

**Overview of Thailand's Achievements and Challenges
on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)
and
the Outcome of the Twenty –Third
Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)**

**PART ONE: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality
and women's empowerment**

a) A policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women

A policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women has been adopted at all levels. The Women's Development Plan was developed as a part of the National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) to promote gender equality and women empowerment.

Mechanisms responsible for promoting the policy are detailed as follows:

1. The National Commission on Women's Affairs and Family Development (NCWAFD) is the national mechanism at the highest level. The Commission coordinates in the implementation of the Women's Development Plan among all agencies in both public and private sectors and proposes to the government recommendations and measures for gender equality.
2. The Senate Committee on Women, Youth and Elderly Affairs is a high-level mechanism to monitor the implementation of agencies in both public and private sectors on issues relating to children, women and the elderly.
3. The Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development (OWAFD) is the core mechanism responsible for developing and implementing plans and projects regarding women's affairs in many areas such as gender mainstreaming, gender advocacy, women empowerment and research on gender equality development.
4. Chief Gender Executive Officers (CGEOs) are high-ranking officials in all ministries and departments to integrate gender perspective into projects and programs of all agencies and to develop a Master Plan on The Promotion of Gender Equality of their agencies.
5. Gender Focal Points are established in every ministry and department to ensure gender equality in the operation of all ministries and departments.

b) The status of the national action plan

As mentioned in the CEDAW report, Thailand has developed a Women's Development Plan under the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006). NCWAFD is responsible for the issues of concern specified in the plan through its member representatives of GOs and NGOs. At present, the plan has been used as a guideline in policy formulation and evaluation for concrete results relating to women development issues.

The OWAFD as the national women machinery is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Women's Development Plan. Accordingly, the related ministries and organizations have to report in writing on their progress to the OWAFD through the NCWAFD.

The existing constraints in utilizing the plan are as follows:

- Insufficiency of active involvement from parties concerned
- A number of private and public organizations still lack gender sensitivity in their action planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation systems.

c) The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Declaration Goals (MDGs)

Thailand has utilized the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Declaration Goals (MDGs) as guidelines of the national framework for development. Several National Synthesis Workshops have been organized to monitor the MDGs. The workshops aim to

synthesize the information, to propose indicators and to evaluate situations in Thailand in order to formulate the appropriate policies to be implemented in the Thai context.

The MDGs have also been utilized as a framework in the Women's Development Plan in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006), including the strategies to develop women's potential and to increase women's participation in decision-making and the promotion of gender equality and social security.

Regarding Goal Three on gender equality, it is likely that Thailand has achieved one of the educational goals as the literacy rate of female and male youths aged 15-24 is considered quite similar. Nevertheless, there is some progress needed to be completed in order to achieve other MDGs. Though the number of women as local candidates in local election has been increasing for more than 10 percent, this number remains relatively low. Moreover, even though women constitute almost half of the total employed people, women's income is still not equal to those of men in the same position.

d) CEDAW affected national legislation and implementation

CEDAW has been used as a framework/standard of guidelines, affecting not only institutional structure but also policy and legal reforms on women's issues. Proper mechanisms and legal/ practical measures based upon CEDAW guidelines to address the discriminatory issues have been approved by NCWAFD and taken into actions.

These actions are, for example, the decision of Constitutional Court in June 2003 resulting in women's rights to choose, whether or not to use their own surname after marriage, drafting of an initiative law on the Promotion of Human Rights and Equality, legal initiatives on violence: Domestic Violence Bill, and Policy and Plan to Eradicate Violence against Women and Children in 2000, CEDAW training workshops, the promotion of women's potential, and campaigns on gender sensitivity.

e) The main legislative and policy-making achievements in the promotion of gender equality

The Cabinet approve the National Policy and Plan to Eradicate Violence against Women and Children in 2000, November as the campaigning month to end violence against women, the establishment of CGEOs and Gender Focal Points in governmental agencies since 2001 and a master plan of each agency, proper number of qualified women appointed to national committees in 2002, mobilization of women's issues and gender equality as priorities to be addressed by concerned government agencies in 2004.

There are laws and MOUs relating to the protection of women's rights in issues such as those in commercial sex, trafficking in persons, education, equal access to employment in civil service. There are also a number of laws on women's protection and empowerment such as Labor Protection Act of 1998. Some are still in the process such as Domestic Violence Bill, revision of Criminal Code Section 276 (marital rape), and the Bill on the Promotion of Human Rights and Equality for All Sectors.

f) Gender perspectives in preparation of budgets

Although gender budgeting is still too far-fetched to achieve in Thai budgeting system, there are organizations which initiate programs and projects having women as their target groups and aiming at empowering women to become potential participants in development. Budget for activities like gender sensitivity, training for trainers on gender issues, production of manuals, handbooks, and some audio-visual media for concerned officials and people are increasingly allocated. Through the setup of CGEOs and the Gender Focal Points in the public sector, it is expected that gender budgeting will be carried out in the near future.

g) Major government policy discussions and/or parliamentary debates

The discussions and/or debates concerning women and integrating gender perspective include amending laws which discriminate against women, and the use of quota to promote women's political participation. Recent major reforms are the Civil Service Reform resulting in the establishment of OWAFD, the enactment of National Education Act effective since 1999, the Cabinet Resolution in 2001 to set up CGEOs and the Gender Focal Points in all

government agencies. Moreover, some independent bodies are established, one of which is the Constitutional Court. This independent body is important as it judges all existing rules, regulations and laws violating the 1997 Constitution which clearly stipulates “the promotion of equality without discrimination”.

h) Gender perspectives in armed conflicts

The situation of armed conflict is quite limited in Thailand, thus, the policy in this area is not a priority under the current national context.

i) Effects of globalization

Globalization has affected the empowerment of women and girls and the promotion of gender equality in many ways. The use of ICT allows women to access useful information and knowledge for themselves through GOs’ and NGOs’ websites. The digital gap between women living in urban and rural areas exists. However, the Internet is the channel to advertise women as sex objects.

Apart from the use of ICT, market liberalization offers better economic opportunities for women to export their products and services. The government has implemented a nationwide project called “One Tambon One Product” to encourage groups of local people, dominated by women in communities to produce local products and services for exports. On the other hand, market liberalization becomes a threat to women, who constitute the majority of unskilled labors in both agricultural and industrial sectors, they are replaced by either lower-waged migrant workers or higher-skilled foreign workers.

j) Specific policies in major sector areas

The major sector areas in which specific policies, strategies and/or action plans on gender equality and women’s empowerment are developed include women in power and decision-making, violence against women, and women and the economy. Regarding women in power and decision-making, the government has implemented projects to encourage women to participate in local administration and to strengthen their skills in political participation. In the area of violence against women, several legislations relating to trafficking in women and domestic violence have been drafted and amended to ensure women’s rights. Gender and family development policies have been integrated to eliminate violence in families and to protect women and young girls from entering into commercial sex trade. In the area of women and the economy, the government has introduced economic stimulating policies with a gender perspective. Members of the Village Fund Management Committee are required to compose of women and men of the same proportion. The ownership of land allocated from the government under the project “Transferring Assets to Capital” shall be granted to both men and women heading households rather than only men who are traditional heads of households.

k) Partnerships established with NGOs and civil society groups

The OWAFD has established various types of partnership with NGOs. At the policy level, a coordinating body so-called the NCWAFD composing of both GOs and NGOs together with some gender experts, has been established. At the implementation level, an MOU has been signed between the OWAFD and the National Council of Women under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen, which is an umbrella non-governmental body, that collaborates with GOs to empower women. More MOUs are prepared to deal with specific problems like violence against women, training of women for local election and for those in the administrative positions. Moreover, the network of media representatives has been established to promote gender equality and gender sensitivity.

l) Engagement of men and boys in the promotion of gender equality

Thailand has made efforts to actively engage men and boys in the promotion of gender equality. An example of this is a project on “Male Responsibility in Protecting Children against Abuses and Violence”. The objective of the activity is to encourage behavioral changes among

men in the pilot areas on violence and sexual abuses against children and women. Moreover, men's interest in the elimination of sexual abuses is exemplified by the campaign against sexual violence or the "White Ribbon Campaign". Nine male celebrities were also selected as the presenters of the event to raise awareness about men's involvement in the elimination of violence against women, an activity which helps put this issue on a national agenda.

Concerning Thai men and reproductive health, a continuous project has been implemented by the Department of Health, the Ministry of Public Health targeting men's participation in family planning. Aiming to instill Thai men with the sense of responsibility for reproductive health and family planning, the media on such issues has been produced. The project extensively reaches the level of local administration in 2002 and is currently on progress.

All of these initiatives epitomize men's involvement in the promotion of gender equality, which result in many successes such as improvement in the behaviors of boys and men, by encouraging better communication among family members, and disseminating the concept of prevention of violence and sexual abuse against children.

Despite all the aforementioned achievements, some constraints are found in the efforts to engage men and boys in the promotion of gender equality. It is difficult to increase male involvement in any effort to reach gender equality, especially in the prevention and elimination of sexual abuses. This is because most men have maintained traditional beliefs concerning sexual values, roles and relationships among family members.

PART TWO: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

A. Examples of successful policies, legislative change and programmes and projects

Women and Poverty

Eradicating poverty is a high priority in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006). Although it is generally aware that the economic crisis in 1997 increases the number of poor people in the country and the majority of the poor are women, existing statistics do not represent different dimensions of poor people such as women in poverty and the poor in informal sector. Therefore, Thai government has recently taken steps to reassess the situation of poverty in the country. Poor people across the country register and report their poverty-related problems to receive assistance from the government. This poverty registration emphasizes problems of women in poverty and enables the government to accordingly tailor suitable poverty eradication program.

In addition, the government has implemented a combination of measures with the aim to improve access of the disadvantaged to sources of capital. For example, debt restructuring suspends debt payment for small-scale agricultural producers for a period of three years. The establishment of the People's Bank and the Village Fund promotes investment and creates employment in rural communities. The project 'One Tambon, One Product' (OTOP) aims to encourage communities to draw upon their traditional and indigenous knowledge for local product development. All of these measures particularly benefit poor women at the grass-roots level. The debt restructuring and People's Bank reduce women's dependency on informal money market.

Finally, gender perspective is integrated into poverty eradication policy. Members of the National Village and Urban Community Fund Committee are required to compose of women and men of the same proportion in order to ensure that women take equal part in decision-making and receive fair benefits from the fund.

Education and Training of Women

Thai government has committed itself to eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education as specified in MDGs. Equal access among girls and boys to primary and secondary education is guaranteed under the National Education Act 1999. According to this Act, all persons have equal rights to receive 12-year basic education for free of charge and parents have responsibilities to ensure their children a nine-year compulsory education. The legislation promotes changes in traditional attitudes on girls' education and reinforces parents to support education for girls.

Regarding higher level education in colleges and universities, the government supports the establishment of private institutions nationwide to allow people in provincial and rural areas to access education at a higher level without migrating to the city. In addition, the offered curriculum in various fields of study is encouraged to facilitate national development in the long run. As a result, there is an increasing number of women furthering their education at a higher level in more various fields of study, especially, those non-traditional ones. Although the concentration of women's enrollment in certain fields of studies such as humanities, commerce and tourism still persists, more number of women pursues their education in law, science and engineering.

The role of informal education in reducing illiteracy rates among those who cannot participate in formal school system is also emphasized. The government has expanded informal education for minorities, illiterate elderly and those in remote areas. As a result, the illiteracy rates for both women and men have been significantly reduced over the past decade.

In 1994, women were accounted for 62% or two thirds of illiterate population while the number of illiterate men was 38%. In 2000, illiteracy gap between women and men was reduced to 56% of illiterate female and 44% of illiterate male.

Furthermore, the government has worked closely with NGOs to design and initiate several training programs in parallel with other government's initiatives for the advancement of women. Examples of these programs include training women in non-traditional professions, strengthening women's skills and capabilities to prevent them from being trafficked and developing women's skills in political participation.

Considering the overall education policies, the government has implemented education reform focusing on learner-centered teaching program, decentralization of education management and lifelong learning. All of these policies provide an opportunity for women to develop themselves according to their own interests and capabilities rather than their assigned gender roles.

Women and Health

In the reproductive health aspect, the special policy on the reproductive health under the National Health Act has been formulated to demonstrate strong determination and great commitment to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) conference's outcome. It is stated that 'Thai people both women and men at all ages must have good reproductive health'.

In 2000, the Ministry of Public Health in cooperation with Chulalongkorn University initiated a pilot project to convey soft key messages to raise awareness of men about their responsibilities and to create understanding concerning reproductive health and sexual behaviors. It also emphasized that the birth control is the responsibility shared by both women and men. In this response, health and counseling services in 24 provinces have been launched. Within three years, after the decentralization to the local government, a number of participating provinces have increased to 49 provinces and it is expected to cover throughout the country in the near future.

Subsequently, the government has established the 'Health Insurance For All' policy or "the 30 bath for all diseases program". Under this policy, women and men are able to access to the quality health care, information and related services more easily. This program has also covered the sickness and health issues common to women such as pregnancy, child delivery, family planning and sterilization, and cervical cancer, which has demonstrated the government's sensitivity and serious concern on the gender issue.

The reproductive health is one of the major concerns in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006), its focus is to provide health care services for people at all ages. With the awareness of the needs of individuals at different stages of life, the Ministry of Public Health has established 'the Menopause Clinic' throughout the region for providing the middle-aged group, especially women, some useful consultations. Moreover, the Plan encourages the study of life, sexual education, family study and gender roles. The specific target of the plan includes reducing sickness and/or death of women from diseases most common to women by 20 percent. This is to enable women to be physically and mentally healthy.

In addition, the Ministry of Public Health in cooperation with the Ministry of Education has revised teaching curriculum on sex education in order to alter the attitude of teachers. Besides, the special training on sex education and reproductive health has been organized for youths in and outside school in order to increase their understanding on the issues.

Violence against Women

The government has well realized that women and children are mainly the victims of violence in both household and public spheres. Thus, NCWFD has appointed the Sub-Committee on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children. The sub-committee is responsible for gathering the information on violence, analyzing violence situations and formulating guidelines through proactive campaigns. They also monitor other related departments as well as suggest measures and policies in order to eliminate such unacceptable practices.

In addition, the Cabinet has designated 'November' as the campaign month to eliminate violence against women and children. Subsequently, several campaigns have been launched in order to raise the society's awareness and understanding on the issue. Various agencies have worked hand in hand to organize annual activities in different parts of the country. The 'White Ribbon Campaign' is one of the most successful campaigns because it invites men as both the presenters and the main target groups. The distinguished male politicians, actors and singers have joined the campaign as public presenters through all kinds of the media. The white ribbons have been widely presented and given in particular to men in the Cabinet, members of parliament, and executives in private organizations, with the realization of their significant roles in initiating gender-sensitive laws and formulating supportive policies to terminate violence against women and children.

The OWAFD as a national women machinery has made tremendous attempts to reduce the negative effects of the violence by preventing violence and assisting victims of violence. Thus, the One Stop Crisis Centers (OSCC) have been established in hospitals in several parts of the country to aid women and children, who are the victims of violence. These centers will provide assistance to the victims by the multi-disciplinary staff such as psychologists, lawyers and consultants on social welfare. Moreover, to commemorate Her Majesty the Queen 72nd Birthday, the Ministry of Public Health in cooperation with the OWAFD has expanded the other 94 OSCCs to cover the entire nation.

The draft law on domestic violence is at present awaiting for the approval of the Parliament. The law has included measures to deal with the problems more appropriately. It can assist victims of violence by setting up an optional procedure to alter an offender's behavior through the court order instead of solely relying on criminal punishment.

Women and Armed Conflict

Thailand has rarely encountered situations of armed conflict, thus there are no substantial problems in this area.

Women and Economy

The economic sector can be considered as one of the most successful sectors in Thailand where gender perspective has been applied. Women's participation in labor force is in a high percentage and gradually increasing. The Labor Protection Law of 1998 has stipulated gender equality in employment, health protection, work safety and the prohibition of sexual harassment of female employees by employers.

The Ministry of Labor as one of the pioneer ministries in gender equality empowerment has established Occupational Training Programs. The programs are responsible by the Department of Skills Development. Women are trained in several courses, including those non-traditional courses, namely, "Technical and Management", "Mechanical Technology Development", "Industrial Technology Development", and "Technical Development for Electricity". The training courses aim to equip women with skills required by the labor market.

The 'One Tambon, One Product' (OTOP) has been initiated with the aim to bring local wisdom to global market. The OTOP projects create self-reliance, creativity and encourage the capacity building for people in communities. Consequently, the OTOP has benefited the grass-root people, particularly, women who are the majority in the informal sector. As a result, capital and resources are located more to women at the local level, and thus, enable them to have their own decision-making for the capital and resources management.

In 2003, the OWAFD was responsible for hosting the 8th Women Leaders' Network (WLN) meeting, under the APEC framework. The 8th WLN meeting affirms its commitment to strengthening and deepening partnerships among economies in the region. It also focuses on development that acknowledges and promotes the contribution of women in their roles as entrepreneurs, which greatly contribute to job creation and economic growth. With strong commitment to the meeting outcomes, the OWAFD as Thailand focal point has coordinated with other related ministries and organizations in order to follow up such declarations effectively.

Women in Power and Decision-Making

The promotion of women's participation in decision-making is stated as one of the major strategies in the Women's Development Plan (2002-2006). The goals of the plan are to achieve one-third of female candidates in election, to double the number of women in politics and public administration at all decision-making levels, and to increase a number of women in national commissions to the same proportion as those of men. The Sub-Committee on Women's Participation in Politics and Administration is the key mechanism to cooperate between public and private sectors. Although the objectives are not expected to materialize in the near future, continuing progress has been made, especially in local administration. Government agencies, NGOs, women's groups and international organizations have collaborated to implement activities including raising awareness on the need of women's participation in decision-making, training women for political election and encouraging women to participate in politics. As a result, increasing number of women play active roles in local administration as voters, election candidates and local politicians. Government funds have been allocated nationwide to support local agencies in organizing seminars to promote women's participation in politics. The Women Network for Local Government has also been established with the supporting fund from the United Nations. The Network will play a leading role to increase the number of female representation at the local level.

In national politics, members of the current Cabinet constitute of three women including Minister of Labor as well as Minister and Deputy Minister of Public Health.

In public administration, some traditional restrictions that women can occupy only certain positions have been removed. Women can become village heads, governors and police officers. Although the percentages of women in these positions are still quite low, gradual progress has been consistently made. In the current government, there are two female civil servants at the highest positions of classification 11. One is the Permanent-Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication and Technology. The other is the Permanent-Secretary of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Several are in classification 10 such as Deputy Secretary-General of the Office of the Administrative Court, Governor of the National Housing Authority and Director-General of the Department of Business Development. In addition, the Ministry of Defense, for the first time, has appointed a woman to take management position as a Deputy Secretary - General.

Reservation or quota system has been used to promote women's participation in some committees such as the National Human Rights Commissions, the National Village and Urban Community Fund Committee and the National Commission on Child's Rights Protection. Several women's organizations are currently lobbying for the use of quotas for other decision-making levels.

Human Rights of Women

The progress on the implementation of the human rights of women has been carried out in institutional structure and legal reforms/initiatives.

Under the NCWAFD, the five sub-committees on health, law, violence, politics, and economy and education have been set up to function as policy bodies to protect women's rights. Furthermore, as a result of the Civil Service reform, the Rights and Liberties Protection Department has been established under the Ministry of Justice, to be responsible for legal procedure relating to human right protection at all levels.

With recognition of existing discrimination against human beings especially women, the OWAFD has initiated law on anti-discrimination. Up to now, the draft has been in the process and is expected to be completed this year.

The issue of pregnant women in prison and women in prison with dependent children has been widely debated. The debates focused on the rights of pregnant women in prison and their baby to be born healthy. In this regard, there has been an attempt to review and amend articles 246 and 247 with additional provisions under the Criminal Procedure Code. Under the revision, pregnant women once verified by any doctor can be granted a temporary respite. Moreover, pregnant women with death penalty can be allowed to get life imprisonment instead. The revision is in the legislative process while public hearing has been organized throughout the year.

Another progress that leads to the withdrawal of the CEDAW reservation, article 16 (g) is that a married woman has the right to choose whether to use her husband's surname or not, according to the decision of the Constitutional Court.

The Penal Code article 276, which allows all men to be exonerated from marital rape has been widely debated. The national committee relating to the revision of the Penal Code are considering the amendment of the article 276 with some restrictions: it is illegal if a husband has serious sexually transmitted diseases or he lives in separation with his wife. NGOs have called for the punishment of all husbands who rape their wives in any situation.

The Act relating to the compensation for victims in criminal cases has also reflected the government's effort to ensure more alternatives and security for those vulnerable from criminal offences, including sexual abuses and exploitation. In addition, there are also an emerging number of other housing emergencies run by both GOs and NGOs after the Beijing plus 5.

Women and the Media

As media producers, women's participation in a decision-making process remains relatively low. As receivers, women's access to the media varies. Middle to upper-class urban women are more likely to get access to the media than rural women. All of these call for urgent actions and public policies. The government, consequently, has been active in the issue of women and the media so as to use the media for the advancement of women and to get media agencies to take responsibility in presenting women's images.

In 2001, the Media Network for Women was established. Its members comprise media professionals, gender experts, representatives from Gos and NGOs for women and those interested. Its activities during 2001-2002 include, for instance, a "gender camp" to equip media professionals with a gender perspective. Apart from this, a series of seminars were held in 2003 for those whose works are related to the production of soap operas, advertisements, radio programs and TV shows. These seminars yield many productive outcomes, especially that they instill gender sensitivity in media professionals. Soap operas producers are urged to

be aware that the portrayal of women as dependent and irrational, for example, can increase violence and discrimination against women in Thai society. Instead, women should be portrayed as diligent, independent, caring and creative. Besides women, the portrayal of homosexuals in soap operas is also given attention. Media professionals should be sensitive and respectful of their rights. With regard to advertisements, women have long been objectified and exploited by the portrayed sexual subtexts. More efficient censorship system is thus required. Furthermore, the establishment of a center where media consumers can call and make complaints when viewing indiscreet contents and images is proposed. Concerning radio programs, it is suggested that a public policy be implemented requiring each radio station to provide 20 percent of its broadcasting time for programs that are beneficial to society, including women.

Apart from all the above activities, the OWAFD with the support from the World Bank also organized a training workshop on gender sensitivity to officials in nine government agencies, including the Public Relations Department. After the workshop, the participants have to extend their knowledge about gender to their colleagues. Moreover, they are expected to use a gender perspective in their work.

Women and the Environment

Thai women, especially those in local communities whose lives are closely connected with the environment, play an important role in environmental protection. Environmental surveillance system and natural resources management are mostly maintained by women. Hence, both GOs and NGOs regard the relationship between women and the environment significant. This is because women not only help sustain natural resources and conserve the environment but they can also use the environment for their advancement if they are sufficiently empowered. These mutual benefits render the issue of women and the environment a national agenda.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives has formulated environmental projects to be in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. For example, several projects have been initiated to strengthen the roles of women in environmental protection such as a research project on “Women’s Roles in Water Resources Management and Conservation” and a project on “Women and Sustainable Environment Management”. In addition, the government has tried to acknowledge women on natural resources management as well as to increase women’s participation in environmental conservation. The Technology Transfer Plan for the Local Natural Resources Protection has been implemented with the aim to provide people in local communities with knowledge and understanding on how to use technology for natural resources protection. Women in local communities are also supported to create products from surrounded natural resources, which generate incomes for both themselves and their communities without destroying environment. Workshops are organized to acknowledge members of local administrative organizations and women leaders in the villages, as the main users of water supply on how to minimize the use of water supply in the households. NGOs also play a role to integrate gender and environmental perspectives. Prominent female agricultural leaders are awarded as role models in this area by NGOs.

Moreover, a lot of working groups of Gender Focal Point Network (GFPN), a women’s network of APEC, deal with the issue of women and the environment. Thailand, as one of the APEC member economies, thus, integrates gender issues into environmental protection through the implementation of these working groups’ policies.

The Girl Child

The government has realized that trafficking in children is one of the increasingly serious problems, the results of which have affected both individuals and social security as a whole. Therefore, it has tried at all costs to tackle with the issue for the past decade. A lot of

progress based upon its strong political will has been continued after Thailand's latest CEDAW Report. It can be noted that a new dimension of Thailand's action against trafficking has been extended to cover more cooperation with the local governments in Mekong Sub-region.

A number of direct and indirect policies have been addressed to combat trafficking in persons. For example, the policies on "Poverty Alleviation" and the "Ending Corruption and Suppressing Criminal Forces, including Trafficking Industry" have been seriously implemented in parallel with the Prevention and Suppression of Money Laundry Act of 1999.

Furthermore, the Cabinet at its meeting in July 2003 has approved the National Policy and Plan for the Prevention, Suppression and Eradication of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Women. The new policy and plan is regarded as an effective instrument to combat the complete cycle of trafficking in persons within the country and across borders.

Regarding cooperation among concerned agencies, four Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) on the practical guidelines to combat trafficking in women and children in the country and across borders were set up in 2003. The MOUs include MOU among government agencies, MOU between government agencies and NGOs, MOU among NGOs and MOU among concerned agencies in the nine northern provinces of Thailand. Furthermore, a bilateral MOU between Cambodia and Thailand has been already signed. To this extent, other two MOUs to be signed with Laos Government and Vietnam Government now are in consideration of the concerned parties.

Debates on legislative gap and inefficient law enforcement in recent years have led to the need for legal reform to render more protection for prostitutes and trafficked victims. In particular, they are the Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act of 1996 and the Measures for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children Act of 1997. Up to now, the latter has been revised to be more appropriate with the situations and new complex forms of trafficking.

Apart from the above mechanisms, another progress on children's issues is the Child Protection Act of 2003, which has been enforced since 2004. The Act aims at protection of children's rights as well as prevention them from all forms of the abuses and exploitations. Besides, under the Labor Protection Act of 1998, children get special protection from being exploited in labor force, especially girl child who must be guaranteed against sexual violation by employers.

B. Examples of obstacles encountered and remaining gaps and challenges

Major obstacles encountered in all critical areas can be categorized as follows:

1. Lack of sex- disaggregated data

Statistics and information tend to be collected without separation of women and men's cases. Researchers in many fields of studies do not integrate a gender perspective into their research findings. The lack of sex-disaggregated data affects women's development planning because women's problems have not been truly revealed and the progress in women's development has not been followed up. Furthermore, while the same issue is taken care by more than few agencies, the overlapping responsibilities and the lack of host agency contribute to unsystematic information database.

2. Persisting traditional values towards women's roles

Thai women are expected to be obedient, dependent and passive. These traditional values impede women's potential and development in many ways. The effect of traditional gender roles on the division of labor indirectly limits women's fields of studies and employment opportunities. In addition, some social attitudes and religious beliefs are barriers to the promotion of women's rights. For example, Thai people perceive domestic violence as a

personal problem and those outside family should not intervene. Religious beliefs also differently influence parents' expectation on their sons and daughters. Sons show their gratitude towards their parents by ordaining for a three-month period. Daughters are expected to look after their parents. In some rural areas, daughters show their gratitude by becoming prostitutes to earn money to support their families.

3. Lack of gender sensitivity

In some cases, officials in some professional areas such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, police, judges and other government officials are not gender sensitive. Many of them do not understand specific problems faced by women in society. Therefore, women's problems such as trafficking, violence against women and sexual abuse are considered second priorities to crime, robberies and drugs. Trafficked women are sometimes perceived as illegal persons rather than victims. These probably stem from the fact that most women are overlooked in law drafting and policy-making processes.

4. Limited participation of men and boys to promote gender equality

Men and boys are unlikely to aware of their roles to reduce women's problems and to promote women's status. The important roles of women in national development as well as the effect of gender disparities on men and on the next generations have not been widely recognized among men and boys. For example, women are blamed for being prostitutes while men are not accused of buying women for sex services.

5. Lack of women's readiness

Women sometimes passively accept their assigned gender roles. Some are not interested in participating in decision-making and confident in their potentials. Others are fully engaged by their housework and child caring so that they do not have time for other activities. Lack of women's readiness is a major obstacle to promote women's participation in decision-making.

Remaining gaps in each critical area of concern are detailed as follows:

Women and poverty

Although women and men possess equal rights to own lands and properties, many women especially farmers do not own even a piece of land for their farming. This is partly due to the fact that men rather than women usually inherit lands and properties from their parents. However, although women are currently more accessible to loans in formal markets with lower interest rates than they did in the past, some still do not know how to use the loans in productive and sustainable ways.

Education and training of women

The government successfully reduces illiteracy gap between women and men as well as gender disparity in primary education to a certain extent. Statistics even show that the ratio of women furthering education in colleges and universities is slightly higher than that of men. However, women's education is largely limited by gender stereotypes with concentration in some fields of studies considered appropriate for women such as Nursing and Humanities.

Women and health

The case of HIV disease illustrates the gap in this area. Statistics show that the number of women with HIV has sharply increased. A large proportion of this group does not have risky behaviors but get the disease from their husbands. This implies that married women are

less able to protect themselves from having sexually transmitted diseases because they cannot refuse to have sex with their husbands.

Violence against women

Despite the fact that the government has issued and amended many laws relating to violence against women, the enforcement of these laws still needs improvement. The delay in legal process and the lack of officials' sensitivity sometimes aggravate the situation.

Women and economy

The government has issued and amended labor laws to protect women's rights in employment. Nevertheless, differences in terms of employment opportunities, salaries and career advancement still exist between women and men.

Women in power and decision-making

Although the number of women as voters and election candidates in local administration has increased, the number of those elected and appointed to decision-making positions is still relatively low. The goals specified in the Women's Development Plan to achieve one-third of women candidates in election, to double the number of women in politics and public administration at all decision-making levels, and to increase the number of women in national commissions to the same proportion as men are less likely to be accomplished in the year 2006.

Human rights

Women are increasingly aware of their rights, which are officially guaranteed by laws. Nonetheless, some do not exercise their rights and continue living miserable lives without searching for legal protection to receive fair treatment.

Women and the media

Even though the issue of women's rights is widely recognized among media professionals, the image of women as sex object is still prevalent in the media. Women's bodies are exploited for commercial attraction in advertisements, magazines and other TV programs. Moreover, disparity in media access among groups of women also represents gaps in this area. Underprivileged women including those with low income and educational levels, disabled women, older women and other minorities still do not have as much access to the media as middle to upper-class women.

Women and the environment

Since technology plays a major role in environment both protection and degradation, differences in skills to use modern agricultural equipment between women and men are considered gaps in this area. Men are perceived to possess superior skills in using equipment and understanding technology. Therefore, women are not instructed or given opportunities to operate these equipment.

The Girl child

There is an improvement in the way parents teaches daughters and sons to share household responsibilities. Moreover, sons are traditionally valued than daughters. Therefore, when families have limited resources, sons are usually provided with better education than daughters. In addition, girls in some rural areas are the main targets of traffickers. The remaining gap in life security between girls and boys as well as girls in rural and urban areas needs to be reduced.

Challenges

The above mentioned obstacles and gaps represent challenges that government agencies, NGOs and all citizens need to meet. Gender stereotypes and traditional values are considered the priority issue that needs to be overcome. The way boys and girls are raised at home and taught in schools need to be changed to lay a solid ground of gender equality for the next generations. The government in cooperation with NGOs will put forth efforts to sensitize career professionals such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, police and policy-makers on gender issues. Furthermore, globalization and modernization also bring in new challenges such as ageing population, new epidemic and cultural decline, which differently affect women and men. All of these challenges call for the government's strong commitment to cope with them.

C. Lessons Learned

Past efforts, obstacles and achievements in each critical area of concern provide valuable lessons for further improvements. Examples of these lessons are summarized as follows:

Relying on laws and policies is not sufficient to achieve gender equality. Other measures including gender education, effective law enforcement and policy implementation as well as social pressure are the efficient means to achieve tangible results.

Increasing the recognition of the seriousness of gender disparity problem has served to mobilize women. Thai women are currently better organized and are more politically and socially active than they used to. Women's organizations do not only have a prominent role in promoting gender equality, but they also play active parts in human rights, child welfare, democracy and social justice.

Existing laws and policies relating to women are inadequate in safeguarding women's rights. Thus, the monitoring system is essential in progress tracking.

PART THREE: Institutional Development

a) National mechanisms

As mentioned earlier, the national mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women exist at both the ministerial and departmental levels. At the ministerial level, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security has its main missions on the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women and the protection and advocacy of women's rights. There are 75 offices in provinces with about 8-900 staff, implementing policies issued by the Ministry. Though they receive guidelines and resources from the central office, they can, to a certain, make their own decisions on the target group.

At the departmental level, the OWAFD is the core organization dealing with gender issues. It has been upgraded from the divisional level to the departmental level since 2002. Formerly equipped with 44 officers, the Office currently has 194 staff working on gender and family issues. Its mandate is to promote gender equality in public and private sectors through CGEOs/Gender Focal Points, NGOs and civil society groups. The decisions on gender issues are carried out cooperatively by the Director-General and the Office's CGEO. The Office has been financed an amount of Baht 20.4 millions in 2003 and Baht 13.4 millions in 2004 to perform their missions.. As the national machinery, it needs to create networks with various organizations and groups. The NCWAFD is established as the coordinating body, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister with 34 members from different GOs and NGOs and gender experts. The Commission has its duties to formulate policies and measures needed to promote gender equality. For example, some laws discriminating against women have been considered for the amendment. Also, it is through this Commission that collaborations and resource mobilization to promote gender equality and to empower women are committed. Besides NGOs as its main partners, the Office has strengthened women's groups at the grass-roots level from villages, to sub-district, district and provincial levels. These organizations are active in enhancing women's roles in all aspects of life.

At the parliamentary level, two different committees on women, children, youth and the elderly are established at the Upper and Lower Houses. The committees have collaborated with gender experts to work closely with the parliamentarians and senators. Moreover, there are committees on specific issues such as health, social development and human security and education, where gender issues are considered. These committees receive financial support from the government.

Besides, a group of women parliamentarians form themselves and establish the Thai Women Parliamentarian. Its members include all women Members of the Parliament and the Senate. It is where the gender issues have been raised. The members play their roles in mainstreaming gender into policies made at the parliamentary level. They work closely with the national mechanism and other NGOs, mostly on legislative amendment to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and public awareness raising.

Regarding the international cooperation during the past five years, the main donor agency is the World Bank. Approximately 175,000 US\$ was given in 1999 under the Project entitled "Improving the Capacity of the Office of TNCWA in Facilitating Gender Mainstreaming Activities in Line Ministries". The project aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Office to incorporate gender concerns into policy formulation. ILO is another agency providing financial resources to the Office for organizing the training programs and activities on gender sensitivity for the Office staff. UNIFEM finances the Office to run activities to empower women's network.

b) Establishment of focal points for gender equality

The Cabinet approved in July 2001 the establishment of CGEOs in all ministries and departments. Administrators at the level of Deputy Permanent Secretary or Deputy Director-General have been assigned to be in charge of the promotion of gender equality in every department. Furthermore, the Cabinet appointed a unit at the level of the office or division as Gender Focal Point. A master plan for the promotion of gender equality will also have to be drafted so as to be integrated in its work plans and programs.

After the Cabinet approved the establishment of CGEOs and Gender Focal Points, a conference was held for the administrators from seven line ministries to brainstorm and outline the roles and responsibilities of CGEOs and Gender Focal Points in September 2001. In July 2002, a workshop was organized for those working for CGEOs and Gender Focal Points of all ministries and departments in order to raise awareness about gender equality and to create the network for the promotion of gender equality in the public sector.

Gender Focal Points are currently established in 95 departments with the support from both within the ministries and other agencies for their implementation. A training budget is allocated with the aim of explaining details of authority and importance of Gender Focal Points, including roles and responsibilities of the working groups.

The implementing agencies of Gender Focal Points are as follows:

- **The OWAFD, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security** acts as a national machinery for the promotion of gender equality. Activities and initiatives to support and promote the implementation of CGEO and Gender Focal Points are summarized as follows:

- 1) A workshop on “Strategies for the Promotion of the Status of Women: Perspectives and Implementation of the Public Sector” for the CGEOs of all ministries and departments at Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok on February 19, 2003.
- 2) A national workshop on “Strategies for the Promotion of the Status of Women” for the CGEOs of all ministries and departments at Rama Garden Hotel, Bangkok on August 27, 2003.
- 3) A training course for 120 heads of Gender Focal Points of all ministries and departments was organized by the OWAFD in cooperation with the Office of Civil Service Commission (OCSC). It was held at the OCSC in Nonthaburi and at Asia Hotel Pattaya, Chonburi between September 1-2, 2003. The training aims to provide the heads of Gender Focal Points with details about their roles and responsibilities in preparation for the drafting of a master plan for the promotion of gender equality.

- **The NCWAFD**

- 1) Acts as a catalyst in gender policies/issues at a national level.
- 2) Follows up, monitors and evaluates the process of gender mainstreaming at a departmental level
- 3) Supports and implements the promotion of gender equality

c) *Monitoring mechanisms*

Progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action and Beijing +5 can be measured by using a report of the implementation of the promotion of gender equality and the status of women and men according to the master plan, gathered from each department. The report has to be submitted by January 31 each year. The first report due by January 31, 2003 comprises:

- Establishment of a Chief Gender Equality Officer
- Appointment of a department acting as Gender Focal Point
- Appointment of a working group for Gender Focal Point
- Drafting of the master plan for the promotion of gender equality

- Outline on the outcomes of the implementation of the promotion of gender equality and the status of women and men according to the master plan

The Cabinet's roles are supporting and implementing the policies on gender mainstreaming in public sector. An example of these is the Cabinet's approval on the establishment of CGEOs and Gender Focal Points on July 31, 2001.

d) Remaining challenges

The remaining challenges in the area of capacity building are summarized as follows:

- 1) Most government officials are not yet aware of gender equality in the public administration. This is partly because it is not in line with traditional principle of the system.
- 2) Members of the sector do not consider gender equality significant, especially the administrators who do not regard gender issues as the organization's priority.
- 3) The OWAFD has been informed by the heads of Gender Focal Points that the implementation of the master plan for the promotion of gender equality is more of a burden than a direct responsibility. In addition, their regular work is already of great amount.

e) Monitoring indicators

The government has attempted to promote the compilation and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and information prior to the Beijing Conference. Our core set of indicators, sex-disaggregated data and bibliographical data, has been further improved. The national mechanism has been upgraded from the divisional level to the departmental level, namely the OWAFD. The OWAFD has further developed a necessary database, established and strengthened women's information network, and disseminated women's information on the Internet. The OWAFD is responsible for annually updating indicators and reporting the women's present status and situations to the high-ranking decision-makers. As the national women machinery, the OWAFD also disseminates sex-disaggregated data through publishing and the Internet as well as integrated the data into the master plan of each ministry.

However, there are areas that still lack sex-disaggregated data, namely, violence against women and the girl child, while the new type of data needed to be collected is that of ICT. On the contrary, the sex-disaggregated data on education, health and decision-making areas are being effectively used to inform policy-making and planning in the country.

f) Roles of different stakeholders

Many stakeholders are involved in the promotion of gender equality. With regard to the Parliament, there are Committees relating to children, women and the elderly of both the Upper and Lower Houses, namely, the Committee on Women, Youth and Elderly Affairs and the Committee on Children, Youth, Women and the Aged dealing with gender issues. Moreover, women's interests are voiced through the Thai Women Parliamentarian, some of whose members are also the members of the aforementioned Committees. Besides the Parliament, NGOs are important stakeholders in the promotion of gender equality. NGOs in the northern part of Thailand, for example, organized a gender sensitivity workshop for groups of women leaders in Lampang.

PART FOUR: Main challenges and actions to address them

From the earlier mentioned reply to the questionnaire, it could be stated that since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, progress in the advancement of women in Thailand has been achieved. Several legislative amendments have been carried out and some of the reservations made to the CEDAW are withdrawn. Gender issues have been given more concern in society. Some serious problems encountered by women like violence and trafficking, for instance, have been taken into consideration by concerned officials. Women are able to participate more in development activities. Most importantly, institutional development is seen in the public sector, wherein the CGEOs and the Gender Focal Points have been established to ensure that gender equality and empowerment of women are systematically considered. However, some challenges need to be taken into account if gender equality is to be achieved.

Firstly, although the mechanism established in the public sector is appropriate in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, a lot of work remains to be done. The OWAFD proposed effort is that Gender Focal Points must be established to be a permanent section in all ministries and departments, with at least two officials working full time on gender issues, collection of sex-disaggregated data, formulation of the master plan for gender equality, development of gender indicators, monitoring of the plan and implementation of gender sensitivity and training. Moreover, the ministries and the departments must encourage their staff to receive further education in Gender Studies or related fields. The Office of the Civil Service Commission must set up a policy that recruitment of new staff with knowledge of the issue is necessary.

While moving towards the above-mentioned actions, there should be a continuity of gender sensitivity and gender training for a better understanding on gender issues to staff of Gender Focal Points who are assigned to work on a temporary basis.

It is one of the most important challenges that gender budgeting will be formulated at ministerial and departmental levels, after the structure of the Gender Focal Points is changed as proposed.

The OWAFD finds it important to categorize and prioritize Gender Focal Points in order to implement gender equality. Departments responsible for education, finance, budgeting and laws, for instance, should be a priority to cooperate since these departments can greatly contribute to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women if they are fully sensitized.

Besides prioritization, mechanisms like CGEOs and Gender Focal Points should be promoted within the military services, police agencies especially local government where resources are still mainly accessed and controlled by male representatives.

Secondly, due to the fact that a number of women in power and decision-making are still low, there should be more efforts to work on the issue. The OWAFD together with other concerned agencies should continue its work to empower women with various kinds of knowledge and skills needed. Women must have an access to and are able to choose information useful to them while concerned agencies must take into consideration a proper channel to provide such useful information for women and make sure that there is less information gap between those in urban and rural areas.

Simultaneously, as a number of women politicians remain little, a proposal to use quota of representation is required as a temporary measure to achieve the success of women in power and decision-making. One of the best practices of using the quota is in the “Village and Community Fund”, administered by a committee consisting of equal number of male and female members. What is needed is the empirical research on how such measure affects both women and the community as a whole.

Thirdly, the issues of economic empowerment and alleviation of feminization of poverty must be given more attention in the future. At present, the government has set up a policy on “Alleviation of Poverty and Social Problems Encountered by the Poor” starting with identification of social problems leading to poverty, registration of those encountered such problems and development of measures to alleviate them. The government sets the target to help the registered people within six years. This is challenging to all agencies since government agencies of which CGEOs and the Gender Focal Points are ensuring women the target of the policy. More comprehensive approach to empower women should include some important activities such as women’s ownership of lands and properties, knowledge and skills development, accessibility to capital funds or loans, women’s ownership of business and entrepreneurship, protection by any social insurance and labor laws.

Fourthly, it is realized that gender equality and the empowerment of women cannot be successfully achieved without men’s participation. Therefore, another challenge for the OWAFD in the coming years is to work with men and boys in gender issues. A curriculum with a gender perspective needs to be developed. The CGEOs and the Gender Focal Points of the Ministry of Education must be encouraged by the OWAFD to take part in the development of the curriculum at all levels of education to lessen gender stereotypes. Teachers must be trained on gender issues and the textbooks where gender stereotypes are presented must also be changed.

In all training and meetings where gender issues are the main themes of discussions, male participants should be invited to involve. Moreover, those who work with mass media must be given the knowledge on gender issues so that they would integrate a gender perspective into their works.

Concerning older women, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security has implemented the Elderly Act 2003 which advocates the protection and promotion of the elderly in various areas such as health care, education and training, empowerment and social participation. This Act greatly benefits older women who comprise more than half of the elderly. Nevertheless, a serious commitment and further actions are required as merely inscription is insufficient in achieving the well-being of the elderly.

Last but not least, even though there have been many efforts in legislative amendments and new drafting of laws relating to gender equality and women’s rights, it should be noted that the enactment of those laws must be effectively carried out as well. There is a challenge to monitor how the laws have been implemented and to what extent women are protected under the laws. This monitoring system will need the provision of knowledge about the CEDAW and women rights for those concerned professionals such as police, judges and public prosecutors. Simultaneously, women should be aware of their rights as well as have knowledge about laws relating to their rights and gender equality.

In the coming years, the OWAFD will play an active role in advocating all Bills concerning women which are still in process. The important ones are the draft laws on “Domestic Violence Act” and on “Human Rights and Equality”. The CGEOs and Gender Focal Points within the Ministry of Justice and the Office of Council of Jury will be advocated by the OWAFD to play their roles in the consideration of the draft laws. The public awareness on the draft laws should be raised through several meetings, seminars, and forums of different stakeholders.

In conclusion, that the OWAFD will be able to overcome these challenges depends upon many factors, one of which is the collaboration between the OWAFD and other organizations including GOs and NGOs, civil society groups, local government and experts. Furthermore, the commitment at the international level through concession of any convention relating to women’s rights is one of the factors to reaffirm the eradication of gender disparity.