

Women's Development

In the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan
(2007-2011)

Summary

1. Ninth Plan Progress Report

The Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) focused on five areas: strengthening women's development potential; increasing women's participation in decision making; promoting equality and social protection; developing media to support women's development; and strengthening women's organizations and networks.

During this period, women's development progressed in many areas. In 2005, educational opportunities were equal for both women and men, resulting in improved enrolment ratios favoring women -- 0.94 females to 1 male at the primary level; 1:07 to 1 at the secondary and more females at 1:55 to 1 male at the tertiary level. In terms of averages, numbers of women staff increased from 17.8 percent in 2002 to 21.9 percent in 2005 of total employees in the civil service, at the higher grades (Grades 9-11). Women now make up the majority in the civil service with 60.3%, but mostly in the lower grades. More women entered the labor force; in 2004, the rate was 83 percent for men and 65 percent for women. The move towards more political participation was evident in the numbers of more women on the voters' registers; it was noted that women exercised their votes more than men.

Overall, women continued to enjoy longer life expectancy and adequate health benefits. Most received medical care during pregnancy and childbirth, except for those in the northern region and the three

southern provinces. These regions faced discrimination based on language, tradition as well as cultural differences that set them apart from the majority of Thai society. However, the government's policy of promoting women's health and reproductive rights eventually created better awareness and improved maternal health.

In economic development, Thai women played important roles side by side with men. By providing family support and nurturing both younger and older members of the family, women provided the stability needed by the family unit to enable its members to contribute to economic development. Outside the family sphere, their contributions extended to labor within the society's workforce.

In promoting gender equality, mechanisms for evaluating and encouraging progress were established at government levels. At present, the Permanent Secretary at all ministerial levels appoints a Chief Gender Equality Officer in charge of women's affairs, usually his or her deputy, and the Director General of each department under each ministry is required as well to appoint his own department CGEO as gender issues focal point. A master plan guides all the gender focal points in their duties. Although these units are at an early stage, work has started to include gathering of gender related statistics, training, capacity building and creating awareness. In addition, a National Committee on Women and Family was formed to assist in promoting women's issues, including capacity building, and to ensure ongoing monitoring of government efforts. A group of elected women representatives established the Thai Women Parliamentarian Club to foster women's economic and political participation at all levels.

On the other hand, many issues failed to make progress. Despite the fact that sustainable development depends equally on both women and men, there are too few women at the higher political levels and even fewer women representatives at the local levels. At the local, community and village levels, women leaders accounted for less than five percent of the total numbers.

Practices of family planning continued to be women's burden. The problem of unplanned pregnancy, abortion as well as abandoned children persisted. The number of HIV-infected female adolescents remains also slightly higher than that of males.

Cases of domestic violence increased as well as cross-border trafficking of women and girls, rape, sexual harassment and forced prostitution. Media, including mobile phones, worsened women's image by presenting them as sex objects. Vulnerable groups consisting of

elders, victims of natural disasters, women in the three southern provinces, immigrants, women without nationality and prostitutes were vulnerable to violence and experienced difficulties in accessing basic government services.

Enforcement of gender equality in employment has not been totally effective. Traditional women's employment remained mostly lowly paid, unskilled, with little or no benefits and comparatively unstable compared to that of men. The informal work system, in particular, is characterized by unfair wages, poor working conditions, and lack of availability of proper training. All these conditions continued to result in moral and physical threats to women, especially the poor and disadvantaged, often manifesting in poor health and other health related issues.

A lack of gender disaggregated data collection and research vital to evaluation of women's status and appropriate public policy persisted. A gender perspective was lacking in policy discussions and decisions, mostly attributed to absence of adequate research data and allocation of government funds.

Efforts towards changing laws and regulations discriminating against women on several issues such as marital rape and divorce finally bore fruit, with the ratification of several amendments by the National Legislative Assembly in September 2007.

2. Variables Affecting Future Trends in Women's Development

Population structural changes in Thailand may result in an additional fourteen million elderly within the next 20 years. Consequently, women whose numbers have increased in the formal workplace have to shoulder the added responsibility of taking care of the additional number of elders as well as household chores. The trend towards single families has also forced more women into taking on leading roles as household heads.

On a positive note, the Thai Government has adopted a series of national plans and legislations to support and strengthen women in development. The Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011), guided by the Constitution of 1997 prevailing at the time, places its focus on people as the center of development with women in development as a major part. The new Constitution of 2007 continues this focus and explicitly gives assurance of gender equality and fairness.

Furthermore, the country has acceded to many international conventions relating to the advancement of women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Another positive development is the progress in information technology which facilitates availability of information, accessible to all, equally, thus helping women's advancement.

In spite of these optimistic trends, however, current Thai society continues unwittingly to deprive women of their rights to personal security, integrity and full career advancement and empowerment due to archaic views on men's and women's roles. The reproductive and nurturing role of women in the family, although essential to the existence of family and humankind, is unaccounted for in the calculation of the gross domestic product (GDP). Such estimation reflects negligence in recognizing women's economic contribution as well as women's full potential as human resources for development.

Traditional stereotypes against women begin at home, and reinforced unintentionally through educational institutions and the catalytic role of media. Projection of negative and degrading images of women has prejudiced the cause of women and their participation in society. Lack of understanding of women's perspectives continued to distort women's gains from national development.

An unfortunate assumption persists that recognition and fulfillment of women's human rights could affect negatively the current stability of Thai family and culture. According to women's rights advocates, it is imperative to educate and remind Thai people in particular that women's human rights is not a new paradigm in Thai culture. There are historical records in the past, such as during the reign of King Rama IV, that women were recognized as individuals in their own right, that a woman may choose to marry whom she pleased, and that the treatment of women as men's property was condemned.

3. Objectives and Goals of the Tenth Women's Development Plan

The underlying obstacle to Thai women's development has always been societal attitudes toward gender. The tenth plan therefore seeks to focus on changing attitudes of Thai society towards gender equality,

while continuing to build women's capacity to enable them to live to their full potential as both actors for and beneficiaries of national development.

Positive changes towards women's development not only need the strengthening of women's capacity but also collective work in partnership with all key players to take necessary steps to ensure that gender equality is well understood and effectively addressed. Other byproducts of cultural biases against women are violence and abuse, negative projection of women's images by the media, lack of opportunity to make economic as well as political decisions, and absence of the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the community, in the workplace and at the wider national level.

The goals are as follows:

1. To shift societal attitudes towards deeper awareness of and respect for human rights and gender equality
2. To advance women's empowerment for greater participation in development
3. To ensure women's protection as safeguard to their human rights

The objectives are:

1. To achieve better respect of human integrity and gender equality among children, youth, women and men;
2. To increase the numbers of women in politics and administration at all levels;
3. To improve participation of women representing different groups in the area of health policy formulation, and promote access to quality health care and reproductive health services;
4. To decrease significantly cases of violence against women, while improving access to resources and services when such cases occur;
5. To create conditions for improved women's economic participation and benefit sharing.

4. Strategies for Strengthening Thai Society's support of women's rights

Strategy 1:

Mobilize all stakeholders to promote attitude change towards gender equality

Government representatives, educational institutes, media, families – all have the responsibility to work jointly to achieve the goals of gender equality and women's development. To this end, authorities must revise curricula used in formal and non-formal education that would reflect and promote gender equality as a desired family and moral value analogous to respect of human rights. Government should encourage and fund relevant researches, develop specialists, allocate adequate financial budget and acknowledge and disseminate research and studies that promote human integrity.

Strategy 2:

Increase women's participation in political decision making

Democracy can only be strengthened through ensuring equal political, economic and social participation of women in all spheres of life. Government should actively encourage both public and civil society to foster mechanisms for women leadership development and capacity building. Moreover, government also should examine their own language, communications and policies to ensure the projection of positive images of women in politics and public life. Affirmative action towards appointing more women to committees at the national level should be supported by government, albeit temporarily. Measures should be identified and supported that would counter under-representation of women in parliaments, such as initiation of research on women's impact on political and administration systems.

Strategy 3:

Improve access to health care services

Government authorities and civil society must take appropriate actions to provide health care services for women and support their

reproductive rights in the context of health sector reform and development and to secure equitable access, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups. It is imperative to include women in the design and implementation of the program which must also emphasize preventive measures. Other than women, young people, and men in particular, should be educated and informed on sexual and reproductive health issues. They should be encouraged to accept their responsibilities in these issues, which include the use of contraceptives and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, childrearing and household work.

***Strategy 4:
Strengthen women's rights to human security***

Strengthening women's rights to human security means protecting every group of women especially the vulnerable groups so that they enjoy freedom from fear. By creating better education, employment opportunities and encouraging women's involvement in planning as well as policy formulation, government could prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

Nationwide coverage of accessible support services for women's protection and awareness of legal rights, equipped with female staff and funding, must be provided. Furthermore, government must ensure that a gender-sensitive perspective is integrated into the design and implementation of legislation in cooperation with law enforcement, the private sector, state enterprise as well as civil society.

To promote gender equality, individuals and organizations who have achieved remarkable success in the field of women's rights and human security must be recognized, and research on factors leading to gender-based violence must be encouraged.

***Strategy 5:
Foster women's economic participation***

Women's productive economic participation can be achieved through full integration of women into the formal economy and, in particular into economic decision making. Strategies must be developed to eliminate unequal pay based on gender, and designed to create better educational and employment opportunities, such as improvement and

upgrading of technical skills, business and management skills and the use of new technologies.

It is also important that Government, financial institutions, nongovernmental organizations, civil society and women's organizations jointly promote women's entrepreneurial activities and gainful self-employment through technical assistance, training, creation of networks and adequate financial support.

Moreover, this form of assistance must cover all groups of women especially in the informal sector and agricultural sector where women work at home and are either unpaid or lowly paid workers.

Education should be aimed at raising and promoting awareness of the rights of women as human rights. Research in regard to usefulness and economic value of women's economic participation and conversely the costs of their exclusion could serve as a special mechanism for monitoring how gender equality can be achieved.

Lastly, women entrepreneurs, women-friendly corporations and socially responsible businesses must be supported and recognized.

5. Mechanisms for Women's Advancement

Government should be encouraged to establish a main national organization for women, separate from the current Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development subsumed under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Chief Gender Equality Officers and gender focal points currently at ministerial and departmental levels should be replicated at the provincial and local levels, following a localized master plan along with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Capacity building must extend to all officials at all levels on women's and gender equality issues, with required responsibilities for ongoing situation analyses and budget allocation for relevant activities.

Civil society must work jointly with government and other allies such as the family, educational and religious institutions who all play vital roles in shaping the right attitudes towards gender equality. Government must allocate a budget to civil society to function effectively

as a full partner.

Government must foster a broader commitment by providing funds for more studies and research on women's health and reproductive rights, security, political and economic participation, capacity development, and women's human rights. CGEOs and gender focal points must be trained to recognize importance of data and research as a basis for decision making related to women's advancement.

6. Processes

Laws and other legal measures must be reviewed, adjusted and amended in order to improve effectiveness at advancing gender equality. Efforts to increase numbers of women at all levels of government, including Parliament and the local levels, women at national committees must be backed by temporary special measures, to correct the imbalance of gender representation in policymaking. Special attention must be provided to protect the non-formal labor sector, mostly comprised of women.

Incentives are needed to encourage:

- studies and research on gender equality;
- individuals who have performed in an exemplary manner in roles related to promoting women's human rights and gender equality;
- creation of fiscal policies to promote health and reproductive rights of women;
- social responsibility in organizations and corporations to protect and promote women workers.

Government must provide even greater special protection to disadvantaged groups of women, such as those from the south who are more vulnerable to violations of human rights. Public and private sector must jointly work to ensure that these at-risk women's groups have access to health and education services, and protection from gender-based violence, and that funds are available for this purpose.

7. Roles of Key Players

Government, in partnership with the private sector and other

actors of civil society, has a major responsibility in promoting women's human rights. In particular, government must undertake further measures towards advancement of gender equality and changing Thai society's negative perception and treatment of women, through the following measures: adjustment and correction of laws, revision of educational curricula to reflect gender equality, improvement of women's skills through capacity building, creating awareness and initiating action on relevant issues such as protection of women against violence, and coordination and encouraging maximum participation of all stakeholders at all levels.

Besides promoting women's political participation at all levels, political parties must also create policies to support women's human rights, utilizing both formal and informal educational and training activities.

The private sector should be encouraged to work in partnership with government to break down gender stereotypes and create awareness of gender equality. Civil society must work to support public awareness campaigns, encourage women's participation, and mobilize women for capacity development. The mass media, designed to reach a large audience such as the population of the country, is a crucial partner in advancing women's human rights through a more affirmative portrayal of gender roles, positive images of women and men as equal partners and crucial actors in preventing violence against women, and through recognition of individuals who are role models.

The family plays a vital role when it comes to inculcating the right attitude, the right values to its members, which include the belief in gender equality, and its relation to promoting family harmony. Strong family values include promoting the concept, especially to its male members, of shared roles and responsibilities in sexual relationships, household chores, and child rearing.

Likewise, educational institutions must develop policy and content on gender equality and translate these into teaching materials and appropriate teaching methodology that would enhance acceptance of the objective. Alternatively, religious institutions could play similar roles through preaching of teachings about gender equality, organizing religious activities that would target youth and reinforcing positive values that are already repeated through several media reaching youth. These media include advocacy – advertising, marketing, public relations messages, political communications; education; news; entertainment; electronic and print media including film, Internet, and even video games.

It is in this Tenth Plan that this value change should be foremost in all words and actions of all stakeholders, and eventually revolutionize the status of women for true gender equality in Thai society.