

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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