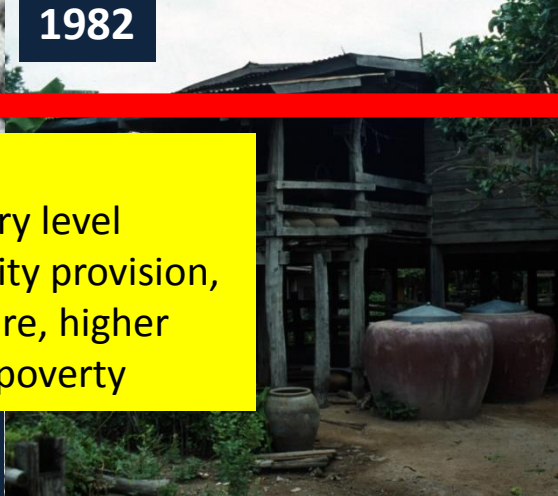
'A happy man is a wealthy man. We know how happy a man is by counting his material goods such as car, money, gold, and jewellery. These rich people don't have to work hard' (59 year-old widow from Isan, quoted in Jongudomkarn and Camfield 2005: 20)



**Moerman
1959-1961**



1982



2008

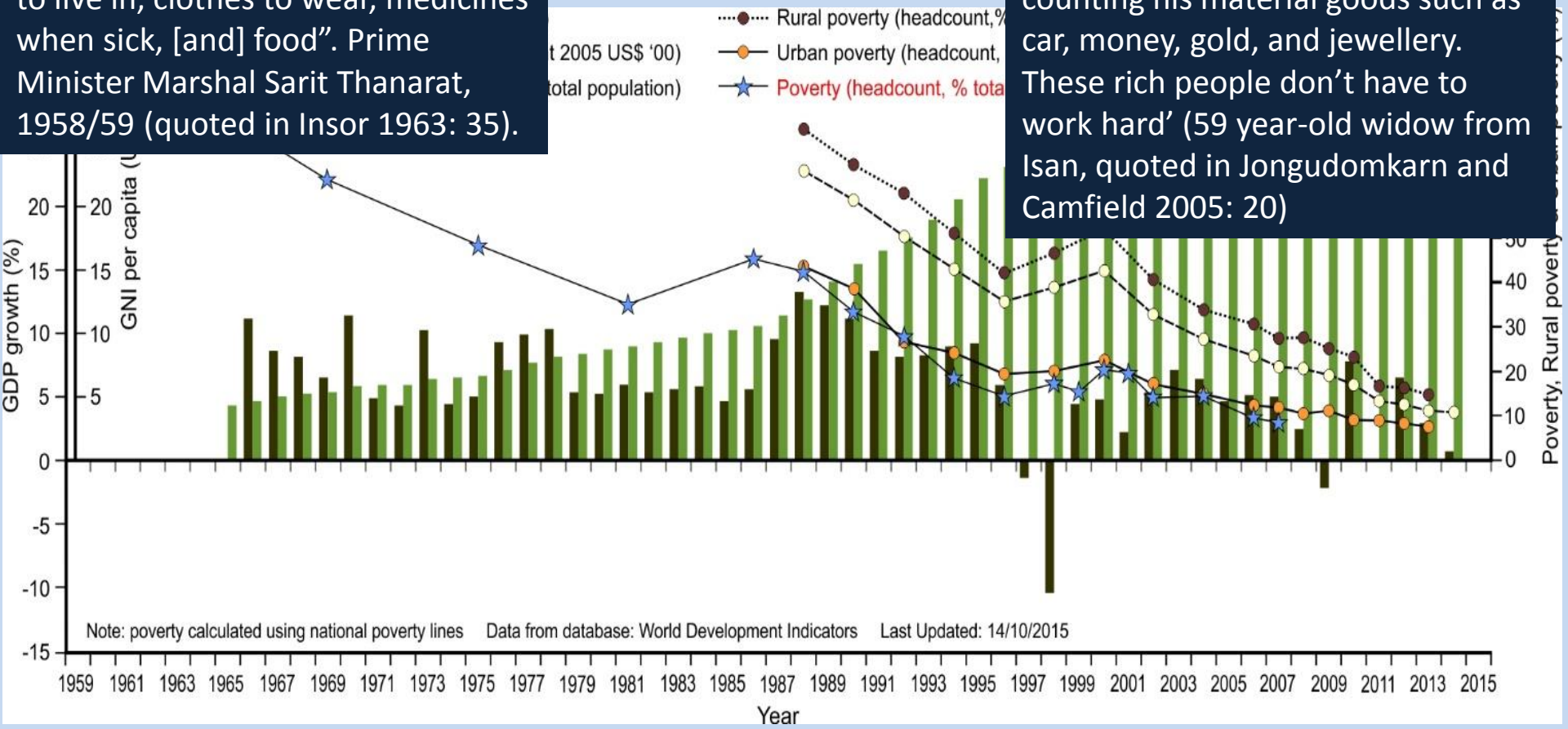


'Traction'
clean water, primary level education, electricity provision, access to health care, higher incomes, reduced poverty

'Friction'

"The happiness of the people depends on four materials: a house to live in, clothes to wear, medicines when sick, [and] food". Prime Minister Marshal Sarit Thanarat, 1958/59 (quoted in Insor 1963: 35).

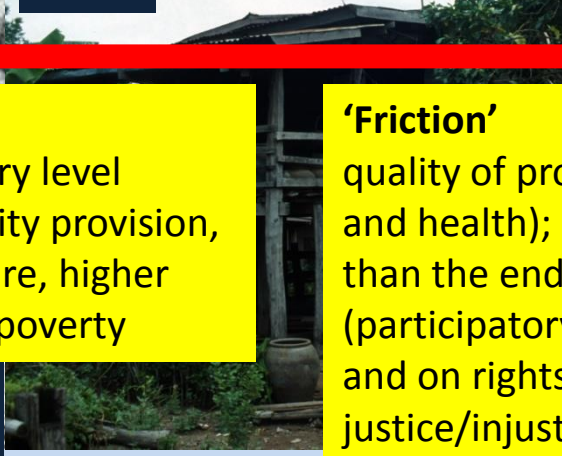
'A happy man is a wealthy man. We know how happy a man is by counting his material goods such as car, money, gold, and jewellery. These rich people don't have to work hard' (59 year-old widow from Isan, quoted in Jongudomkarn and Camfield 2005: 20)



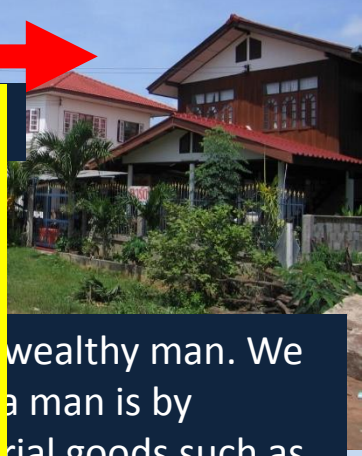
**Moerman
1959-1961**



1982



2008

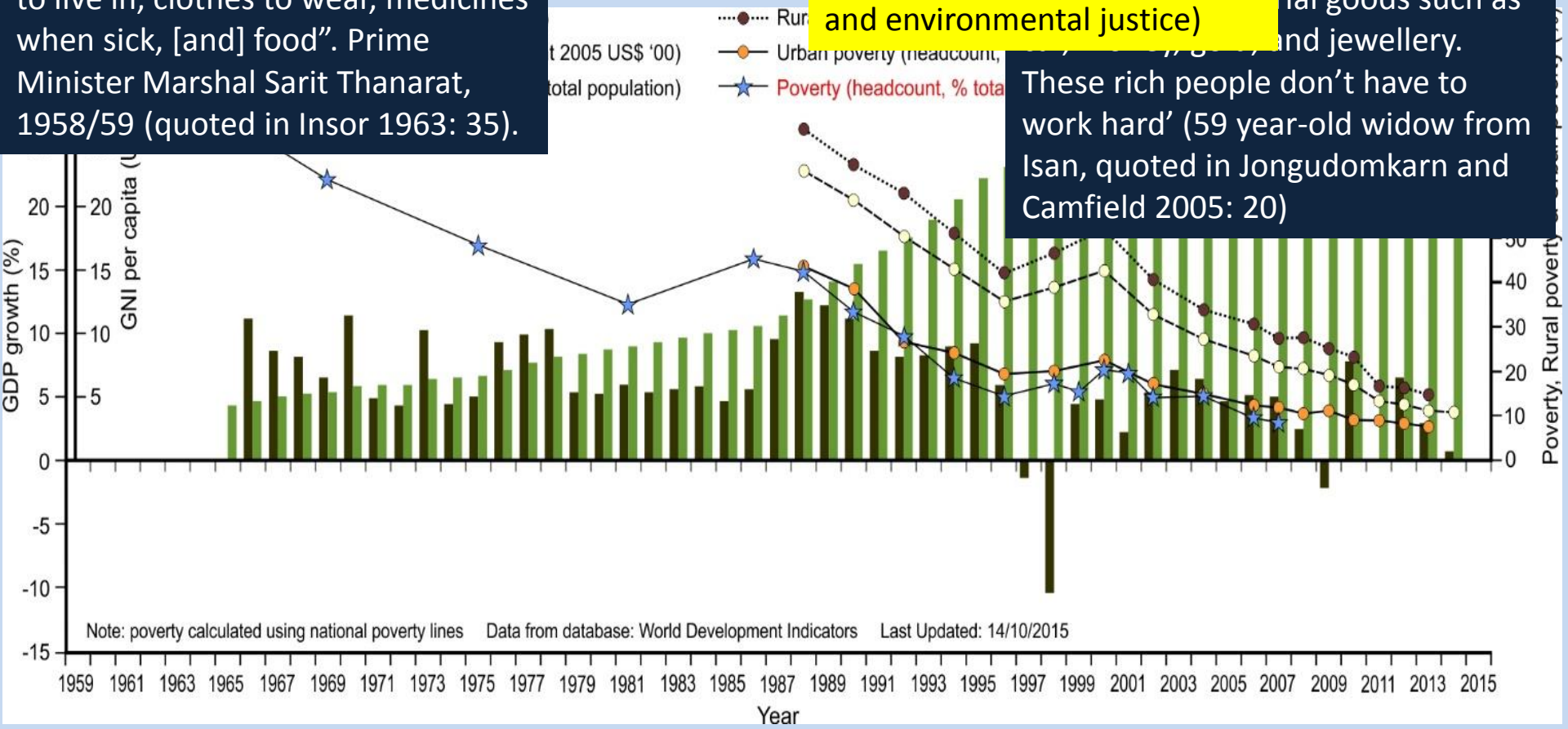


'Traction'
clean water, primary level education, electricity provision, access to health care, higher incomes, reduced poverty

'Friction'
quality of provision (education and health); means rather than the ends of change (participatory, empowering); and on rights and justice/injustice (such as social and environmental justice)

"The happiness of the people depends on four materials: a house to live in, clothes to wear, medicines when sick, [and] food". Prime Minister Marshal Sarit Thanarat, 1958/59 (quoted in Insor 1963: 35).

wealthy man. We a man is by arial goods such as and jewellery. These rich people don't have to work hard' (59 year-old widow from Isan, quoted in Jongudomkarn and Camfield 2005: 20)



**Moerman
1959-1961**

1982

2008

'Traction'
clean water, primary level education, electricity provision, access to health care, higher incomes, reduced poverty

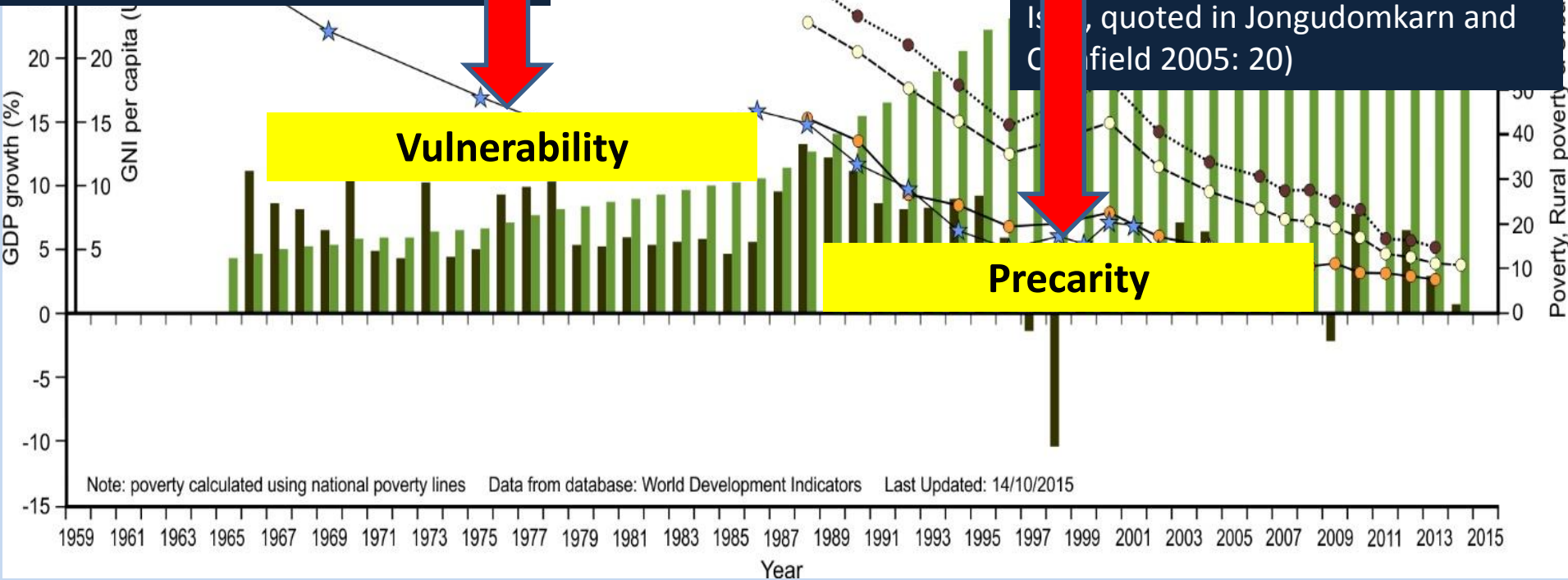
'Friction'
quality of provision (education and health); means rather than the ends of change (participatory, empowering); and on rights and justice/injustice (such as social and environmental justice)

"The happiness of the people depends on four materials: a house to live in, clothes to wear, medicine when sick, [and] food". Prime Minister Marshal Sarit Thanarat, 1958/59 (quoted in Insor 1963: 3)

"...wealthy man. We... a man is by... material goods such as... and jewellery. These rich people don't have to work hard' (59 year-old widow from... quoted in Jongudomkarn and... field 2005: 20)

Vulnerability

Precarity



Defining terms: Vulnerability and Precarity



O’Riordan (2002) defines **vulnerability** as “the incapacity to avoid danger, or to be uninformed of impending threat, or to be so politically powerless and poor as to be forced to live in conditions of danger.”

Solution: spatial integration, diversification, marketization, labour market reforms



Precarity: those people whose employment is unstable and insecure, face the threat of eviction, lack social safety nets whether traditional or modern, have minimal trust relationships with capital or the state, and whose work is part-time, non-formal, non-unionized, casual and unregulated.

	Character of Exposure	
	Vulnerability	Precarity
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occupation of marginal, hazard prone land - Small landholdings - Steep, poor quality land in the hills which limits agricultural productivity - Absence of irrigation technologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dispossession of (and from) land - Commercial logging and associated soil degradation - Resettlement on marginal lands - Chemicalisation of agriculture - Loss of biodiversity
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High dependency on agriculture - Lack of access to credit - Lack of access to markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsustainable levels of debt - Market dependencies - Growing inequalities between rich and poor - Out-migration
Political and socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caste system and associated marginalisation - Gender divisions in society - Participatory exclusions - Lack of empowerment - Feudalism, lack of land reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Erosion of the community covenant (moral economy) - Falling fertility rates, ageing population - Emergence of multi-sited households and crisis of care for elderly - Left-behind children
Poverty		

	Character of Exposure	
	Vulnerability	Precarity
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occupation of marginal, hazard prone land - Small landholdings - Steep, poor quality land in the hills which limits agricultural productivity - Absence of irrigation technologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dispossession of (and from) land - Commercial logging and associated soil degradation - Resettlement on marginal lands - Chemicalisation of agriculture - Loss of biodiversity
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High dependency on agriculture - Lack of access to credit - Lack of access to markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsustainable levels of debt - Market dependencies - Growing inequalities between rich and poor - Out-migration
Political and socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caste system and associated marginalisation - Gender divisions in society - Participatory exclusions - Lack of empowerment - Feudalism, lack of land reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Erosion of the community covenant (moral economy) - Falling fertility rates, ageing population - Emergence of multi-sited households and crisis of care for elderly - Left-behind children
Poverty		

	Character of Exposure	
	Vulnerability	Precarity
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occupation of marginal, hazard prone land - Small landholdings - Steep, poor quality land in the hills which limits agricultural productivity - Absence of irrigation technologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dispossession of (and from) land - Commercial logging and associated soil degradation - Resettlement on marginal lands - Chemicalisation of agriculture - Loss of biodiversity
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High dependency on agriculture - Lack of access to credit - Lack of access to markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsustainable levels of debt - Market dependencies - Growing inequalities between rich and poor - Out-migration
Political and socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caste system and associated marginalisation - Gender divisions in society - Participatory exclusions - Lack of empowerment - Feudalism, lack of land reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Erosion of the community covenant (moral economy) - Falling fertility rates, ageing population - Emergence of multi-sited households and crisis of care for elderly - Left-behind children
Poverty	Old poverty (inherited)	New poverty (produced by processes of wealth generation)

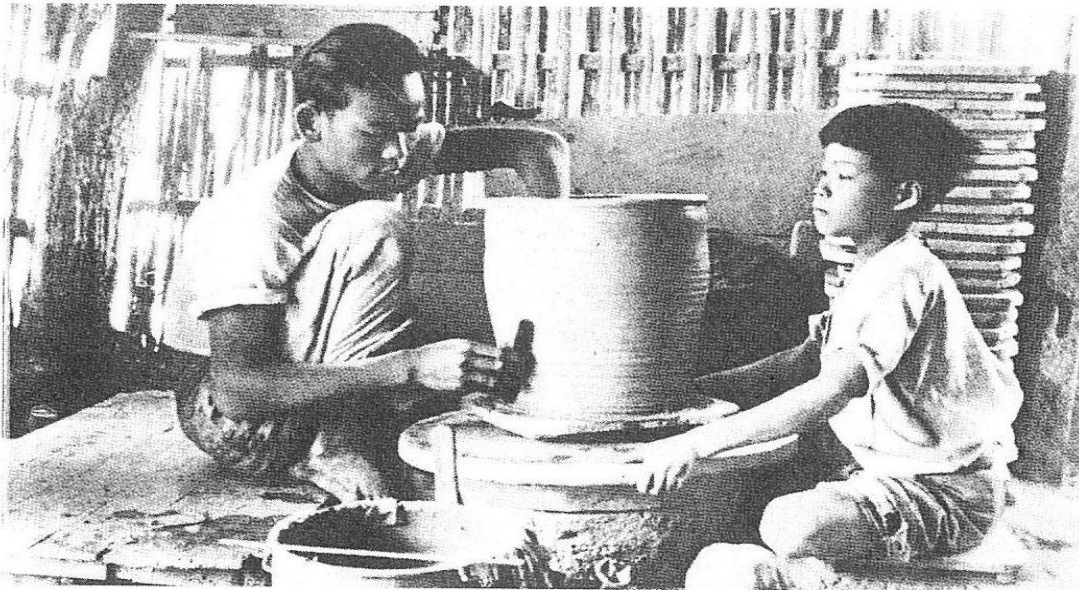
Developing rural Thailand: From content to discontent

Siam

Rural Economic Survey

1930-31

Carle C. Zimmerman



White Lotus

Carle Zimmerman's *Siam rural economic survey 1930-31* predates the coining of the Thai word for development (*kaanpattana* [การ พัฒนา]). The report concludes by setting out three reasons why rural Siam had not achieved 'full efficiency', as he put it, because:

- "there has been little or no pressure to make the country people extend their imagination into better ways of doing things"
- rural people have not "completely learned the spirit of the capitalist economy"
- the "agencies for carrying out this capitalist economy have not been completely developed"

“...for many of the more important economic problems which Thailand will face in the future are unlikely to be solved save by the initiative of the Government. These are not problems of the distant future. They are sufficiently near that it is essential for the Government to begin preparing its plans now if it is to cope with them before they become critical. Moreover, the Government – given its limited resources and the growing demands upon them – will have to play its part more effectively in the future than in the past if the momentum of the economy and the welfare of the growing population are to be maintained” (IBRD 1959: 1).

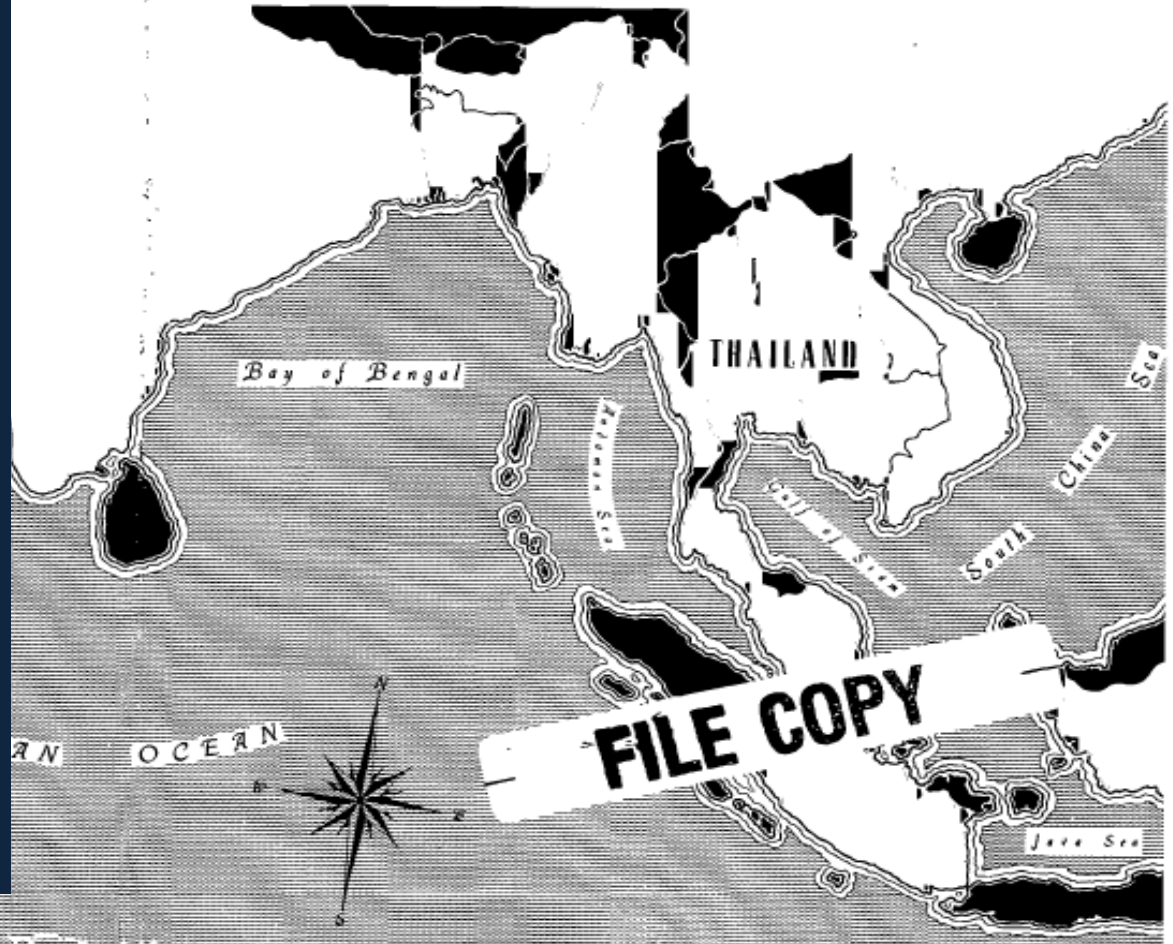
A Public Development Program for

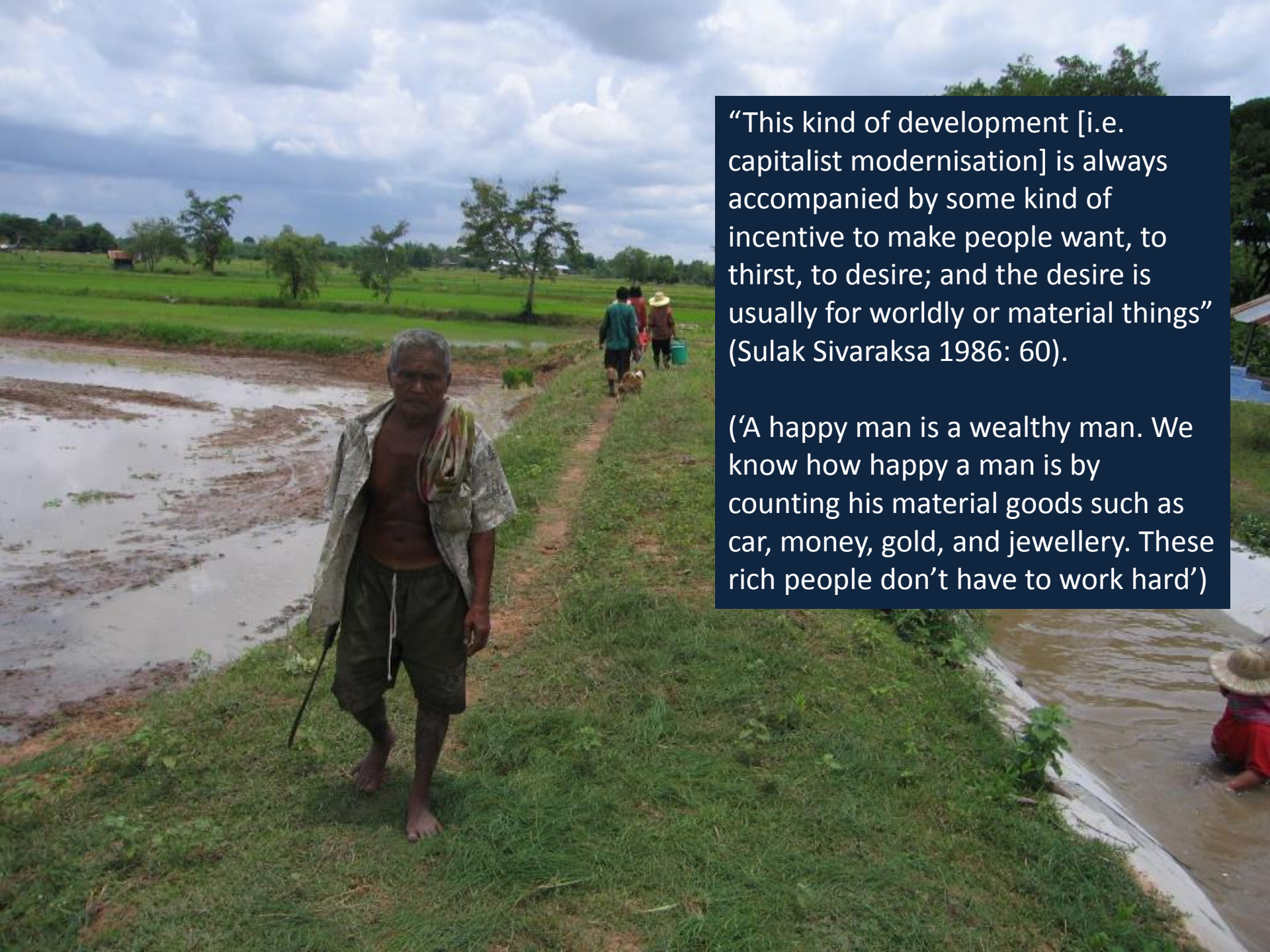
Ref 9990

1957

A PUBLIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR THAILAND

REPORT OF A MISSION ORGANIZED BY THE International Bank for Reconstruction and Development





“This kind of development [i.e. capitalist modernisation] is always accompanied by some kind of incentive to make people want, to thirst, to desire; and the desire is usually for worldly or material things” (Sulak Sivaraksa 1986: 60).

(‘A happy man is a wealthy man. We know how happy a man is by counting his material goods such as car, money, gold, and jewellery. These rich people don’t have to work hard’)

**From content to discontent:
flourishing then, flourishing now**



1982

1994

2008



1982



1994

2008



1982



1994



2008

TRACTION: Delivering development, Ban Non Tae and Ban Tha Song Korn, 1982 and 2008

	1982	2008
Human capital		
% of children with vocational, upper secondary, university of further education	4%	46%
Infrastructure improvements		
% households with motorcycle	21%	82%
% households with vehicle	0%	34%
% households with a TV	25%	95%
Market integration		
% of household members engaged in non-farm and ex-situ work	8.8%	48.5%
% adult members with primary occupation of farmer	84%	52%
% households in debt	51%	91%
Average household income (2006 prices)	52,939 baht	171,588 baht
New/old technologies		
% rice land planted to modern varieties	4%	81%
% households with buffalo (for land preparation)	86%	1%

Note: the follow up surveys in 1994 and 2008 were panel surveys, tracking the same households (or their descendants) that were first surveyed in 1982. The original 1982 sample was 81 households; the 1994 and 2008 surveys tracked 77 of these original 81 households.

Sources: survey questionnaires, 1982 and 2008; n =77.

From traction to friction

From traction to friction

- Capacity to aspire – and an aspirational deficit
- Spaces for rural work
- Emergence of the neo-liberal family
- Vulnerability to precarity
- Asocial inequality

Capacity to aspire – and an aspirational deficit



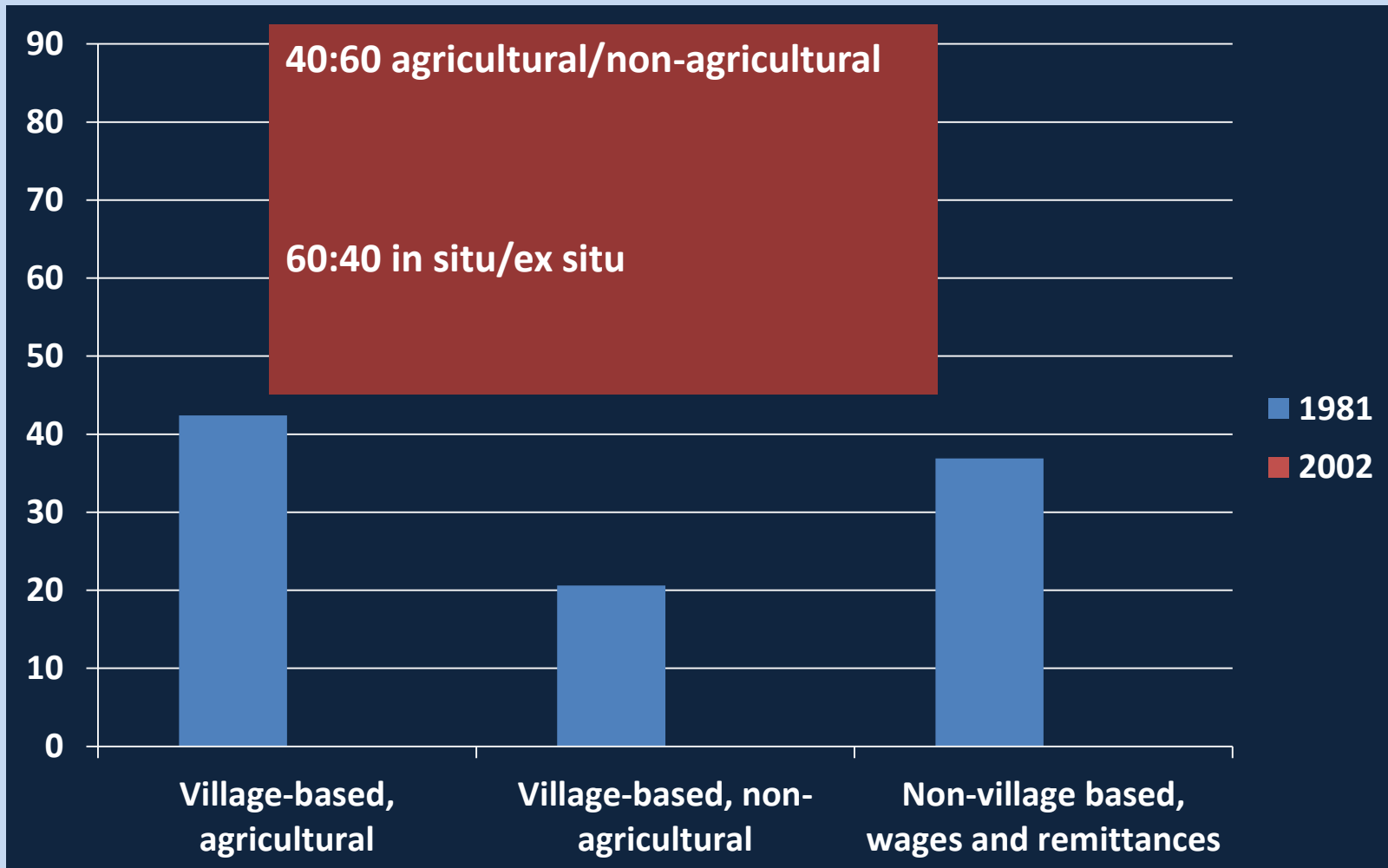
Rural aspirations

Well-being I: *kin dii yuu dii* (กินดีอยู่ดี) or 'eat well, live well'.

Well-being II: *kin dii yuu dii mii sukh* (กินดีอยู่ดีมีความสุข) or 'eat well, live well, have happiness/be content'.

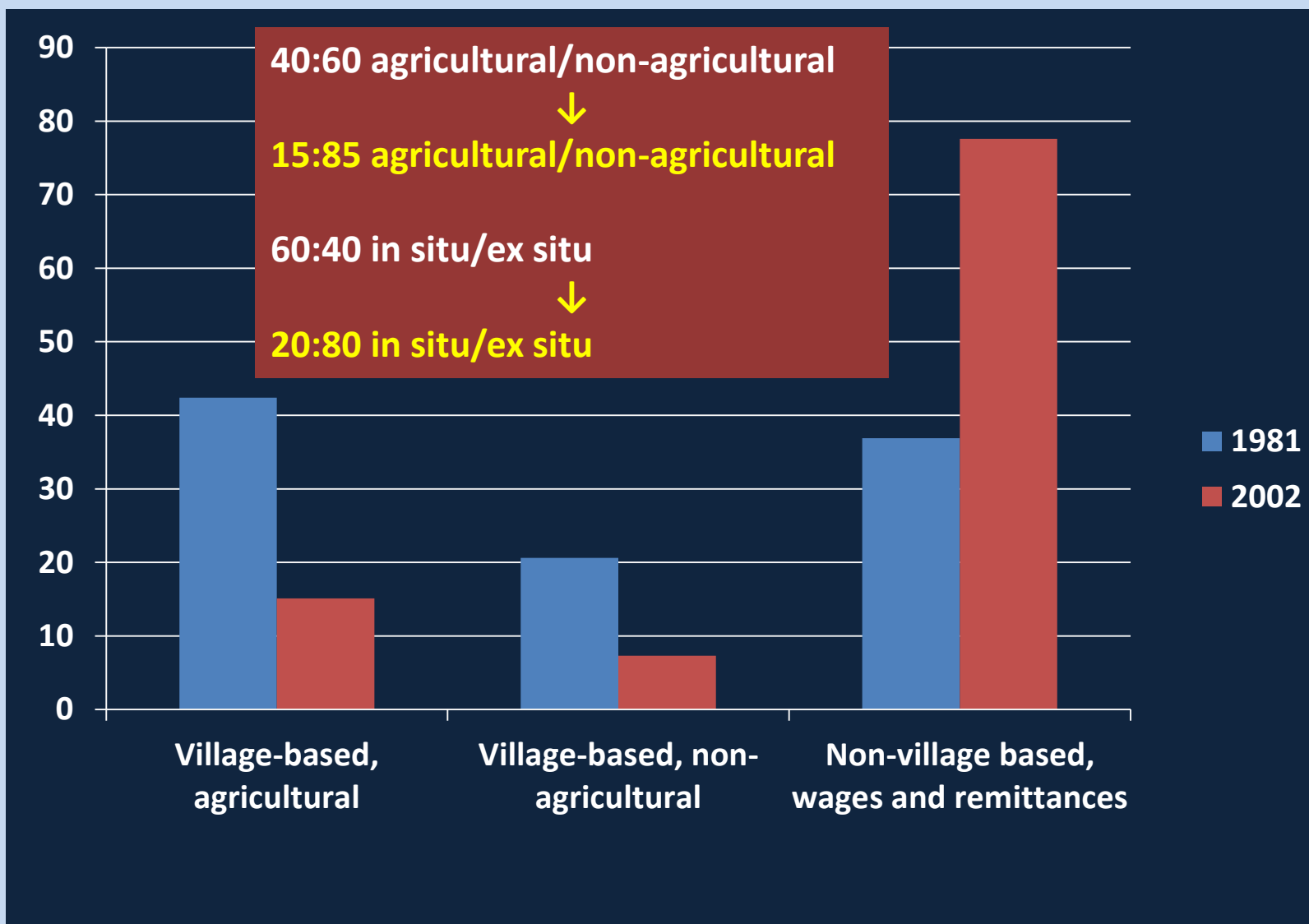
(Here, in Sulawesi courtesy of Tania Li.)

Income sources, Ban Dong Daeng, Northeast Thailand: 1981 and 2002 (per cent)



Source: data extracted from Funahashi 2009: 3.

Income sources, Ban Dong Daeng, Northeast Thailand: 1981 and 2002 (per cent)



Gender and work, Ban Non Tae and Ban Tha Song Korn, Mahasarakham 1982 and 2008 (primary occupation)

1982	Male	Female	Total
Farm	91	124	215
Non-farm	32 (26%)	11 (8%)	43 (17%)
Total	123	135	258

Source: author's survey, 1982, n = 258; and author and Salamanca's survey, 2008, n = 241

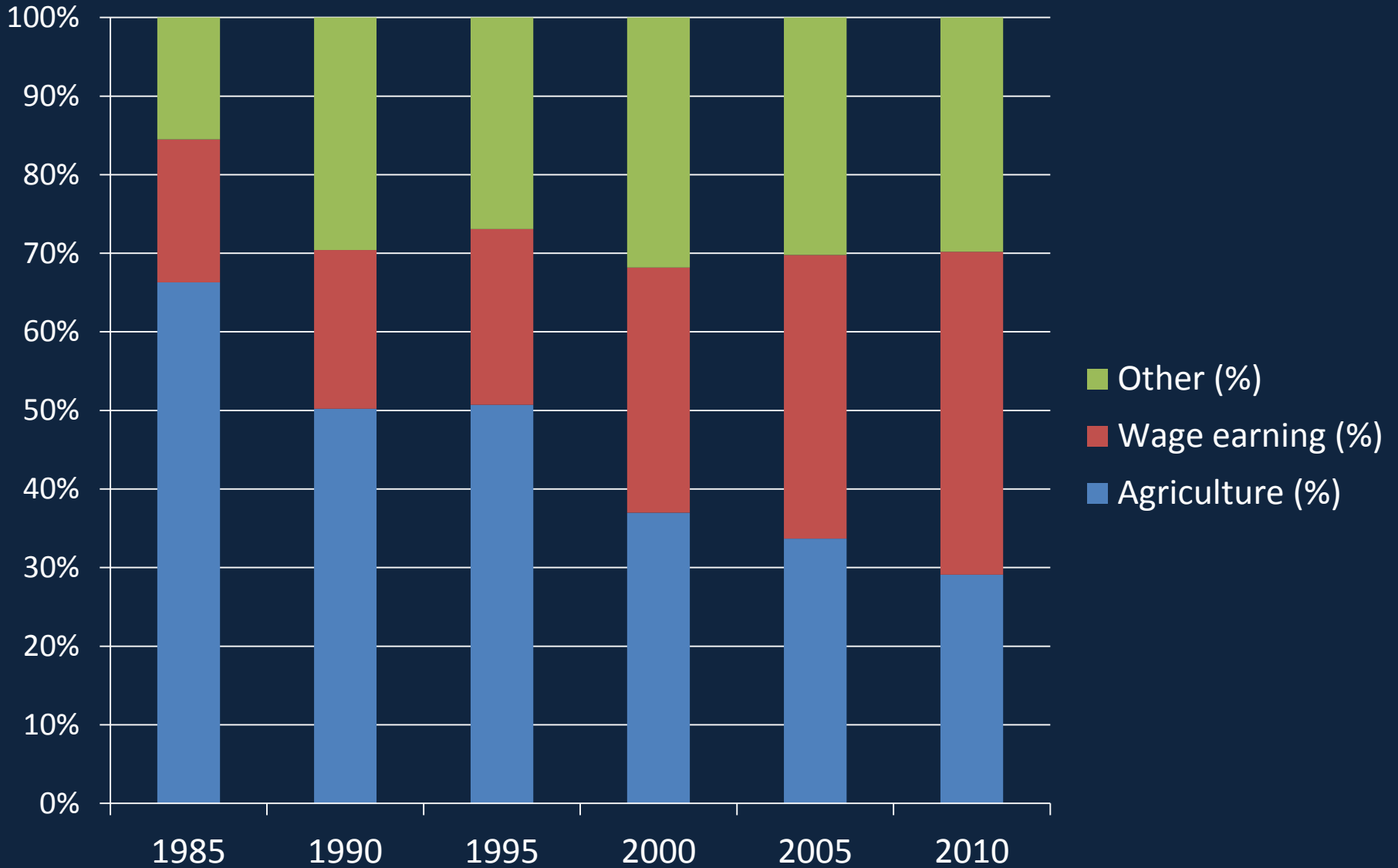
Gender and work, Ban Non Tae and Ban Tha Song Korn, Mahasarakham 1982 and 2008 (primary occupation)

1982	Male	Female	Total
Farm	91	124	215
Non-farm	32 (26%)	11 (8%)	43 (17%)
Total	123	135	258

2008	Male	Female	Total
Farm	52	69	121
Non-farm	58 (53%)	62 (47%)	120 (50%)
Total	110	131	241

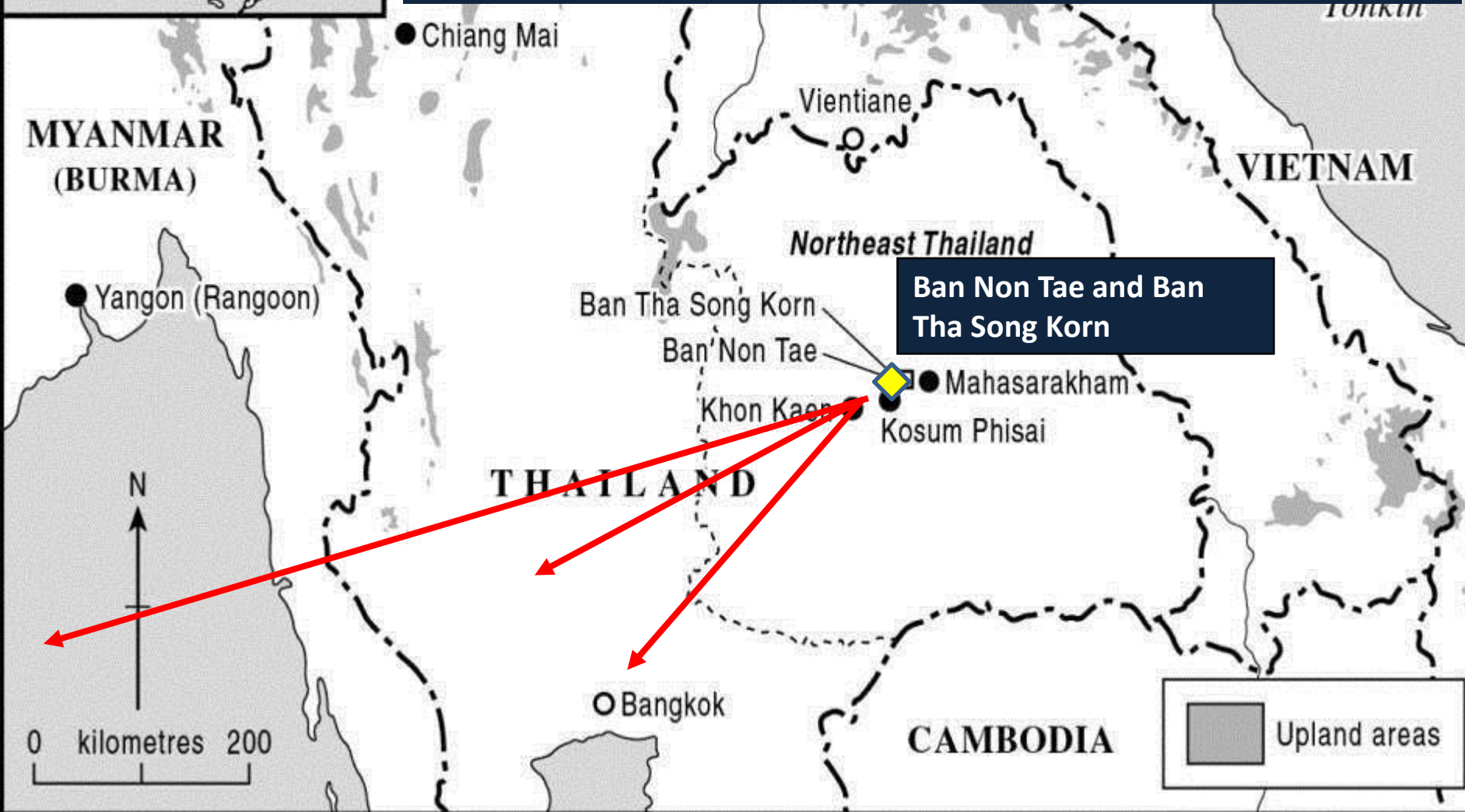
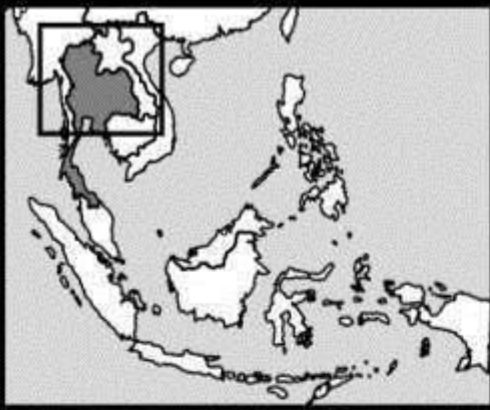
Source: author's survey, 1982, n = 258; and author and Salamanca's survey, 2008, n = 241

Income share of Chinese rural households, 1985-2010



Source: data extracted from Huang et al 2012: 17

“In a usual panel data survey, that aimed to study rural poverty changes, a huge underestimation of poverty declines of those living in rural areas at baseline would have taken place [if we did not take account of migration]. **Surely, studying these movements must be at the core of understanding rural poverty and policies to reduce it?**” (Dercon 2006: 7-8)

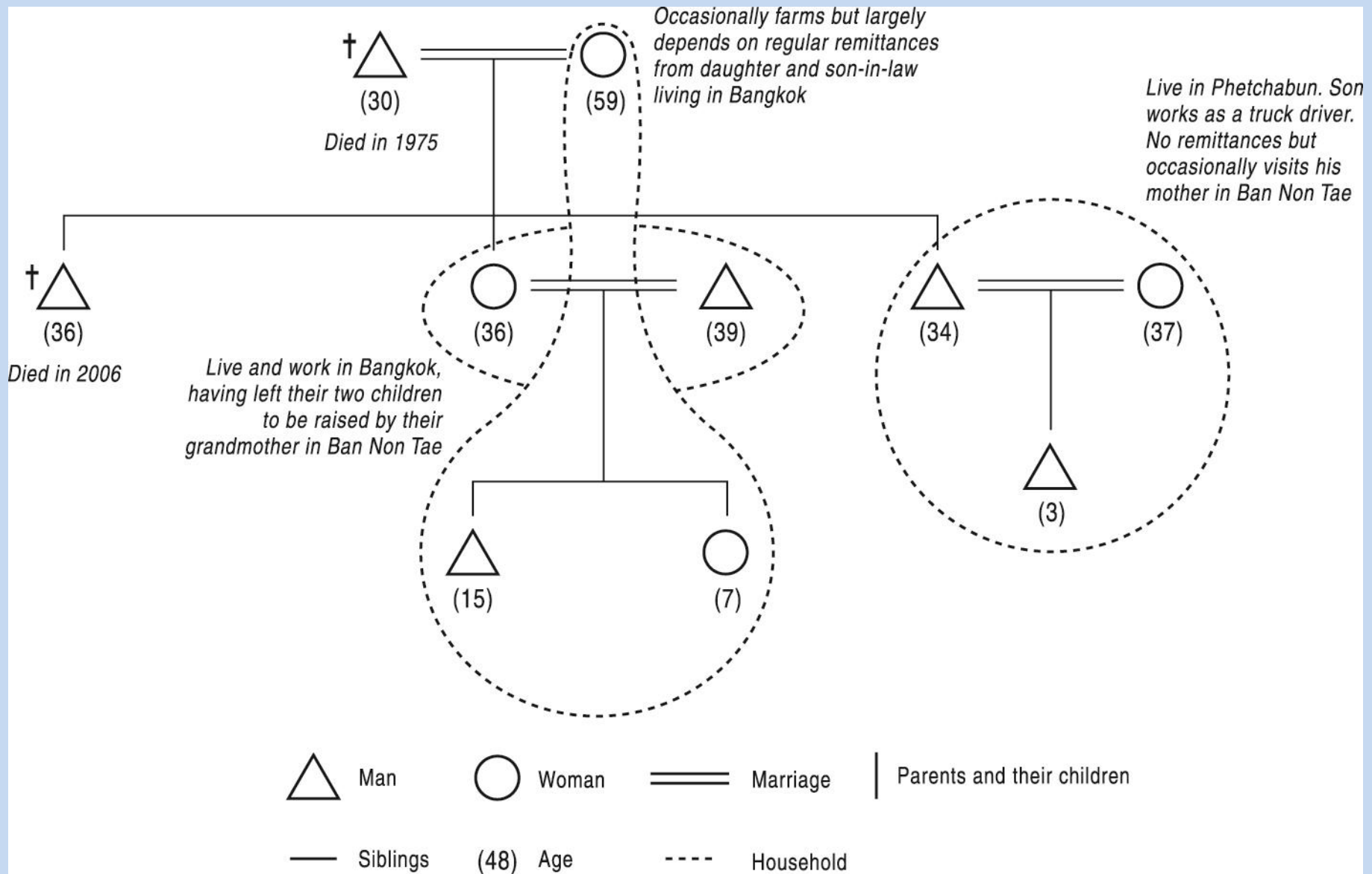




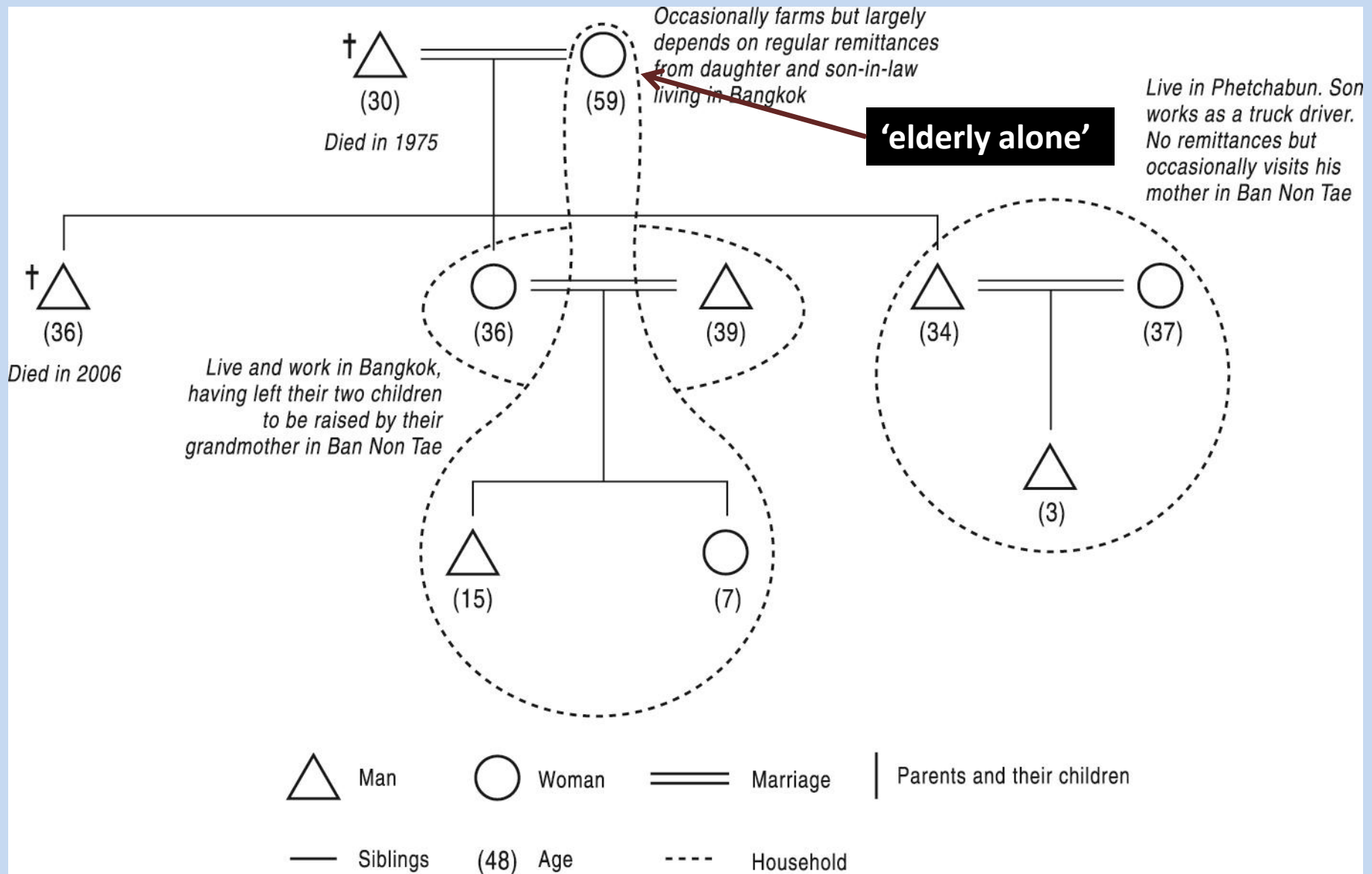
The functions of the household:

- Sharing labour and managing resources;
- pooling production and incomes;
- meeting the existential and other needs of household members;
- bearing, raising and, increasingly, educating children;
- caring for the elderly; and
- reproducing the family and the household.

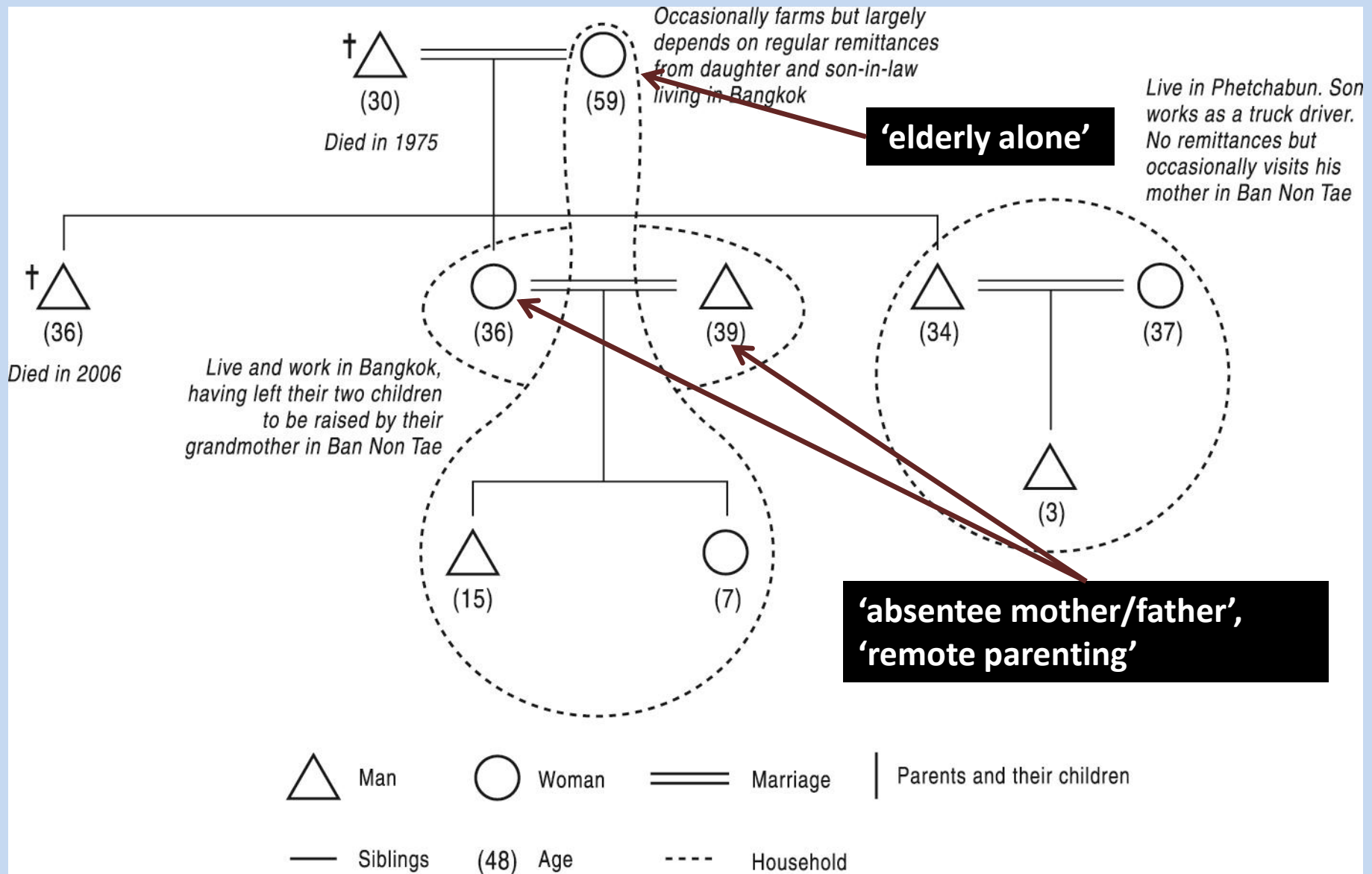
Accumulation with social fragmentation (in Northeast Thailand)



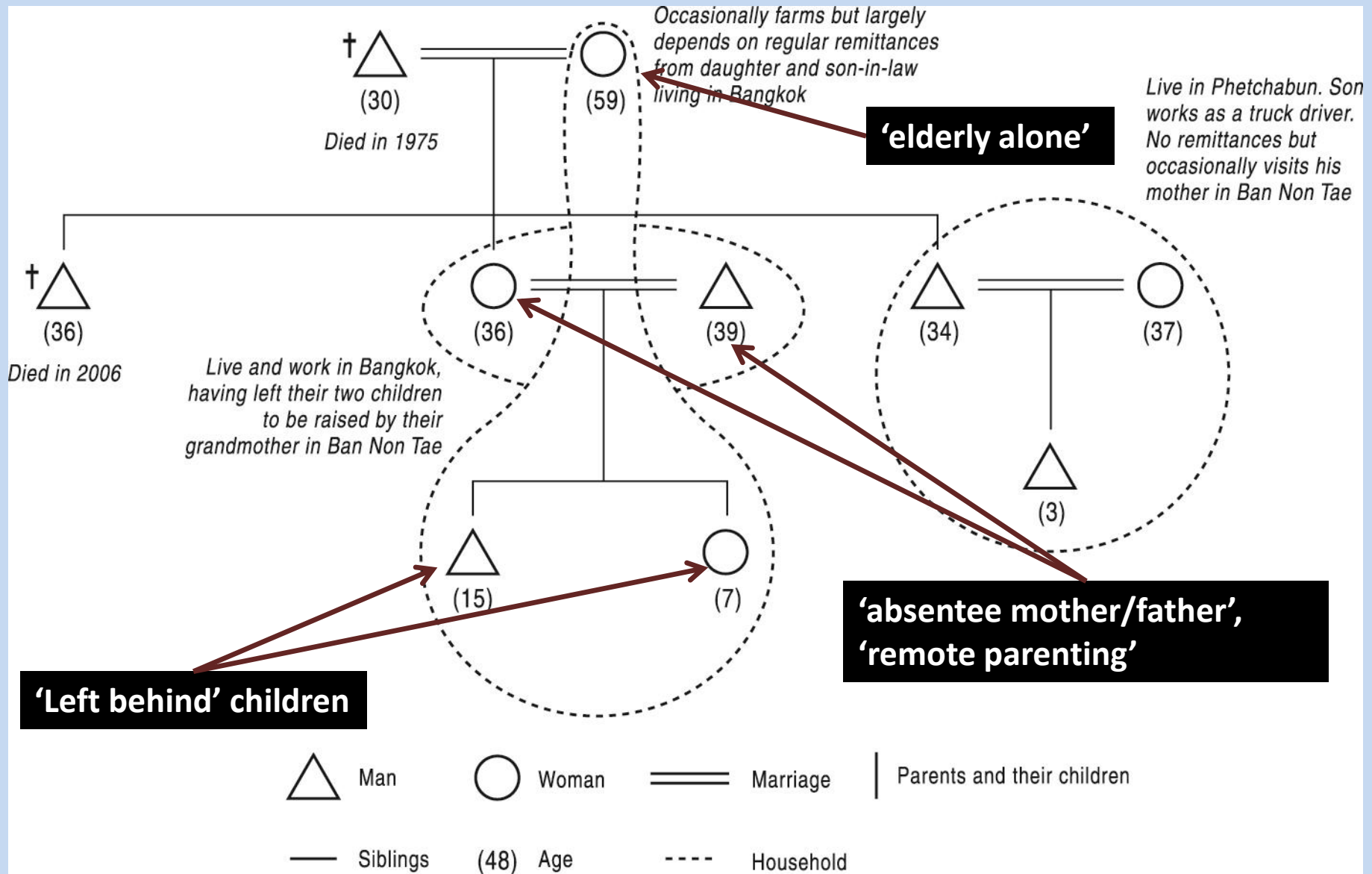
Accumulation with social fragmentation (in Northeast Thailand)



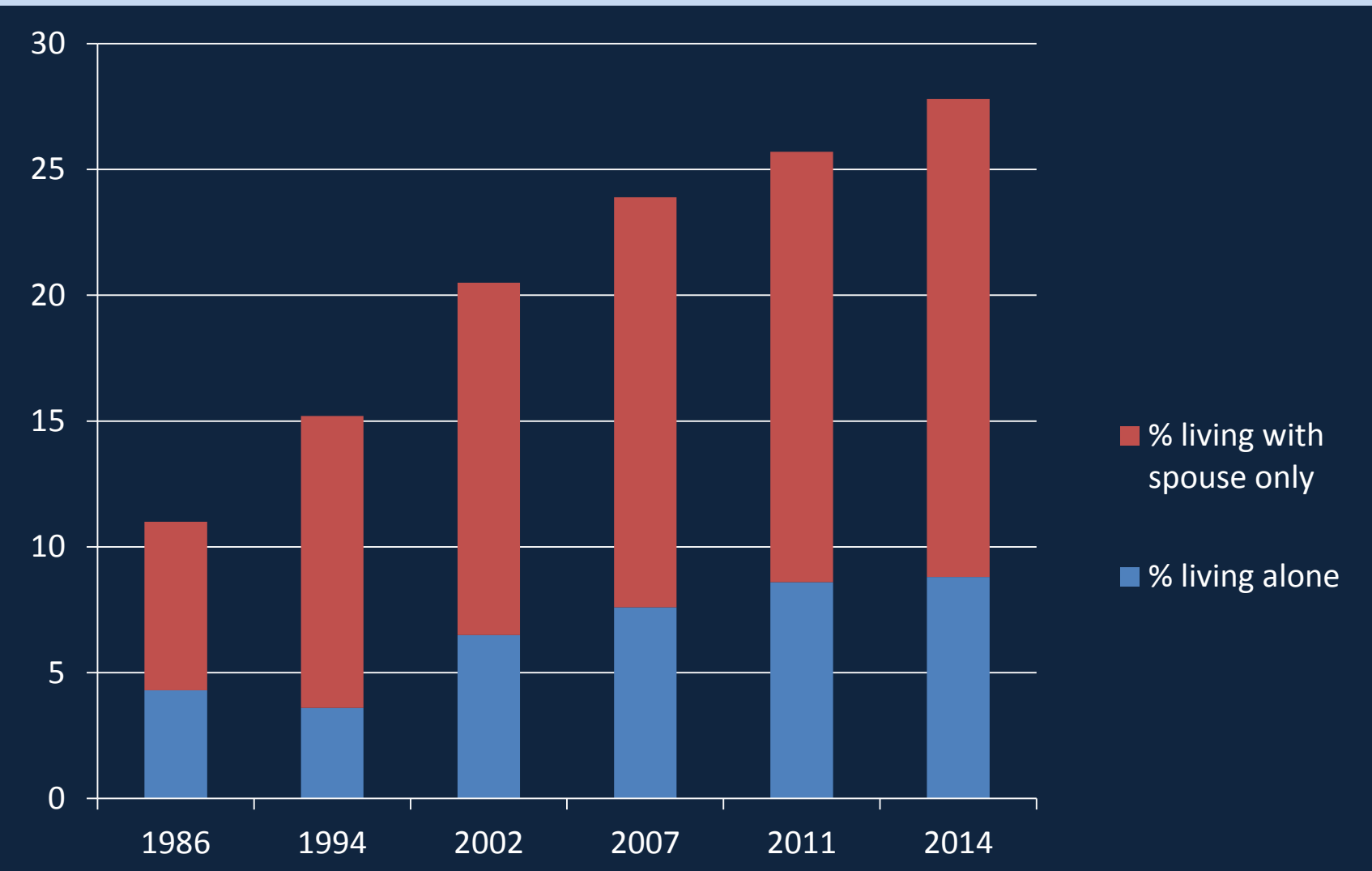
Accumulation with social fragmentation (in Northeast Thailand)



Accumulation with social fragmentation (in Northeast Thailand)



Proportion of the Thai rural elderly living alone or with their spouse only (1986-2014)



“This is the most difficult period for me. I have to be home alone. I feel lonely. The house is always very quiet when I get back from work in the rice field. All of my children are away to work. They don’t send me any money. I have to work every day just to get by. What will happen when I cannot work any longer?”

A 61 year-old Thai rural woman, quoted in Jongudomkarn and Camfield 2005: 12



If children are truly our future, then the fate of these 3 million [left behind children] in Thailand are at stake. It is a problem that is slowly, in the background, jeopardising the nation (Bangkok Post 7.7.2014 [http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/419215/])



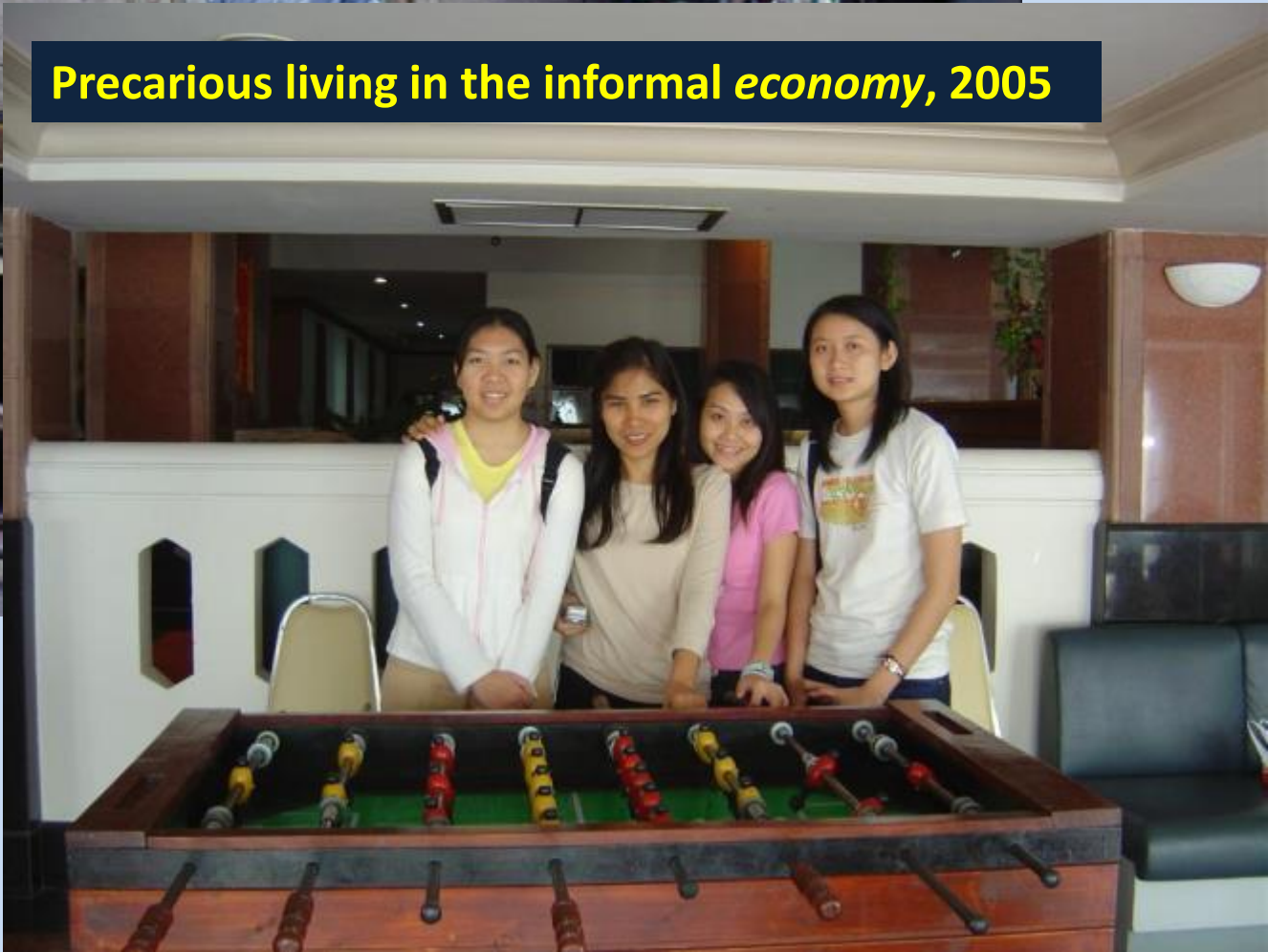
**Making a living in the informal sector,
migrants in Bangkok circa 1990**



Making a living in the informal sector,
migrants in Bangkok circa 1990

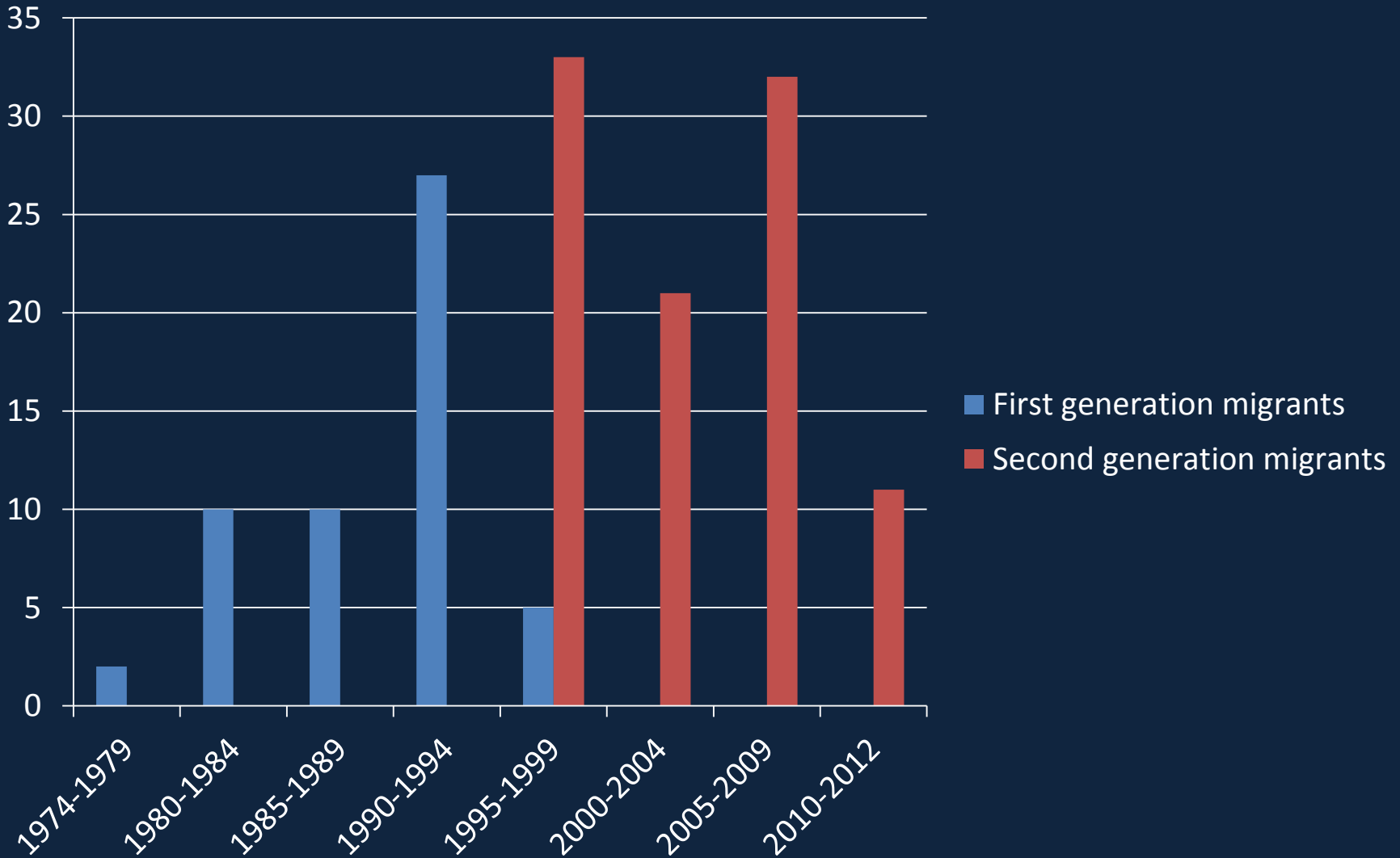


Precarious living in the informal economy, 2005



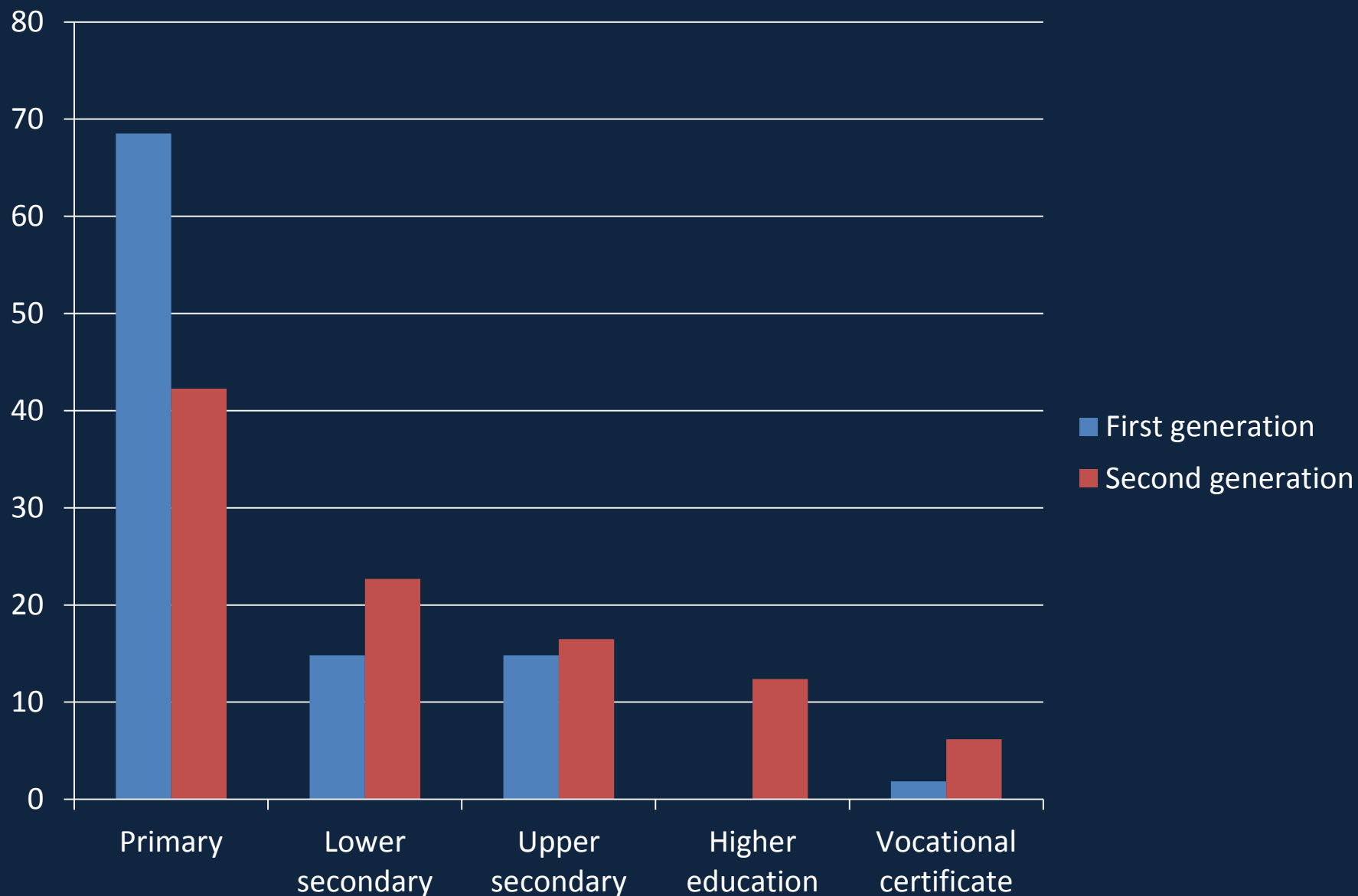
Date of initial departure of first and second generation migrants

Source: survey, Nov-Dec 2012; n = 54 (first generation migrants) and n = 97 (second generation migrants)

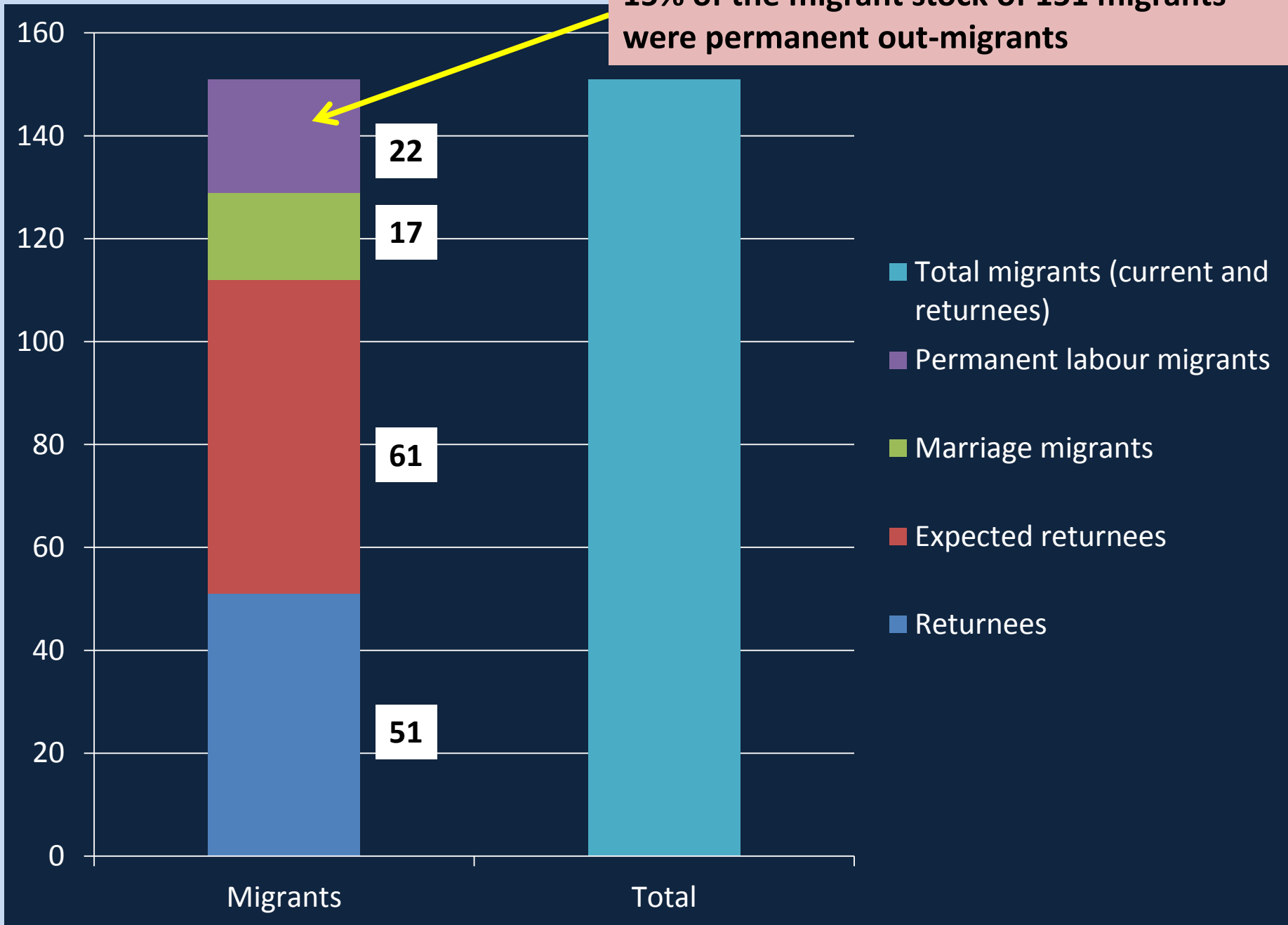


Educational status of first and second generation migrants on departure (%)

Source: survey, Nov-Dec 2012; n = 54 (first generation migrants) and n = 97 (second generation migrants)



15% of the migrant stock of 151 migrants were permanent out-migrants



Inequality to asocial inequality



<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/features-casestudies/features/18557/raising-low-aspirations-is-vital-to-reducing-poverty.aspx>

“By ‘asocial’, I mean here something quite specific. There are, of course, still identifiable and important links between the worlds of rich and poor, and if we insist (as social scientists tend to do) that every human relation is by definition a social one, then, of course, the sort of inequality I have in mind plainly *is* ‘social’. But if we ask another question, namely whether inequalities are lived and experienced within the imaginary horizon of that nineteenth-century invention ‘society’ – whether inequality, that is, is conceived as a relation among the members of a morally binding membership group – then the answer, increasingly, is ‘no’” (Ferguson 2013: 232–3).

Linking Vulnerability and Precarity

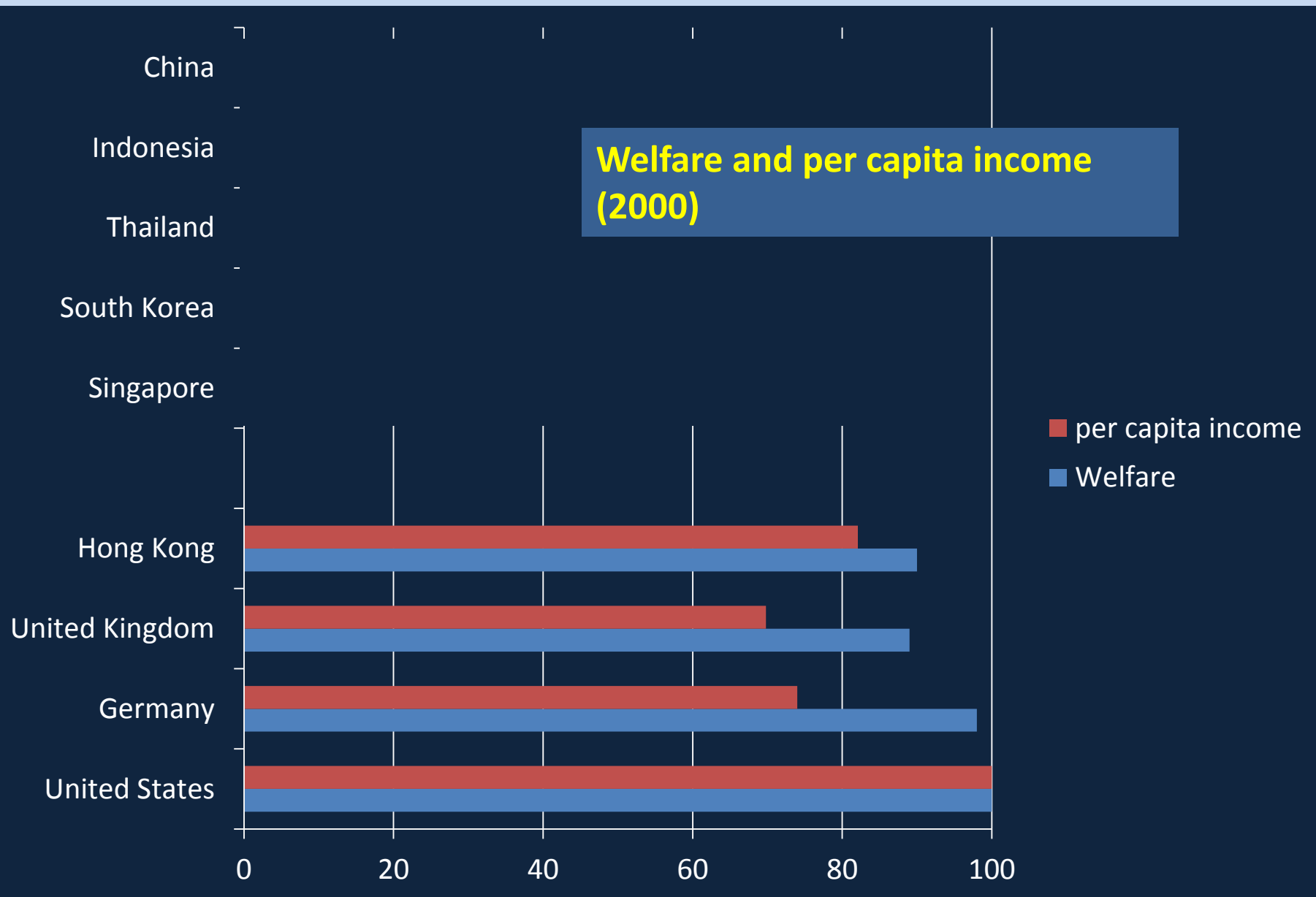
There are dynamic links between vulnerability and precarity and the manner of their association with wider development processes:

- In the past, physical isolation and relative immobility were important barriers to livelihood improvement;
- road construction and improving public and private transport and heightened levels of personal mobility have enabled households to engage with the world beyond the local area and the opportunities to be found there; and
- this has raised incomes, reduced inherited vulnerabilities and bolstered livelihoods.

But, at the same time, these development interventions and effects have:

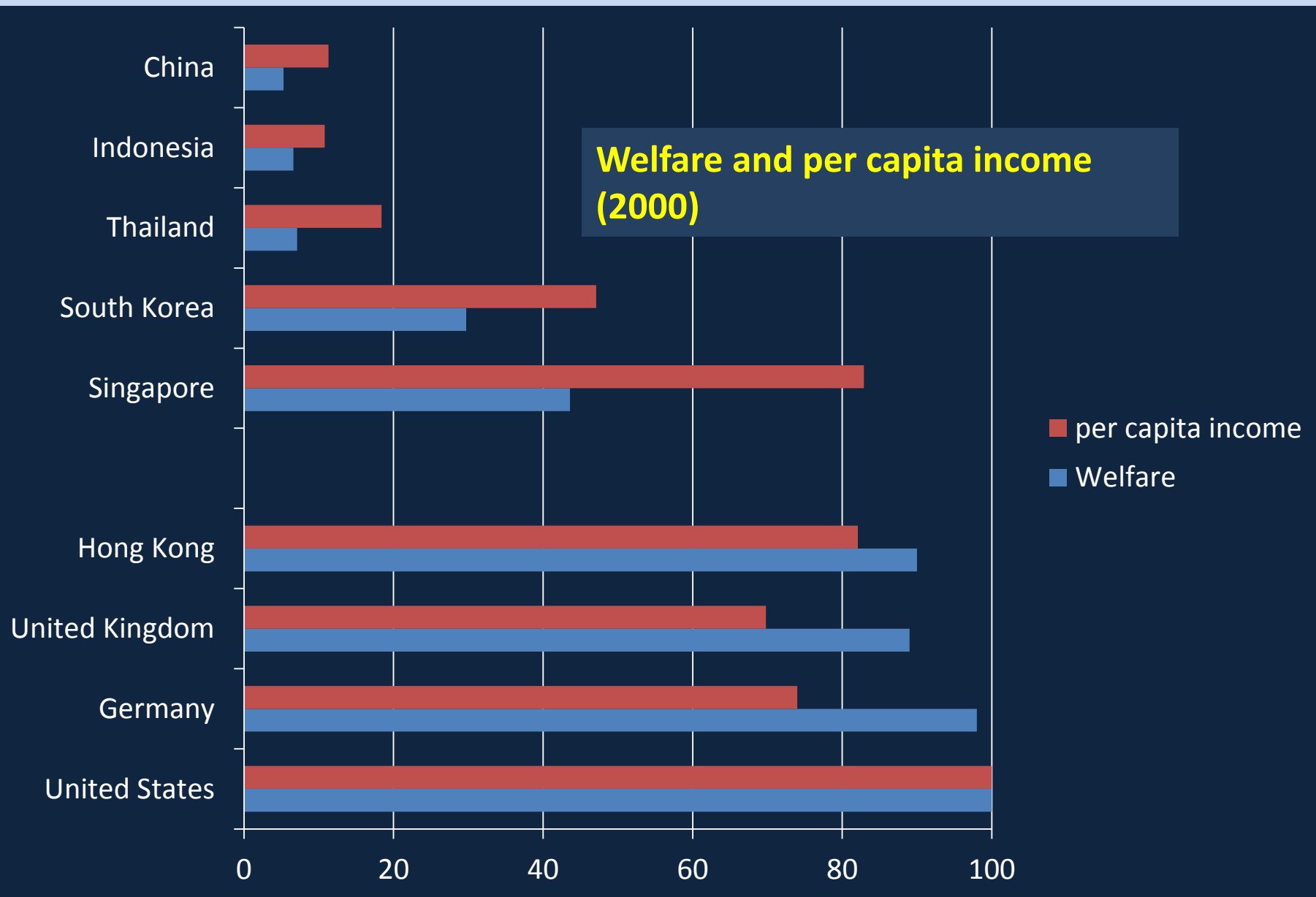
- Commoditised land, raising its value and therefore making it harder for the young, land poor and landless to secure a land-based livelihood;
- encouraged new land owners to change the basis of long-standing tenancy or sharecropping arrangements;
- exposed labour migrants to the risk of migration failure and high levels of debt; and;
- thereby injected a degree of precariousness into livelihood profiles.

Growth and well-being



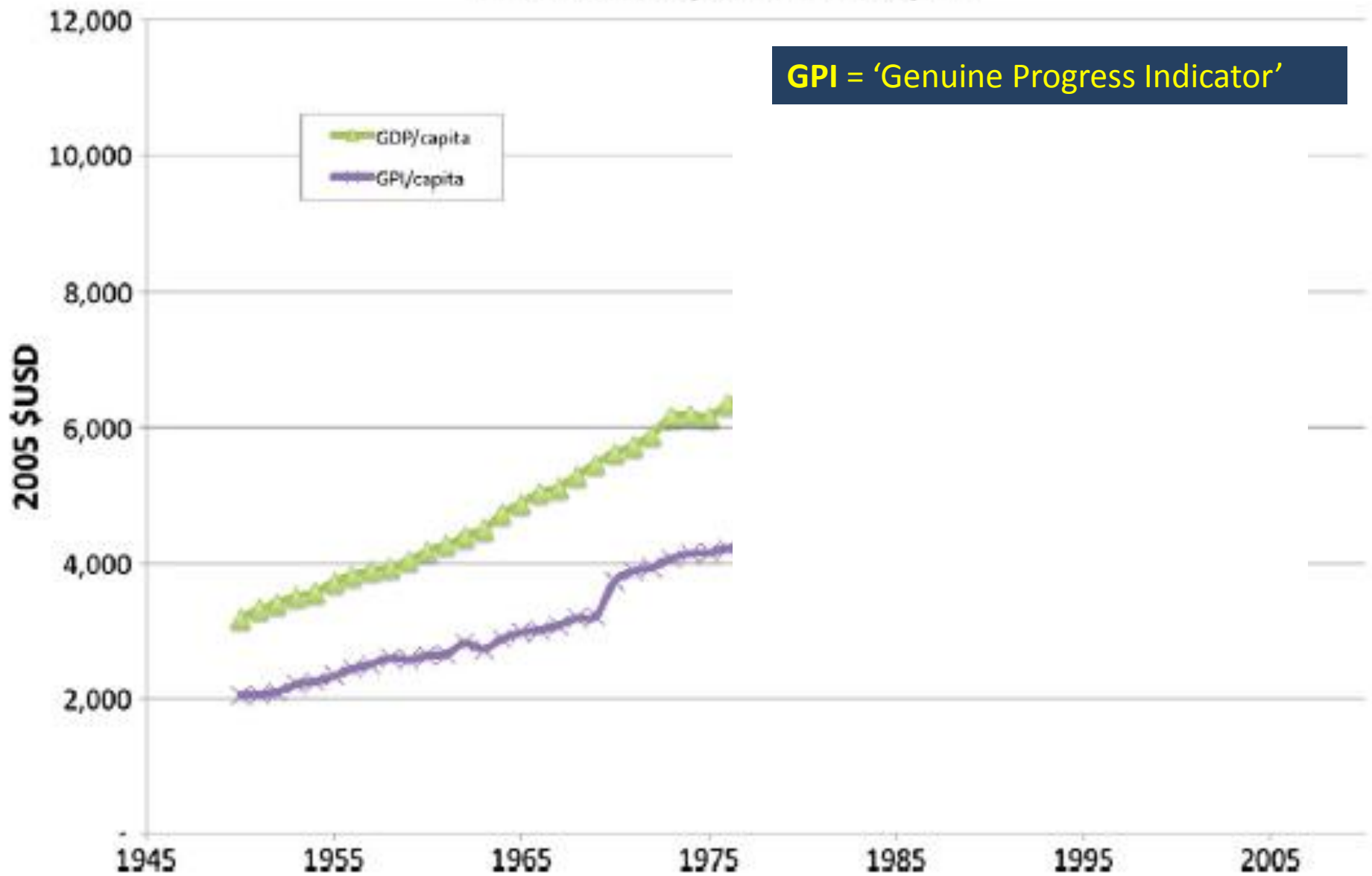
Source: data extracted from Jones and Klenow 2010: 22

Growth and well-being

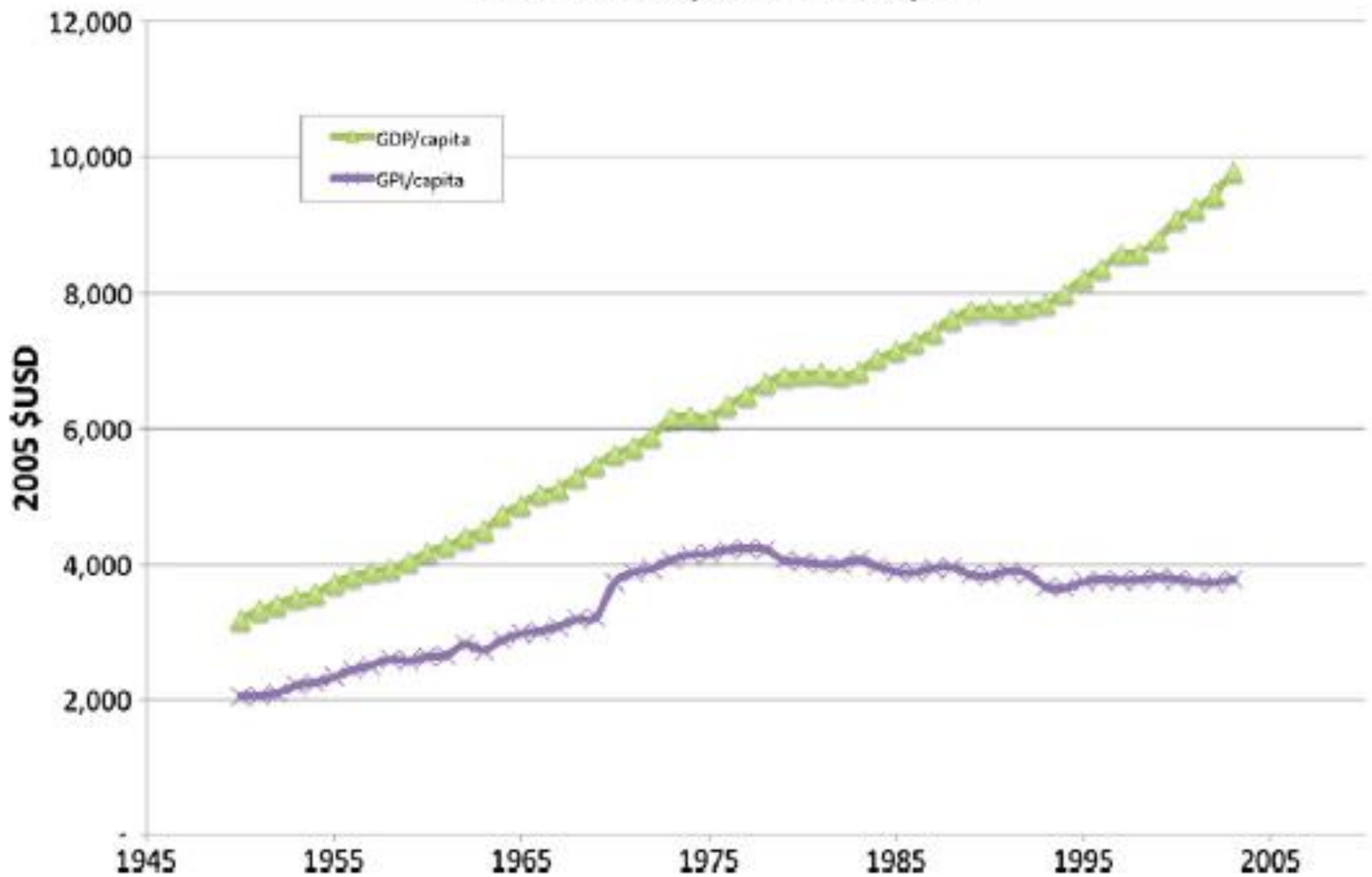


Source: data extracted from Jones and Klenow 2010: 22

Global GPI/capita & GDP/capita



Global GPI/capita & GDP/capita





“...poverty isn't a residual problem to be solved by the march of progress, the extension of markets, or the promotion of economic growth. Too often, it is the *product* of the capitalist form taken by this 'progress' that entrenched inequalities and fails to provide jobs. Poverty in these places isn't being reduced, as optimistic development narratives propose. It is expanding and intensifying, exacerbated by development policies that place their faith in markets to generate economic growth from which all are expected to benefit...” (Li 2014, p. 180).