

FOREWORD

Soon after the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and the passage by consensus of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), it was clear to all advocates of gender equality and women's empowerment that for all the long hard work involved to reach agreement on the strategic objectives and recommended actions in the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform, the tougher challenges still lay ahead. Many women NGOs were formed with the explicit mandate to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the Asia Pacific region, the South East Asia Women Watch (SEAWWatch) was among the first NGO networks to be organized around Beijing follow-up.

SEAWWatch viewed itself less as an advocacy group pushing for implementation of the BPFA (although it certainly was that as well) and more as a technical group providing or sourcing the specialized rigorous and scientific support necessary for the proper monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the BPFA in the Southeast Asia region. Thus SEAWWatch projects and activities focused on key strategies such as the development of gender-sensitive indicators, training in the development and use of gender-sensitive indicators and actual application of this technology to monitoring and evaluation of specific critical areas of the Platform.

We have conducted research studies in the areas of poverty, the economy and the environment in several Southeast Asian countries. This volume studies the progress in the area of women in power and decision-making. It has not been easy finding support for SEAWWatch projects at this time of goal diffusion and donor fatigue. For this volume, we have been most fortunate to have as partner the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) whose interest in the area of women in politics and governance linked well with our research agenda. FES provided very valuable contributions to the substance of the project, valuable contacts through their country offices and the much-needed financial assistance. We thank FES for the support and partnership.

This study contributes to the various preparations for Beijing + 10. The Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing + 10 was held last June 30 - July 4 in Thailand

and attended by over 700 delegates. With the theme “Celebrating Gains—Confronting Emerging Issues”, the Forum was significant for having been held at all given limited preparation time and even more limited resources. That it drew such interest and participation among women NGOs around the region was even more significant as it demonstrated the increased capacity of regional networks to effectively collaborate and successfully mobilize. The AP NGO Forum celebrated the Beijing Platform for Action as a strategic document for women’s empowerment, human rights and development. At the same time it recognized the enormous and complex challenges still facing women in the region.

In September the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) convened the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes. With at least 47 countries represented, the meeting reaffirmed commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing + 5 Outcome Document despite some attempts to water down the Beijing language.

The main Beijing + 10 event will be at the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women on February 28 - March 11, 2005. We hope that this study of progress in women in power and decision-making in Southeast Asia will contribute data and insights as we push to confront the many remaining challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

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P R E F A C E

Are Women in Southeast Asia gaining ground in politics and decision-making today, ten years after the UN World Women Conference in Beijing 1995? The title of this book still carries a question mark. Though many improvements have been undoubtedly achieved, neither a major breakthrough toward a more equal the political representation of women and men nor a more natural design of gender responsive policies and reduction of other gender imbalances has occurred.

The year 2005 is crucial because it brings together the ten-year review of the progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, the five-year review of progress on the Millennium Declaration, and the anniversary of the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It needs to be seen whether the necessary next steps can be taken in order to make gender equality more meaningful to the majority of women who can only dream of a world free from poverty, violence and discrimination. However, the current political conjuncture seems to present more chances for setbacks than for rapid improvement of women's human rights worldwide.

The representation of women worldwide currently stands at around 15% in lower houses of parliament. The highest representation can be found in the Nordic Countries with about 40% and the lowest in the Arab States with about 7%. In Asia, it is around 15%. But the goal of gender equity is not only about statistics. We have to look beyond numbers. Which are the underlying structures and mechanisms that still present major obstacles for a better representation of women? How do women make use of power positions? The experiences in Asia show that female presidents, parliamentarians or other leaders are not necessarily more gender sensitive than their male colleagues.

This book attempts to contribute to the Asian review process of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the partnership between South East Asia Women Watch (SEAWWatch) and the Regional Gender Project of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation we were able to come up with this publication. We are happy to present to you in-depth studies of five Southeast

Asian countries and we hope that these qualitative data could complement the ongoing review processes at all levels.

Each of the country studies explains the socio-political, economic and cultural background of the situation of women and men and the drastic under-representation of women in politics and public offices. The data collection pointing out the quantitative and qualitative changes was not always easy since gender-disaggregated data are still not readily available. At the same time encouraging developments, successful mainstreaming efforts, improvements of national legislation and best cases will be introduced so that the overall picture remains less grim.

FES is strongly committed to contributing to the ongoing debate on democracy issues, gender responsive governance and mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policy areas at all levels. It is impossible to imagine the democratic development of countries without a fair and just participation and representation of all citizens. Gender equality in politics is one of the main features. Persistent advocacy and lobbying efforts by strong networks of civil society groups will be crucial for the further strengthening of democratic developments and good gender responsive governance.

FES is very grateful to SEAWWatch, to the authors of the country papers and to all those who have contributed essential information and help for the realization of this book. This book is meant for everyone who is interested to work toward a more gender-just society. A lot is left to be done in the future but nothing is impossible!

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INTRODUCTION

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted by governments at the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995 is a milestone document for advancing women's rights and equity worldwide. For the first time, the international community agreed to a comprehensive blueprint of formal commitments supporting the full development of women and their equality with men in many key areas.

The BPFA is a strong statement of political will and commitment on the part of governments that has been useful to women's movements everywhere in pushing for their political, economic and social demands. Although it does not carry the same legal weight as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted in 1979, the BPFA provides standards and concrete references for pursuing fairness and reasonableness in the relations of the sexes.

Neither women's relationship with the state nor their codetermination of the broader ambit of politics and governance was ever directly addressed by any of the 1990s conference (Antrobus, 2004). The BPFA, however, partly broke this pattern when it took up the issue of political justice for women as one of its critical areas of concern. Section G on "women and power and decision-making" focused on ways by which women's participation in public leadership and governance may be advanced and the goal of gender balance in political representation and decision-making achieved.

Nevertheless, several commitments were qualified with the phrase '*where appropriate*' (for instance, sections 190b, 190d, 190h) or were mildly articulated in words such as "consider" rather than in a stronger language such as 'commit' (for instance, sections 191a, 191b, and 191c). These qualifications reveal an international consensus underpinned by a range of positions among governments with regard the full and rapid integration of women in governing bodies and political parties.

The goal of equality between women and men in governance was expressed in relation to fairness, democracy and transformation (Section G.181). A coequal

share of males and females in governance reflects more appropriately and justly the reality that half of the governed are women. Furthermore, having women's voices and interests heard and recognized in decision-making mechanisms and processes result in a more vibrant working democracy. But more than these, the BPFA declares that women's political participation constitutes a positive move toward infusing governance itself with women's perspectives and interests, thus giving it substance and character.

Specific commitments were made to various aspects of political leadership and governance, in order to reach stated goals. Foremost was setting the goal of gender balance and taking concrete steps toward its achievement in governmental bodies, committees, judiciary, political parties, government-funded institutions, research and academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, national, regional and international organizations, as well as the private sector. The BPFA also called for the reform or creation of mechanisms, programs and processes that would remove built-in discrimination against women, ensure their representation and participation in decision-making, and build their capacity for public leadership. Finally, commitments were made on the conduct of regular monitoring of women's representation in both the public and private sectors and the widespread sharing of women specific data.

A Contested Space

The issue of political justice for women goes beyond the goal of equality between women and men in governance and leadership that is found in the BPFA. For women in the South who often find themselves in situations where democracy is adopted only in rhetoric and form, or dominated by an elite minority, and where a complex of political, economic and socio-cultural forces consistently undermine citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, integrating women into politics means co-optation into an unjust system. Questions such as, "Shouldn't our principal effort be aimed instead at challenging the state?" are raised at the local/national and global spheres. Such concerns are critically relevant for women in Southeast Asia where various forms of autocracy and elite democracy reign.

In the run-up to, during and after the Beijing Conference, women's movements from various places shared differing levels of enthusiasm for and expressed a range of concerns around the BPFA commitments to gender equality in governance and decision-making. But no one opposed it. Governance nevertheless is a contested space and women often find that there is a "dual nature" to their engagement (Taylor, 2000). Women's engagement with the state is at once critical and collaborative.

Monitoring Ten Years of the BPFA

As we commemorate the tenth year of the BPFA, we need to ask not only what have been achieved regarding commitments implemented but more so, what have been the impact of women's participation in politics on the broader women's movement. How have women who have been integrated into the institutions of power and decision-making been able to make a difference for the majority of women citizens in their country? Have gains really been made toward transforming governments and institutions to become more women friendly? Have women's entry into politics enlivened democratic governance? Interrogating all these, what knowledge and insight can be derived from the decade-long struggle to put women in positions of leadership?

The South East Asia Woman Watch, a network dedicated to monitoring the implementation of the BPFA, engaged with these political concerns through a monitoring framework anchored on the intertwined concepts "women's power and agency". The framework made it possible to interrogate three intersecting questions. How are women faring in terms of occupying positions of governance and public leadership? Are women able to exercise real power after having acquired formal power? Finally, what are the structural and institutional factors in governance and politics that constrain women's agency or their capability to make autonomous choices and decisions?

This volume contains five country studies providing a general view of women participating in the terrain of governance and politics in Southeast Asia, ten years since the BPFA was adopted. Written by activists and researchers who are closely linked with the women's movements in their countries, the volume also gives insight into the forces and processes that underlay the statistics constituting research results. Strong resemblances run through the country studies, despite their differences in contexts and research emphases. The emerging regional scenario, unfortunately, is not encouraging and point to very real and serious concerns.

Losing Numbers

Women's participation in various levels of governance has not shown any significant improvement either in terms of numbers or in the power that it wields. None of the countries came anywhere near the 30 percent target of having women in political positions of leadership which was strongly advocated by women's groups in 1995. Women's numbers in high level government positions have risen and fallen at a doldrums pace by slight margins. The numbers game has been unpredictable, with some trends appearing to signal stagnation, if not decline. Particularly stark is the Philippines case where the number of women in the Senate has dramatically dipped from one election to another. Not even the emergence of female heads of states, such as, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of

the Philippines or of Megawati Sukarnoputri in Indonesia could strengthen the numbers. The slight increase in the number of women that was noted in Thai national politics was attributed to the support for women's leadership among small and less influential political parties. The writer, moreover, reported that the bigger more prominent parties remain strongly male-dominated as they have traditionally been so.

Women, however, continue to fare better in the lower and middle rungs of the bureaucracy and in local governance, their traditional positions. A glass ceiling in the bureaucracy and in both appointive and elective positions seems to be as entrenched as ever and remains difficult to break.

Persistent Patriarchies

Socio-cultural beliefs about women's inferior status to men and their inadequacies as leaders are principal constraints on women's participation in elections and in governance in general. These beliefs are often shared by both ordinary men and women. Apart from family and school socialization, these views are actively mediated by new social authorities in the communities that promote ideological views reinforcing prejudice against women and other social groups. In Malaysia, for instance, a newly emerged religious political party went so far as to announce that women cannot stand up as candidates. Religious teaching was also cited in the Indonesian report as a factor inhibiting women from public life. Women who are able to hurdle such and make it in government and political parties only find themselves in a more constraining environment. Women leaders have to contend with the pervasive male brotherhood and some need to struggle against macho politicians who resist women's presence in politics or who mistreat them in varied ways, from promotion bypass to sexual harassment. A much publicized case of the Thai Prime Minister condoning a minister's unprofessional handling of a woman senior subordinate, exemplifies the machismo culture in government that still persists. Male privilege inside government and politics also account for the inaction by officials to women's advocacy for a clear sexual harassment policy in countries, such as, Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia.

Reforms With No Bite

The country studies highlight several constitutional and legal guarantees as well as gender and development plans that are, for various reasons, not implemented. In some cases, such as in Cambodia, affirmative action for women in politics and the bureaucracy remain at the talk-shop level. In Indonesia, the commitment made by political parties to setting a quota for women candidates and nominations, were undermined by political maneuvers such as giving male candidates the winnable areas while women were put up as candidates in areas where their parties had less chances of winning. In

the Philippines, commitment to gender mainstreaming among line agencies is rarely matched with budgetary allocations. A strong lobby will be needed to effect real changes in this area.

Lingering Uncertainty with Women in Politics

The sub-region's women's movements continue to have a dilemma with putting women in political positions as a focused strategy in a sub-region where elite democracy and/or autocratic regimes persist. While a range of different women's groups and organizations come together around advocacies for laws, regulations and programs that promote women's rights and welfare, there is less unity around supporting women candidates. Tensions exist between women's groups of the educated middle class that pursue more actively the redistribution of political power and those that work more vigorously on economic redistribution among the politically marginalized. For instance, attempts to rally women's groups behind the quota system for women in political parties in Indonesia were only partly successful while in the Philippines, a women's sectoral party was unable to sustain its base of voters and eventually lost its seat in Congress. At best, women's movements remain friendly to individual women politicians who are seen as critical allies and whose support they court behind certain policy reform agenda.

Women's Welfare, not Political Equality

Throughout the country studies, one finds the Southeast Asian governments treating women's rights almost exclusively as a welfare issue that is linked to poverty alleviation and the protection of the vulnerable. This may be seen in programs addressing poor women's practical needs and in efforts to curb the trafficking of women and girls. In many places, women's welfare is associated with the preservation and protection of the family and pursued within an ideological frame that invisibilizes the conflict and inequality between males and females and instead valorizes the "complementarity of the sexes". Some national machineries for women are instituted in ways that attach women's affairs to family welfare/development (Thailand & Malaysia) or to veterans' affairs (Cambodia). In contrast, there is less attention given to the promotion of women's political empowerment and equality, as indicated, for instance, by the long-drawn struggle of women's movements to put in place regulation that would protect women in government from sexual harassment, or in the case of the Malaysian women's movement, demands for more democratic space that guarantees the fundamental right of women and men citizens to organize for political action.

Transforming the Mainstream

The road to women's equal participation in power and decision-making in the Southeast Asian region remains as challenging as ever. In many cases, a weak

link exists between women leaders and the women's movements. Further advances in the mainstream political arena will depend on the strengthening of these links, and on the organized efforts of Southeast Asian women working together with other like-minded groups. It is absurd to think that the patriarchal state will legislate itself away. Neither will it be realized only through the efforts of women who enter the mainstream. The transformation of governance and public leadership can only be achieved through a broad and sustained struggle marked by diverse efforts, positive tensions, as well as gains and setbacks. The women's movements in Southeast Asia have traveled far, and grown from the small fragmented groups that they were more than ten years ago, to groups and networks gone much bigger, acting with a persistence that promises to continue for many years to hold governments to account and to transform. The monitoring initiative that produced this volume certainly manifests such a promise.

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POSTSCRIPT

BPFA at Risk

In the last ten years, the BPFA has provided women with a minimum political platform for asserting and expanding their rights. Women's movements, nevertheless, know that the battle to realize the commitments have been an uphill climb from the outset. In 2000, women's movements saw a very thorny negotiation of the 5-year review of the BPFA when some governments began questioning their prior commitments. In March 2005, the international community will convene in New York to commemorate the 10 years of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). For sure the women's movements will be there as well, some coming from the sub-region of Southeast Asia on which this volume is focused.

There are big reasons for the women's movements to be anxious about with this forthcoming meeting. Overall, states have become exclusively preoccupied with the issues of national growth and security such that citizen's rights, including women's rights, and democracy have become mere appendages and footnotes in formal agreements. Moreover, the prevalent state discourse on development has become more narrowly focused on a minimum agenda of the Millennium Development Goals in which women's rights is threatened with further invisibility. Furthermore, women's rights are under direct attack by states that are controlled by conservative political forces which moralize and essentialize the unequal relations of the sexes. The heightened insecurity and confusion has created a fertile ground for intolerance and increased the propensity of states for social control everywhere.

This extremely complex and threatening environment calls for supporting women's leadership and power as a challenge and alternative to male-led political constructions of the state and processes of governance. But the immediate challenge lies in the ability of women's movements to recast how women's access to public power and leadership is understood and pursued. Integral to this is the repositioning of the strategy of women in politics within women's movements that are active, dynamic and radical and which are politically interlinked with other movements and progressive forces. The promotion of women's political rights and empowerment must also be

interlinked more firmly and consistently with the struggle for people's rights and justice. At all levels, the defense of the BPFA must be made together with the defense of other commitments to human rights, justice and freedom. Only then do women stand a chance at confronting systematic backlash reaction to women's rights coming from states and other political, economic and socio-cultural forces. Only then can the BPFA vision of the women's equal access to power and decision-making make a difference for gender equality, democracy and overall transformation.

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She is also an advocate on women issues in the political arena in Phnom Penh. She is coordinator for the Gender and Millennium Development Goals in Cambodia, a project of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Since 1997, she has been active in the field of peace and non-violence in Cambodia. She worked in conjunction with the Dhammyietra Peace Walk started in 1993, when she facilitated group of concerned citizens to advocate for the writing and passing of the most liberal constitution in Asia.

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University in Bangkok. She was appointed to the board of the National Commission on Women's Affairs for two terms and served on several national committees dealing with women's concerns. She currently chairs a national committee to prepare 'The Strategic Plan for Women's Economic Security' which is expected to be submitted through the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to the cabinet for approval by early 2005.

She did research and published about several topics, such as employment, gender and development, migration and urbanization, industrialization, and social protection. She has served as consultant to several international organizations (e.g. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UN ESCAP, UNIDO, UNCTAD and ILO). She was the coordinator of UNDP/UNIFEM Gender Mainstreaming Facility in Thailand.

Dr. Pawadee is very active with both national and regional NGOs working on the advancement of women. She is a founding member of Thai Women Watch (which monitors Thailand's implementation of the UN Beijing Platform for Action), a board member of the Southeast Asian Watch (SEAWatch) and a steering committee member of the Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW, a regional NGO promoting the advancement of women).

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She has been involved in a number of major research projects on the status of women in Thailand that include, among others, the study on The Situation of Gender Equality in Thailand (Report on the Status of Women for the Fourth World Conference on Women) and A Feminist Appraisal on Income Generating Projects for Rural Women in Thailand.

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