

Chapter 4. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

A. Framework for Policies and Programs on Women and Development in Thailand

1. Foundation of National Policies on Women in Development

Women's development programs in Thailand have been catalysed by international agendas for women in development (WID). Thailand sent a delegation to the UN First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, and joined the world community the following year in recognition of the decade of women. Women's concerns and issues have increasingly been brought to national consciousness since then.¹ The Government established a National Commission of Women's Affairs in 1989, but this commission lacks permanent status, being dissolved automatically every time there is a change in the Government.

Another major impact of the 1975 Women's Conference on Thailand was the setting up of a national committee to prepare the first long-term Women Development Plan, which covered the period 1982-2001. Earlier Five-year National Economic Development Plans focused on infrastructure and did not start to address social issues until the Fourth Plan, (1977-81), when women were recognized as a special target group, along with children and youth. The long-term plan for WID was incorporated into subsequent Five-Year Plans, starting with the Fifth Plan in 1982.

When the permanent National Commission on Women's Affairs (NCWA) was established, Thailand was in the middle of a transition to another stage of development. The economy was expanding at an unprecedented rate, and this was accompanied by a wide range of social changes. The first long-term plan, therefore, required substantial revision and updating to keep in step with the changing social and economic environments, as well as to reflect new concerns among women. The second long-term Women Development Plan came to be known as "The Perspectives Plan (1992-2011)". It was subsequently used as a basis for the short-term Five-year Women Development Plans, to correspond with the Five-year National Economic and Social Development Plans (the Seventh and Eighth Plans).

2. Five-Year Women Development Plans

Women Development Plans have been adapted to correspond with two major policy documents, one national and the other international, the Government's Eighth Plan and the Beijing Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. "People-centered development" is the key phrase of the Eighth National Economic and Social Plan (1997-2001). The Plan aims to allow the Thai people to develop their physical and intellectual potential to the fullest extent. It recognizes that everybody has the right and should have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the country's development. The goal stated for women in the corresponding Five-year Women Development Plan is to enable them to develop their potential fully; to become valued human resources; to enjoy a good quality of life; and to participate in every aspect of the country's development. The above goals are to be accomplished by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, and providing protection according to their varying needs, including elimination of exploitation and violence.²

¹ Pawadee Tonguthai. 1995. *Toward the Third Decade of Women Development in Thailand: Progress, Problems and Prospects*. Paper presented at a Conference on Strategies for Women's Development and the Status of Women in Thailand, Bangkok.

² Thailand, National Commission on Women's Affairs. 1997. *Women in Development Plan during the period of the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan*. Bangkok.

The broad objectives of both the short- and long-term plans are:³

- to enhance women's economic and political opportunities and choices so that they can fully develop their potential. Consequently, women will be equipped with the skills and abilities needed to adapt to changing circumstances. Having become self-reliant, in time they will also be capable of supporting their own families and making greater contributions to national economic and social progress;
- to encourage women to become more involved in all aspects of national development at all levels of the decision-making process; and
- to create a national environment that will be supportive of women's employment. Discrimination and inequalities will be gradually eliminated and new social attitudes that recognize women's contributions to economic progress in Thailand will be developed.

3. CEDAW and its Impacts on Thai Women

The increased equality of Thai women under law demonstrates the value of policies and actions of international agencies for WID, including those of the Bank. For example, Thailand acceded to CEDAW just before the Nairobi Conference in 1985, with seven reservations. The Thai Government has gradually dropped five of its seven reservations to CEDAW.

- Women now have access to all government positions, whereas previously they were barred from certain positions, such as district officers. Shortly after the removal of this reservation, women were appointed to the posts of provincial governor, district officer, and army general.
- Women now have equal opportunity to enroll in all types of educational institutions, including all military academies.
- Children may now take the nationality of their mother as well as that of their father.
- Regulations by the Ministry of Interior now allow for equal pay for work of equal value by both men and women workers.
- Women are now accorded a legal capacity identical to that of men in relation to administering their property. Consent of both husband and wife is required for concluding contracts pertaining to property and assets acquired after marriage.

The two remaining reservations are Article 6, on marriage and family life, and Article 27, on settling of disputes by the International Court of Justice. Removal of the reservation on Article 6 has to await amendment of Thai family law to allow women the choice to retain their family names, which is not presently permitted by law, and to have access to the same grounds for divorce as their husbands. Article 27, however, will remain a reservation since Thailand has maintained its right to sovereignty in all international conventions it has ratified.

4. Provisions in the Eighth Plan and the New Constitution

The Eighth Plan commits Government to implement both CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action. This commitment is attributed to intense lobbying by the NCWA and NGOs throughout the drafting period, and during the time that the first draft was published for public debate. In addition, the new Constitution prepared by the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, and passed narrowly in the Thai parliament in September 1997, guarantees equal rights for men and women, and specifies that any discrimination on the basis of gender shall be unconstitutional. Whether these commitments by the state

³ Thailand, National Commission on Women's Affairs. 1996. *Perspective Policies and Planning for the Development of Women (1992-2011)*. Bangkok.

will lead to action and the relevant amendments to existing national legislation and subsequent enforcement remains to be seen.

The strategic objectives for human resource development under the Eighth Plan are based on recognizing that human development is necessary to increase Thailand's competitive capacity and technological self-reliance. These objectives will be achieved by programs that develop the skills of middle- and higher-level workers in quality, quantity, and efficiency. However, since the majority of women workers are in the lower levels of the workforce, more direct affirmative action will be required to increase gender equity.

B. Institutions for WID

There are several mechanisms that aim to ensure that new policies on gender equality are translated into relevant and appropriate actions and programs.⁴ This section discusses major organizations on WID—the national machinery, NGOs, international agencies and academic institutions. Details of their functions are provided in Appendix 1.

1. The National Commission on Women's Affairs

The NCWA was established to promote and coordinate efforts for the advancement of women. The NCWA Secretariat is attached to the Office of the Permanent Secretary, under the Prime Minister's Office. Its main functions include: (i) submitting policy statements and master development plans for the promotion of women's activities, roles, and status to the Council of Ministers for approval; (ii) recommending guidelines for implementing plans and policies in accordance with the Five-year National Development Plan; and (iii) giving comments and recommendations to the Prime Minister on the need for new legislation, or revision and amendment of existing legislation, that may affect women's rights.

The Prime Minister is formally the chairperson of NCWA, but in practice, the task is delegated to one of the Deputy Prime Ministers, with a Minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office as a Vice-chair. The NCWA Board has 30 members, ten of whom are appointed on the basis of their expertise in areas related to WID, two are representatives of major NGOs, and the rest are heads of Government agencies. The 10 experts, along with members of the 14 committees, provide NCWA with a variety of qualifications, experiences, backgrounds, and connections. Details of policies and measures are first discussed at the committee level, and working groups comprised of specialists are often set up. Reports and recommendations are then submitted to the Board, which meets at least twice a year, and then passed on to the Cabinet.

Women representatives from community organizations and from the elite of Thai society are included in NCWA. The former have first-hand knowledge of many major problems for women and the capacity to handle action programs, while the latter are able to influence or attract attention to women's issues at the highest levels of Government.

The major programs of NCWA are:

- Development of women's potential and quality of life;
- Promotion of women's legal equality, safety, protection, and welfare;

⁴ Thailand, National Commission on Women's Affairs. 1995. *Thailand's Report on the Status of Women and Platform for Action*. Bangkok.

- Women's participation in societal development;
- Improvement and solution of the problems of commercial sex workers;
- Improvements of mechanisms for the advancement of women;
- Advocacy and dissemination of information on women;
- Research and data on women; and
- Cooperation with international women's organizations.

Several major documents relevant to WID have been prepared by NCWA in the last few years. These include: Perspective Policies and Planning for the Development of Women (1992-2011), National Declaration on Women (1992), 1990 Gender Statistics, Thailand's Report on the Status of Women and Platform for Action (1994), Thailand's Combined Second and Third Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1996), and Women's Development Plan during the period of the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001).

The NCWA is also responsible for translating and distributing important documents, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as organizing a series of consultative meetings throughout the country to publicize the Platform and to integrate the Platform into action programs under Thailand's Women Development Plan.

The effectiveness of NCWA has been constrained because its main function is advisory, and because, as a divisional head, the director of NCWA has a lower rank than the heads of most of NCWA's contact agencies, which has affected its monitoring abilities. In April 1997, the Cabinet approved a proposal to raise NCWA's status to department level within the next two years. As of July 1997, NCWA had 47 full-time staff members working under the Government with an annual budget of B14 million. It is anticipated that NCWA will increase its scope of activities when it gains departmental status, commissioning NGOs and individual contractors to work on specific projects, and increasing its networking, coordinating and monitoring roles. However, the Commission faces constraints as the number of staff will be restricted by hiring limits imposed on Government agencies, and it may be adversely affected by reductions in public expenditure.

2. Other Organizations Working in Women and Development

a. Nongovernment Organizations

There is a broad range of NGOs with primary interests in women's rights or welfare in Thailand, from grassroots organizations to associations of people highly placed in Thai society. Together, they have the potential to be strong advocacy groups and catalysts for change. Recently, they have seen the advantage of coalitions and collective action, linking women's organizations with other reform-oriented NGOs to provide a single voice for change. This is evident, for example, in lobbying and raising public awareness of the new constitution, in which gender issues were linked to other issues of human rights.

Nongovernment organizations have played an increasingly important and high-profile role in the promotion of WID and women's rights at all levels of Thai society.⁵ It is almost impossible to separate the activities of NGOs, Government and academic institutions in WID, as the same people often serve various roles in these organizations. The commitment of these people and their multiple roles are responsible for several achievements in the advancement of women in Thailand.

The NGOs working on women's issues are long-established and better-recognized by the Thai Government than, for example, NGOs working on human rights or environmental issues. The main

⁵ See Appendix for more details.

reason is that their work has tended to complement rather than conflict with that of the Government, and they have been an important source of current data for the Government, as well as a source of trainers for various Government programs.

The number of women's NGOs has grown since 1985. The two-year period just before the FWCW brought many of them on to the world stage. In the preparations for FWCW, these NGOs joined forces and made their collective voice heard. In response, the Thai Government funded attendance of NGO representatives at the FWCW—the first time that the Government had formally supported NGO activities.

Since the FWCW, NGOs have been paying more attention to international developments that affect women, such as the world trade system, regional economic cooperation, and human rights. They have gained confidence in taking up issues of concern with Government. They have also become more adept at obtaining foreign support and expertise and working with international organizations, and more effective at networking among themselves and with NGOs in other countries and regions around the world. Since the Beijing Conference, a working group called Gender, Women and Development (GWAD) has been formed to coordinate WID and gender and development (GAD) efforts in Thailand. This organization's close contacts with the articulation of gender issues at the global and regional levels enables it to support follow-up, advocacy, networking, and the planning of programs of action.

b. Academic Institutions

The activities of academic institutions consist mostly of curriculum development, research, data collection, and academic services such as training, seminars, discussion, newsletters, and lectures on various aspects of women's concerns. Most of these activities are broad rather than in-depth, and still lack coordination. Researchers and academicians, government agencies, and NGOs have gradually begun to recognize and appreciate the benefits of working together. The main activities that currently work well as joint efforts are seminars, training, and small, accessible research projects. Foreign donors are more interested in supporting a network rather than individual organizations, and efforts are being made to build up a network system.

C. Programs for Women and Development

Both Government organizations and NGOs are involved in activities and programs for women. In human resource development, Government agencies have undertaken education and job training programs aimed at improving the skills and employability of women. There have also been Government initiatives to expand and modify the curricula of formal and nonformal education programs to teach more relevant vocational skills, suitable for local conditions. The main responsibilities for women's training programs fall under five Ministries, Labor and Social Welfare, Interior, Agriculture, Education, and Industry.

Government, NGOs and the UN have also cooperated to assist girls who are considered to be at risk of being lured into prostitution. By helping these girls to continue their education to secondary levels, it is hoped to increase their choices of occupation and their prospects for employment. Girls who do not wish to remain within the formal education system are offered training for jobs in the service sector. Assistance is also extended to the parents to enable them to generate a regular income while their daughters undertake further education or training. An example is the Youth Career Development program organized by the UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and six leading Bangkok hotels since 1996 to train girls from northern Thailand in the hospitality industry. Girls who are accepted into the program undergo a 20-week training course after which they can either return home or take the jobs that might be offered by the participating hotels.

The Department of Public Welfare, also in the MOLW, operates similar programs to those run by the Department of Community Development in the Ministry of Interior. The programs are oriented toward traditional women's interests, such as dressmaking, weaving, food preservation, and handicrafts.

The Department of Community Development, Ministry of Interior, aims to develop women's abilities to increase family income. There are also courses that aim to enhance women's participation in local politics. This latter program has been conducted jointly with the NCWA for two years and specifically aims to provide women with the skills and confidence to run for positions on Subdistrict Councils, which are regarded as the foundation of national-level democracy. The NCWA also works with NGOs to design and offer training programs to teach women the skills and knowledge needed to stand for election at all levels of Government.

The Department of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, focuses on training in home economics, with subjects such as mulberry production, silk weaving, and handicraft making. The Department's objectives in supporting women in agriculture are to enable them to participate in production as efficiently as possible, reduce inequality between women in agriculture and other groups in society, and enable them to take part in decision-making processes, both at the family and community level.

The Department of Agricultural Extension is also applying gender analysis in its planning for women agricultural workers. Women's groups are encouraged to establish links and form horizontal networks to exchange knowledge and experiences in developing their groups. The Department also supports income-generating activities that are agriculture-related, such as food processing. The objective is to provide rural women with alternatives to migrating away from their families, and to increase their per capita incomes to B4,000-B12,000 per year. The Department has also established an Agriculture Housewives Fund to encourage supplementary income-generating activities, and to educate women on, lending procedures and savings facilities at commercial banks, how to manage money, and how to access low interest loans to expand their business activities.

The Department of Industrial Promotion emphasizes handicraft and cottage industry products such as wood carving, gemstone cutting, furniture making, artificial flowers, dolls, and garment making. Most training expenses are provided from the national budget, and trainees bear only a small proportion of the total costs.

The Department of Skills Development in the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MOLW) puts serious effort into skill development among women workers by targeting both new entrants to the labor market, current workers, and rural workers. Programs in basic, upgrading, and on-the-job training are offered. A survey has also been conducted to collect information on older women who are facing the possibility of retrenchment and layoff, and to organize training programs for them. Such programs will be developed at the request of either the employer or the workers themselves. Participants are charged a small fee, most of the expenses are borne by the participating employers and the Government.

The Department of Skills Development also has campaigns to encourage rural women to acquire technical skills. This effort is to support the decentralization of industry and solve the general shortage of technicians, in accordance with Board of Investment policy. These campaigns aim to raise women's awareness that home economics and handicrafts have less economic potential than new technical skills. Several groups of women enrolled in training courses to become welders, electricians, repairers of home appliance, and bricklayers have performed satisfactorily. For the three-year period 1994-1996, the total

number of women trained under the Department of Skills Development plans throughout the country are shown in Table 21.

Table 21: Number of Women Trained Under Regular Plans of the Department of Skills Development, 1994-1996

Program	1994	1995	1996
New entrants	296	1,508	2,539
Training in rural areas	932	8,996	15,548
Skills upgrading for current workers	800	7,477	8,830
Special training	3,762	7,819	12,533
TOTAL	5,790	25,800	40,893

Source: Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, April 1997.

There are many NGOs involved in training programs, such as the National Council of Women of Thailand, the YWCA, the Council on Social Welfare, the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women, and the Appropriate Technology Association. The aims of women's skills training and upgrading vary, and include courses to increase basic knowledge, supplement family income, encourage women to use their spare time productively, and prevent rural-urban migration. Courses usually duplicate those run by government agencies, and are oriented toward traditional women's roles and occupations. Training frequently includes skills such as handicrafts, cooking, food preservation, hairdressing, weaving, and dressmaking. Agriculture-related training includes raising silkworms, animal husbandry, growing mushrooms, and the use of fertilizers.

D. Assessment

Several problems remain with the above programs:

- Coordination among various agencies is still limited, skills training activities are duplicated, and there is oversupply of trained workers in some areas (e.g., artificial flower-making), resulting in marketing problems, leading to price cuts and reduced profit.
- The programs offered revolve around areas such as hairdressing, dressmaking, food preparation and preservation, and handicrafts. These programs are popular because women often mistakenly believe that there is likely to be a demand for such services. New courses should be introduced, along with advice on the potential market demand for the skills being taught.
- Many trainees run into difficulties after completing the course, when they try to turn their newly-acquired knowledge into an income-earning occupation. This is often because they lack the initial capital to start a business.
- Too much reliance is placed on classroom instruction or written materials. The programs cannot be fully effective if trainees are illiterate.

- Most courses are short-term and the skills learned often cannot be used as a major occupation, only to provide supplementary income. Rural women are now more interested in receiving training that will enable them to have an independent occupation, and which will provide substantial income, rather than training that aims to enhance their domestic role.
- Some of the skills training programs are not designed with local markets in mind, or designed with only a limited market potential. If women try to seek work near home, they are likely to be disappointed and remain unemployed. This may lead to more migration if the women with these new skills go to the cities, where the demand for such skills is greater. The rural community therefore does not benefit from such training but may, instead, experience labor outflows.
- Follow-up support is lacking in the fields of capital, management, and marketing techniques. The items produced, particularly handicrafts, may be left unsold for a long time due to lack of knowledge in quality control; repetitive, old-fashioned designs, or designs that do not suit consumer tastes, particularly those in high-income groups. Opportunities for selling in export markets, which command higher prices, are thus limited.

Records of the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation, under the Office of the Prime Minister, show that, during 1990-1993, support for women's development projects from foreign donors represented just over one percent of total assistance. Most projects remain women-specific, and include offering women the awareness and opportunity to benefit from existing economic and social services, enhance their abilities, and improve their quality of life. Being small-scale activities, the projects provide only temporary relief, without longer-term impact. The present emphasis on small-scale short-term training activities—while well intended—is not sufficiently linked to the challenges of Thailand's changing economy and new labor force requirements. Such activities are unlikely to empower women to enter into the mainstream of the economy and improve their economic and social position on a sustainable basis.