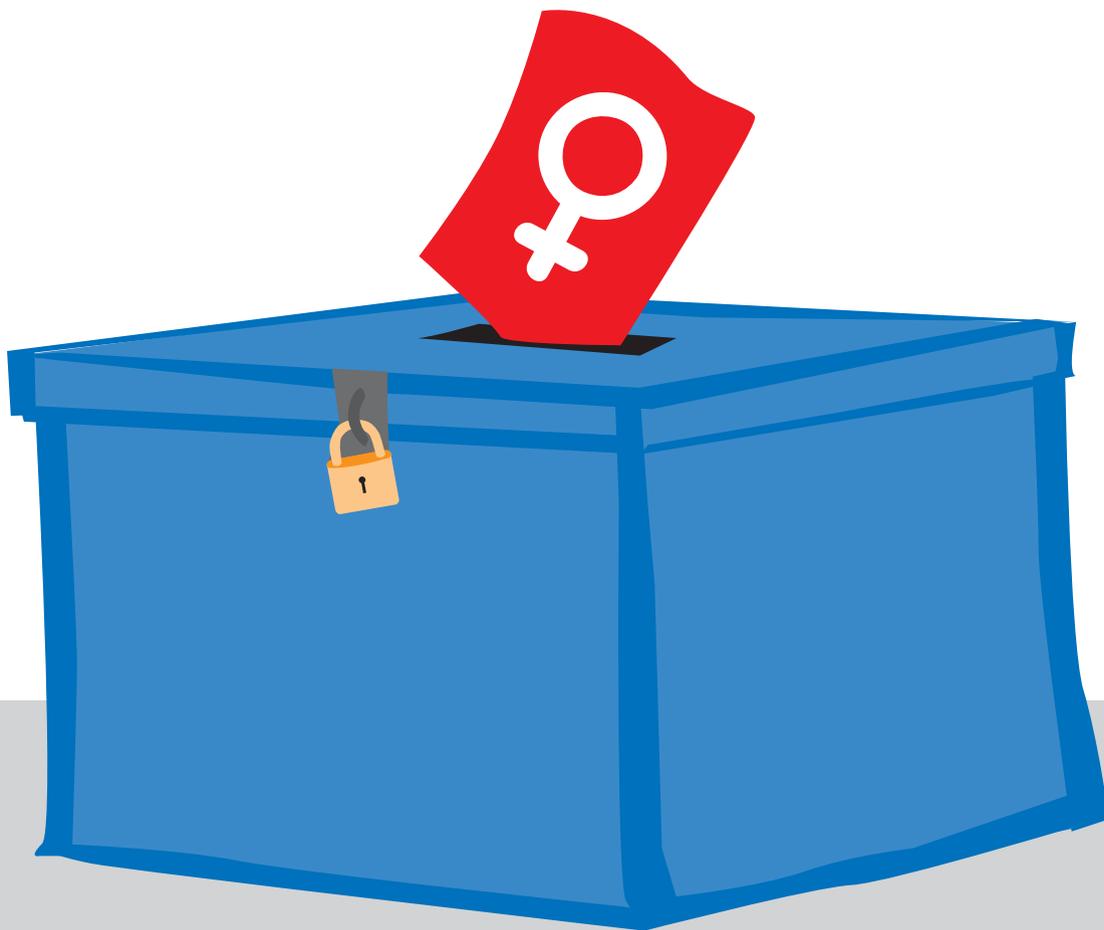


Women's Right to a Political Voice in Thailand



**Millennium Development Goal 3:
Promote gender equality and empower women**



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Millennium Development Goal 3:

Promote gender equality and empower women

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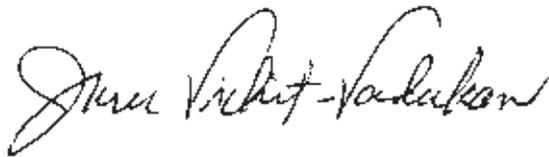
Foreword

This report is the product of a partnership between the Women for Democratic Development Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme. It is the fruit of a long process of consultation and dialogue, bringing together eminent experts, government officials, academics, and activists. We would in particular like to express our deep appreciation to the members of the Advisory Panel who guided the research and production of this report.

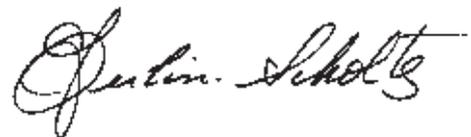
As a contribution to the crucial work of the Subcommittee on Women's Participation in Politics and Administration, Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Security, this report aims at highlighting the current status of women's role in government, analyzing the reasons behind the slow progress to date, and proposing ways and means to overcome existing barriers to women in politics, be they implicit, or explicit, latent or manifest.

Targeted at policy makers, politicians, proponents of gender equality, and the general public, the report is intended to provide illuminating information as well as to serve as a tool for mobilizing support for increased women's participation in politics and administration.

We sincerely hope that this report will become a valuable contribution to the current debate about how to better promote, protect and fulfill women's right to a political voice and strong representation in the higher echelons of government in Thailand.



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Visible progress, hidden prejudice

1

Women have participated in many ways in Thailand's rapid progress in human development – improving their incomes and gaining steadily higher standards of health and education. Nevertheless, Thailand's success story has been tainted by a notable gender equality failure: Thai women have yet to gain a strong political voice and influence in public life.

Over the past three decades, Thailand has made striking progress. An economy that relied largely on agriculture has become one of Asia's fastest growing industrial economies – enabling millions of people to work their way out of poverty. A military-dominated regime has given way to a democratic constitutional monarchy. And what was once a poor developing country has achieved rapid progress in human development – with remarkable advances in education and health.

Thailand's achievements are evident in its advance towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals emerged from a gathering of world leaders at the Millennium Summit in New York in 2000 and established time-bound targets for combating poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease, discrimination against women and environmental degradation by 2015. Thailand is likely to meet most, if not all, the MDGs well before that date. Thailand has, for example, already surpassed the first target of reducing poverty by two-thirds, and is well on its way to meeting the targets for malnutrition, child and maternal health, and access to primary education.

In spite of these impressive achievements, major challenges remain. The benefits of development have not been equally shared – between different social or ethnic groups, or between rural and urban areas, or between regions. And the country has had to confront

some daunting challenges – notably the Asian financial crisis, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami. Nevertheless, Thailand, a country with a strong sense of identity and purpose, clearly has the capacity and the determination to overcome these obstacles and to pursue further progress in human development and a more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth.

Thailand's MDG-Plus target for gender equality

In view of Thailand's rapid overall advances in human development, the Royal Thai Government has committed itself to a set of ambitious "MDG-Plus" targets going well beyond those agreed internationally. For example, with poverty already reduced by two-thirds, the country sets a target of further reducing poverty to 4 percent by 2009. This would mark a four-fifths reduction in poverty since 1990. MDG-Plus targets were also set for education, maternal and child mortality, HIV/AIDS, gender equality and environment (*Figure 1.1*).

One of Thailand's MDG-Plus targets is to *double the proportion of women in national parliament, local government bodies and executive positions in the civil service by 2006*, a target originally established by the Ninth Women's Development Plan for 2002-2006.

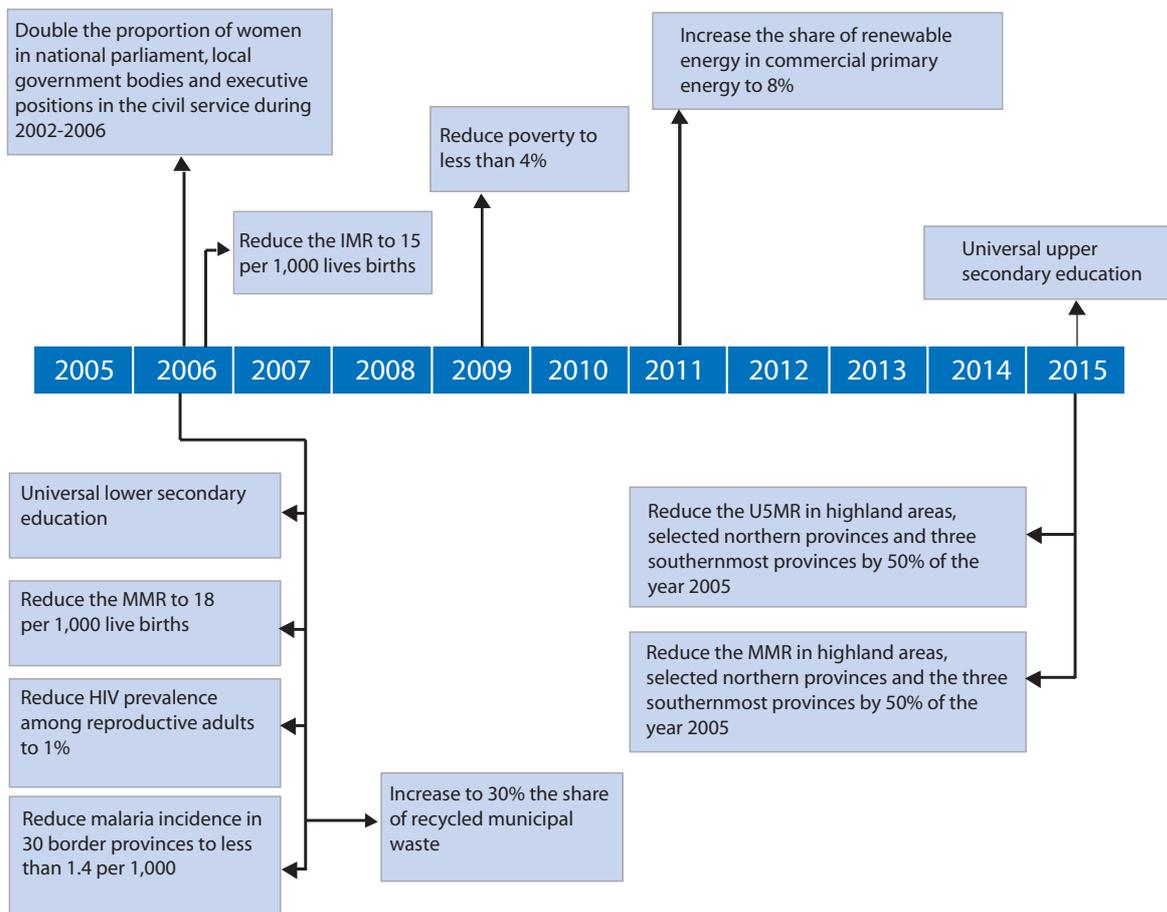
It is clear at this point, however, that Thailand will unfortunately miss this MDG-Plus target for gender equality. In the parliamentary election in February 2005 Thailand lost the chance to double the proportion of women MPs: the proportion did increase, but only from 9.2 percent to 10.4 percent. And much more needs to be done to increase the number of women in local government bodies and in senior level civil servant positions.

Nevertheless, this year and the next will offer many opportunities for promoting women's political voice in Thailand. During 2005-06 there will be more than 3,000 local elections, and early in 2006 a senatorial election will take place. Similarly, the time is ripe for a new push by the Government to accelerate progress in increasing the proportion of women in the higher echelons of government.

This report is about the challenge facing Thailand in reaching the MDG-Plus target of doubling the proportion of women in national parliament, local government bodies and executive positions in the civil service. It provides an analysis of the slow progress in promoting women's participation in politics and higher echelons of government. Finally, this report concludes with a wide range of recommendations as to how progress can be made to enable Thailand to meet the MDG-Plus goal.

Before analysing the progress and setbacks in promoting a stronger voice of women in Thai politics and government, it is important to look at the overall picture of the status of women in Thailand. This introductory chapter provides that backdrop, looking at advances and challenges in promoting gender equality in the areas of health, education, employment, violence

Figure 1.1 Thailand's MDG-Plus timeline



against women, as well as the many traditional prejudices that women still face in Thailand. It concludes with an account of the Government's overall policies to promote gender equality.

Women live longer than men

Thai women may lack political voice, but in many other ways they are forging ahead, particularly with regard to health care. Women's life expectancy is now eight years longer than that of men (73.4 years, compared with 65.2 years). This partly reflects not only improved standards of water supply and hygiene but also better health services. Improvements in health services, particularly having sufficient skilled health personnel to attend virtually all births, have also contributed to a reduction in maternal mortality which between 1990 and 2002 dropped from 36 to 24 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Not all women have shared in these improvements. Maternal mortality rates, for example, tend to be higher in the mountainous areas of the north as well as in the three southernmost provinces. Provincial-level data show that a maternal mortality rate in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala – the three southernmost provinces – is twice as high as that of the national average.

If health services are to serve women better, it also needs to pay more attention to the specific needs of women, particularly with regards to reproductive health and family planning. Health services should, for example, give more support to those who have unwanted pregnancies, or those who have been victims of violence. In 1999, the Cabinet approved a series of measures that aimed to eliminate gender-based violence, but the Government has not provided a

budget and the plan has been poorly implemented and monitored. The Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development needs to acquire sufficient funds to implement the comprehensive plan.

More girls are going to school

One of the most important channels for achieving gender equality is schooling – and here too Thai women have had some notable achievements. In the early years the Royal Family played an important part in this improvement. Thailand first opened its education system to girls in 1901, and Queen Saowapa of King Chulalongkorn endowed a number of schools for girls. Access to higher education came somewhat later: Chulalongkorn University, for example, admitted its first female student in 1927, ten years after it was founded.

For many years education was strongly biased towards boys. Often, this was a result of family circumstances. If parents could not afford to educate all their children they would give preference to the sons, keeping the daughters at home to do household chores or to look after younger siblings. Indeed, even some well-off families were so bound by tradition that they would keep their daughters at home.

In recent years, however, girls have been catching up – thanks to the efforts of the Ministry of Education and the enforcement of compulsory education for both boys and girls. Girls are now enrolling at the primary level at much the same rate as boys. In so far as the upper and tertiary levels are concerned, girls now seem to be enrolling at a higher rate than boys (*Table 1.1*). Gender disparities in literacy are now much narrower. Over the period 2000-04 Thailand's overall adult literacy rates were 94.5 percent for men and 90.5 percent for women.

Table 1.1 Male and female educational enrolment, 2002/03

	Male	Female
Primary gross enrolment ratio	89%	88%
Primary net enrolment ratio	86%	85%
Lower secondary gross enrolment ratio	90%	88%
Upper secondary gross enrolment ratio	63%	66%
Average years of primary and secondary schooling	10.5	10.3
Tertiary gross enrolment ratio	36%	42%

Source: UNESCO, 2005

The remaining significant is still significant because women in earlier generations have missed out on schooling. Among the younger generation literacy rates are almost identical. Literacy rate for young adults (aged 15-24) is 98.1 percent for males and 97.8 percent for females.

Although there are now fewer differences in school enrolment between boys and girls, it is clear that men's and women's educational paths diverge, since at the tertiary level they take quite different courses. Men are, for example, far more likely than women to study engineering, architecture, law, mathematics and computer sciences, while women are more likely to study the humanities, social sciences, and medical and health services, particularly nursing. However, there are some signs of progress. Between 1991 and 2001 the ratio of women to men studying mathematics and computer science, engineering and law increased (Figure 1.2).

Women at work

Another crucial dimension of women's empowerment is in the area of employment opportunities. Here again Thai women have made significant progress. Certainly a high proportion of women are working. In 2004 the labour force participation rate was 83 percent for men and 65 percent for women. However, the rates do vary

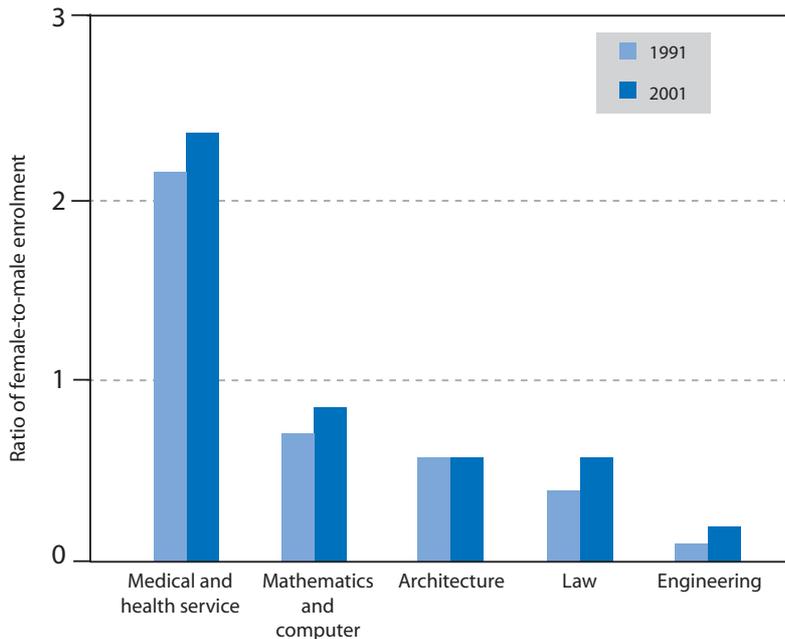
considerably with age: they are more than 80 percent for women aged between 30 and 50 years (Figure 1.3). In Thailand, as elsewhere, women's working opportunities are restricted by household responsibilities. Women are less likely than men to be working outside the home: in 2004 over 600,000 women were not employed because they were doing household work.

Though many more women are working, they are less likely to have the senior jobs. Table 1.2 lists the type of work that men and women do. At the top of the ladder 9 percent of men are employed as legislators, senior officials and managers, while for women the proportion is only 4 percent.

Women, in contrast with men, are more likely to be professionals, technicians and clerks. The other main difference is that women are predominant in service trades, particularly retailing, while men are more likely to be craft workers or machine operators. However, there are also clear distinctions in terms of job status. Women are less likely to be in charge.

This distribution is also reflected somewhat in wages. While 41 percent of men earn above baht 5,500 per month, only 34 percent of women do so (Figure 1.4). In industry, even when women are doing the same jobs as men they are often paid less. Overall women in Thailand earn only around 60 percent of the income of men.

Figure 1.2 Female-to-male ratios in types of higher education, 1991 and 2001



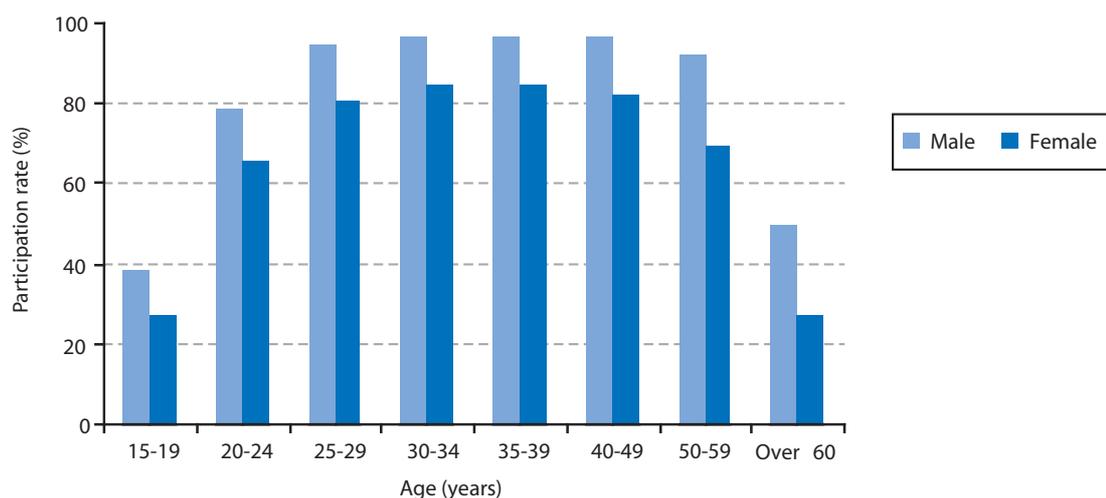
Source: NESDB/UN, 2004

Thai women have clearly made many important economic gains. This was confirmed in 2005, when an international survey of women's empowerment by the World Economic Forum put Thailand in first place in terms of economic opportunity in a composite index. This reflects the quality of women's economic involvement beyond their mere presence as workers. But these advances have yet to be translated fully into equal treatment, either at home or in the workplace. In particular, women have yet to achieve parity in the upper levels of the government bureaucracy or in parliament.

Gender-based violence, sex work and trafficking

One of the worst aspects of Thai women's low status is that they are frequently subject to gender-based violence. Much of this takes place at home. The extent of domestic violence is difficult to assess since most cases go unreported, but a study in 2000 in Bangkok and Nakhon Sawan Province found that of 2,800 women interviewed, 44 percent had been abused by their husbands or partners: either physically or sexually, or both (Figure 1.5). Another study, of men, said that 20 percent said they had at some point beaten their wives. In 2003, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

Figure 1.3 Male and female labour force participation rates, 2004



Source: NSO, 2005

Table 1.2 Male and female jobs, 2004

	Male workers %	Female workers %
1. Legislators, senior officials and managers	9.3	4.2
2. Professionals	3.1	4.8
3. Technicians	3.5	4.5
4. Clerks	2.3	4.9
5. Service workers and shop and market sales workers	9.2	19.6
6. Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	36.4	34.2
7. Craft and related trades workers	12.9	7.8
8. Plant and machine operators and assemblers	10.5	5.7
9. Elementary occupations	12.8	14.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: NSO, 2005

reported that 1,714 women sought medical care. Among these women, 725 had been physically injured by their husbands or partners.

Sometimes this violence arises as a result of arguments fuelled by alcohol. But more often it is the result of stress within the home. It is also common that a man would use violence as a way of demonstrating power over his wife and children.

Women may not report this because they feel shame and want to keep the family together for their children's sake or simply because they don't have access to appropriate public social support services.

Although most gender-based violence takes place within the home, the same attitudes towards women also surface in the workplace or at schools or in public places – in the form of sexual harassment or physical or sexual abuse. Thai newspapers are, for example, increasingly reporting on gang rapes of schoolgirls.

Among those most at risk of gender-based violence are sex workers. Thailand probably has up to 200,000 female sex workers – either full-time or part-time – though – not all are Thai. Many girls have been driven to sex work under the pressure of poverty – as a way of earning

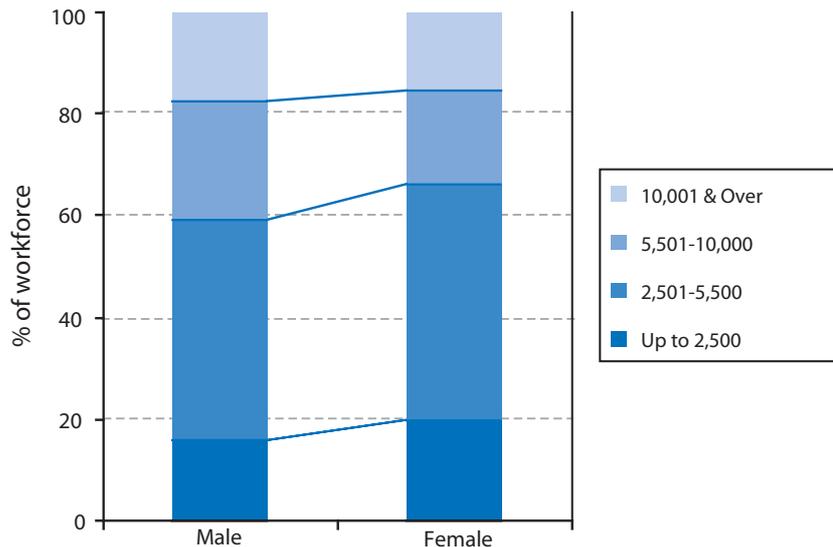
money for their own families or to send to their parents. Prostitution is illegal so sex workers cannot seek official forms of protection from violence by clients or from other forms of exploitation.

Most exposed of all are women and girls who have been trafficked for sex work since they may be effectively held against their will – far from their homes. Nowadays fewer Thai nationals are being trafficked within the country; women trafficked into the lower end of the sex industry usually come from neighbouring countries. However, Thai women from northern hill tribes or from other ethnic groups who lack citizenship papers are still at high risk of being trafficked, since they often lack legal status to travel and work outside of their home areas. In addition, many Thai women are trafficked overseas to work in Japan and elsewhere.

Women and HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS remains a major threat to both men and women, but the proportion of women affected has increased. In the period 1984-98 they represented around one quarter of HIV infections, but currently they represent around one third.

Figure 1.4 Monthly wages of men and women (baht), 2004



Note: This chart shows, for example, that while 41% of men earn more than 5,500 baht per month, only 34% of women do so.

Source: NSO, 2005

Women are especially vulnerable to HIV infection because of unequal power relations between men and women. Thai men often have multiple sexual partners so can potentially infect their wives as well as their mistresses. For married women and mistresses, it can be particularly difficult to insist on the use of condoms even if they know their partners are putting them at risk. Insistence on the use of condoms by women is often interpreted as an insult to men, and women often remain powerless in protecting themselves from HIV/AIDS. The result is that as many as half of new HIV infections each year are happening within marriage or regular relationships where condom use tends to be very low.

Another risk factor is the customary male expectation that women remain sexually “innocent” and, therefore, also “ignorant” of sexual knowledge, which, by implication, includes knowledge about preventing HIV infection. Unless women are empowered enough to gain control over their sex lives and have access to good reproductive and sexual health knowledge, their risks of becoming infected will not diminish.

The most despicable manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women is sexual violence and abuse, during which men are unlikely to use condoms, which puts women at greatest risk of HIV infection.

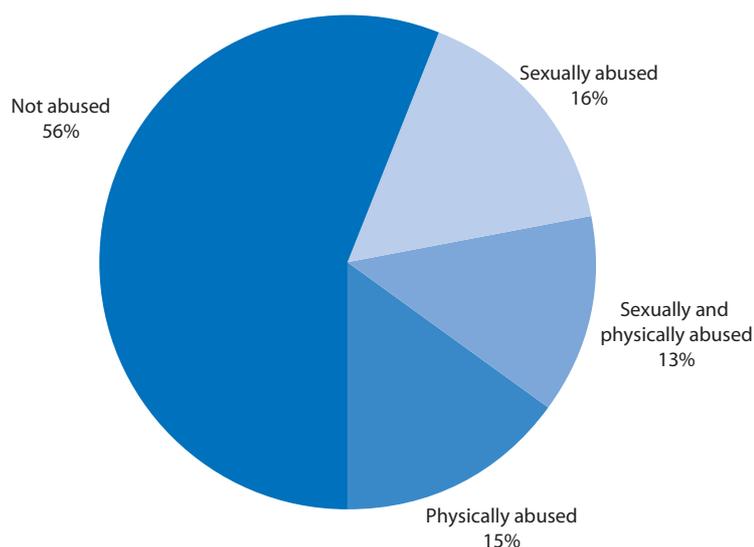
Women sex workers in brothels are more likely to be empowered to insist on condom use, but those selling sex outside of established brothels (at bars or restaurants or other premises, etc.) are less likely to be thus empowered, or may be less aware of the risks. Also, older sex workers (in order to compete with younger women) may be inclined to offer sex without a condom. It is possible also that some sex workers will offer sex without a condom for a higher price. The power of bargaining seems to depend on social and economic status of clients and sex workers.

Women also face other challenges posed by HIV/AIDS. When infected, they can encounter severe stigma and discrimination. The burden of care at both household and community levels are usually borne by women, as the public infrastructure to care for people living with HIV/AIDS is still considered a luxury in most parts of the country. It is the women, whether as partners, or mothers or even grandmothers, who must look after the sick or dying and take care of any orphaned children.

Hidden barriers, traditional prejudices

Despite rapid progress in the areas of health, education and employment, many Thai women continue to be hindered by a series of cultural obstacles and traditional prejudices. These biases are evident from birth – as boys and girls are expected to slot into traditional gender roles.

Figure 1.5 Abuse of women: A study in Bangkok and Nakhon Sawan Province



Source: FES, 2000

Still now, when a son is born, some parents often anticipate that he will grow up to be strong and capable, whereas for a girl they are more likely to anticipate that she will be beautiful and a responsible homemaker. This partly demonstrates that parents see their children as a potential economic contribution. In the rural areas, they may visualize boys helping in agriculture and thus boosting the family's cash income. Girls, on the other hand, might be seen as help in the home, performing household chores without bringing in any money, prestige and status. Ultimately, they assume that a girl will eventually marry, and until then she will need to be brought up carefully if she is to bring in a substantial dowry.

The most severe gender prejudice appears to occur in the more traditional rural communities. This is evident in a number of folk beliefs. Some people still consider, for example, that garments that have been worn by women are in some way polluted, especially as a result of menstruation, and that they can reduce male potency. As a result households may wash men's and women's clothes separately. A few men may even refuse to walk under a washing line on which women's clothes have been hung, fearing that this will reduce the magical powers of any amulets they are wearing.

Attitudes towards boys and girls are also influenced by Buddhist beliefs. Parents may hope, for example, that if they have a son he can become a monk and thus bring them merit – representing a rope that they can use to ascend to heaven. A girl, on the other hand offers no such opportunities.

These and other biases place many Thai women into an inferior role – in which a female's only true destiny is presumed to be marriage and motherhood rather than independence and a career. Certainly women will also work outside the home; indeed they may be forced to by economic necessity. But this is regarded as a secondary activity. Women are expected to see their first priority as maintaining the household and caring for the extended family – tasks that men rarely share equally. Working women in Thailand, as in other countries, thus carry a double burden – with both domestic and economic responsibilities.

But Thai women also carry a third burden – the task of maintaining family and social networks. It is women who take prime responsibility for marking the social rites of passage: births, weddings and funerals – doing all the organizing, shopping and planning. Women are also responsible for contacts outside the family – maintaining social reciprocity and social exchange, and organizing functions that men are happy to attend but unlikely to plan. Even when it comes to public meetings, many of the logistical tasks often fall to women.

It might be thought that the situation would be better for unmarried women who appear to have more time and independence. But in practice they often find they have less of both. Single female relatives are assumed to be always available to help look after children, for example, or the sick and infirm. And the unmarried daughters are the ones typically expected to care for elderly parents. This could result from women being socialized at young age to be caring and grateful to parents. Men are usually excused because they take on the role of being the family's breadwinner.

As a result, Thai women have rarely been visible in the public arena in their own right, but only as partners of men. This is evident too in the way that Thailand's history has been written, suggesting that almost all significant historical figures have been male. But even today, school text books often reinforce gender stereotypes – as do the media, particularly the TV soap operas which generally give the principal and more thoughtful roles to men and use women as secondary characters, often portraying them as over-emotional or irrational, or jealous and manipulative.

Within the family daughters are frequently undervalued. Parents will know, for example, that in reality daughters also make a substantial economic contribution. As well as working at home, they may also be labouring in the rice fields. And daughters who leave home to work in factories, restaurants, shops, the tourism industry or domestic service will also send money home to help their parents. They also realize that daughters are typically more dependable than sons and are more likely to look after them in their old age.

However, none of these gender roles are fixed. Indeed, they are constantly being renegotiated generation by generation. And the situation for women has been changing fairly rapidly as Thailand urbanizes and modernizes – and many more women have entered the labour force, either by choice or out of economic necessity. Social attitudes also tend to be more enlightened in the urban areas where more than one third of the population now live, and in greater Bangkok which is home to around 15 percent of the population. Nevertheless, social attitudes in Thailand appear to lag some way behind social and economic reality – to the detriment of women.

Government policy on gender

An important way of improving women's position and shifting social attitudes is through public policy and national leadership, and over the years Thailand's governments have slowly been moving forwards on

gender issues. To some extent they have done so in response to social changes and to lobbying from women's organizations, but they have also had to respond to international pressures in order to fulfil Thailand's international commitments.

When Thailand emerged as a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the first Constitution (passed in 1933) granted men and women equal rights to vote. Over subsequent decades, the Government has tried to counter prejudices against women and remove some institutional discrimination. Meanwhile, women themselves came together to lobby the Government. So, for the 1974 Constitution the 'Group of Women Lawyers and Thammasart Graduates' pressed the Government to ensure that the Constitution referred specifically to women, and as a result it asserted: "Men and women shall have equal rights".

Despite these formal changes, in practice the Government at the time still had very limited awareness and understanding of the importance of gender equality in development, and devoted little attention to gender issues. Khunying Amporn Meesuk, one of a few high-ranking female civil servants, who headed the Thai delegation to the UN meeting for International Women's Year in the 1975 in Mexico City, considers that gender issues were dealt with perfunctorily. It was not really until the late 1980s that Thailand started to make more significant progress, due largely to participation in international forums and agreements.

In 1985 Thailand acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Earlier, Thailand took a cautious approach to the Convention and entered reservations wherever the Convention seemed to differ from domestic law or practice. Over the years it has withdrawn from most reservations it previously had, though in some cases, the country has not actually taken the necessary action to fulfil the commitment (*Box 1.1*).

It was the government of General Chatchai Choonhavan that in 1989 took one of the most decisive steps by establishing under the Prime Minister's Office the National Commission for Women's Affairs (NCWA) to coordinate policies and programmes on women among all agencies. The Government also introduced measures to protect women labourers.

The government's resolve to promote the interests of women was further strengthened in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women when Thailand signed the

Beijing Declaration, committing itself to advancing gender equality. A number of women's NGOs also attended the conference. They and their networks would try to ensure that Thailand honours this commitment.

One outcome was that the 1997 Constitution offered an even stronger framework for women's rights. During the drafting period, a number of groups formed the Women and the Constitution Network to provide recommendations and to put pressure on the drafting committee to ensure that it included gender equality. As a result, Article 30, for example, guarantees legal equality between men and women and prohibits discrimination; and Article 80 requires the state to promote gender equality and to further protect women workers.

Over recent decades Thailand has also tried to ensure that women's priorities are reflected in national planning. The early Five-year National Economic Development Plans had focused on infrastructure. It was not until the Fourth Plan (1977-81) that it started to address social issues and recognized women as a target group, along with children and youth. But it was only the Fifth Plan in 1982 that began to address women's concerns more systematically when the National Commission on Women's Affairs produced a series of Women's Development Plans to accompany the National Economic and Social Development Plans. The Women's Development Plan for 2002-06 highlights five strategic areas and goals (*Box 1.2*).

The Government has also introduced mechanisms to translate these plans into action. Thus in 2000 it introduced an administrative regulation requiring all government departments to appoint a Chief Gender Equality Officer (CGEO) who should be at least at the level of deputy director-general, to ensure that all policies, programmes and budgets take gender issues into account. Each department is also required to establish a gender focal point and formulate a gender master plan.

Those officials appointed as CGEO would, however, be much more effective if it was made clear that this responsibility was not just supplementary but one of their core tasks. For this purpose, they also need more support as well as monitoring to review the progress that each department is making. It would help too if the CGEOs retained the responsibility a little longer: the rotation system among civil servants hampers the CGEO system by making it difficult to maintain continuity.

Box 1.1 CEDAW: Reservations and persistent problems

When Thailand acceded to Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, one of the few human rights instruments to which Thailand had acceded, it applied seven reservations in areas where the Convention seemed to differ from domestic law or practice. Since then, it has withdrawn most of the reservations – though not necessarily followed through with the necessary action.

Thus in 1990, Thailand withdrew two reservations concerning women's equal employment opportunities and their equal capacity to enter into legal agreements. In practice however, little has actually changed: although for legally binding agreements, in theory, both husbands and wives are required to provide evidence of approval from their spouse, in practice, the woman is more likely to be asked for this than the man.

In 1992, the Government withdrew a reservation regarding nationality. In 1995, it withdrew two more reservations, one concerning equal access to all government jobs, and another regarding equal educational opportunities. But these are still restricted in the case of the police academy and other academies under the supervision of the armed forces. Although they do make some jobs available to both sexes, they have yet to ensure that all places are equally available to women applicants. The police have been recruiting women to work, but only on specific technical issues.

In addition, the National Commission on Women's Affairs has been upgraded. In 2002 it was made part of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security where it became the Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development, charged with the responsibility to enhance policies for women and to ensure implementation and coordination among concerned agencies

While the Government has made efforts to amend discriminatory laws, rules and regulations, it appears to rely too much on formal policies and documents to achieve gender equality – while making few efforts to shift social attitudes and practices. In their comments on Thailand's last report to CEDAW in 1999, for example, the CEDAW Committee noted that: "Traditional attitudes that foster discrimination against women and girls continue to prevail and hinder the full implementation of the Convention".

The next two chapters look at two of the results of such attitudes: the low proportion of women in the higher reaches of the civil services, and the scarcity of female politicians.

Box 1.2 Women's Development Plan, 2002-06

The National Commission on Women's Affairs has produced Women's Development Plans that are attached to the five-year National Economic and Social Development Plans. The plan for 2002-06 highlights five strategic areas:

1. *Strengthening women's development potential* – by improving women's skills and knowledge, expanding their economic opportunities and most importantly, by changing social attitudes so as to promote gender equality.
2. *Increasing women's participation in decision making* – This includes the economic, social and political arenas as well as public administration.
3. *Promoting equality and social protection* – By improving laws and regulations to eliminate discrimination and violence against women, creating social networks to protect women and children, and increasing awareness of gender equality and human rights in the family and the society through formal and informal education.
4. *Developing media to support women's development* – Changing public attitudes toward women's development and equality by presenting gender-sensitive messages.
5. *Strengthening women's organizations and networks* – This also includes improving databases so as to provide sex-disaggregated data that can guide policy formulation, planning and monitoring as well as the dissemination of information.

Too few top female civil servants

2

Although women make up more than two thirds of staff in the lower grades of the civil service, they are far fewer in the higher grades – a reflection of a consistent bias against women when choosing candidates for promotion.

Just as Thai women are less likely to be senior managers in the private sector, they are also less likely to occupy the top jobs in public administration. At first glance they seem to be doing well since overall around two thirds of civil servants are women. But this is only because there are many women in the lower grades: in 2004 in grades 1 to 7, 61.2 percent were women.

The lack of top women bureaucrats

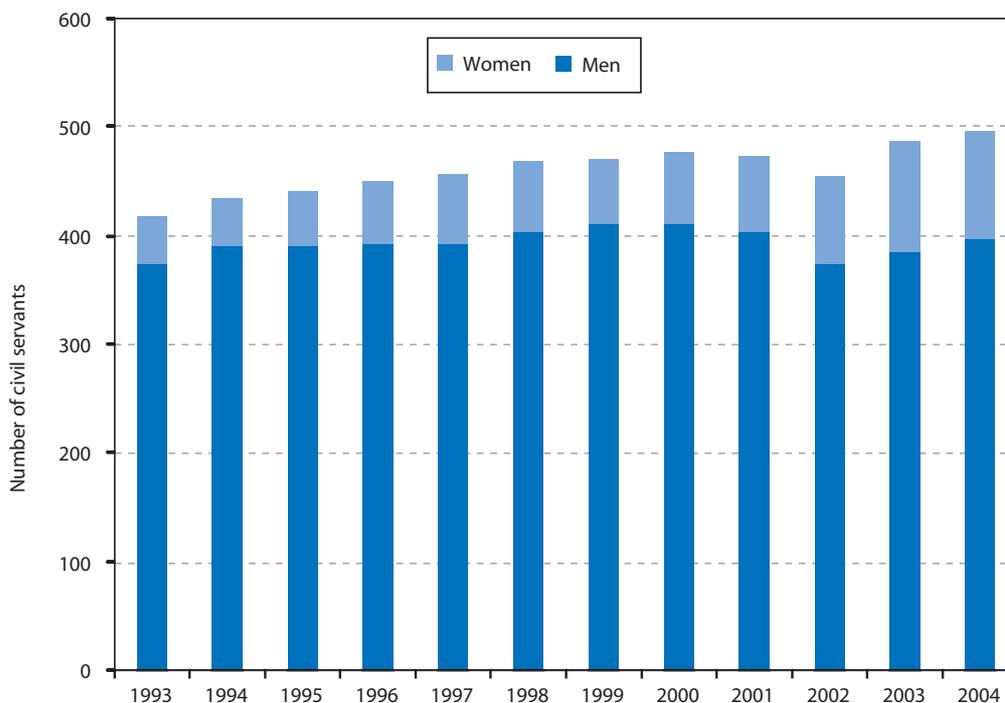
At the higher grades, however, the proportion of women starts to decline: of 14,722 civil servants at the grade 8 level only 5,944 (40.4 percent) were women and of the 496 high-ranking officers at the 9 to 11 levels only 20.2 percent were women. And the percentage gets steadily lower at the highest ranks: only 9.7 percent of grade 11 staff are women (*Table 2.1*).

Table 2.1 Women in the civil service, 2004

Civil service grade	Number of men	Number of women	% of women
Grades 1 to 7	133,869	211,210	61.2
Grade 8	8,778	5,944	40.4
Grade 9	195	63	24.4
Grade 10	173	34	16.4
Grade 11	28	3	9.7
Total civil service	143,043	217,254	60.3

Source: OCSC, 2005

Figure 2.1 Men and women in grades 9-11 of the civil service, 1993-2004



Source: OCSC, 2005

Nevertheless, there seems to have been a steady improvement. Between 1993 and 2004, the proportion of women in grades 9-11 doubled – from 10.6 percent to 20.2 percent. This is illustrated in [Figure 2.1](#) which shows that as the number of people in these grades has increased, most of the increase corresponds to the appointment of women.

Although the average has been increasing, this disguises considerable disparities between different ministries. Thus, while the Ministry of Commerce has achieved gender parity, and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security also does reasonably well, many others are lagging, particularly the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and the Ministry of the Interior. [Table 2.2](#) shows the ratios between male and females executive officials in each Ministry, while [Table 2.3](#) gives the ratios of civil servants based on areas of expertise. From [Table 2.3](#) one can clearly see that, in general, the percentage of women employed as civil servants is relatively higher than men in most categories. However, the top executive positions were still managed by men as indicated in [Table 2.2](#).

Thailand is certainly not unique in having men dominate the top jobs in government administration. Although it is difficult to compare grades between different countries, the proportion of female senior civil servants in many countries can be considerably less than 20 percent. This is evident from data collected by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe ([Table 2.4](#)). Although in some countries, the proportion is more than one third, in the Netherlands it is only 8 percent and in Spain only 5 percent.

Women's under-representation in the upper echelons of the civil service is matched by their absence at the top of many senior institutions. Ironically, although the 1997 Constitution mandates equal opportunities for males and females, this has not been achieved even in the oversight institutions that were created as a result of the Constitution, such as the National Audit Commission, the Ombudsman's Office, the National Counter-Corruption Commission, and the Constitutional Courts and the Administrative Courts. This is illustrated in a selection of institutions in [Table 2.5](#) which ranks the institutions stated above on the basis of their proportion of women. The statistics shows that women have a

Table 2.2 Women in executive positions, 2004

Ranked by % of women executives	Number of men	Number of women	% of women
1. Ministry of Commerce	16	16	50.0
2. Ministry of Social Development and Human Security	8	5	38.5
3. Ministry of Education	13	6	31.6
4. Ministry of Finance	25	11	30.6
5. Ministry of Labour	14	6	30.0
6. Ministry of Prime Minister's Office	33	12	26.7
7. Ministry of Science and Technology	12	1	7.7
8. Ministry of Culture	10	3	23.1
9. Ministry of Information and Communications Technology	11	3	21.4
10. Ministry of Independent Public Agencies	11	3	21.4
11. Ministry of Energy	12	3	20.0
12. Ministry of Public Health	27	6	18.2
13. Ministry of Foreign Affairs	29	6	17.1
14. Ministry of Justice	25	5	16.7
15. Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	26	5	16.1
16. Ministry of Tourism and Sports	6	1	14.3
17. Ministry of Industry	24	3	11.1
18. Ministry of Transport	26	1	3.7
10. Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives	44	3	6.4
20. Ministry of Interior	29	1	3.3
TOTAL	401	100	24.9

Source: OCSC, 2005

Table 2.3 Women in the civil service, by category

Category	October 2000-September 2001			
	Total	Women	Men	% of women
General Civil Servant	388,054	228,161	159,893	58.8
School Teacher	502,923	281,513	221,410	56.0
Civil Servant in University	49,657	33,036	16,621	66.5
General Parliamentary Officer	1,396	942	454	67.5
Independent Organization Officer	7,604	5,811	1,793	76.4
Judiciary	2,930	541	2,389	18.5
Attorney	1,736	210	1,526	12.1
Police	220,447	9,684	210,763	4.4
Bangkok Metropolitan Officer	29,955	20,788	9,167	69.4
General	17,263	11,277	5,986	65.3
School Teacher	12,692	9,511	3,181	74.9
Provincial Officer	4,770	2,976	1,794	62.4
Sub-district Employee	20,873	9,087	11,786	43.5
Municipality Employee	32,624	19,331	13,293	59.3
General	18,587	8,974	9,613	48.3
School Teacher	14,037	10,357	3,680	73.8
Total	1,325,548	652,199	673,349	49.2

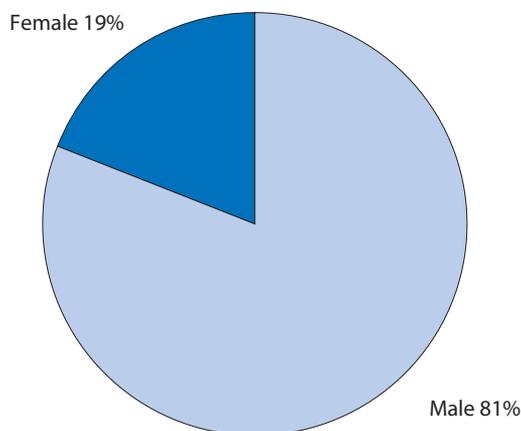
Source: Women and Men in Civil Service in 2000, OCSC, 2002:2 cited in Gender Perspective in Politics and Administration, Gender and Development Research Institute, 2003,p.24

Table 2.4 Female senior civil servants in selected European countries and Thailand, 2000/01

Country	% of women
Estonia	45
Lithuania	35
Austria	24
Croatia	21
Thailand	20
United Kingdom	19
Norway	17
Cyprus	13
France	13
Ireland	10
Netherlands	8
Georgia	7
Spain	5

Source: UNECE, 2005; OSCE, 2005

Figure 2.2 Thailand’s overseas ambassadors, 2004



Source: OSCE, 2005

reasonable representation only in the Human Rights Commission. Among the poorest performers are the Board of Investment and Thai Airways International. It is also disappointing to have no women on the Election Commission. Of the total of 641 appointments in this table, only 68 – less than 11 percent – were women.

In certain administrative units such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, women appear to have better opportunity. At least Thai women are more visible overseas: of 70 ambassadors in 2004, 13 (19 percent) were women (Figure 2.2).

Even fewer sub-national administrators

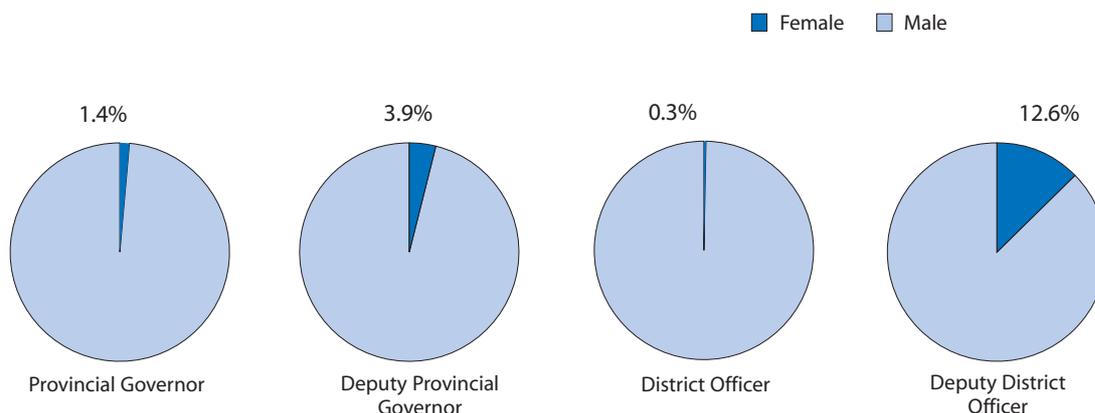
While Thailand’s performance is comparable to many other countries at the national level, at the sub-national level the situation is much worse (Figure 2.3). Out of a total of 76, there is only one female provincial governor. And there are only seven female deputy governors. The Government is missing an opportunity here since women governors could build stronger links between government programmes and local communities in general and women’s groups in particular.

Table 2.5 Ranking of government boards and committees, by women's representation

Rank	Men	Women	% of women
Independent public agencies			
1. National Human Rights Commission of Thailand	6	5	45
2. State Audit Commissioners	8	2	20
3. Board of Governors, Stock Exchange of Thailand	9	2	18
4. National Economic and Social Advisory Council	83	16	16
5. Court of Directors, Bank of Thailand	10	1	9
6. Judiciary Commission	15	1	6
7. Judicial Administration Commissioner	16	1	6
8. Ombudsman	2	0	0
9. Election Commission of Thailand	5	0	0
10. The National Telecommunication Commission	7	0	0
11. National Counter-Corruption Commission	9	0	0
12. Securities and Exchange Commission of Thailand	10	0	0
Office of the Prime Minister			
1. Board of National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre	12	4	25
2. Civil Service Commissioners	14	3	18
3. National Reconciliation Commission	40	8	17
4. National Economic and Social Development Board	13	1	7
4. Public Sector Development Commission	13	1	7
6. Council of State	95	7	7
7. Decentralization Committee	34	2	6
Boards in other ministries			
1. National Science and Technology Development Agency	23	2	8
2. National Research Council of Thailand	18	1	5
3. The Board of Investment, Ministry of Industry	18	0	0
Boards of state enterprises			
1. Tourism Authority of Thailand	4	2	33
2. Board of Directors, Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand	12	3	20
3. CAT Telecom (Public) Co., Ltd	8	2	20
4. Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand	10	1	9
5. Bangkok Mass Transit Authority	11	1	8
6. National Olympic Committee of Thailand	23	2	8
7. MCOT (Public) Co., Ltd	12	1	8
8. Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand	13	1	7
9. Thai Airways International	15	0	0

Source: Women's Democratic Development Foundation

Figure 2.3 Women administrators at the sub-national level, 2004



Source: OSCE, 2005

Why so few senior women?

Thailand's poor performance at appointing women administrators cannot be attributed only to failures in official policy or guidelines. In 1991, for example, the Government ordered all government agencies to review their regulations so as to allow female civil servants to hold any position except those related to national security. Despite such mandate from the Government, in practice, women are still often precluded from entering decision-making positions.

Similarly, the Government has amended regulations at the local level. Previously, for example, women were not allowed to become district officers, on the grounds that this would be risky for them. In 1993, however, the Ministry of Interior changed the qualification criteria so as to accept women.

The Government has also made efforts to achieve gender equality in government appointments generally. Following the 1997 Constitution, the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC) sent letters to all government agencies, emphasizing that appointments and promotion should be based on merit and that all agencies should pay particular attention to gender equality. The Government has also set up systems through which people could appeal against any violation of their rights. In 2000, for example, the OCSC set up a petition system for civil servants.

In the same year the OCSC also issued guidelines for the promotion of gender equality in the civil service. These guidelines, however, focus less on the number of males and females who are employed. Rather, the emphasis is more on ensuring that the civil service as a whole respond to differences in roles, perspectives and needs of males and females.

Given these policies, and the fact that now young women are at least as well educated as men, there would seem to be fewer barriers to women's advancement. Indeed, when it comes to competitive examinations to enter higher grades of the civil service, women perform as well as men, if not better.

Invisible barriers

In spite of the facts mentioned, women still encounter barriers when it comes to further promotion. In many respects this is the legacy of male domination. Since most senior officials are men, they typically dominate the recruitment committees and tend to bypass women candidates to reproduce the structure with which they are familiar, a structure in which men retain the power. Male members of recruitment panels are also more likely to know the male candidates personally; having met them socially, at the golf course, for example, or in other clubs, and prefer to appoint candidates from within their own social network – a network that can also offer them advantages for pursuing their own ambitions. This then perpetuates the status quo of male domination.

Similar situations emerge when women are working in senior executive committees. Khunying Thippavadee Meksawan, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, says that early in her career, when working at the OCSC, she would often request to join committees that would expose her to new knowledge and issues, but the roles were often given instead to male colleagues who admitted that they knew less about the issues than she did.

Men also have had less chance to work closely with female colleagues who are at the same level as they are. Rather, they often work closely with women who are in the roles of assisting them. Women in the role of assistants are often indispensable to the function of an office, but are not seen as an option for promotion. Khunying Thippavadee Meksawan reflected that

The lack of women administrators is a denial of the rights of women who should have equal representation in all senior positions. It therefore also seriously undermines Thailand's efforts to promote gender equality.

If women are not represented at senior levels, they are by no means able to be empowered. Having more women participate in the formulation of policy and in decision making would ensure that the best of the country's human resources are included in leadership roles, including decisions on the allocation of budgets. If the government has committed itself to empowering women, it should not encourage the continuation of practices that contradict this or relegate women to a few ministries that traditionally have been considered the most appropriate for them, such as the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. The upper echelons of all ministries should have gender balance. But if there are too few leading women civil servants, there are even fewer women politicians to help direct their work. The next chapter examines why there are so few Thai women in politics.

Thailand's missing politicians

3

Although women have been playing an increasingly important part in Thailand's economic development, they have yet to feature in substantial numbers in the political arena. Only 10 percent of parliamentarians are women – a lower proportion than in most other countries.

When Thailand changed its constitutional system in 1932 from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary democracy, it granted men and women equal rights both to vote and to stand for national office. Indeed, Thailand was the first country in Asia to grant such rights. However, it was not until 1949 that the first woman, Ms. Orapin Chayakarn from Ubon Ratchatani Province, won a parliamentary seat and only two women were appointed senators. Since then women have voted in considerable numbers. In 1996, for example, 64 percent of women exercised their right to vote, compared with 60 percent of men.

Women members of parliament

Women have not, however, achieved equality with men when it comes to being elected to public offices. The number of women elected has increased, but only slowly, and has only recently surpassed 10 percent. Between 1952 and 2005 the proportion of elected MPs who were women increased from 3.3 percent to 10.6 percent ([Table 3.1](#) and [Figure 3.1](#))

Following the 1997 Constitution, the electoral system was changed so that while 400 people would be directly elected, 100 others would be appointed from party lists according to the proportion of people using their second vote to opt for that party. As [Table 3.1](#) indicates, in 2001 and 2005 women actually represented a higher proportion of elected MPs than of party-list MPs: 11.5 percent compared with 6 percent.

In this respect, there do not appear to be significant differences between the main parties. The four parties represented in parliament following the 2005 election had similar proportions of women among their candidates for direct election as well as on the party lists ([Table 3.2](#)). The Thai Rak Thai Party had a smaller proportion on the party list: it ranked the women at 19, 21, 48, 60, 65, 97, and 99 of whom the first five were appointed. The Democrat Party had 14 women on the list of whom the highest was ranked 7 – the only one appointed.

The smaller proportions on the party lists – and the low positions they occupy on those lists – indicate the low priority that the parties accord to women. First, because it should be easier for parties to place women on party lists than to get them elected; if they deliberately place fewer women on the list, they are evidently not very committed to achieving gender parity. Second, because those they put on the party lists are the prime candidates for executive office since ministers are not allowed to have constituency responsibilities, a low proportion of women on the list indicates that women are not seen as likely candidates for high office.

Women's low positions in the lists also reflect the fact that most have arrived on the political scene only recently. Status in Thai politics depends to a significant extent on seniority and few women have been around long enough to establish a strong position. As a result, there are too few women to build up a critical mass of power within the parties and until recently the parties have not had women's wings or groups to bargain for positions in the nomination. Consequently, political party strategists have not been under much pressure to take gender issues into account.

Table 3.1 Women in parliamentary elections, 1933-2005

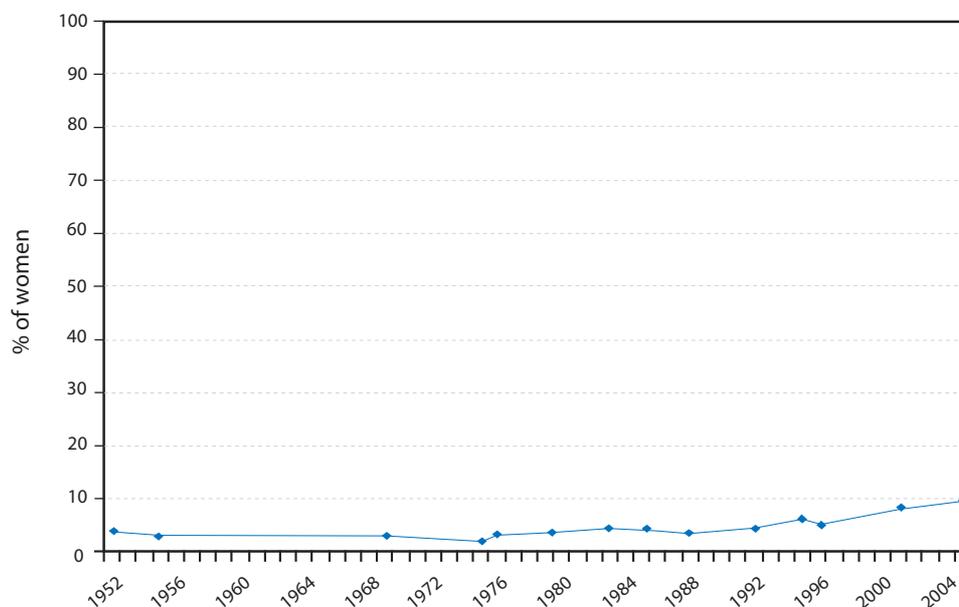
Election date	Candidate			Members of Parliament		
	Men	Women	% of women	Men	Women	% of women
November 1933	n/a	n/a	n/a	78	0	0.0
November 1937	n/a	n/a	n/a	91	0	0.0
November 1938	n/a	n/a	n/a	91	0	0.0
January 1946	n/a	n/a	n/a	96	0	0.0
January 1948	n/a	n/a	n/a	99	0	0.0
February 1952	n/a	n/a	n/a	119	4	3.3
February 1957	n/a	n/a	n/a	159	1	0.6
December 1957	n/a	n/a	n/a	156	4	2.5
February 1969	1,226	27	2.2	214	5	2.3
January 1975	n/a	n/a	n/a	266	3	1.1
May 1976	n/a	n/a	n/a	272	7	2.5
April 1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	292	9	3.0
May 1983	1,826	54	2.9	311	13	4.0
July 1986	3,449	362	9.5	335	12	3.5
June 1988	3,246	366	10.1	347	10	2.8
March 1992	2,742	212	7.2	348	12	3.3
September 1992	2,175	242	10.0	345	15	4.2
June 1995	2,130	242	10.2	367	24	6.1
November 1996	1,950	360	15.6	371	22	5.6
January 2001						
Constituency	2,409	346	12.6	361	39	9.8
Party list	786	146	15.7	93	7	7.0
Total	3,195	492	13.3	454	46	9.2
February 2005						
Constituency	1,523	184	10.8	353	47	11.8
Party list	483	99	17.0	94	6	6.0
Total	1,973	267	11.9	448	53	10.6

Source: NEC, 2005

Table 3.2 Men and women in the 2005 parliamentary elections, by party

	Constituency				List				Total women MPs
	Men	Women	% women listed	Number of women elected	Men	Women	% women listed	Number of listed women appointed	
Thai Rak Thai	351	49	12.3	38	93	7	7	5	43
Democrat	357	38	9.6	6	86	14	14	1	6
Chart Thai	242	23	8.7	2	85	15	15	0	2
Mahachon	275	26	8.6	1	89	11	11	0	1
Others	298	48	13.9	0	130	52	28.6	0	0
Total	1,523	184	10.8	47	483	99	17	6	52

Source: NEC, 2005

Figure 3.1 Women in Parliament, 1952-2004

Note: When there were two elections in the same year the one plotted is that with the highest number.

Source: NEC, 2005

Getting women elected

The proportion of MPs who are women will depend on a number of factors, including their proportion among those people who present themselves to the parties as candidates, the proportion of these whom the parties select, and finally on the proportion selected by the voters.

The number for the first factor is not known, since the parties do not record, or report on, the sex of candidates presenting themselves to selection committees. The second is known – as indicated in [Table 3.1](#) for all parties taken together the proportion of women candidates was 12 percent – similar to the proportion elected.

The final proportion – reflecting the electors' choice – is also known. In 2005 in the constituency elections, of 1,523 male candidates, 353 people (23 percent) were elected, while of the 180 women candidates, 25 percent were elected. This might suggest that women were

more likely to be elected than men. However, it is also important to take into account the difficulty of winning particular seats. Parties typically field their weakest candidates in seats they feel they have no chance of winning while placing more favoured candidates in safe seats; women could thus have been allocated to more or less difficult seats; without further information on this it is difficult to judge how successful they were. Nevertheless, at first glance it seems that men and women appear to be equally popular with the electorate.

International comparisons

Thailand's number of women parliamentarians compares unfavourably with that in many other countries. For the world as a whole the average of women in the lower houses of parliament is 16 percent and in the upper houses is 15 percent, while for Thailand the respective proportions are 10.4 percent and 10.5 percent. The Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva has

data for 185 countries for the representation of women in the lower houses of parliament and places Thailand in a lowly 113th place in this ranking – worse than most countries in East and South-East Asia, though ahead of Cambodia, Malaysia and Japan (Table 3.3).

Women cabinet ministers

Just as there have been few women MPs, there are even fewer women cabinet ministers. In the series of administrations since 1976, there has often only been one woman minister, and never more than three (Table 3.5). The current government has two women

ministers out of a total of 36 – the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives as well as the Minister of Culture. This tendency to deny women the opportunity to take ministerial responsibilities reinforces false public perceptions about the competence of women.

Although the current two ministers have been appointed to 'gender-neutral' jobs, when it comes to allocating women MPs and senators to parliamentary committees, they usually get put into those related to social affairs or those concerned specifically with women and children – which not only narrows the horizons for women but also reduces the opportunities for men to become involved in gender issues.

Table 3.3 International ranking of women in lower houses of Parliament, 2005

Rank	Country	Total number of seats	Total number of women	% of women
1.	Rwanda	80	39	48.8
2.	Sweden	349	158	45.3
3.	Norway	165	63	38.2
4.	Finland	200	75	37.5
5.	Denmark	179	66	36.9
<i>East and South-East Asian countries</i>				
20.	Viet Nam	498	136	27.3
27.	Timor-Leste	87	22	25.3
34.	Lao People's Democratic Rep.	109	25	22.9
47.	China	2,985	604	20.2
49.	Dem. People's Rep. of Korea	687	138	20.1
73.	Singapore	94	15	16.0
75.	Philippines	236	36	15.3
86.	Republic of Korea	299	39	13.0
100.	Indonesia	550	62	11.3
113.	Thailand	500	53	10.6
118.	Cambodia	123	12	9.8
126.	Malaysia	219	20	9.1
139.	Japan	480	34	7.1

Source: IPU, 2005

Box 3.1 Thailand's position in the Gender Empowerment Index 2005

Women's empowerment in Thailand is trailing behind that of many other countries. Published every year in the UNDP Human Development Report, the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is an index that combines women's participation in politics, their representation as managers in the private and public sectors, and their income as compared with men. Thailand ranks only 63 out of the 80 countries included in this index, as shown in the table below (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Gender Empowerment Index 2005, selected countries

Rank	Country
Top 5	
1	Norway
2	Denmark
3	Sweden
4	Iceland
5	Finland
East and South-East Asian countries	
22	Singapore
43	Japan
46	Philippines
51	Malaysia
59	Korea, Rep. of
63	Thailand
69	Mongolia
73	Cambodia
Bottom 5	
76	Turkey
77	Egypt
78	Saudi Arabia
79	Bangladesh
80	Yemen

Table 3.5 Women cabinet ministers, 1976-2005

Period of Government	Women ministers
1976 - 1977	2
1979 - 1980	1
1988 - 1990	1
1991 - 1992 (*2)	1
1992	1
1995 - 1996 (*3)	3
1997	1
1997 - 2001	2
2001 - 2005	3
2005 -	2

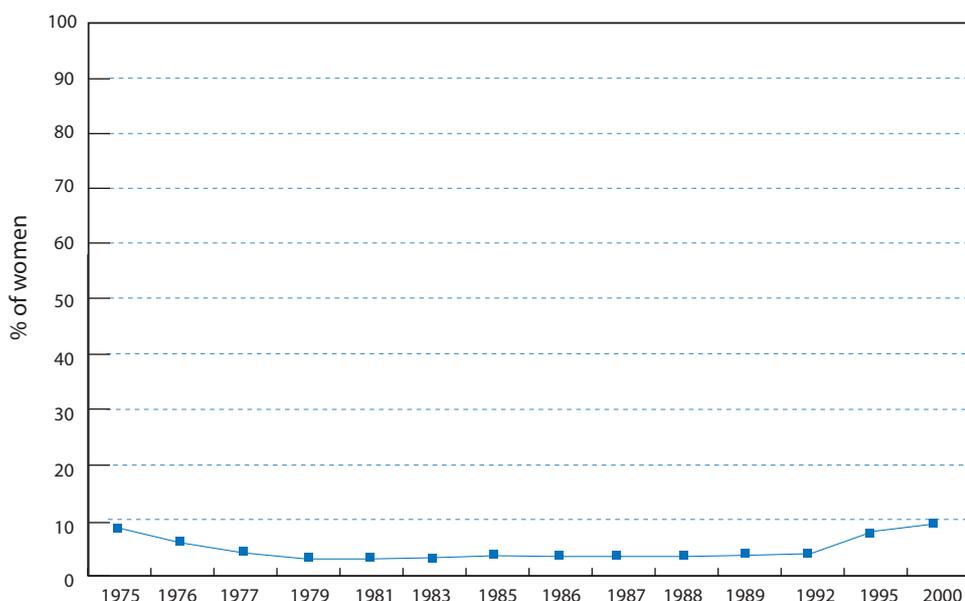
Note: * Represents the number of short-lived administrations over that period

Women senators

Until the 1997 Constitution, senators were not elected but appointed by the Government. The new Constitution, however, provided for elections to the Senate and in the 2000 elections for 200 senatorial positions the voter turnout was 70 percent – the highest figure in the Thai democracy's 68-year history. Out of 115 female candidates 20 were elected (17 percent); of the 1,417 male candidates 180 (13 percent) were elected. This resulted in the highest ever proportion of women in the Senate, though still only 10 percent (Figure 3.2).

A number of these women have taken prominent roles since being elected. Ms. Maleerat Keawka, a senator from Sakon Nakhorn Province, provides a good example. Currently, she chairs the Thai Women Parliamentarian Caucus. Ms. Maleerat Keawka is a social activist and has been a strong advocate for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights. She feels that although there are still too few women to form a critical mass, they have nevertheless been able to take a prominent role on

Figure 3.2 Women in the Senate, 1975-2000



Source: NEC, 2005

a number of key issues. She herself, for example, has spoken out on the draft law on domestic violence and on the trafficking of women and children, and Ms. Malinee Sukhawejworakit, a senator from Nakhon Sawan Province, has been prominent in national discussions on bird flu. Ms. Rabiabrat Pongpanit, another female senator from the Northeast is also a strong advocate on women’s rights. She argued for women to have a right to be ordained as Buddhist monks. These senators will end their term in 2006. However, they will be able to play important parts in supporting women candidates in the next senatorial elections and in helping those who are elected.

Local elections

The situation of women is even worse at the lower levels of government. This may partly be a legacy of earlier discrimination since it was only after 1982, following the Local Administrative Act, that women were allowed to stand as heads of villages and sub-districts. Nevertheless, more than 20 years later the proportions are still very low. In 2004, of sub-district heads only 2.4 percent were women, and of village heads only 3.3 percent (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Women elected to local, municipal and provincial administrations, 2004

	Total number	% of who are women
Provincial Council Members	2,322	4.8
Municipality Council Members	10,167	6.6
Sub-district Heads	7,263	2.4
Village Heads	61,344	3.3
Sub-district Administrative Organization Board Chairpersons	6,725	3.8
Sub-district Administrative Organization members	127,594	6.7

Source: Gender and Development Research Institute, 2005

Table 3.7 Local political election in Bangkok, by sex, 2002

Election	Candidates			Elected		
	Women (%)	Men (%)	Total	Women (%)	Men (%)	Total
Bangkok Metropolitan Council	42 (15.6)	227 (84.4)	269	10 (16.7)	50 (83.3)	60
Bangkok Sub-district Councils	137 (14.7)	792 (85.3)	929	30 (11.5)	230 (88.5)	260

Source: Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2004

The figure of women's participation in local Political Election in Bangkok is much better than that of the municipal and provincial administrations. In 2002 Election of the Bangkok Metropolitan Council (BMC) and Bangkok Sub-District Councils, women candidates made up of around 15 percent. However, only 16.7 percent and 11.5 percent were elected in BMC and Sub-District Council respectively (Table 3.7)

Why so few women enter politics

The low number of women in politics in Thailand reflects a long tradition in which women have looked after the household while public matters have been taken care of by the heads of households – typically men. In the past this would also have been affected by women's inferior levels of education. Nowadays, however, women's standard of education is more or less equal to men's so this can no longer be considered a barrier – certainly there should be no difficulty in finding 250 women sufficiently qualified to serve in the national parliament.

General social attitudes

However, the historical legacy and the cultural barriers remain. Some of these reflect public attitudes towards women who in the media and elsewhere have often been stereotyped as weak, indecisive, emotional, dependent and somehow less productive than men. Culturally, some people still seem to prefer men to hold positions of power and view women as second-class citizens. This applies not only just to men but also to women. One woman politician reported that it was bad enough to be opposed by men on women's issues, but worse to be opposed by women. She lamented: "When will women win the hearts of fellow women?"

Potential women politicians can also be held back by the attitudes of their families. Many still believe that a woman's primary responsibility is to the household and that she is only free to do anything else once she has fulfilled this task. As one female Tambon Administration Organization member put it: "I am lucky to have been able to enter the public world. I have my family to thank. They allowed me to enter the candidacy, saying that I have always fulfilled my role as a good wife and mother". Another woman village leader reports: "My children did not want me to participate in village activities, saying it was a waste of time. My husband did not give me any support either, but at least he did not forbid me."

As this suggests, women themselves may also be affected by such attitudes: often they have automatically and unconsciously assumed that it is their role to follow men and as a result lack the confidence to step forward on their own. Women may also be discouraged because politics appears to be a dirty and corrupt business in which they would prefer not to participate.

Attitudes of politicians and political parties

The low rate of participation of women in politics also reflects the fact that political leaders have little awareness or understanding of gender issues, or of the importance of promoting women in politics. However, women's progress is not hampered just by the attitudes of male politicians. Women politicians too have been known to stand in the way of measures that would improve the status of women. Women politicians may also help reinforce the stereotypes as they perform their duties. As one female politician explained: "I have to pretend to be weak or stupid to elicit people's sympathy so that they do what I want them to do. We cannot issue a direct command, as men do, since our society and culture will not accept it."

Practical difficulties

As well as having to overcome social attitudes, women also face a number of practical difficulties. One abiding issue is the shortage of time. Many women are still likely to be burdened with household and family responsibilities that will reduce the time and opportunities they need to build the key relationships and a political base within their communities. Once elected, they will also find that men often hold meetings and negotiations at night making it difficult for women with families to attend.

Adding to a shortage of time is a shortage of money. Even if women have the right education and experience they will not be able to achieve their political goals if they do not have sufficient funds to run elections or to participate fully in community and social events. Unlike men, who have established networks and routes for entering politics, many women also not know how to begin.

Why Thailand needs more female politicians

The main reason why there should be more women in politics is to fulfil women's rights to equal representation and power at all levels of public life. A low level of political representation not only denies this right but also hampers the achievement of gender equality generally and puts Thai women at a serious disadvantage. Village council meetings, for example, will often decide on who should benefit from new resources or from opportunities for training on new farming technology. If women do not have a say, they are likely to be excluded.

It can also be argued that increasing women's representation would also improve the quality of decision making generally to the benefit of women, men

and children. At the local level, for example, while some might want to concentrate public investment in areas of interest to them, such as building new roads and communications infrastructure, others, usually women, may be concerned with the health and education of children and, therefore, be more interested in social investment. A study on success factors of poverty policy implementation shows that, in the case of the village revolving fund, the poor in a village where there are more than five women members on the village revolving fund committee are 1.6 times more likely to be able to borrow from the fund than in a village where there are less than five women members on the committee. Women also tend to be more aware of gender issues, and of the ways in which public policies and decisions have different impacts on men than on women.

Women also tend to have closer linkages than men with community networks. So women who are elected to local or national politics will tend to be better informed than men on the needs and priorities of their constituencies – and know where resources could best be allocated – and thus can play key roles in coordination and facilitation.

Positive developments

Women's participation in leadership roles of major political parties in 2003 was quite low. Only the Thai Rak Thai Party had women who held positions in their Administrative Committee, or as Advisors and Heads of Advisory. In the former the Chat Pattana Party, women held 14.3 percent of the Administrative Committee and 4.2 percent as Advisors (*Table 3.8*).

Political parties in Thailand have yet to develop coherent strategies on gender issues in general and on women's

Table 3.8 Leadership in major political parties, by position and sex, 2003

Party	Admin. Committee			Advisors			Head of Advisory team			% of women
	Women	Men	% of women	Women	Men	% of women	Women	Men	% of women	
Thai Rak Thai	2	29	6.5	1	26	3.7	2	32	5.9	5.4
Chat Thai	7	52	11.9	-	13	0	-	9	0	8.6
Chat Pattana	5	30	14.3	1	23	4.2	-	-	0	10.2
Democrat	4	43	8.5	-	6	0	-	-	0	7.5

Source: summarized from Thailand's Combined Fourth and Fifth CEDAW Report, Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2003

representation in particular. Nevertheless, there have been positive developments – many of which have been in response to pressures from women's organizations. The Gender Development Research Institute, for example, prior to the most recent elections has organized 'Political Party Platforms': forums that give people the opportunity to question political leaders on their party agenda and their plans to improve the status of women.

The Thai Rak Thai Party

When the current governing party, The Thai Rak Thai Party, was formed in 1997, it said that it would aim for 30 percent representation of women. Although it has not achieved this, it has made progress. The Thai Rak Thai Party says that it chooses candidates not on the basis of their sex but on how hard they have worked in their constituency as well as on their likely appeal to the voters, based on a polling system.

Prior to the 2001 elections, the party conducted successful 'women in politics' training across all regions for potential women candidates. Partly as a result of this between 2001 and 2005, the party increased its number of women MPs from 5 (2.0 percent) to 43 (10.6 percent). Another encouraging sign is that a woman has been appointed Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives – the first woman to hold this position.

In addition, the party has started to establish a women's wing. This consists of the 38 directly elected women MPs and five from the party list. Over the next four years, according to an influential party member, they aim to ensure enforcement of the laws related to women and children and to build up a safe and secure society for young people and families.

The Democrat Party

The Democrat Party has also declared its determination to increase the number of women representatives. It has established a women's advocacy group to organize a series of informal public forums in many different places from university lecture halls to public markets. The aim is to encourage people to understand that political issues

are part of their daily life and to raise party and public awareness on gender issues. The women's group also coordinates with other sections of the party to support different types of community women's groups such as those promoting income-earning activities. The party also has programmes for young people to try and change their attitudes about gender from young age.

For the first time the Democrat Party has appointed a woman as Director of the Party: Dr. Pusadee Tamthai, a party-list MP in the previous parliament. The party has now established a quota of at least two women in the 11-member executive committee for each branch to help women enter the decision-making levels of the party. Women members of local branches are also expected to work with women's groups in their areas and encourage them to participate more actively in the political process, whether as campaigners or candidates. For the most recent election the highest woman on the party list was in seventh position and was allocated a seat. The other women on the list were much further down.

Thai Women Parliamentarian Caucus

The Women Parliamentarian Caucus (WPC) was established in 1993 but previously only served as a space in which women MPs and senators could get to know each other. In recent years, however, especially following the last two elections in which the political process has become more structured, women from both the government and opposition parties have come together under the WPC to discuss ways to support women in politics to generally improve their status and to increase public awareness on democracy and women in politics.

The new group of women MPs from the recent election has a mix of the old and new schools of politics. They appear to be willing to accept new ideas and cooperate more across parties and concerned agencies. The WPC has also organized meetings to discuss plans to support women in the 2005 local elections and for the elections to the Senate in 2006.

Box 3.2 Thai people want more women in politics – opinion poll results

Most Thai people believe that Thailand does reasonably well in gender equality and could soon have a woman prime minister. Nevertheless, a sizeable minority still do not approve of opening up more opportunities for women – thinking that they are not suited for politics and senior civil service. These are the main findings of a large-scale opinion poll conducted by Bangkok University and the UNDP. The poll covered a sample of 6,000 people and was conducted in both urban and rural areas across the country.

Thai people want more women in politics. Nearly eighty-five percent of Thais believe that a woman could be a good prime minister for Thailand. Nearly seventy-five percent believe that Thailand would be better off if more women are promoted to executive positions in civil service. The same proportion believes that Thailand would be better off with more women in parliament.

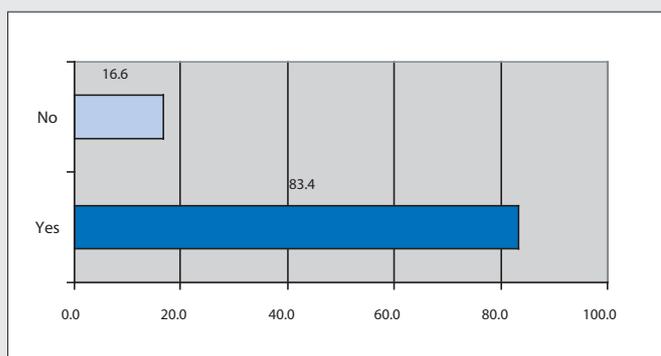
People also seem somewhat optimistic about the prospect of having a woman prime minister in the not too distant future. Sixty-four percent think that it is likely that Thailand will have a woman as prime minister in the next 10 years, whereas nearly eighty percent think it is likely to happen within 20 years.

People also seem satisfied with what is being done to further promote gender equality. More than seventy percent agree that the law and Constitution of Thailand provide equality between women and men. Less than thirty percent express dissatisfaction with the government’s efforts to promote gender equality in public life.

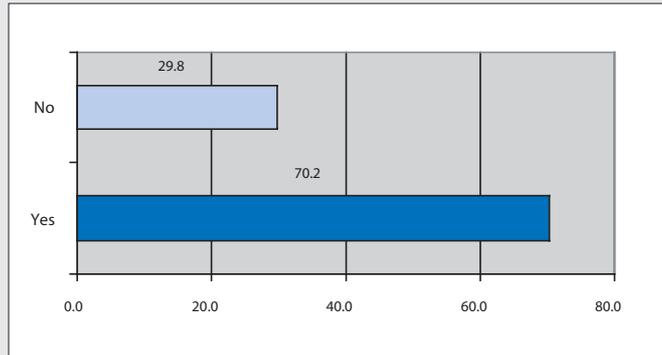
In contrast, a sizeable minority of Thai people display discriminatory opinions about the role of women in politics. Nearly thirty percent say that if they were given the choice between equally qualified male and female candidate for public office, they would choose the man. The poll also shows that over thirty percent of respondents do not believe women are as capable as men in taking decisions, and over one-third do not believe women are good at problem solving. More extreme still, nearly twenty percent of people do not believe that women with equal qualifications should have equal opportunities to occupy senior civil service positions.

Finally, and somewhat puzzling, the opinion poll shows a seemingly misinformed view of the state of gender equality in Thailand. Nearly seventy percent of Thai people believe gender equality has already been achieved in politics. This is in stark contrast with the fact that less than 10 percent of parliamentarians, only two ministers, and one lonely governor, are in actual fact women. More public debate and awareness-raising about the low participation of women in politics are obviously needed.

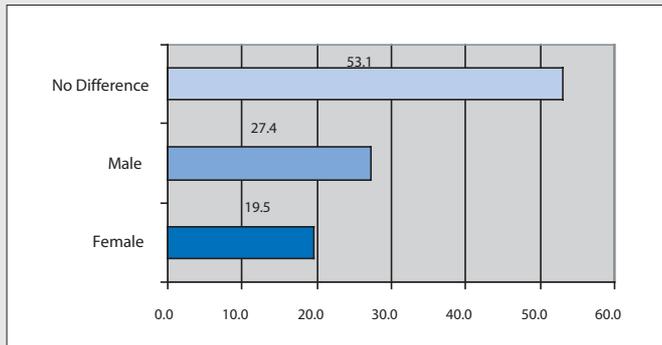
In your opinion, do you think a woman could be a good prime minister for Thailand?



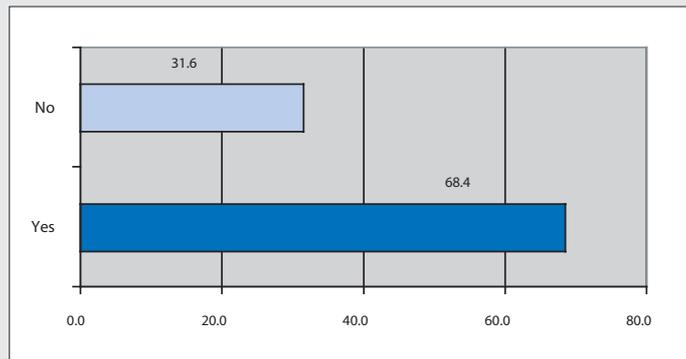
In your opinion, do you think Thailand will ever have a female prime minister?



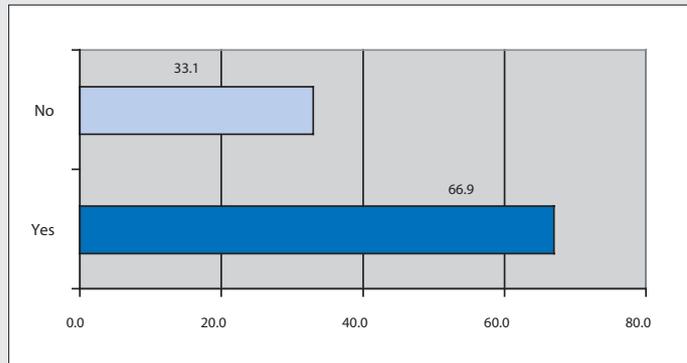
If you have a choice between a male and female political candidate with equal qualifications, would you more be likely to vote for:



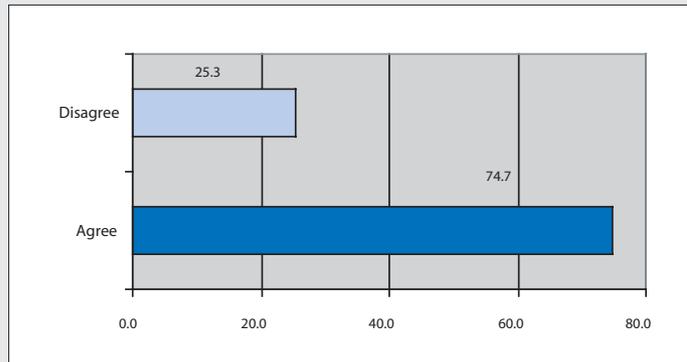
In your opinion, are women and men equally capable of making good decisions?



In your opinion, are women and men equally capable of solving problems?



Would having more women in executive positions in the civil service be good for Thailand?



Source: Bangkok University and UNDP, 2005

Women can take the lead

Thai women could make a much stronger contribution to public life. But it is clear that this will not happen until the society as a whole starts to change its attitudes towards women, and the Government and political parties make deliberate efforts to invite women to join their ranks and ensure that they have the appetite and the capacity for public office. How this can best be achieved is the subject of the final chapter.

Equal opportunities for women in public life – The way forward

4

In recent decades Thai women have had access to better healthcare and education and have played a crucial part in the country's remarkable achievement in human development. But in critical areas they still face cultural and social barriers, especially in government administration and politics. If Thailand is to meet its 'Millennium Development Goals-Plus' target for gender equality, more needs to be done to promote and protect women's right to equal participation and representation in public life.

Thailand's swift achievement of most of the Millennium Development Goals is a testimony to the hard work of the Thai people and to the determination of both the Monarchy and the Government to move the country forward. But, as this report has demonstrated, Thai culture has yet to catch up with these changes. In many ways it continues to treat women as second-class citizens destined to play a subordinate role in the family, in the community, and in politics.

Changing these perceptions and prejudices will not be easy. It will first and foremost require not only strong leadership from the Government, but also commitment by the country as a whole – the media, the business community, non-governmental organizations and civil society at large. Some quick results can be achieved through immediate changes in public policies. Other actions might take years or even decades to bear fruit. But in any case, changes must start now if the next generation of women are to reach their potential, enjoy their human right to political participation, and play their full part in the nation's future.

The National Women's Development Plan 2001-2006 set an ambitious target to *double the proportions of women in the national parliament, in local government bodies, and executive positions in the civil service*. This target was subsequently included as one of Thailand's Millennium Development Goals-Plus targets endorsed by the Cabinet of the Royal Thai Government in June 2004. It is now clear, however, that time has run out and this target will not be achieved by the end of 2006. Prompt action is therefore needed to accelerate progress towards the

realization of women's political rights in Thailand and rapidly move the country in the right direction.

The Government, civil services, male and female politicians and advocacy groups, media and the public at large, all need to come together in a collaborative effort to speed up progress towards gender equality in public life. The following are recommendations for action that emerged during the active consultation process leading up to the production of this report.

Priorities for the Government: Strengthening leadership

Changing attitudes and perspectives is inevitably a gradual process. The Government must show leadership, elicit consensus and mobilize broad commitment from the society as a whole. This report recommends the following priorities for Government agencies in speeding up progress towards gender equality in public life:

- *Implement the Women's Development Plan* – The current and future Women's Development Plans need to be taken seriously, implemented and monitored. Through the Chief Gender Equality Officer system, the Government should demand that all agencies develop the corresponding detailed plans and guidelines. It should establish a system for monitoring their activities and holding senior officials accountable.

- *Follow the Constitution* – To fulfil the Constitution's provisions for equal rights and gender equality, the Government should accelerate the necessary revisions of laws and regulations, including setting tough targets and deadlines and establishing rigorous mechanisms for enforcement.
- *Research* – At present Thailand conducts relatively little research on gender issues, qualitative or quantitative. If gender equality is to be achieved sufficient funds should be allocated for research on gender issues. Researchers will need to investigate gender issues, specifically by looking at different perspectives and experiences of men and women. The findings will reveal and highlight cases of persistent discrimination. Dissemination of such data through the media and other channels available can demonstrate the untapped potential of women and encourage them to enter public life.
- *Balance committees* – All government committees should have both men and women to ensure that issues concerning women are included and taken into consideration in the committee's activities.
- *Sensitize civil servants and employees in the private sector* – the Government should insist that all enterprises, be they public or private, provide their workers with gender-sensitive training. This can come in the form of cross-sector collaboration. The government might be the driving force that provides guidelines and information to be passed on to the media
- *Strengthen roles of Chief Gender Equality Officer (CGEO) and Gender Focal Points (GFP)* – The Government should strengthen the role of the CGEO and GFP that have been appointed in all public agencies. All agencies need to be held accountable for making sure that this system works and that those who occupy these posts are given the necessary support and means to carry out their functions.
- *Create gender-sensitive educational system* – The Ministry of Education should make sure that all teachers (both in public and private schools) go through the necessary training that address gender issues and have capacity as well as materials to devise interesting and challenging lessons that bring the issues home to children. Civic education in schools should also have a strong gender component, ensuring a commitment from the younger generation to promote the role of women in politics.
- *Allocate sufficient funds* – Under the newly restructured system, the Government has upgraded the National Commission for Women's Affairs and to the Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development (OWAFD). It has provided funds to promote gender equality and women in public life (both in politics and administration) through this office. But to meet the third MDG-Plus target, much more funding is still needed. The money should also be allocated to different advocacy groups and political parties to strengthen women's participation in politics and administration.

Priorities for the civil service: Promoting female administrators

Thai women are underrepresented at the higher levels of civil service. While this may reflect societal factors that discourage women to apply for the top jobs, it is also the result of men preventing women from reaching decision-making positions. Thailand has committed itself to meet gender equality goals set at the international level, in particular the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). As party to this convention, Thailand is bound to do its utmost to correct serious imbalances within the ranks of its own civil service. Necessary action includes:

- *Sensitize policy makers* – Policy makers must be made aware of the importance of gender equality and of Thailand's international commitments and legal obligations.
- *Sensitize new recruits* – All newly recruited civil service officials should receive gender equality training in their job orientation.
- *Balance promotion and evaluation committees* – All promotion and evaluation committees for high ranking officials must consist of both male and female members.
- *Use role models* – The civil service should take advantage of those women who have made it to the top – offering them opportunities to talk to different departments about their experiences. Such women should also be encouraged to advise their younger colleagues – explaining how they have overcome obstacles and balanced their family lives with their careers.

- *Foster mutual support* – Each governmental organization should encourage and fund a women's association or women's union to create opportunities for women to share their experiences and discuss common problems. The association could invite experts to talk on gender and employment and explain how other countries with good records on gender equality have dealt with issues such as sexual harassment and the need for childcare in the workplace.
- *Build capacity* – Introduce capacity-building and training programmes targeted at women to strengthen their potential and career opportunities.

Priorities for politicians and advocacy groups: Opening up the political system to women

Ensuring higher proportion of top women administrators should in principle be easy, since most of the actions required are under the control of the civil service. Getting more women elected to public office, however, is a much more complicated challenge. For one, women need to become more interested in politics. They must be encouraged to join (local or national) political activities or to run for public offices. Barriers to women candidates need to be overcome within the structure of political parties. Then, last but not least, voters need to vote for women. At each stage, the Government, political parties, and individual politicians must be willing to work harder and to do much more to promote the participation of women in politics.

Getting women interested in politics

Advocates of gender equality including women politicians, former or current, can play an important role by convincing women that politics is not something for men only. Women politicians need to:

- *Identify the issues* – Women politicians must build their own political identity and agenda around vital issues.
- *Count the cost of silence* – Advocates and female politicians must demonstrate that the lack of female voices in political arena is having a negative impact on Thai society and means that many issues directly affecting women are being neglected.
- *Highlight the opportunities* – Advocates and female politicians must also demonstrate to the public the improvement female politicians have been able to

bring despite low representation. One example is the successful fight for maternity leave. Political parties and others can support this by gathering and publicizing information on successful track records of individual female politicians.

- *Offer space for debate* – Advocates and female politicians must provide opportunities for people, especially women, to engage in public discussions on political issues.

Recruiting more women candidates

Women need to be aware not just of Thailand's international commitments and legal obligations to promote women in public life but also of the potential benefits for women as voters, campaigners or candidates. To do this, political parties need to:

- *Develop gender policies* – All parties need to formulate policies on gender equality that signal to women their party's commitment to offering equal opportunities to both sexes. The Government and women's advocacy groups can assist with this by organizing seminars for party leaders.
- *Use women politicians as recruiters* – Women MPs can actively reach out to local women's groups to explain their party's policies. At the same time they can identify potential activists and explain how they can get started in politics.
- *Balance constituency candidates* – Parties should try their best to move towards equal numbers of men and women as constituency candidates. They should also distribute male and female candidates evenly across the more and less winnable seats.
- *Balance the party lists* – Parties can encourage women by ensuring that party lists have at least as many women as men, and that women have an equal share of the top positions.
- *Offer concrete assistance* – Provide women candidates with the necessary financing, coaching and training.

Together with the above mentioned, the OWAFD and other women's advocacy groups and networks should cooperate more with local women politicians and women's groups to identify and assist local women leaders who are interested in participating in politics. The OWAFD has been working with field officers from other ministries to reach out and provide information to women leaders. The Local Women's Political Network

was established and received training. Local women politicians need more support if they are to increase their number in the Tambon Administrative Offices.

Demonstrating that women are effective campaigners and representatives

Many women may feel they lack campaign skills. At the local level, women candidates should be able to look for support from many different sources; for example, from women's groups, and community leaders. At the national level, much of the support can come from the parties who should:

- *Establish activist networks* – Women politicians can bring women together into different groups and networks. From such groups and networks women can get advice on how to become involved and overcome obstacles they have in common.
- *Show ways to deal with men* – For the foreseeable future women politicians will also need training on how to survive in current male dominated environment. When trying to overcome male prejudice, they need advice and support from experienced people. The consultants can include other women working in politics, business, academics, and NGOs.
- *Support women's campaigns* – Parties, women's networks and national machinery should ensure that they provide women with essential support during campaigning – offering, where necessary, a coach who can offer consultation.
- *Support women representatives* – The parties, the Women Parliamentarian Caucus, OWAFD and women's advocacy groups will need to provide additional support for women representatives – showing them how to take on issues, how to work in committees, how to draft laws, where to get help on specific issues, and most importantly how to survive and be effective in the currently male-dominated political environment.

After having been elected representatives, women should be able to rely on a support and training network to ensure that they can continue to work effectively and sustain their public role. This will enable them to serve as role models for other women candidates, recruit new candidates and put pressure on the party leaders to promote gender equality.

Ultimately the voters will decide whether or not they want women to represent them. But they can only do so if they have enough women to choose from and have confidence in those who appear on the ballot papers. Eventually, many of these gender barriers should disappear, and it will become as common to vote for a man as a woman. Until then Thailand will need to rely on its political leadership, on women's groups, and particularly on today's small band of women politicians, to demonstrate that the country needs women in prominent positions, to both fulfil their rights to equal representation and to enrich public life with their distinctive experience and skills.

Priorities for the media and the public: Engendering fresh attitudes for the next generation

Shifting cultural attitudes is never easy. The current generation of Thai men and women has been brought up, knowingly and unknowingly, to expect certain types of behaviour and to accept attitudes and practices that denigrate and suppress women. These attitudes are not set in stone; people change; cultures adapt.

These changes have to start within the family. Thai parents need to treat boys and girls in a more equal fashion emphasizing that they have the same rights and duties – and equal capacities and potential. To do so, however, they should also be able to rely on a more supportive environment – from the media, the schools, activist organizations, the Government, civil society, and the Thai public. Steps taken can be as follow.

Screening out stereotypes

Thailand's media can take the lead in presenting a more honest and realistic picture of women. Rather than resorting to stereotypes (of women being non-rational and emotional) that have been used for years, they should now be able to present a more balanced picture. They should explore what Thai women are really doing today and what they are capable of doing. Producers of news programmes, documentaries and articles can highlight women's involvement in political, social and community issues and also take advantage of an under-used pool of talent by opening up more opportunities for Thai women as directors, producers and presenters. Producers of dramas and soap operas can also play an important role in correcting women's images by portraying women in a more contemporary and positive light. This may require more effort and creativity but it would also make for more convincing and engaging dramas.

Starting at school

Children learn what society expects of them from their teachers, as well as from their fellow students and from their homes. Unfortunately, many teachers unconsciously reinforce gender discrimination in the classroom by treating boys and girls differently and expecting different things from them. Instead, teachers need to reflect on how they teach and to seek ways to make a more positive contribution to gender equality.

Teachers can also encourage more gender-balanced behaviour at home – showing that household chores are the responsibility of all members of the family, and not just of girls or women. They should also explore difficult issues such as domestic violence, and do so in ways that children can relate to and understand, while also explaining how such behaviour reflects an imbalance of power between men and women.

More generally, the courses and examinations for teachers should include gender sensitivity training so teachers can transmit values of gender equality to others. If teachers are to do this effectively, they will need support from textbooks and other teaching aids that are gender-sensitive and make deliberate efforts to counter gender stereotypes. These materials will challenge both teachers and pupils to think in new ways.

Women's networks

Many of Thailand's existing achievements in gender equality have resulted from pressure from women's

advocacy groups. These existing groups mostly were formed by professional women who used their skills and education to lobby the Government (at different times). But many women are also forming groups at the community level, for example, groups coming together for income-generation schemes or offering support to families affected by HIV/AIDS. In the rural areas, women's groups could also be encouraged to open centres and shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence. Such places not only will provide safety but also counselling and advice. Support groups of this nature can also unite to form national networks to advocate change on specific issues and on the rights of women in general. As such women will have a stronger voice in public affairs.

A manifesto for men

Gender equality cannot be achieved without changes in the attitudes and behaviour of men. The Government, the media, the education system, advocacy groups, researchers and the public must insist that issues related to gender are not only 'about women' but also about the relationships, interactions and power imbalances between men and women. They will, therefore, need to demonstrate to men as well as to women that time has changed, and that it is no longer acceptable or 'manly' for men to dominate women. Specifically, men should be made seriously aware that violence towards women demonstrates their weakness, not their strength. Having more women as partners and colleagues in public life will enhance not only the quality of workplaces, but it will also pave the way for a balanced development that will eventually benefit men and women, boys and girls.

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