

Women's Studies in Thailand

By
Virada Somswasdi¹

1. Backdrop of Women's Studies Programs in Thailand

Women's issues started to be seriously discussed in academic institutions after the 14th October 1973, the political incident that sparked the democratization movement in Thailand. Being under the influence of Marxist school at that time, topics of discussion among women's groups revolved around the subordination of women, class struggle, and cultural oppression. The short-lived trial period of democracy ended in 1976 with the bloody coup d'etat, and subsequently, political activism and discussion were either prohibited or put under surveillance.

Women's Studies has received increasing attention from academics since the United Nations designated 1975 as International Women's Year, with the objective of promoting equality between men and women and encouraging women's participation in the development and maintenance of world peace.

Parallel to this, the Thai government included the Women and Development Program (WAD) in the National Economic and Social Plan, underlining women's roles as mothers and homemakers.

During the United Nations Women's Decade 1975-1985, more attention was paid to women's economic, political, and social roles and capabilities. As a result, member states were requested to set up national machinery for the advancement of women. Thailand responded to this in its Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan, which took place from 1982-1986. It was at this time that the Thai government designated women as a special target group and began to adopt a Women In Development (WID) approach.

Since then, there have been eight Women's/Gender Studies programs established in state and private universities scattered throughout three regions²:

Three units are in Bangkok, including:

- **Chulalongkorn University**, Women's Studies Program at the Social Research Institute, established in 1981 as an official research program; it was recognized as an official "Women and Children Unit" in 2001
- **Srinakarinwirote University**, Prasarnmit campus offers a major elective in Women's Studies in the Faculty of Education Masters Program in Adult Education; the Songkla campus has established a "Project on Centre for Research and Women's Development for Southern Rural Areas"
- **Thammasat University**, Women and Youth Studies Program, established in late 1986, under the administration of the President's Office

¹ Virada Somswasdi is the founder of the Women's Studies Center and currently the Chair of the Graduate Program in Women's Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.

² The Gender and Development Studies at the Asian Institute of Technology is an Asian regional program, please see Annex.

Three units are in the north:

- **Chiangmai University** (Chiangmai), Women's Studies Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences, established in early 1986; the official status endorsed by the government as announced in the Royal Gazette was in 1993. Lanna Women's Studies at the Faculty of Education was established in 1990 as an unofficial project with an objective to develop a Women's Studies curriculum at the graduate level. Its past activities included training for rural women leaders on local politics and research on women and child labor in agriculture. The current activities are limited to research.
- **Naresuan University** (Pitsanuloke) first established as "Women and Children Studies Centre". Later changed to "Gender Studies Program", established in late 1997, under the administration of the President's Office
- **Payap University** (Chiangmai), Women's Studies Program, established in 1984, under the administration of the President's Office, currently chaired by Assistant President in Academic Affairs, having Dr. Sangrawee Anantapanit as the Secretary.

Two units are in the northeast:

- **Khon Kaen University**, the first Gender Studies Centre at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, established in 1983, Parnna Waikakul is the incumbent Chair. The Women's Northeast Centre for Women's Development, has been established at Faculty of Management in 1994, Mattana Samart is the current Chair.

Yet, in 1995, the M.A Program in Social Development at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has offered an elective course on Women's Roles in Development. In 1998, the Department of Social Development Management has been set up and offered elective required courses on Women and Development, Women and Environment Development and Women and Politics in the BA program

One is in the south:

- **Prince of Songkla University**, established in 1985 as Centre for Research and Women's Development to research, development database, and training, the official status has yet to be approved.

Scope of work

Other programs also offer some courses on Women's/Gender Studies. The Women's Studies Program at Payap University offers "Social Integration and Masculinity and Femininity", Introduction to Women's Studies, and "Women and Society" in the Department of Sociology. Payap University has a plan to set up an undergraduate degree program in Women's Studies. It is now at a preliminary stage of preparation, and there is of yet now concrete timeline for its completion.

Nonetheless, the majority of the above mentioned institutions do not have official status or regular programs of study. Some do not have their own staff or office premises. Their activities revolve around research work in relation to women's/gender issues, occasional short-term training, and forum on emerging women's issues.

It is noteworthy that a few programs include youth/children in their titles, in order to include research in that area. The rationale is basically to win support from the male dominated powers that be. This is due to the fact that the study of youth/children's issues is always more favorable than that of women issues, which are often considered by the patriarchal frame of thinking as harmful to the family institution. Women's /feminist perspectives are seen as polarizing the unity of male/female citizenship and thus society as a whole. Another rationale for joining women's and youth/children studies may be that the concerned parties perceive them as naturally inseparable topics.

This paper will present in detail the two main programs at Chiangmai University and Thammasat University where Master of Arts Programs were established in 2000 and 2001, respectively.

2. Profile of Women's Studies Programs in Thailand

A. Thammasat University: Blessing from the Top³

The Women and Youth Studies Program was established in 1986 through a special policy of the President of the University that aimed to create an institution for Women and Youth Studies. The Program operates hand in hand with the Women in Development Consortium in Thailand (WIDCIT), which was established in the same year, with generous support from the Canada International Development Aid (CIDA).

The creation of both programs marked the beginning of Thammasat University's academic mission to open new fields of study, which now enjoy clear and distinct academic status. The work of the Women and Youth Studies Program is comprised of four aspects: (1) curriculum development, (2) the promotion of research, (3) social and academic services, and (4) the resource center.

Thammasat University was not able to establish Women and Youth Studies Institute according to original plans due to a lack of government permission to establish new offices. Nonetheless, the Women and Youth Studies Program and Graduate Volunteers Center are successful in offering a Women's Studies Masters curriculum as of 2001.

The program emphasizes education on youth and families by giving special interest to promoting creative and egalitarian gender roles and relationships, and by instilling awareness in youth of their roles and importance in the development of society. According to program literature, the program's basic goals are formed with respect to the student population, who regardless of gender, are now more openly than ever involved in the demand for human rights, freedom, and dignity. With much confusion caused by rapid changes in society, the program emphasizes the necessity

³ Parts of information are translated from Graduate Volunteer Center, Women and Youth Studies Program, Thammasat University, **Student Handbook 2003: Thammasat Women's Studies.**

of relying on academic analysis to develop understanding and solutions to address current issues.

Thammasat University's Women and Youth Studies Program is dedicated to coordinating theoretical knowledge with practice to stimulate the development of a society that is creative and egalitarian with respect to gender relations. The Program Committee stresses the importance of a blend of indigenous knowledge and outside scholarship. In addition, the Committee is aware of the role and importance of spirituality in creating peace and happiness at all levels of society. Despite the importance of this, there remains a disparity between men and women's opportunities for spiritual development, which closes women off to opportunities for spiritual education and practice through structural discrimination. For these reasons, one of the original and on-going activities of the program is to rally for religious institutions' awareness of the importance and necessity of supporting women to attain equal opportunity for spiritual education and practice for both personal and social development.

It is understood that the then prominent Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, an expert in spirituality and Buddhism, prepared the statement above. She was ordained as a bhikkuni early in 2003 and plays a significant role in advocating for legal reforms to allow women to be ordained.

Thammasat University Women and Youth Studies Program Objectives:

- To serve as a resource for information and as a center for the coordination of the University's work in Women and Youth Studies
- To promote and support Women and Youth Studies education and research
- To provide academic services, disseminate information, and organize activities to promote awareness of Women and Youth Studies for personal, community, and social development
- To work cooperatively and promote collaboration with other agencies both nationally and internationally to enlarge the network and support the work of other Women and Youth Studies programs
- To locate funding sources promoting work in Women and Youth Studies

Structure of the Women's and Youth Studies Program:

A committee and advisory board has been set up to oversee the work of the Program, with Assistant Professor Malee Pruekpongswalee, who was the first Chair of the Program as the current Chair, Associate Parichat Valaisathien, Dr. Chalidaporn Songsampan and Dr. Chaiwat Bunnag as Deputy Chairs, and with Dr. Thitiporn Siripan, Assistant Professor Boonjira Toengsuk, Dr. Pawadee Tong-Uthai, Assistant Professor Sitanon Chatroopracheewin, Dr. Janjira Iammayura and Mrs. Darunee Woonnatee as members of the committee.

Objectives of Thammasat University's Master of Arts Program in Women's Studies⁴

⁴ <http://www.tu.ac.th>

As described in the Thammasat University website, "Women's Studies is a new social science discipline that aims to understand the power relations between men and women. The field of Women's Studies explores how these relations affect the degree to which each gender contributes to the creation, control, and change of social and cultural systems they belong to, recognizing that gender is in turn, affected and constructed by these same systems. The scope of Women's Studies is, therefore, interdisciplinary in nature; for example, the various aspects of this power relation include economic, social, political, health, educational and philosophical dimensions. As a result, Women's Studies places emphasis on questioning, debating and challenging these power relations in order to better understand, for the purpose of changing the underlying social structures in an effort to create and realize justice for women and men from different races and classes.

In this respect, the objective of the Master of Arts Program in Women's Studies is to produce post-graduates who have acquired knowledge and understanding in the concepts, theories and perspectives that allow them to effectively address the need for equal and fair gender relations. Furthermore, the program provides students with the know-how to conduct research on and provide and analysis for problems concerning various dimensions of gender relations. The aim of this research is to provide a foundation for fundamental transformation in outlook that could lead to the formation of a democratic society based on gender balance and real equality in economic, social and political opportunities.

This is a special program in which classes are held in the evenings and on the weekends. The tuition fee is thus higher than that of a regular program.

Curriculum: Students must complete the total requirements of 39 credits both in Plan A and Plan B.

Plan A requires course work and thesis

Required courses	15 credits
Elective	12 credits
Thesis	12 credits

Plan B requires course work and individual research project.

Required courses	15 credits
Elective courses	18 credits
Individual Research Project	6 credits

Required Courses

Students in both Plan A and Plan B are required to study the following five courses (15 credits)

- Introduction to Women's Studies
- Feminist Theory
- Feminist Multiple Research Methods
- Women's Studies Practicum

Elective Courses

- Non-mainstream Feminist Thought
- Women's History and Feminist Analysis
- Body, Gender and Sexuality
- Masculinity
- Women, Law and Politics
- Women and Economics
- Women, Environment, Science and Technology
- Women, Arts and Culture
- Gender and Social Policy
- Gender and Planning
- Women's Movements in Comparative Perspectives
- Special Topics in Women's Studies
- Independent Study

Women's Studies and Youth Studies Thesis Seminar Project

- Ethics project to develop gender roles and relationships
- Youth project to develop the quality of life and society
- Training project to disseminate information on The Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
 - Curriculum development project for administrators to support gender roles and curriculum for training Center staff to coordinate work with respect for gender equality

Enrolment Profiles

Master	Female	Male
Year program commenced Year 2001	38	5
Year of highest enrolments Year 2001	38	5
1998	-	-
1999	-	-
2000	-	-
2001	38	5
2002	29	6
2003	31	5

Graduate Profile

Masters	Female	Male
Year of highest no. of graduates Year 2003	2	-
1999	-	-
2000	-	-
2001	-	-
2002	-	-
2003	2	-

Current Faculty Profile

Full-time staff	Female	Male
Ph. D	-	-
Masters	1	-

Bachelors	-	-
Other	-	-
Part time and/or visiting staff ⁴	Female	Male
Ph. D	14	1
Masters	14	5
Bachelors	-	-
Other	-	-

B. Chiangmai University: Efforts from the Ground-Up

After more than a decade of advocating for women's concerns through personal capacity, in 1986, Virada Somswasdi, an associate professor of law, was given a green light from the Associate Dean in Academic Affairs of the Faculty of Social Sciences to set up the Women's Studies Program (WSP) with the mandate to bring in funds from outside for research on women's issues. She saw an opportunity to institutionalize the efforts to advocate for women's concerns, and thus accepted the offer and negotiated for a "free hand" to set up a working group as a body of the Women's Studies Program Committee.

The first group of committee members included Virada Somswasdi as the Director, with the following members: Shalardchai Ramitanondh and Jammaree Pitakwong of Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Benchavan Tongsiro of Department of Economics, Veerawoot Vadhanayon and Kobkun Rayanakorn- law professors of Department of Political Science, and Jintana Soonthorntham of Department of Business Administration.

The "free hand" given by the Faculty of Social Sciences to the WSP also meant that the Faculty was free from any obligation to allocate funds to support activities organized by the Women's Studies Program. In other words, the unofficial Women's Studies Program was started up without support from the Faculty or the University, except for a tiny space for three desks.

Support and Objectives:

As of 1986, the Women's Studies Program, has secured financial support from the following partners: Asia Foundation, Ford Foundation, International Development Centre (IDRC) of Canada, Norwegian Association of Women's Jurists (NAWJ), Frau An Stiftung, Heinrich Boell Foundation, Toyota Foundation, Himalaya Foundation, Global Fund for Women, British Council, the Population Council, Rockefeller Foundation, Women and Children Network (Japan), and Thai Cement Foundation. Through those funds, the WSC has been able to pursue its objectives, which are:

- To promote women's perspectives
- To encourage study, research projects, and collection of information relating to women's issues
- To establish a source of data and information about women
- To create an ongoing academic exchange on women's issues
- To create a liaison with other governmental and non-governmental organizations in working towards the development of women
- To encourage local capacity building with women at various levels

Activism:

Kicking off a symposium on women's current issues in 1986, the Women's Studies Program introduced its coming to life to academic circles in Thailand.

The Information Center, established in 1987, is an excellent library with strengths in social sciences, gray literature, in-house research, and a clipping service, with a total of approximately 14,000 publications in its collection. The Information Center has been assessed by users as the best of its kind in Thailand. It disseminates news and data via the web site www.soc.cmu.ac.th/~wsc, through the Women's Studies Newsletter, through English Language Newsletter, and through a weekly Thai radio program entitled, "Not the Hind Legs of the Elephant." (This title refers to a Thai saying that equates women as the hind legs of the elephant, implying their roles as followers).

Starting in 1989, the WSC continues to conduct leadership training for rural women and female politicians, Women's Studies research training, and paralegal training for rural women and participate in the women's movement lobbying for women's rights.

Resource persons are drawn from various faculties of Chiangmai University and elsewhere, such as Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Mahidol University, the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Silpakorn University, Sri Nakarinvirote University, Khon Kean University and Ubon University.

In 1992, the Women's Studies Program moved into the Women's Studies Building constructed with funds from the Norwegian government through the coordination of Norwegian Association of Women's Jurists (NAWJ). The physical presence of Women's Studies has thus emerged.

Seven years after its establishment in 1986, efforts to win official support started to bear fruit in August of 1993, when the Women's Studies Center was officially recognized as a new department under the Faculty of Social Sciences. It is the first Women's Studies Center in the country to receive official endorsement from the government.

Through its work, the WSC has attempted to address three specific issues from feminist perspectives: law, human rights, and development.

In 1996, the Paralegal Project Building was built under the sponsorship of the Norwegian Association of Women Jurists and Frauen An Stiftung.

It took the Women's Studies Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences seven years to receive official endorsement from Chiangmai University and the Thai government, and another seven years to pass all hurdles and launch Thailand's first Women's Studies Masters Program in 2000.

The WSC is currently supported through a combination of grants, with approximately 80% of revenue from external sources and 20% from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Chiangmai University. However, with the recent Thai - Lao Scholarship Program on Gender and Health Equity, the percentage of financial sources may be changed to 90:10

The Women's Studies Masters Program seeks to address the needs of NGO workers, government officials, students and academics who wish to expand their knowledge of women's issues. It also serves as a site for the cultivation of Thai Women's Studies knowledge, as students and teaching associates are expected to relate their life experiences and the evolving Thai women's movement to feminist theory and praxis worldwide.

The WSC pioneered the development of an institutional base for Women's Studies in Thailand. Nonetheless, a gendered understanding of male and female roles remains limited both in the public and among policy makers, who tend to equate Gender and Women's Studies with radical (and Western) feminism. Funding for Gender Studies or Women's Studies is thus limited largely to non – Thai sources. Neither the National Research Council nor the Thailand Research Fund, principal sources of publicly funded research on social issues, includes specific provisions for Women's Studies. Although in the course of more broadly focused research, both may fund research of interest to women, this constitutes more of a happy coincidence rather than a reliable and consistent source of long-term support.⁵

The WSC has been carrying out Women's Studies Research Project since 1989. This is a nationwide grant program directed at junior researchers from universities, governmental organizations and NGOs for studies that explore gender issues in Thailand. After the training, the project provides a number of grants to successful research trainees.

Over ten years' time, the WSC has published thirty-six research papers covering a broad base of topics including domestic violence, prostitution, trafficking in women, reproductive health and rights, women and political participation, women in the environmental movement, women and the media, gender in Thai language, gender construction and patriarchy within ethnic groups, reproduction of patriarchal ideology and tourism, women in community - based networks, and women and market integration.

3. Positioning Women's Studies within Academic Forums

The WSC focuses on supporting and strengthening the women's advocacy movement, and on building a new generation of people who are committed to women's causes and development. These goals are articulated through the following projects.

A. Paralegal Training

The Project entitled "Paralegal/Feminist Legal Training for Rural for Rural women in Northern: Monitoring on the Constitution and Research" was first funded by the Ford Foundation in 1989 and has continued under various other sponsors.

The Paralegal Training Project targets rural women who are nominated for their leadership roles at the local level. Nominations come from government agencies,

⁵ Ekasingh, Benchaphun and Suwannarat, Gary (2002), *Evaluation Report: Activities of the Women's Studies Center, Chiangmai University*, ChiangMai: Thailand., p. 8

NGOs, and paralegals who have completed or are near completion of the 3- year training. Training is carried out periodically over a three-year period (in 2-3 day sessions), and selected "graduate paralegals" are invited to participate. Training include (1) seminar-type training, principally lectures by academics in law and political science and practitioners working on constitutional, political and women's issues, along with exchange of experiences among trainees, (2) study visits to communities where women activists have made a difference in local community affairs, (3) study visits to Bangkok - where women meet Parliamentarians, members of the Human Rights Commission, and other relevant government and non governmental agencies, and (4) follow-up community visits by WSC staff, who collaborate with paralegals to address legal and political questions in their communities.

The Project has been implemented for over ten years, with four groups of paralegal trainees. During this time, the WSC has successfully implemented a shift from focus on specific laws to the broader framework of Thailand's 1997 constitution and its implications for women.

The Paralegal Training Project specifically promotes the empowerment and support of rural women to take an equal role with men in the political process and the building of a new pool of people committed to Women's Studies and causes. It has introduced a feminist legal perspective to rural women leaders. The Center's greatest impact has been to enhance the understanding and skills necessary to use political mechanisms to achieve social justice. Participation in the training and related activities has also developed a new sense of agency among paralegal trainees. They are willing to speak out in public meetings, to tackle controversial issues, and to contact government officials to redress grievances. A few have undertaken training of younger women, emphasizing the importance of reaching out to the younger generation to achieve fundamental social change.

The Project curriculum emphasizes the significance of constitutional protection of women's human rights. It has established and strengthened a network of rural women's groups and has introduced policy intervention strategies, which form a base for a strong women's human rights movement at the grassroots level, bridge gaps between academic institutions and grassroots women's movement, and influence policy in women's human rights protection.

Through the project, the WSC has trained over a hundred rural women leaders from 17 provinces in northern Thailand. In 2001 the group formed the Women's Studies Paralegal Network to expand and strengthen training at the community level, and to undertake long-term empowerment and networking activities.

B. Women's Studies Research Program

The Women's Studies Research Program is a nationwide grants program directed at junior researchers from universities and NGOs wishing to explore gender issues in Thailand. A short training on research methodology is provided, and WSC identifies academics at Chiang Mai University or, for researchers based elsewhere in Thailand, institutions closer to the respective researcher to supervise the research.

After an initial two week training, each research trainee is asked to develop a small proposal, to be funded by the WSC. Each proposal is supervised by 2-3 advisors from either Chiang Mai University or other affiliated universities. Most advisors come from the Departments of Sociology and Anthropology, the Department of Political Science, and the Faculty of Economics of Chiangmai University. A few came from Bangkok's Chulalongkorn, Mahidol and Silpakorn Universities. The majority of projects are field oriented the rest were secondary data reviews.

The above-mentioned activities have in many ways created opposition and brought criticism from conservatives in the academic administration, who accuse the WSC of playing "the fashionable game" of Westernized women's rights advocacy.

Consequently, a very minimal budget from the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Thai government through Chiangmai University was allocated to the WSC. It took the WSC ten years, starting in 1996, to gain support for the first staff salaries for one administrator officer and in 1997 a janitor. Currently, half of the staff fleet of 14 people is under the Faculty of Social Sciences and Chiangmai University salary books. Notwithstanding, the WSC has to offer a top-up for staff to be able to make ends meet, and this makes fund raising necessary. Consequently, the Foundation for Women, Law and Rural Development has been set up to supplement the WSC work and budget.

Hence, the WSC deems crucial a long-term presence in an academic institution to address women's concerns and pursue feminist ideology in both theory and practice. It has struggled hard to keep activism going and to make its feminist academic presence felt not only at Chiang Mai University but also in other spheres.

One of the objectives of the WSC is to serve as a center of Women's Studies research, promoting training and dialogue to build knowledge and policy-related propositions for planning for the development of women to government and non-government organizations. To achieve this, the operating objective is to establish a Masters Degree Program in Women's Studies. Undoubtedly, the WSC faced many obstacles at different levels before the complex procedure of official approval was completed.

Gradually, support from the Faculty of Social Sciences has increased in recent years. Credit can be given to the incumbent Dean who comes to the position with a vision and understanding of the difficulties encountered by the WSC over the years.

4. Theorizing and Actualizing Women's Studies Within the Global Stream of Patriarchy

In 2000, the Women's Studies Center at Chiangmai University launched a Master of Arts in Women's Studies Program, the first of its kind in Thailand. It aims to

address the needs of NGO workers, government officials, students, and academics who wish to expand their scholarship on women's issues.

It also serves as a site for the cultivation of Thai Women's Studies knowledge, as students and teaching associates are expected to relate their life experiences and the evolving Thai women's movement, to feminist theory and praxis worldwide.

The Women's Studies Masters Degree Program has the following objectives:

- To identify and develop a body of Thai Women's Studies scholarship by drawing on the history of women's activism and research in Thailand, students' life and professional experiences, and faculty members' involvement at various levels with the various Thai women's movements of the past 30 years;
- To promote serious academic attention and exchange of various aspects of Thai women's issues by emphasizing the multidimensional aspects of Thai women's experiences of class, gender, ethnic and age discriminations;
- To enhance the collaboration between feminist academics and activists in the teaching of Women's Studies in Thailand to ensure that new Thai Women's Studies scholarship responds to the various needs of women's groups in Thailand.

The Program is interdisciplinary and stresses both academic excellence and effective feminist activism. It is attentive to the structure of power and its manifestation in Thailand's historical, political, economic and cultural contexts. It emphasizes students' self-reflexive learning via exchanges with faculty members.

Students may choose between (1) thesis and (2) fieldwork and independent research, both with a course requirement of 42 credits.

- Twelve credits of required courses, consisting of Theoretical Analysis of Women's Studies, Feminist Philosophy, Comparative Studies of the State of Women's Studies, and Women's Movements in Thailand.
- Eighteen credits of elective courses, to be chosen from the following tracks:

Yet in practice, students are encouraged to take more than 42 credits by enrolling in additional elective courses and sitting in on relevant courses in other departments.

Politics, Law and Policy Studies Track

- Human Rights and Women's Rights,
- Gender in Development,
- Feminist Legal Studies
- Women and Politics
- Women and Public Policies
- Advanced Tutorial in Politics, Law, and Policy Studies
- Special Topic Seminar in Politics, Law, and Policy Studies

Anthropology, Sociology, and Economics Track

- Women in Socio-cultural Perspectives
- Women, Family, and Kinship

- Women and Economy
- Women and Labor Force
- Women in Agriculture
- Women and the Environment
- Advance Tutorial in Anthropology, sociology, and Economics
- Special topic Seminar in Anthropology, Sociology, and Economics
- Gender, Family and Development

Humanities Track

- Women in Mass Media
- Women and Literature
- Women and Thai History
- Women in Mass Media
- Women and Arts
- Women and Religion
- Advanced Tutorial in Humanities
- Special Topics Seminar in Humanities

Science, Health, and Reproductive Rights Track

- Women, AIDS, and Social Transmitted Diseases
 - Sex Crimes and Violence Against Women
 - Gender and Sexuality
 - Women and Health
 - Women's Reproductive Rights and Family Planning
 - Women, Science, and Technology
 - Advance Tutorial in Science, Health, and Reproductive Rights
 - Special Topics Seminar in Science, Health, and reproductive Rights
 - Selected topics in Women Health and Nursing III
- Thesis, fieldwork, and independent research counts towards and additional 12 credits

Enrolment Profiles

Master	Female	Male
Year program commenced Year 2000	8	2
Year of highest enrolments Year 2000	8	2
2000	8	2
2001 (closed)	-	-
2002	6	1
2003	4	1

Current Faculty Profile

(Number and qualification of academic staff teaching Women's / Gender Studies full or part-time)

Full-time staff	Female	Male
PhD	-	-
Masters	1	-
Bachelors	-	-
Other	-	-

Part time and/or visiting staff	Female	Male
PhD	22	5
Masters	26	4
Bachelors	-	-
Other	-	-

The M.A. Program has been embracing young enthusiastic NGO workers, researchers, students and practitioners from Thailand the neighboring Laos People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) by providing scholarships secured from national and foreign foundations in Asia, Europe and U.S.A.

A. The Lao- Thai Scholarship Program on Gender and Health Equity⁶

With increasing incidences of HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual violence and violence against women in the Greater Mekong sub-region, various international organizations and some national institutions have gradually acknowledged that the situation is of utmost and urgent concern.

Over time, studies, debates, critiques and dialogues among public health experts and women's groups have brought to light the nature of gendered power relations, gender inequity and the violation of human rights as critical factors contributing to poor sexual and reproductive health and well -being. Nonetheless, this realization is not yet grounded in the mainstream institutions or majority establishments, and least of all within the general public.

Understanding and support for gender equity in relation to health equity will not come by accident; it is rather dependent on the adoption of new public health perspectives, political will, gender-sensitive policies, adequate resources, systematic, and well-defined and long term planning for comprehensive measures.

Sexual and reproductive health programs, and development interventions and activities that have begun to include women as target group, often do so in a top-down fashion, and mostly in terms of their functionality as mothers and wives rather than focusing on women on their own terms. Women are thus not empowered and their perspectives remain overlooked. Too often health strategies have maintained the status quo or have even led to a worsening of women's position. Without bringing about fundamental changes, women remain marginalized and vulnerable to sexual health hazards.

In the health field, as in other sectors of society, there is growing recognition that gender mainstreaming in policy and services is necessary to achieve gender equality and improve women's sexual and reproductive health. As defined in the Economic and Social Council, gender mainstreaming means "...the process of

6. The Women's Studies Center, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiangmai University, **A Proposal and Summary Statement on Lao-Thai Scholarship Program on Gender and Health Equity**, presented to the Rockefeller Foundation, June 2003.

assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal sphere so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."

The WSC realizes that for gender mainstreaming to be efficient and effective, gender perspectives must be introduced along with gender education, gender data collection, gender research and gender analysis. Consequently, programs to develop gender specialists and advocates who can work in health and in other sectors are urgently required.

This need is particularly acute in Lao PDR, where limited information and understanding of gendered power relations and gender equity often prevent provision of gender-sensitive development (including health) programs to effectively respond to the specific needs of women and men. This remains true despite the fact that the Lao Women's Union (LWU) has been given the mandate from the government to carry out most of women's development work, with a special focus on reproductive and sexual health as it affects the socio-cultural, economic and political position of women.

Considering the importance of work with Lao PDR on issues of gender in relation to sexuality and sexual health, in 2001 the WSC initiated collaboration with the support of the RF "Gender, Sexuality and Productive Rights and Health in the Mekong Sub-region Project.

Under this project, the Translation/Adaptation Publication Series on Gender, Sexuality and Reproductive Rights and Health in Thailand and the Mekong Sub-region which will launch the first three books in the latter part of 2003. Other project components include the Fellowship Program in which two students from Laos, a woman officer from the Vientiane based Gender and Development Group CUSO and a male officer from the Committee for Planning and Cooperation, National Economic Research Institute, have attended the M.A. Program in Women's Studies since June 2002.

The other component of the project is a Seminar Series on current events that impact the formation of gender power relations, sexuality and reproductive rights and health in the Mekong Sub-region. The two Lao students under scholarship of the Rockefeller Foundation have participated in every seminar that has taken place. A regional seminar was held in June 2003 on "Learning about Lao Women's Identities through Literature" with the Lao prominent writer and intellectual, Mrs. Duangduen Boonyawong" as the key note speaker.

Through various contacts and activities held with civic groups and NGOs in the past years, the WSC has experienced great interest from the young generation in Laos PDR to apply for the M.A. Program in Women's Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiangmai University.

Given that the majority of Lao Women's Union, health ministry and other governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations personnel are not yet equipped with theoretical framework or empirical data to promote gender equity in sexual health, the WSC perceives crucial provision of training in a systematic and solid program like the M.A. in Women's Studies provided by the Women's Studies Center (WSC) at Chiang Mai University, to strategically placed individuals in Lao PDR. This is especially the case, considering that WSC has developed a special focus on gender, sexuality and sexual health in its program.

The National University of Laos is currently preparing to establish a curriculum program on Women's Studies to accommodate these needs, but still lacks the necessary human resources. It is thus appropriate and timely for WSC to help train personnel for these significant educational efforts. Consequently, in 2003, the WSC offered a full scholarship to a lecturer from the National University of Lao PDR and a male medical doctor whose groundwork is concentrated on HIV/AIDS. It is hoped that they can contribute to curriculum design upon their graduation.

Lao PDR is at a turning point in adjusting its economic and social structure; Thailand has found herself in a much more modernized setting. The program will, hence, offer students from both countries a forum where a learning process for all will take place to reflect on both the negative and positive effects of development and health intervention on gendered power relations in both countries.

The fact that Laotians can understand the Thai language and the close historical linkages between Lao PDR and Northern Thailand further facilitate exchanges and make WSC a suitably placed resource center for the development of a gender-sensitive approach to sexual health in Lao PDR.

The program continues the course set in the previous phase, directly complimenting the strategies set by the Rockefeller Foundation for the work area "Engendering Sexuality in Southeast Asia" by strengthening research capacity, enhancing training capacity and setting a public agenda on gender equity in sexual health.

In particular, the WSC has established a Lao-Thai Fellowship program on gender and health equity to develop the necessary expertise and promote networking among students from Lao PDR and Thailand with the following objectives:

1. To respond to the urgent and unmet need for human resources capable of promoting gender equity in sexual health in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.
2. To develop and enhance knowledge and human resource capacity on gender, sexuality and sexual health in Lao PDR.

In sum, to attain the program goals, the following integrated activities are being undertaken:

1. Scholarship Program aiming to select eight strategically placed individuals to participate in the M.A. Program in Women's Studies at Chiangmai University, with a particular focus on gender, sexuality and sexual health;

2. Participation of Lao students in national and regional seminars on sexual health issues.
3. Field visits of students (both Lao and Thai), coordinators and professors in the M.A. Program in Women's Studies to organizations in Thailand and Lao PDR working on sexual and reproductive health issues
4. On site seminars on relevant topics such as gender mainstreaming in the provision of sexual services; safe sex negotiations and sexual power dynamics; and trafficking in women.

B. Reaching out to the Public

Apart from the regularly updated website sponsored by Chiang Mai University, the WSC weekly radio program "Not the Hind Legs of the Elephant" has been given air time, free of charge, from two state radio stations. The WSC Women on Film Project has been carrying out for over the past several years for students and the public to view films through a feminist perspective. The WSC also collaborates with both government and private agencies to disseminate information, academic works, and experience in women's issues by holding meetings, seminars, and lectures, through academic publications, press releases in Thai and English, and through mass media.

The Center regularly organizes seminar on national and regional women's issues; for example, there were 32 events held in 2002 and 23 up to November of 2003. Among those topics are for instance⁷:

- "Homosexual Activism",
- "Gender",
- Women's Struggles in Thai Society",
- "Universalism, Relativism, and the Current Controversy in Feminist Anthropology",
- "The Women's Movement in Australia",
- "Woman Leaders and the Human Rights and Environmental Movements",
- "The Global Economic Environment"
- "The Contributions of Women's Studies to Thai Society",
- "Women of Burma"
- "Flowers of the Night: Living Commodities",
- "Stepping on Lotus Flowers: Women's Space in Buddhism",
- "In Her Own Words: Voices of Refugee Women",
- "Women's Lives at Risk: Violence Against Ethnic Women in Burma"
- "The Identity of Women in Research: Perspectives from Those Who Are Researched",
- "Human Trafficking",
- "Young Female Factory workers in Bangkok",
- "The Dispossessed"
- "The Women's Crisis in Thailand"
- "Bhikkhuni (Female Monks) and the Role of Gender and Sexuality in Thai Society,"
- "Sexual Violence: Crimes Against Humanity"
- "Women and Peace"
- "Gender Equality & Sensitivity"

⁷ Women's Studies Center, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, **Annual Report 2002**

- "The Identity of Lao Women in Literature"
- "The Women's Crisis in Thailand"
- "Anti-Trafficking: Rescue or Arrest"

Representatives of the WSC attended 44 seminar/meetings as speakers/participants in 2002 and similar number of times in 2003, at the national, regional, and international levels.

C. Collaborative Programs with Academic Institutions Abroad

To develop international capacity and promote scholarly collaborations with overseas institutions, the Center operates several collaborative programs with various countries. These include staff exchanges, collaborative research, and training. Following is a list of collaborative programs:

- Women's Studies Research Training Program for the **Youth Research Institute, Hanoi**, Vietnam was conducted by the WSC in 1998. Supported by the Toyota Foundation, the training provided Vietnamese researchers with knowledge and methodology on conducting research on women's issues.
 - A project entitled "Women's Human Rights: Training of Trainers" was held in Laos in 2000 and 2001 in conjunction with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development. This project facilitated the process of experience sharing between neighboring countries, and WSC staff members were given an opportunity to learn more about the critical issues and concerns of the **Lao Women's Union** and its members.
 - The Himalaya Foundation made possible the Center's "Leadership Training for Young Women Activists," which took place in China from October 2-12, 2001. Participants were chosen by the **Shaanxi Women's Research Institute** in Xian. Trainees were exposed to the various gender issues located within the social, economic, and political contexts of their respective countries, and to those that exist in the rest of the world. In addition, trainees were equipped with gender sensitivity and analytical skills to enable them to design, develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate policies and programs which incorporate gender issues and the specific needs and interests of women.
 - The Higher Education Links Program, with support from The British Council, is a program promoting collaboration and development in Women's Studies research and scholarship on the topic of "Gender Politics of Environment and Development in Thailand" between the Center of Development Studies, **University of Bath**, and the Chiang Mai University Women's Studies Center. The program is two years and six months in duration, and began in September of 2000.
 - The WSC is involved in an Exchange Program for scholars with **Wheaton College**, U.S.A.; it participates in Exchange Programs with the **State University of New York at Buffalo** and the **University of Philippines**, and is happy to have hosted Fulbright Scholars from the **University of Washington**, the **University of North Carolina**, and **Wesleyan University**.
- D. Building up Public Understanding on Human Rights of Women: A Colloquium with the Judiciary

This project aims at promoting women's human rights education with the objective to gender - sensitize personnel in the judicial process i.e. judges and public prosecutors. The WSC together with the Foundation for Women, Law and Rural Development (FORWARD) collaborate in organizing a colloquium to share gender-sensitization approaches with personnel in the judicial process with input from feminist academics, human rights academics and non-governmental activists. The colloquium seeks to address women's human rights concepts and critical concerns as enshrined in the international as well as national instruments.

The project has been able to bring together over a hundred judges, both male and female, to participate in the serial colloquium. In the near future, target groups will be expanded to new countries in Eastern Europe wherein various levels of Thai judges will share experience and views with their counterparts on issues of women's human rights and trafficking in women.

This pioneering project will surely have a powerful impact on the long-term protection of women's human rights.

E. Collaboration with Women's NGOs

FORWARD: Foundation for Women, Law and Rural Development

activities, e.g.:

- Rural Women's Paralegal Training Program
- Feminist Research Training Project
- Seminar Program for Ministry of Justice and personnel in judicial process
- Scholarship program promoting research and education in Women's Studies

The Foundation was established to supplement the work of the WSC. It fills in where and when advocacy activism requires swift and dynamic moves within the women's movement. Its board members are drawn from the committee members of the WSC.

APWLD: Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development:

Sponsorship for women's human rights training for the Lao Women's Union in Lao PDR. Officials of APWLD work as volunteers to organize meetings throughout the Asia Pacific region, to collect data on women's issues, disseminate documents, and conduct regional training. Some committee members of the WSC sit on the board of directors of APWLD.

Women's Links: Regular open seminars are held on issues such as the status of Burmese Women, migrant workers and trafficking in women are conducted through collaboration with the WSC on a bi-monthly basis.

5. Challenges and Issues for Women's Studies Programs in Thailand

A. State Shortcomings

It has been over two decades since Thailand Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) designated women as a special target group. Yet, national gender statistics, in response to calls from women's groups and the country obligations to CEDAW, which Thailand acceded in 1985, show inferior participation and benefits to women in all aspects when compared to those of men.

Violence against women and gender inequality are witnessed publicly with the rising media reports and cases brought to the judicial process, while domestic violence remains generally considered as a "private matter," of concern only to those directly involved.

Quite often, women's human rights are violated and overlooked by the state itself, either by gender biased legal provisions and machinery or abusive and corruptible state personnel and law enforcement officials. Not surprisingly, heated debates took place during the drafting of the current constitution on the meaning of human rights and dignity, and whether they need to be stated as recognition of civil rights. The state policy on "public order and interest" has periodically overridden basic human rights including those of women.

The Ministry of University Affairs, recently restructured into the confusing Ministry of Education, had not been proactive in gender mainstreaming or education. Often times, its administration and bureaucracy actually impede development of Women's Studies program and curriculum. State universities are mainly run by males with a gender bias and male-dominated females; this is one of the main reasons why support for the official establishment of new Women's Studies programs or any advancement of the already existing Women's Studies programs is quite limited. Any progress or success shown in Women's Studies programs in state universities generally derives from the personal efforts of academics involved and the individual support of specific members of the administration.

The National Commission on Women's Affairs, established in 1989, has not been provided with sufficient resources for staffing, budget or gender education. Their work had thus been limited both horizontally and vertically. Commitment and dedication to women's development had been initiated mainly, if not entirely, by members at the policy level; actual practitioners are often unenthusiastic bureaucrats.

With such limitations, the work of The National Commission on Women's Affairs has included publications, gender sensitivity training, a Long-Term Development Plan for Women, an advisory role on the legal revision of the Labor Law to extend maternity leave, develop Laws on Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution, and an Anti-Trafficking Policy and Plan of Action. Its academic contribution to formation of knowledge on women's issues was the Women's Studies Book Project started in 1997. The Project is the production of a two book series on various issues.

The first book series addresses eight issues:

- Women and Environment
- Women and Science
- Women and Technology
- Women and Power: Masculine Writing
- Women and Psychology
- Women and Language
- Women and Literature and Contemporary Media
- Women and Buddhism

The second book series covers the following new gender issues:

- Women and Leisure Spending
- Women/Men: Domestic Sphere/Public Sphere
- Family and Never Changing Relations?
- Women and Information Technology: Theories and Recommendations
- Women and Identity
- Women and Economics

Referring to commitments to the CEDAW, the joint efforts of Dr. Saisuree Chutikul of the National Commission of Women's Affairs and that of the Secretary General, Tippawadee Meksawan, of the Civil Servants Commission Office, has made possible establishment of scholarship programs for Women's/Gender Studies in foreign countries. The program started in 1993. Ten years later, the program has awarded scholarships to 35 students for Masters and Ph.D. level study, mainly in Western countries like the U.S.A., U.K., European countries and Australia. However, the Civil Servants Commission does not provide positions after graduation; consequently, the majority of graduates have not been able to find work in institutions of their choice. Their choices are dependent on the availability of positions in certain units, and in most cases not the academic institutions that are most in need of their expertise. The majority of Women's Studies graduates have found employment in the Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs.

It remains to be seen how the newly structured Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs as the current " Office of Women's Affairs and Family Institution" will execute their duties to formulate policy and measures to enhance social security for women, as well as set up mechanisms for promoting coordination among concerned GOs and NGOs. The Office's mere name opens debate on gender roles and stereotyping. In addition, one of its functions relates to "empowerment of the family institution," which makes us wonder whether it will reinforce the existing patriarchy in the family. The Office also faces challenges around financial resources and qualified personnel to deal with escalating problems faced by women of various groups with different classes, experiences, ethnicity and ages.

Superficially, having seen some women in business and professional settings, a great number of people contend that women's situation in Thailand is improving faster than those of many societies in the region. Yet, figures and statistics can be shown to the contrary and it is even more alarming that structural violence and hegemonic sexual oppression are unacknowledged. The author considers that the contention itself is invalid and unacceptable since comparison can not be

made between two different situations and contexts. At the least, Thai society appears more progressive than that of Japan (the usual point of comparison), South Asia or the Middle Eastern societies. Should one wish to make a comparison, it is to be between men and women in Thailand, not elsewhere.

Despite the constitutional provision on gender equality, government after government fails to recognize the Women's Agenda as part of the National Agenda. The gender budget allocated in the national financial plan is consistently far below actual needs to address gender equality, women's empowerment and the protection of women's rights. Women's Studies programs in state universities have not yet gained adequate official support, if any, in comparison to their significant missions and heavy responsibilities.

Gender bias is deep-rooted and predominant in all societal spheres while the level of awareness among both men and women is still extremely low. Internalized oppression is far beyond imagination; consequently urgent work plans and strategies are badly needed.

A few years ago, the Parliament's dropping the Bill- ignoring the constitutional equal protection for men and women that should allow married women to keep their maiden names was a classic example of gender bias. It required the efforts of women's groups to file the case in the Constitutional Court. Only when the Court's decision was announced on July 2003, that the Married Women's Name Act was conflict with the current Constitution thus null, were women allowed to retain their last names (which is again that of the man of the family – i.e. the woman's father).

B. Challenges and Issues for Women's Studies Programs in Thailand

The existing two Women's Studies Programs at Chiang Mai University and Thammasat University, which have been offering the Masters program since 2000 and 2001 respectively, are still very young and fragile. The WSC at Chiangmai University, although more mature in activism and closer to the women's movement, especially that of the grassroots, is largely dependent on outside support, both financially and politically. Despite tremendous work over the past decade and being a pioneer in developing an institutional base for women's studies in Thailand, its presence often goes unnoticed even by its closest allies. The rest of the Women's Studies Programs in Thailand still in very preliminary stages of development.

Surrounded by dominating patriarchal social structures, the Women's Studies Programs in Thailand have to overcome socio-cultural, political and economic challenges on all levels. On the one hand, they are seen as units to cultivate knowledge and as academic institutions and fighters for gender equality and women's human rights to a small number of women and men. On the other hand, at times, some extremist groups brand them as agency of the state - thus enemies. Ironically enough, the state educators often see them as instigators of pedagogical insurgency. They are seen as working hand in hand with women's groups, campaigning for women's rights, such as the rights of displaced women and migrant workers and as troublemakers and saboteurs of national security and interests.

Academic life within Women's Studies programs, including discussion relating to women's issues, is seen as a reflection of attempts of the women's movement, social as well as political, to bring important issues to the attention of the public and to win support from policy makers⁸. Nonetheless, with the pressing issues of concern, academics in Women's Studies are expected to take on the roles of movers and shakers in the women's movements, outside of classes and seminar rooms. Amara Pongsapich, a prominent anthropologist from the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, asserts that "Thai Feminists are not very keen to be involved in discussion on ideology and philosophy, or even the concept of feminism. They are willing to get to action after agreeing with the rationale of the activities. Theoretical explanation has second priority to praxis."⁹ Her analysis is quite accurate. There is then a question of whether only a handful of Thai feminists/ Women's Studies academics can afford the luxury of time spent in discussing theories while women's situation is not advancing but rather back-sliding, and women remain more oppressed than ever in many aspects. The academic feminists might wish to be left alone to their lectures and conferences, but it is the student feminists/activist feminists themselves who criticize their professors' non-performing role in the movement. As it has been gradually revealed, within the context in which Thai Women's Studies and feminism are embedded, theories and praxis are not separable. In Thailand as in other third world countries, the approaches/theories available to tackle the diverse issues of various groups of women are many and integrative; there is no one potion to be prescribed as a grand cure for all ills.

The Women's Studies/Feminist scholarship in Thailand has embraced a range of feminisms from those of the Liberal, Cultural, Marxist, Socialist, Radical, Eco, Post Colonial to Post Modern schools. Forum and debates on new concepts and discourse on Post Modernism within feminist theories have been given so much space in certain academic institutions that it has raised concerns from the activist feminists about the reemergence of an "ivory tower" that is high above the ground and in the clouds. Theories seem to have priority over praxis despite a great need for the contrary.

The key issues as demonstrated by the focus of projects, frequent debates, campaigns, panel discussions and seminars held by the Women's Studies at Chiang Mai University are violence against women, trafficking in women, prostitution, women's rights, gender equality and sensitivity, sexuality and reproductive rights and health, and women in armed conflicts.

Currently, the burning issue of legalization of prostitution has at certain levels split the women's movement in Thailand as elsewhere. One approach is to go all the way for legalization and to legitimize prostitution as work. The other approach is limited to decriminalization of prostituted women and a call for state responsibility in providing rehabilitation programs and empowerment for women to leave prostitution. The end goal is to curb sexual exploitation and focus on

⁸ Virada Somswasdi and Sally Theobald, "Introduction" in Virada Somswasdi and Sally Theobald, eds., **Women, Gender Relations and Development in Thai Society**, Women's Studies Center, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, 1997. p.xxiv

⁹ Amara Pongsapich, "Feminism Theories and Praxis: Women's Social Movement in Thailand" in Virada Somswasdi and Sally Theobald Eds. (1997) p.34

gender equality and defending women's human rights. The WSC has taken the leading role in advocating for the latter.

6. Marching with the Women's Movements in the Sub-region

Thailand might not directly experience the situation of women in armed conflicts. Yet, for decades, it has witnessed the cruel impact of war on women from neighboring countries such as Burma. Numerous women, the majority of whom are of ethnic minorities, are affected from Burma's internal conflicts. The plights of trafficked and displaced women, refugees and female migrant workers, are well known to human rights groups based in Thailand but not to the wider civil society. The Thai media has not given sufficient attention or sympathy to their miseries. Media is instead used by mainstream conservatives to reiterate prejudices against those who fled Burma and are taking refuge in Thailand.

To support the campaign for public understanding on the Burma issue and violation of women's human rights, the Women's Studies Center at Chiang Mai University provides Burmese women's groups and ethnic minorities a forum for information sharing with students and civic groups on various issues from their first hand experiences about the situation of armed conflict in their country. The students and staff of the WSC participate in rallying and organizing events to attract the attention of the Thai and international media to issues of militarism in Burma.

The latest big campaign was the launch of the report on "***License to Rape: The Burmese military regime's use of sexual violence in the ongoing war in Shan State, Burma***" in May 2002. The report was the work of the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) and Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) on the effects of the continuing civil war in Burma on ethnic civilians, particularly women. The campaign was an effort to expose these issues to Thai human rights groups and media.

The report details 173 incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, involving 625 girls and women, committed by Burmese army troops in Shan State, mostly between 1996 and 2001. It should be noted that due to the stigma attached to rape, many women do not report incidents of sexual violence. Incidents may also not have reached SHRF, as information on human rights abuses in Shan State is gained from refugees arriving at the Thai-Burma border. Therefore the figures in this report are likely to be far lower than the reality.

The report reveals that the Burmese military regime is allowing its troops systematically and on a widespread scale to commit rape with impunity in order to terrorize and subjugate the ethnic peoples of Shan State. The report illustrates there is a strong case that war crimes and crimes against humanity, in the form of sexual violence, have occurred and continue to occur in Shan State.

The report gives clear evidence that rape is officially condoned as a 'weapon of war' against the civilian populations in Shan State. There appears to be a concerted strategy by the Burmese army troops to rape Shan women as part of their anti-insurgency activities. The incidents detailed were committed by soldiers from 52 different battalions. 83% of the rapes were committed by officers, usually in front of their own troops. The rapes involved extreme brutality and

often torture such as beating, mutilation and suffocation. 25% of the rapes resulted in death, in some incidences with bodies being deliberately displayed to local communities. 61% were gang rapes; women were raped within military bases, and in some cases women were detained and raped repeatedly for periods of up to 4 months. Out of the total of 173 documented incidents, in only one case was a perpetrator punished by his commanding officer. More commonly, the complainants were fined, detained, tortured or even killed by the military.

Shan women are increasingly vulnerable to rape due to the increased militarization and anti-insurgency measures in Shan State by the Burmese regime, currently named the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The number of battalions in the state has nearly tripled since 1988. The majority of rape incidents were committed in the areas of Central Shan State where over 300,000 villagers have been forcibly relocated from their homes since 1996. Many rapes took place when girls or women were caught, usually searching for food, outside the relocation sites. Rapes also occurred when women were being forced to porter or do other unpaid work for the military, and when stopped at military checkpoints.

The report also explores some of the physical and mental effects of the rapes on the survivors, who suffered not only from the lack of legal redress for the crimes, but also the lack of any crisis support. Some survivors faced blame and rejection from their own families and communities. Many of the survivors decided to flee to Thailand after being raped. However, the lack of recognition of Shan refugees in Thailand means these survivors have no protection, no access to humanitarian aid or counseling services. They are thus vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking and are in constant danger of being deported into the hands of their abusers.

Subsequent to the report on "License to Rape", the SHRF and SWAN made the following recommendations:

To the State Peace and Development Council:

1. To immediately implement a nationwide cease-fire in order to stop increased militarization and anti-insurgency campaigns in the ethnic states;
2. To begin tripartite dialogue with representatives of non-Burman ethnic nationalities and the democratic opposition on the country's political future;
3. To respect fully their obligations under international humanitarian law, including article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, to halt the use of weapons against the civilian population, to protect all civilians, including children, women and persons belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, from violations of humanitarian law;
4. To respect fully their obligations under the ILO 1930 convention concerning forced or compulsory labor (No.29);
5. To end the continuing violations of the human rights of women, in particular forced labor, forced relocations, abuse, torture, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse in detention and summary executions, often committed by military personnel and especially directed towards women who are returning refugees, internally displaced, or belong to ethnic groups or the political opposition;
6. To put an end to the causes of the systematic forced displacements of persons and the flow of refugees to neighboring countries and create

adequate conditions for their safe and voluntary return and complete reintegration, to allow humanitarian personnel safe and unhindered access to assist their return and reintegration, and to address the problems of trafficking of women and children, especially in the border area;

7. To fulfill its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by bringing national legislation and practice into conformity with these conventions, and to consider signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
8. To implement fully the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in particular the request to prosecute and punish those who violate the human rights of women;

To the Royal Government of Thailand

1. To give protection to Shan civilians along the Thai-Shan border by allowing them to cross the border into Thailand and to access refugee camps and UNHCR.
2. To allow Shan asylum seekers access to humanitarian aid agencies based in Thailand.
3. To exercise particular caution in relation to the deportation of Shan migrant workers as many are genuine refugees.
4. To not repatriate Shan women into the hands of the Burmese army.
5. The governments of Thailand and Burma should allow the international community and UNHCR to participate in any discussions, negotiations and /or repatriation programs involving Burmese migrants. Such discussions must address the root causes for the outflow of migrant workers.

To the International Community

1. To not allow political developments in Burma to act as a 'smokescreen' on the continuing human rights violations occurring predominantly in the non-Burman ethnic nationality areas;
2. To pressure the SPDC to fulfill the recommendations above, which are based on the Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/67 on the 'Situation of human rights in by Burma.
3. To pressure UN agencies and international NGOs working in the ethnic states of Burma to publicly bear witness to the atrocities being committed by the SPDC against civilians in these areas, since their silence makes them complicit in these abuses.

7. What Lies Ahead?

As discussed above, the key issues and challenges of Women's Studies in Thailand are violence against women, trafficking in women, prostitution, women's human rights, gender equality and sensitivity, sexuality and reproductive rights and health, and women in armed conflicts. These issues could also be categorized into the two overarching areas of women's human rights and gender equality with the rest as subheadings.

Following are recommended strategies and points for consideration:

A. State shortcomings:

Lack of Policy and political will to ensure gender equality as guaranteed by the current Constitution:

Immediate Strategy (with a five year timeline): as this government will be in power for another five years, unless unforeseen political incidents arise, there needs to be powerful and tactical calls from the top levels of leadership within the international community to the real decision maker at the top level of administration – the Prime Minister of Thailand himself. Calls must be made to observe the 1997 resolution of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which was adopted by ECOSOC in Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 to mainstream gender perspectives into all policies and programs in the UN system, and into that of the national structure and bureaucracy. This also means approval of the official status and strengthening of Women's Studies centers, along with provision of adequate budgets.

Middle and Long Term Strategies:

- Strengthening the Human Rights Commission as a monitoring independent body with full authority in accessing and dissemination of information on the violation of women's human rights and gender inequality. The Commission is responsible for prosecuting human rights violation cases through its own prosecutors. Members of the Commission are to be selected through a careful process with participation of women's groups and NGOs at every level.
- A special Tribunal/Court of Justice on Human Rights with full authority to adjudicate perpetrators of human rights violations needs to be established.

B. The Role of Women's Studies:

- To take the lead in women's human rights and gender equality training for state personnel, NGO workers and civic groups
- To empower grassroots women's groups
- To strategize national work plans and measures,
 - To conduct research to provide the National Commission and other relevant agencies- GOs and NGOs- with data and recommendations for further action.

Needs for assistance:

To actualize the above roles, the needs of Women's Studies Programs in Thailand are as follows:

University administration:

- University administration support is needed to endorse the official status of Women's Studies programs where necessary and to strengthen that of already existing programs through adequate budget for personnel and activities

Other government agencies:

- The Ministry of Education must fully support, not obstruct, the development of Women's Studies in every aspect
- The Office of Women's Affairs and Family Institutions will not only work with Women's Studies institutions based in Bangkok but recognize the authority of and extend its coordination with those institutions based in the field throughout the country

UN agencies:

- Referring to the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2, support from all relevant UN agencies is much needed to actualize and strengthen the role of Women's Studies (see B.) in order to effectively implement a gender-mainstreaming scheme. The UN agencies may be able to provide the resources to enable Women's Studies programs to provide training in women's human rights and gender equality, to conduct research, and to meet the need for capacity building for staff.

External Linkages:

A network of an Asia Pacific Women's/Gender Studies will be quite useful if

- Women's Studies institutions are strengthened and equipped with expertise in all areas and subjects relevant to the region;
- Regular information sharing in the form of colloquium among network members can be established
- Dissemination of information to the wider public, and relevant agencies of national, regional and international GOs and NGOs can be made
- Regular forums with relevant UN agencies is established

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