THAILAND

Working for a Voice in the Communications Landscape

The ICT Environment and Infrastructure

How Intermediary Groups Use Communication Tools for Grassroots Women's Empowerment

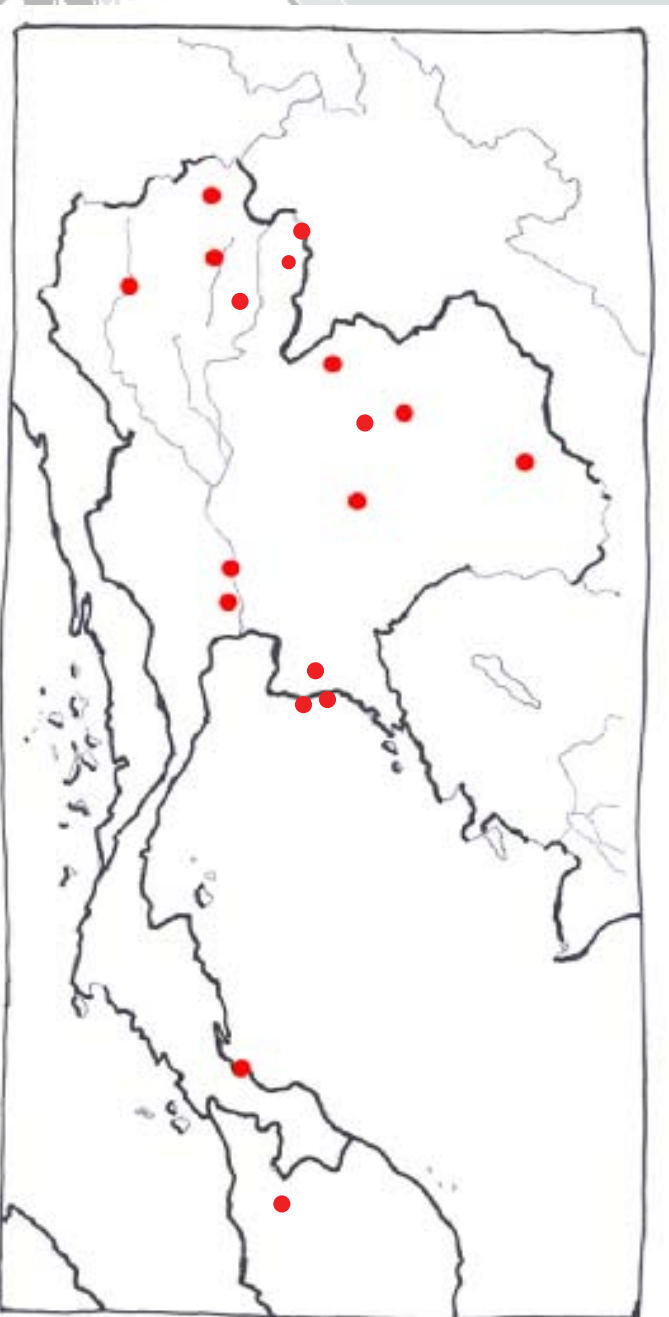**How Intermediary Groups** View Empowerment and Communication

How Grassroots Women View Communication Tools and Empowerment

"[The communication tool] depends on the situation and should suit the locality."

CENTER FOR GIRLS, THAILAND

AMNATCHAROEN
1. Amnatcharoen Women's Friend Centre

BANGKOK
2. Center for Labor Information Service and Training (CLIST)
3. Foundation For Women
4. The Women's Health Advocacy Foundation
5. Friends of Women Foundation

CHIANGMAI
6. Women's Study Center
7. Community Theater Project

CHIANGRAI
8. Center for Girls
9. Development and Education Programme for Daughters and Communities

KHON-KAEN
10. Northeastern Women's Network

LEOY
11. Sunflower Group
12. Fai-In-See Villagers Group

NAKHON RATCHASIMA
13. The Promotion of Women Status Club

NONTABURI
14. Empower Foundation

PAYAO
15. Payao Province Woman Network

SONGKHLA
16. Resource Management for the Southern Coastline Project
17. Operation for the Community and City for Better Living in the Southern Region Project of the Thai Community Foundation

THE ICT ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN THAILAND

T HAILAND has a growing economy and a population size of over 62 million as of 2002 (UNDP, 2005). By 2005, its population has been estimated at over 65 million, which makes it the 19th most populous nation in the world. In 2003, 68% of the population still lived in rural areas while 32% lived in urban areas. During the 1980s, its economic profile changed from a predominantly agricultural economy to a more industrialised one. This thriving, fast-growing economy attracted large number of Thais to the expanding industrial and services sectors. The literacy in Thailand stands at 92.6%, however, social and economic inequalities in Thailand are prevalent (Civil Media Development Institute [CMDI], 2005).

The country is governed by a constitutional monarchy, with the King as the constitutional monarch and chief of state and the Prime Minister as the elected head of government. Although the King does not possess political powers, he is a revered and influential figure who is above politics. The monarchy is respected as a symbol of national identity, and the Thai media exercises self-censorship concerning the royals (CMDI, 2005).

The Thai state has been relatively unstable in the decades following the 1932 abolition of absolute monarchy. Thai politics has been characterised by changes in government, military coups, popular protest, and bloodshed. The country has been ruled by a series of military governments throughout the 20th century, until the 1992 elections. At that time, democratic rule returned to Thailand, alongside constitutional changes in the government. However, in more recent times, there has been another reshuffling in the power dynamics when the military staged a coup against the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006. It is the 19th coup since Thailand became a constitutional monarchy and its first in 15 years. As in many of its previous coups, power changed hands without

violence or bloodshed (CMDI, 2005).

Culturally, the Thai population has a unitary identity in terms of language and religion. The country speaks and writes the same language and the country is predominantly Buddhist (95% of population). Indeed, religion, monarchy and the military have helped shape Thai society and politics. Amidst all these, the press, broadcasting media, telecommunications, ICT and other media forms have played important roles in its history. Presently, they serve as crucial infrastructures for regional economic development and as a vital means that could help unite the entire nation (CMDI 2005).

THAILAND'S MEDIA PROFILE

Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country that was never colonised by a Western country. The Thai press was born in the 19th century, a period when the literacy rate was low, and the circulation of the newspapers was largely limited to the royal court and the high-ranking bureaucrats (Karuchit, 2005). Because of the open-minded policy of the royal court, newspapers remained largely independent throughout the absolute monarchy period. These are trends that have persisted to this day. Currently, all newspapers are privately-owned (Library of Congress, 2005a), with the government forbidden by law to subsidise private newspapers. In addition, foreigners were banned from owning newspapers as a safeguard against undue foreign influence (National Centre for Research on Europe [NCRE], 2005).

Since its birth, daily newspapers have increased in number and have established a stronger role and significance in Thai society. There are 38 major national dailies, ranging from those which specialise in sensationalised news to those which focus on business and political news. Most of the newspapers are in Thai (22), while the rest are in English (2) and Chinese (2), with one paper dedicated for Muslims. The daily circulation of all these newspapers approximates over 2 million, although the actual readership is higher (Public Relations Department, n.d.). There are 4 weekly and 4 monthly political magazines. There are 1,189 periodicals, many of which are published on a fortnightly basis, with a circulation of under 4,000 (Thongpao, 1990). These periodicals are mostly in the provinces. Newspapers and magazines, however, remain to be more accessible in the urban areas and among the literate elites (Siriyuvasak and Wiwattananukul, 1999). The largest circulation among Thai-language newspapers is *Thai Rath* (Thai State) with a circulation of 1 million (as of 2002) and a readership of about 25 million (NCRE, 2005).

The economic boom in the 1990s led to a further expansion in the operations of existing publications and an increase in the number of magazines, as well as in advertising revenues. According to the 1999 survey on World Press Trends conducted by the World Association of Newspapers, there was a striking 58.9% increase in 1999 in the advertising revenues of Thai newspapers after a drop of 34% in 1998 (World Association of Newspapers [WAN], 2000).

The Thai press is presently known as one of the freest and most outspoken in the region (McCargo, 2003; Sricharatchanya, 1998). However, Thai press freedom wasn't realised overnight. Thai journalists have had to struggle through the years against the legal restraints posed by restrictive laws and regulations. When a 15-year old press-gagging law was lifted in 1991, the Thai press became free in the truest sense of the word (Sricharatchanya, 1998). The newspapers no longer had to be in constant fear of being shut down by the government for political reasons. Freedom of speech has been further guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution. During this period, no special regulations existed to restrict the press in its functions. However, media freedom was once again threatened when the 1997 Constitution was abolished by the Council of National Security governed by the military group responsible for the deposition of the Thaksin administration in 2006 (Asian Media, 2006).

The Thai press functions not only as a medium of information, but also as a watchdog whose contributions have brought about important political, economic and social changes in the country's history (Sricharatchanya, 1998). They have earned enough autonomy through the years to report and express their comments on political developments, and in the process, shape public opinion. In particular, the Thai-language press has been known to engage in aggressive exchanges with the people in power, thus contributing greatly to the demise of autocratic governments (McCargo, 2003). One of the instances when the press was successful in bringing about concrete change was demonstrated in the downfall of the Suchinda government, which resulted from the highly critical print media coverage of the military crackdown on demonstrators in Bangkok in May 1992. It is interesting to note, however, that many of the big newspapers in Thailand such as *Thai Rath* and *Daily News* adopt a sensationalist approach as well (Karuchit, 2005). However, the growing sophistication of the average reader has also translated to higher expectations about the editorial quality of the newspapers (Sricharatchanya, 1998). As such, there have been increasing complaints from the public about newspapers' sensationalised reporting and biased coverage. Generally, newspapers are still preferred over radio and television when it comes to news and commentaries as they are perceived to be more authoritative in this aspect (Sricharatchanya, 1998).

RADIO

Newspapers may be more popular as far as news and commentaries are concerned, but it is still the radio that is the most accessible medium, with 95% coverage area (Siriyuvasak & Wiwattananukul, 1999). While newspapers were introduced by private entrepreneurs, the introduction of radio took on a different path. It was in 1930 when the era of public broadcasting dawned on Thailand. King Rama VII officially opened the *Bangkok Radio Station at Payathai*, the country's first radio station, which was intended

to promote education, commerce and entertainment (Ekechai, 2000 as cited in Karuchit, 2005). As of 1999, there were approximately 14 million radios, 204 AM radio stations, 334 FM radio stations, and 6 shortwave radio stations in Thailand (World Factbook, 2006). The FM stations cater mostly to urban listeners whereas AM stations are more popular among rural, lower income listeners (Advertising Book 1997-1997 as cited in Siriyuvasak and Wiwattananukul, 1999). Women prefer listening to music and drama on the radio (Siriyuvasak and Wiwattananukul, 1999). According to the Thailand Human Development Report 2003 (UNDP, 2003), 71.8% of the Thai population has access to the radio.

The transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy in 1932 saw the government take full control of this medium. They used the radio to convey messages to the public because it was more controllable than the press. The Propaganda Department, later known as the Public Relations Department (PRD), was founded in 1933 and was mandated to do all the broadcasting of news and announcements about state policies and activities. In more recent times, the PRD requires all Thai radio stations to carry 30 minutes of official news prepared by Radio Thailand twice each day (Library of Congress, 2005b).

Radio broadcasting in Thailand is operated under 3 major networks: the network of Radio Broadcasting of Thailand (PRD), the network of Mass Communication of Thailand (MCOT), and the network of the military (Karuchit, 2005). The government owns most radio stations, determines its programming content, rents out airtime and leases station licenses to private operators. Radio frequencies belong to government agencies such as the Public Relations Department (PRD), the Mass Communication Organisation of Thailand (MCOT), the Defense Ministry, the Police Department, the Post and Telegraph Department (PTD), the military, state universities and others. Radio Thailand (RTH), the national broadcasting service, is government-owned and has seven networks that specialise in areas such as news and information, public affairs, social issues, education, and foreign language broadcasts. All radio stations, except the Ministry of Education and Radio Thailand, are still commercial, which means that they rented under contract from the state. As these stations operate on a commercial basis, they rely heavily on advertising (CMDI, 2005).

Since private entities are allowed concessions to operate, this has created a "dual system" in Thailand, in which all stations are owned by the state but most are operated by private businesses (Siriyuvasak and Serithanawong, 2000 as cited in Karuchit, 2005). It has been argued that this dual system resulted in "patronage capitalism" wherein state departments have the absolute authority to grant licenses and where money and "connections" become deciding factors over quality of programming. To avoid offending authorities, radio and television programmes often censor themselves by choosing not to discuss politically sensitive topics (Yong, 2005).

The 1997 Constitution, particularly article 40 which guaranteed the public the right

to access the airwaves, tried to ensure that the monopoly of the media by the government and other powerful groups would be gradually dismantled (Suriyasarn, 2002). The creation of the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Committee (NBC), which is supposed to be an independent organisation that will oversee all broadcasting affairs, was also borne out of this "People's Constitution." The main mission of the NBC is to redistribute radio and TV frequencies so that there would be more equitable distribution (Yong, 2005). Another product of the Constitution was the Frequency Allocation Commission Act of 2000 that allocated at least 20% of all radio waves to the public sector for community broadcast, public service and other non-profit purposes (Siiriyuvasak and Serithanawong, 2000a as cited in Karuchit, 2005). However, the optimism that these reforms generated may have been premature. Currently, there are serious concerns that the majority of NBC nominees were chosen because of their connections to key players in the industry whose interests are being threatened by the introduction of these reforms (Yong, 2005). It is very likely that the public's interest will be put aside in favor of those groups with vested interest.

Nevertheless, there is one significant media reform that occured in the field of radio broadcasting as a result of the people's initiative. The impetus for reform stemmed from civic and community groups, which felt the need for and the relevance of community radio (Siriyuvasak, 2002). This grassroots movement started with a few provinces in 2001 and eventually spread to more provinces across the country. Within two years, more than 100 community radio stations had already been in operation. Statistics from the PRD showed that, as of 2005, there are already around 2,500 registered community radio stations nationwide. It is estimated that another 1,000 stations are unregistered (Kheunkaew, 2006). The movement has indeed flourished, particularly in the outlying and remote areas.

As the most powerful law of the land, the 1997 Constitution has guaranteed the people's rights to express themselves freely. However, the State has continued to utilise its power to clamp down on community radio (Siriyuvasak, 2002). It has persisted in finding ways to control these stations' independent operations and to keep the people's media from growing. State agencies denounce these radio stations as illegal and threaten to close them down. By making them register to the PRD before they can continue their operations and by granting permission for commercial advertisements to air at 6 minutes per hour, the government creates the conditions for controlling these stations (Virojtrairat, 2005). These conditions undermine the concept, belief, and goals in which the community radios were originally envisioned.

In the face of all these attempts to control, commercialise or quell community radio, this grassroots movement continues to struggle and challenge the state and its directives. The people were able to gain new knowledge from their experiences in community radio

and to draw from traditions, rules and regulations within the realm of the community or people's institutions to support their position (Virojtrairat, 2005). Community radio advocates continue in their struggle for freedom, knowing that their access to the airwaves is clearly founded on the Frequency Allocation Act and on the specific articles of the Constitution (CMDI, 2005).

Nevertheless, the emerging form of radio broadcasting, whether it is community radio or commercial radio, presents an innovation wherein a variety of new programmes and content are provided to the people. These programmes, with religious, entertainment, political, cultural, community, local, national, development and commentary thrusts, tend to have fresh and independent ideas quite distinct from those presented in mainstream programmes due to the latter's exercise in self-censorship for survival.

Since the September 2006 coup d'etat, the 1997 Constitution was abrogated and the military rulers have clamped down on some media. News reports say that more than 300 community radio stations in the northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hang Son have been suspended (Asian Media, 2006). These stations were perceived to operate in areas where ousted Prime Minister Thaksin was said to be popular.

TELEVISION

Thailand was the first Southeast Asian country to start regular television broadcasting in 1955 (PRD, n.d.; Karthigesu, 1994). The first station was operated by the Thai Television Co. Ltd., later renamed the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT). This company was the sole organisation authorised to operate both radio and television broadcasting, produce programmes, and maintain a monopoly in selling TV sets, among others (Siriyuvasak, 1999). Similar to the radio, the television started out as a government tool for political propaganda when Field Marshal Plak Pibulsongkram, who held power from 1938 to 1957, used the television to gain public favor for the 1957 election.

While the radio was the most pervasive and popular medium among both elite and mass listeners in the 1950s and 1960s (Siriyuvasak and Wiwattananukul, 1999), the television eventually emerged as the most popular and preferred medium among the Thai people. A survey by AC Nielsen reveals that in 1999, there was at least one television set in 94% of the households whereas only 69% had a radio receiver and newspaper circulation was only 7.2 per 100 people (Siriyuvasak and Serithanawong, 2000 as cited in Karuchit, 2005). The television has a 90% coverage area and has reached 89.3% of the Thai population as of the year 2000 (UNDP, 2003). The television probably owes its popularity in part to the fact that TV sets became more affordable to the people, both in urban and rural areas, during the 1980s (Siriyuvasak and Wiwattananukul, 1999). Thailand has around 15 million TV sets (Library of Congress, 2007). Women, mostly housewives, working

women and students, comprise the main target audience of drama serials which dominate primetime TV (from 7 pm to 10 pm) daily (Siriyuvasak and Wiwattananukul, 1999).

Thai television certainly holds great potential as an educational and informational tool for national development. However, the realisaton of this potential appears to be challenged by the overwhelming number of entertainment programmes such as formulaic series, game shows, and sensational talk shows in most of the networks as compared to news and information programmes. Moreover, there is a dearth of educational programmes. Thailand may not be an English-speaking country, but many action series from the West are avidly viewed in Thai-dubbed versions (Karthigesu, 1994). Since television has always been state-owned, the private companies tend to be uncritical in order to not antagonise the government from whom they received their licenses. This uncritical attitude towards the government could have led to the proliferation of entertainment-oriented programmes which allow these private companies to earn high revenues.

Presently, there are six free-to-air national TV channels (Channels 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and iTV) (Yong, 2005; Koanantakool, 2003a). Only one channel, Channel 11, is non-commercial as it is owned and operated by the PRD. iTV or Independent Television is a relatively new UHF (ultra-high frequency) television station that went on air in 1996 as an offshoot of the May uprising of 1992. Siam TV and Communication, a consortium of 10 companies, acquired the concession to operate iTV in 1995. This new station, which claimed to be Thailand's first independent television, provided the viewers with more news, current affairs and documentary programmes relative to the other channels. However, it should be noted that the license of iTV still belongs to the Prime Minister's office (Muntarbhorn, 1998 as cited in Karuchit, 2005). The rest of the channels are commercial ones operated by private groups as concessions from either the Royal Thai Army or the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT) (CMDI, 2005).

The entry of transnational broadcasting through cable TV ushered in a wider set of choices of information and entertainment programmes from abroad. The MCOT granted concessions to International Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) in 1989, followed by Thai Sky in 1990 and UTV Cable Network (UTV) in 1993, whose programmes are mostly imported from the USA. On July 1998, a merger occurred between IBC and UTV and they came to be known as United Broadcasting Corporation. It is currently the sole cable TV operator in Thailand which provides services through fiber optic networks (Horcondi, 1999). Since 1989, it is the middle and upper class viewers in Bangkok who have mostly subscribed to cable TV (CMDI, 2005).

This transnational broadcasting received mixed reactions from Thai viewers. The younger viewers welcome the programmes being shown on cable while the older generation worries about the possible impact of such programmes on Thai social and cultural

identity. There is a growing concern that the indigenous or traditional cultural values would erode with the onslaught of Western programmes (Horcondi, 1999). However, a study conducted in 2005 showed that media imperialism in Thailand, particularly in the television medium, may be unwarranted (Karuchit, 2005). When the programmes were content analysed, results revealed that the overall proportion of imported programmes is only 9.2% of the total broadcasting time, which also represents a downward trend compared to previous years. The exaggerated fear may have stemmed from the anxiety brought about by globalisation developments in the 1990s and from the frustration over the financial crisis in the 1970s. Findings also suggested that Thai values remain to be more dominant than Western values both in TV programmes and commercials, although the gap seems to be closer for commercials (Karuchit, 2005).

Nevertheless, a strong trend towards the commercialisation of culture, particularly sexuality-related values, seems evident. Karuchit (2005) concluded that Thai critics should be more concerned about this commercialisation of Thai media and its detrimental effects on traditional culture than the prevalence of Western culture in Thai television.

It has been noted as well that satellite TV in Thailand has to some extent robbed governments of their control over the medium (Barraclough, 2000). For instance, the 1992 overthrow of the Suchinda government demonstrates the power of satellite broadcasting in the people's movement for freedom. When international broadcasters like BBC World and CNN showed footage of the violent suppression of the Bangkok protests to the Asian public, Thai activists got hold of this material and distributed it to the public, primarily to those who didn't have access to satellite TV. Because of this, the freedom movement gained momentum and protesters secured confidence as news about the Thailand crisis obtained more international coverage. One event led to another and in the end, Suchinda stepped down from power (Barraclough, 2000).

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Since the late 19th century, the Thai government has been providing telecommunication services on the basis of state monopoly. The government enacted the Telegraph and Telephone Act in 1934, which gives exclusive power to the state, through the Post and Telegraph Department (PTD), to establish, maintain and operate telephone services within the country. Before, telecommunication services were under the monopoly of the PTD. However, in 1954, the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT) spun off from the PTD. The Telephone Organization of Thailand Act of 1954 mandated the TOT's monopoly over the provision of domestic and voice-telecommunication services, primarily the local and long-distance telephone services (Suriyasarn, 2002).

More than twenty years later, forced by increasing demands for services and the

limited capacity of the TOT, the Communication Authority of Thailand (CAT) was established, enabled by the Communication Authority Act of 1976, as a national body under the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MOTC) (Srisakdi, 1994 as cited in Suriyasarn, 2002). Thus, the Thai telecommunications industry gained another primary service provider. The CAT is responsible for international telephone services except to neighboring countries, and domestic non-voice communication services such as telex and facsimile (Lueprasitsakul, 1998). In the absence of a clear and well-defined division of responsibilities, the activities of these two bodies duplicated and overlapped at times which held back the optimal development of the Thai telecommunication industry during that time.

The 1990s proved to be a significant period when the government changed its telecommunications policy to allow the private sector to participate in the development of the telecommunications infrastructure. Thus, this period was characterised by a move from state monopoly to broader deregulation and liberalisation of the industry. Several dominant players began entering telecommunication services, including fixed-line telephone, domestic fiber optic networks, and satellite. There was also an expansion and modernisation of basic network facilities and services (Lueprasitsakul, 1998).

Among the major local conglomerates that had clear dominance in different market segments, Shin Corporation, a powerful telecommunications operator founded by the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, has a large market share in the mobile telephone segment, cable and multimedia, satellite communication and value-added services (Lueprasitsakul, 1998). It is interesting to note though that by 2000, the mobile phone market was a clear duopoly comprised of Shin Corporation and UCOM, another powerful telecom operator, with almost 97% market shares between the two of them (Suriyasarn, 2002).

Privatisation efforts also focused on changing TOT and CAT from state enterprises to stock companies, in keeping with Thailand's World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments. CAT was therefore privatised in August of 2003 as CAT Telecom Public Company Ltd, while TOT was to be floated on the stock exchange in 2006. Two private carriers, Telecom Asia and Thai Telephone and Telegraph, were granted licenses to provide local and long-distance telecommunication services in specific regions of the country.

Key articles in the 1997 Constitution also reinforced efforts of dismantling the government's long tradition of monopoly over these resources by stipulating the creation of independent regulatory bodies that will supervise the telecommunications business under a free and fair competitive administration. This resulted in the establishment of the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) in 2004 as the sole and independent state regulator of the telecommunications sector in the country entrusted with the task of

granting licenses to telecom operators and setting licensing requirements, standards and technical specification (National Telecommunications Commission [NTC], n. d.).

In 2005, there were approximately 26.6 million mobile phone lines, while there were only 6.6 million landline phones as of 2003 (Library of Congress, 2005). As of 2003, the fixed-line teledensity is 12.9 per 100 inhabitants while the mobile phone density is 30.6 per 100 inhabitants. Clearly, mobile phone subscribers have surpassed the number of the fixed phone line subscribers (UNDP, 2003). In many remote areas in Thailand, the mobile phones have helped overcome infrastructure barriers. As the UNDP report noted, the well-developed province is 30 times better than the poorest province in the basic telephone indicator and because of this, mobile phones have become a popular alternative. Bangkok, compared to other cities and rural areas, has a better telephone service in terms of quality and availability (Library of Congress, 2005a).

In late 1999, a new market developed for handy cordless telephones called personal communication telephones (PCTs). These phones allow the people to use their home phone numbers while away from home instead of having to purchase the more expensive cellular telephones. As a low-cost alternative, these phones were well-received by the Thai consumers (Suriyasarn, 2002).

NEW ICTS

As in most countries, the Internet in Thailand began in the academe. In the late 1980s, Thai Internet usage developed slowly and was largely limited to researchers and academics. For most of the 1990s, the Internet industry was governed by the state's monopolistic regulations which resulted in slow access expansion. The Internet was commercialised in 1995 and by year's end, the estimated total number of Internet users was at 100,000, with half of these users associated with research or academic institutions (Wlatham, 1996 as cited in Suriyasarn, 2002). However, the number of users remained small, especially when compared to the number of users in Singapore and Malaysia. This remains to be the case in 2004 (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF INTERNET USERS AND PCS ACROSS SELECTED ASIAN COUNTRIES

| Countries	INTERNET				PCS	
	Hosts Total 2004	Hosts per 10,000 inhabitants 2004	Users (in '000s) 2004	Users per 100 inhabitants 2004	Total (k) 2004	Per 100 inhabitants 2004
(141) Thailand	360,255	58.13	6,972.0	11.25	3,716	6.00
(133) Philippines	65,390	7.91	4,400.0	5.32	3,684	4.46
(125) Malaysia	135,082	52.81	9,879.0	38.62	4,900	19.16
(136) Singapore	503,099	1,165.93	2,421.8	56.12	2,590	62.20
(112) Indonesia	111,630	5.01	14,508.0	6.52	3,022	1.36

Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2002

It was only towards the year 2000 that the Thai Internet industry began to experience growth and became more competitive. High-speed broadband services emerged, access fees fell and foreign interests began buying stakes in local Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The number of commercial Internet users doubled from 600,000 in 1999 to 1.2 million in 2000, then further increased to 2.3 million in 2001 (Suriyasarn, 2002).

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), there were over 6 million Internet users, or 11.25 users per 100 inhabitants in 2004. Compared to some countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, Thailand still seems better off in terms of Internet usage. Clearly, the Internet user population has been increasing through the years. From 1999 to 2003, the average Internet growth is 58.3% (Asia Pacific Development Information Programme [APDIP], n.d.). Also, in 2004, there were over 3 million personal computers, with 6 computers per 100 inhabitants. This is also better than the figures of Indonesia and the Philippines, but is behind those of Singapore and Malaysia.

A 2001 research study (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center [NECTEC], as cited in Bhattarakosol, 2003) also found that Thailand's Internet access mostly occurred in Bangkok and its suburbs. Generally, the Internet use in urban areas is only 26% while that of the rural areas is much worse at 6% (APDIP, n.d.). Email was the most common reason for Internet use.

According to another study, 58.1% of Internet use still takes place through dial-up access, followed by leased-line access at 23.9% (Koanantakool, 2003 as cited in Bhattarakosol, 2003). Dial-up access, which requires the smallest investment per person, is understandably the most popular access route in a developing country like Thailand. On the other hand, leased line Internet access is the general solution for business organisations. The new access technologies such as mobile Internet, satellite systems and asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) are not yet as popular in Thailand due to its prohibitive costs. Moreover, only a few companies in Thailand offer these services.

FIGURE 1. THAILAND'S INTERNET USER POPULATION, 1991 TO 2003
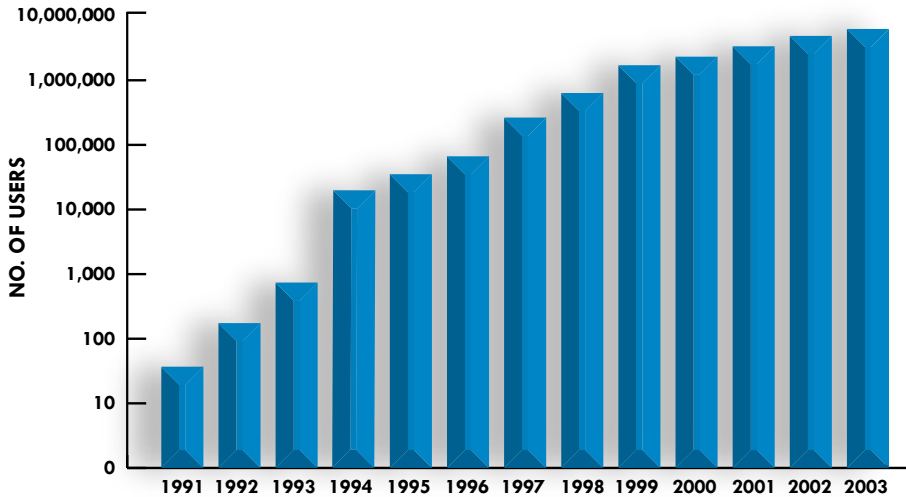
Source: Koanantakool (2003b)

When access fees dropped, more content and services became available, and large businesses began planning e-commerce activities. However, for small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), which are considered the backbone of the Thai economy, e-commerce remained slow and impractical. In 2000, these SMEs were still hindered by the high costs of connection and the lack of knowledge and understanding of e-commerce (Charoen, 2000).

In its bid to achieve the status of an "information society," the Thai government launched a number of policies and initiatives. In 1987, the National Electronics and Computer Technology Center (NECTEC) was established to promote the development and competitiveness of Thai electronics, computer and IT industries through research and development (R & D) programmes and funding services to universities. It is one of the three research centres under the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), which in turn is part of the Ministry of Science and Technology. In 1992, it was assigned to undertake an additional responsibility, ɪᴛ policy planning, in its capacity as National Information Technology Committee's (NITC) secretariat. The NITC was established in 1992 to oversee the policy aspects of IT development and deployment in

Thailand and to promote ICT for social and economic development (CMDI, 2005).

Despite policies and initiatives aimed towards developing the IT infrastructure, these efforts still met with limited success. So in 2002, the government announced new ICT policies, the most crucial of which was the creation of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) (Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, n.d.; Bhattarakosol, 2003). It was mandated to develop and support electronic processes for government, commerce, industry and education. These new ICT policies endeavor to integrate IT in every aspect of Thai society which would ultimately transform the economy.

The government drew up two National Information Technology policies, namely: IT 2000, a short-term policy for 1997-2001 and IT 2010, a long-term policy for 2001-2009. As a product of these policies, several NITC-initiated national IT projects have been implemented since the mid-1990s. Among the most significant national IT projects were SchoolNet, Software Park, Government Information Network (GInet), Electronic Commerce Development, TradeSiam (Thailand's National IDI Service Provider), and IT Law Development. SchoolNet, which we will describe in further detail in the section on social movements, was launched in 1998 to provide free Internet access to primary and secondary schools (Thaweesak, 1999 as cited in Bhattarakosol, 2003).

The ICT policies established also called for strong and direct government investments in the domestic IT industries that would help propel these industries into the world market. The Thai government has chosen to focus on the software industry because of the discouraging growth rate for IT services (see **Figure 2**) and because of the fierce competition in the hardware market, especially with countries like Taiwan and China producing hardware at a lower cost. One of the projects to come out of this policy was the implementation of the Software Park project participated in by many of Thailand's software companies. All the activities that will be undertaken here are envisioned to stimulate the development of the Thai software industry to a sustainable and competitive level in a rapidly changing global digital economy (Bhattarakosol, 2003). Between 2002 to 2003, the software segment expanded by 13% and accounted for 17.7% of the total ICT market (Koanantakool, 2006). Moreover, in 2003, the government set up another agency, the Software Industry Promotion Agency (SIPA), under the MICT to promote and support the local software industry.

FIGURE 2. COMPARISON OF THE 1999 AND 2002 GROWTH RATES OF IT SERVICES, SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE.
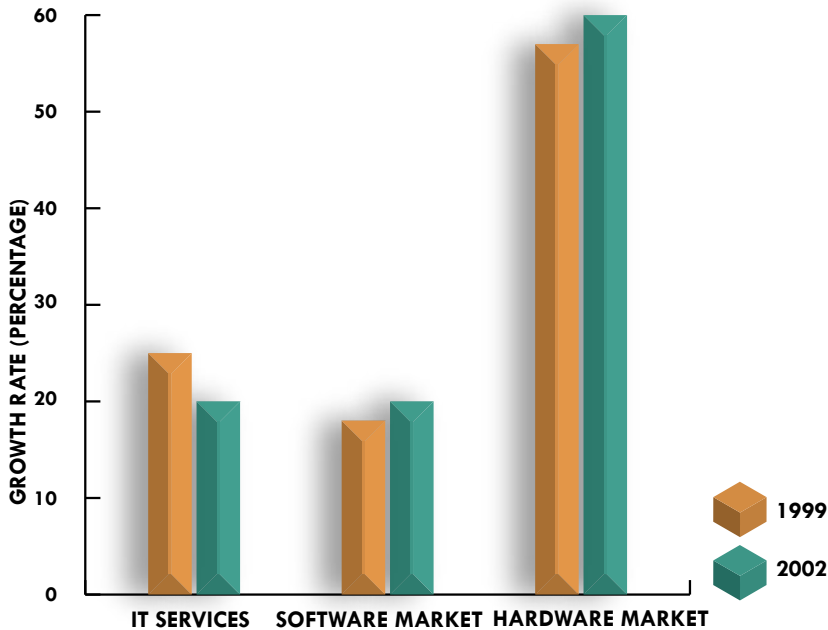
The government has also sponsored three free Internet Service Departments: the Government Information Technology Service (GITS), the Office of Information Technology Administration for Education Development (OITAED) and the TOT Corporation Public Company Limited (Bhattarakosol, 2003). The GITS is responsible for providing Internet service to all government sectors, while OITAED aims to provide Internet linkages among the Thai universities. The TOT provides free Internet service for Thai citizens. Due to this, Thai citizens have now been able to access the Internet from everywhere in the country (Bhattarakosol, 2003).
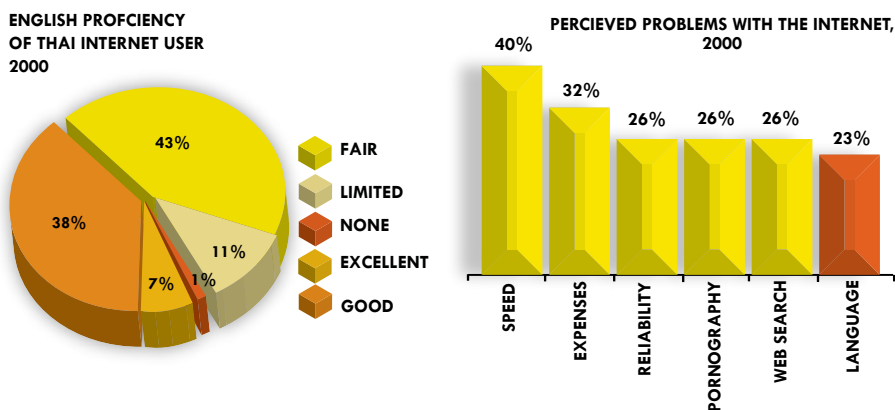
The government undertook several other key initiatives that aimed to open the access of ICT to more people and to bridge the digital divide. For instance, to increase computer ownership, the Computer ICT Programme was launched in 2003. This programme, which offers citizens low-cost computers that have a preinstalled Linux and OpenOffice package, not only boosted the free and open source software movement but also led to the dropping of prices among sellers of generic and brand-name computers (Koanantakool, 2006). The

GoodNet programme was another initiative by the MICT in cooperation with the Internet Café Club. Their aim was to turn cyber cafes into ICT Knowledge centers, hopefully leading to an increase in computer literacy, to the creation of a new culture within the Internet user community, and to a transformation in the perception of cyber cafés from being gaming centers to that of edutainment centers (Koanantakool, 2006).

Internet penetration in Thailand has been slow because of several factors. One barrier is the language. English is still the dominant language in cyberspace and web content in Thai language is still wanting. As such, one needs to have some degree of English fluency in order to surf the net. With English spoken only by an estimated 5% of Thais, it is understandable that the number of Internet users has not grown to levels found in other countries. As another study revealed (NECTEC, 2000 as cited in ITU, 2002), the majority of Thai Internet users had fair English proficiency (see **Figure 3**), suggesting that if a Thai does not understand English, then s/he will not likely surf. Another factor is the Thai written language. Because it has its own character set, there is an added complication that arises from fitting the Thai written language to computer hardware and software.

FIGURE 3. THE ENGLISH BARRIER

ENGLISH PROFCIENCY OF THAI INTERNET USER 2000

43% FAIR
LIMITED
NONE
EXCELLENT
GOOD
38%
11%
7% 1%

PERCIEVED PROBLEMS WITH THE INTERNET, 2000

40% SPEED
32% EXPENSES
26% RELIABILITY
26% PORNOGRAPHY
26% WEB SEARCH
23% LANGUAGE

Source: ITU adapted from NECTEC, "Internet User Profile of Thailand 2000."

Recognising that the Thai market offers huge potential, major foreign IT companies are developing Thai language support and portals such as Thai versions of the Windows operating system and Office applications. Another major development is the creation of Parsit, an English to Thai website translator, that was developed by NECTEC and NEC of

Japan. The available options for Thailand are therefore to increase the Thai content on the web, to further encourage the learning of the English language among Thais, or to do both. Many Thai web sites have used "Thailish," a combination of Thai and English.

Prepaid Internet services have managed to unleash the potential of the "informal economy." By eliminating credit cheques, those living outside of the financial system were given access to ICT and became part of the digital revolution that had previously bypassed them. This has become a popular option for many users because the use of prepaid Internet services is convenient and flexible, providing users with different package sizes without any required commitment to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) (Kulatumyotin, 2001).

The gender gap in Internet usage in Thailand seems to be narrowing (see **Chapter 2 Figure 1**). The share of female users jumped from 35% in 1999 to 49% in 2000. This is supported by a NECTEC Internet user survey that disaggregated data according to sex. Data from this research also showed that women have now achieved parity with men in Internet usage.

FILM AND VIDEO

For decades, movies have been one of the most popular forms of entertainment for Thais. The first Thai film was shot in 1922 by a Hollywood film production team. The first Thai film production company was established five years later. It was in the 1970s that Thai film production was organised along the same lines as the Western model. Since then, Thai films have used the 35 mm film and the Western-style narrative structure. This increasing Westernisation has been reinforced by the emergence of a number of Western-trained directors (Rapeepun, 1989). But while the direction of Thai movies has been geared towards a more direct reproduction of Western movies, the content of Thai movies started out as imitations of the characteristics of stage plays which then evolved into a separate form with its own traits. Presently, the imitation of Western movies in both form and content remains unavoidable (Dunagin, 1993).

Films go through government censorship before they can be shown to the public (Rapeepun, 1989). The government directly imposes religious and cultural censorship. Production financing constraints also pose some limitations for some. The creativity of filmmakers in presenting new ideas and images of reality is also constrained by the primacy of profits in filmmaking. Until recently, film in Thailand has hardly been considered an art form, but rather as a business venture whose purpose is to generate profits. When crafting films for the mass audience, 80% of whom come from the rural areas, Thai filmmakers often repeat old, successful plots or copy from successful Hollywood movies.

Thai people watch movies primarily to be entertained. The majority of moviegoers in both the urban and rural areas are teenagers (Siriyuvasak and Wiwattananukul, 1999). They prefer to watch American, Hong Kong and Thai movies.

In terms of the images of women in films, a study by Rapeepun (1998) showed that women are often portrayed as young, single, middle-class, employed and independent. However, women are still depicted as inferior to men. Whenever portraying positive images of women, Thai films often do it within moderately accurate ranges.

FACTORS AFFECTING COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS IN GENERAL ECONOMIC

Thailand is still a developing country. Compared to some of its neighboring countries in Southeast Asia like Singapore and Malaysia, Thailand has a relatively low-level income. It lacks human resources, funding, and technology expertise. This makes it difficult for Thailand to adopt and assimilate Internet from Western countries. Investments in new communication technologies in particular may not be a priority among many whose basic needs remain unfulfilled. The rural nature of much of the country and the lack of telephone service in many regions has limited the impact of the Internet on the country as a whole (Prammanee, 2003). Since dial-up Internet, which requires fixed lines, remains the most popular type of Internet access, the slow Internet diffusion, particularly in the rural areas, becomes understandable.

Neo-liberal economic ideas like liberalisation and global economic integration have had a direct impact on the country's policymaking. Thailand's export-oriented and growth-oriented policies since the 1990s have been influenced to a large extent by the free market ideology, as propagated by powerful international trade and financial institutions. The need for foreign capital and technology transfer further compels the country to accept the reality of economic liberalisation. This has led to a more open telecommunications and information sector. Thailand's initial attempts to privatise two state enterprises, the CAT and TOT, had its impetus from consultations that the Thai government made with the World Bank (CMDI, 2005).

However, the global liberalisation agenda enforced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) caused anxieties among those who felt that their interests were being violated. The rural and urban poor were hard hit by these measures' resulting economic crisis, but did not feel any relief from the implementation of the IMF-imposed measures. For instance, due to comprehensive economic restructuring measures implemented in obedience to the IMF, the Democratic Party and the Chuan government were blamed for its perceived failure to lead the country to recovery. They were perceived as ineffectual officials that bowed to foreign interests and neglected the poor. It was within this context that Thaksin, with his CEO-like but populist approach, won the popular vote as Prime Minister and assumed power (CMDI, 2005).

POLITICAL

Many political factors like corruption and bureaucracy have hampered the rapid growth of the Thai telecommunications, broadcasting and IT industry.

Business groups have become active participants in politics. Initially, they acted as patrons of politicians and allies of bureaucrats, but eventually, they became politicians themselves. The most notable example of this is the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a highly successful telecommunications tycoon who became Prime Minister in 2001. He was the founder of one of the largest telecommunications conglomerate - the Shin Corporation. He became the foreign minister and deputy minister under several governments. He established his own political party, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT), in 1998, and won the 2001 election by a landslide. When his family sold its shares in Shin Corporation to Temasek Holdings in January 2006, they legally avoided paying tax on income. This was one of the triggers that led to his ouster by the military and the recent demise of his government. Notwithstanding this recent coup, it is significant that as the Thai political system became more democratic since the 1990s, democratic participation became the new, acceptable means to assert influence. Because of a brewing resentment among an increasingly aware public towards oligopolistic arrangements between military and bureaucratic officials, political players and interest groups recognised that an effective way to influence policy was to take part themselves in politics through the electoral system (CMDI, 2005).

There appears to be a growing public interest activism among intermediary groups, academics, and media representatives, but this is still relegated to the peripheries of decision-making and policy-making. One reason could be that telecommunications involves an unfamiliar and complicated set of issues which may still be difficult for the public to comprehend. It could also be because policy-making has traditionally been in the domain of the political and business elites (CMDI, 2005).

A major political reawakening occurred in Thai society after the 1997 economic crisis. Aware of the corrupt political system and resentful against foreign forces, like the IMF, whose imposed economic measures did not yield positive results for many Thais, Thai society began to turn inward and engage in self-examination. The consensus that came thereafter was that political reforms were essential in bringing about a sustainable economic system (Sakkarin, 2000 as cited in Suriyasarn, 2000).

This political reawakening led to a more serious scrutiny of the government's policymaking and the politicians' involvements in business deals in all sectors, including the media. For instance, the army-owned TV and radio networks were audited in order to properly estimate their real income and financial contribution to the state coffers (Sakkarin, 2000 as cited in Suriyasarn, 2000).

The public mistrust in the government and the economic liberalisation that swept the nation in the late 1990s led to widespread reforms in most sectors, particularly broadcasting and telecommunications. The People's Constitution in 1997 introduced several articles that promulgated freedom of expression and the ideological concepts of accountability and transparency (CMDI, 2005).

SOCIO-CULTURAL

From a cultural perspective, Thailand has a disadvantage in an ICT world dominated by the English language, as discussed above. English would not appeal to a country whose language and set of characters are distinctly its own. Having this linguistic disadvantage discourages people from using the Internet and therefore, from benefiting from the information and resources that the Internet has to offer. This could become less of an issue should more local software products and more Thai web sites are developed. However, in the field of software development where most tools, documentation and training courses are in English, this lack of English proficiency becomes a major obstacle (Prapphal, 1998). Major external markets to which software products could be exported also use English. The complexity of maneuvering oneself in cyberspace could also be another factor (Prammanee, 2003). Given that the Internet diffusion is still quite low, it is understandable that people feel intimidated by the Internet.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS USAGE BY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

For Thai NGOs, the term 'grassroots democracy' means a democratic system that responds to the needs and aspirations of the people at the grassroots. It requires wide-ranging reform of the bureaucracy and decentralization of power to allow more for local communities and people's organizations to take part in decision-making processes affecting their economic and cultural life – as well as to restore their rights to manager local resources. Since poverty was a politically constructed problem, exacerbated by public policies, it had to be solved by political means. Examples include the campaign on community rights, public participation in natural resource management, people-centered development policy and political reform (Bangkok Post, 2 May 2000, as cited in CMDI, 2005).

From the urban side of civil society, grassroots participation could be seen in the 70% voter turnout for the senate election on 4 March 2000. For 60 years, the Senate had been viewed as 'the house of bureaucrats', consisting merely of elite members whose job was only to scrutinize laws written by the government of by the lower house. The impressive turnout suggested that these senate elections were one of the most significant developments in Thai democracy since the abolition of absolute monarchy in 1932. After the new constitution was first promulgated on 11 October 1997, Thai civil society groups

had felt that they had achieved what they had fought for, and interest in political reform subsided (CMDI, 2005).

The variety of programmes described here attempt to address the digital divide and to solve the "basic problems" of Thais, especially those with lower income and opportunities. Most of these programmes utilised various communication tools. Thailand has developed National IT Policies (IT 2000 and IT 2010), which promote the move towards a knowledge-based economy and society. In accordance with these national policies, the Thai government has implemented several development programmes using new ICTs as tools to improve the education of people, to build the information structure, to develop sustainable communities and to address the problem of poverty. These programmes fall into three main categories: information management, access to information and the Internet, and learning and knowledge for self-sufficiency and sustainability. Recognising that there is no quick and easy way to absorb the potential of technology without really understanding its power, many development projects were created and implemented jointly with the communities. The projects were defined and executed by the community for the community. By working closely with the communities, there was a realisation that better results are obtained. The degree of success depended not on the amount of material resources, but rather on the leadership and the attention given to the technology transfer (CMDI, 2005).

ICT FOR EDUCATION: THE SCHOOLNET THAILAND PROJECT

SchoolNet Thailand was started in 1995 with the initial plan to facilitate a pilot IT programme of 50 schools that were ready to try the Internet. The second stage was implemented during 1998-2000, with a capacity to serve 1,500 schools nationwide through the use of the "Golden Jubilee Network," which was constructed to celebrate the King's 50th Anniversary of accession to the throne. During this phase, schools were given free Internet access and teachers were given training in the use of the Internet and participated in the "local content development community." Through the computer network and knowledge sharing, contents in the Thai language were made available to every school. In 2003, the SchoolNet Thailand project was handed over to the Ministry of Education to be run as a normal production service. SchoolNet Thailand was adopted by UNESCO as a model in setting up the "Asian SchoolNet Programme" for neighboring economies. One notable creation is the software distribution system called "Linux School Internet Server" or Linux-SIS, which a school can simply install and manage using a web-based system management tool in the Thai language. The other important asset is the "SchoolNet Digital Library" website (www.school.net.th/library/), where nearly 10,000 web pages containing useful articles and pictures in Thai language produced by schoolteachers all over the country are accessible for free use.

COMMUNITY TELECENTRES

A "telecentre" is a place in the community where people can go to use public telephones, facsimile and the Internet. In 2001, there were more than seven organisations in Thailand interested in developing and evaluating the telecentre concept. These organisations, together with NECTEC, the World Bank, and the Ministry of Finance, began to discuss the telecentre concept. The groups implemented these ideas using different approaches, in order to reach the goal of achieving self-sustaining telecentres. The growth of these centres is expected due to their perceived value to the communities (Koanantakool, 2002).

The Thai Government used NECTEC as a research arm to invest in four pilot telecentres. The objective of the project was to experiment in transforming these telecentres to become gateways to electronic commerce for the communities. Telecentres were established in four provinces and regular visits were made in order to make sure that the facilities were being used effectively.

One notable project was initiated and run in a joint-effort by Thailand and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT): the Suksa-Pattana Foundation's Lighthouse Project, with support from the Thaicom Foundation. The project is located in a village called Ban Sam Kha in Lampang Province, about 100km South of Chiangmai. The project was aimed towards empowering the people in the community through project-based learning experiences. At Ban Sam Kha School, practical working programmes involving students and their parents were organised. A number of workshops took place at Ban Sam Kha to solve the biggest financial problems of the community, namely the debts that had been incurred by the village. Once the people were given information about the total amount of their debts and the main expenditures, their behavior changed significantly. Currently, the villagers are trained to keep records of their income and expenses, with training in a simple accounting tool which children learn at school. Parents are encouraged to join the evening classes to learn about computers, where the kids act as teachers. The school has fifteen computers that are used as instruction tools and as community telecenter tools (Koanantakool, 2003c).

COMMUNITY RADIO

Most villages in Thailand are equipped with an "audio tower" for announcements by the village headperson. The only voice that the people hear is the amplified voice from the house of this person. It is either his/her voice or someone s/he assigned. Sometimes, a radio broadcast of music is relayed. Most households now also possess their own radio sets, and upon endorsement by the Constitution, each community may now run a community radio station (Koanantakool, 2003c).

A project was designed to combine community radio and the audio-tower system for a small village in the province of Lampang. It is a small radio station that broadcasts at a low power but provides a clear reception as long as the radio is set on the VHF/FM band. The system was donated by NECTEC to the main school in the village so that the students can take care of the station. Secondary-level students have been broadcasting useful news from various newspapers and books (Koanantakool, 2003c).

NEW ICTS FOR THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

Most of the projects that aimed to address basic issues of the underprivileged sector utilised new ICTs. Many of the projects in this theme are initiated and executed by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. The Princess started the "Princess-IT Project" in 1995. She closely supervised the project team and provided support by regularly visiting the sites in order to give advice and follow-up.

One of the target groups was the schools in remote areas. Donations of electric typewriters and used computers were made to the school. Teachers were also trained on basic computer skills. Due to this, students who cannot continue to attend higher education can still be employed easily on the basis of their basic computer skills (UNESCO, 2004).

Another target group was the chronically-ill children in the hospitals. There were equipments donated to set up the computer classroom in three hospitals with appropriate edutainment software. Prison inmates and people with disabilities also benefited from similar projects.

LOW-COST PC AND LOW-COST INTERNET ACCESS

Starting in 2001, major local PC manufacturers joined force with NECTEC to produce a low-cost PC model in order to promote the use of new ICTs such as the Internet. The price of a computer was brought down by means of volume-based negotiation with the key suppliers of computer parts, given that more than 60% of the parts are manufactured in Thailand. Instead of using Microsoft Windows and MS Office, which proved to be too expensive, Linux, in cooperation with Thai Language Extension (Linux-TLE) and Office-TLE package based on the Open Office software were used. Over 100,000 machines were shipped during 2001 and 2002. In February 2003, the Ministry of ICT, together with local PC manufacturers and NECTEC, pushed the project further by targeting one million machines in the following year. Over 130,000 machines were sold in the first two months of introduction (Koanantakool 2003c).

The Low-Cost PC project is the result of collaboration among many organisations, both in the public and private sectors and was implemented without direct government subsidy. Through this project, computers are offered to the general public at very affordableprices.

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HOW INTERMEDIARY GROUPS USE COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THAILAND

A TOTAL of 17 organisations from Thailand were interviewed for this study. The responses of the key informants were sorted and content analysed. Results are described in this report. The first two sections of this report were based on a content analysis of data from the Organisational Information Sheets submitted by all the respondents while the subsequent sections were based on a content analysis of the key informant interviews. For a complete breakdown of the statistics per category, please see the annex.

It is important to note that some of the translations were imperfect. Also, some interviews concentrated mainly on the women. Except for one interview, all have multiple responses.

TYPE OF INTERMEDIARY GROUP

Based on the Organisational Information Sheets (OIS) filled out by the respondents, seven out of the 17 groups (or 41%) of the organisations in the sample responded that they provide services to and take on the issues and concerns of grassroots communities in general. Six groups (35%) reported that they focused on women in general and only three groups (18%) catered to the grassroots women. Only one group (6%) reported that they have broader or other target beneficiaries, counting grassroots women as only one of their many beneficiaries. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of groups in terms of beneficiaries.

FIGURE 1. TYPE OF ORGANISATION (BASED ON BENEFICIARIES) (N=17)

- **WOMEN IN GENERAL**
- **GRASSROOTS IN GENERAL**
- **GRASSROOTS WOMEN**
- **OTHERS**
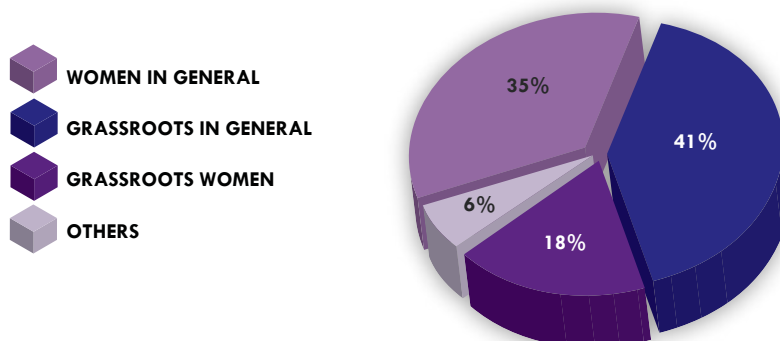
MISSION / THRUST OF THE ORGANISATION

Based on the OIS, 15 groups (88%) reported that education and information dissemination is part of their mission or thrust. Many were also set up for networking (11 groups or 65%), training and capacity building (11 groups or 65%), and services (10 groups, 59%). A number of groups were also involved in research, publication, and documentation (7 groups, 41%) and advocacy and mobilisations (6 groups, 35%). Only one or two groups mentioned economic empowerment (12%), organising and community building (12%), and governance (6%) as their mission and thrust. See Figure 2 for the breakdown according to the mission and thrust of the organisation.

FIGURE 2. MISSION / THRUST OF ORGANISATION (N=17)

- **EDUCATION/ INFORMATION BUILDING**
- **NETWORKING**
- **TRAINING/ CAPACITY BUILDING**
- **SERVICES**
- **RESEARCH**
- **ADVOCACY**
- **ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**
- **ORGANISING/ COMMUNITY BUILDING**
- **GOVERNANCE**

256
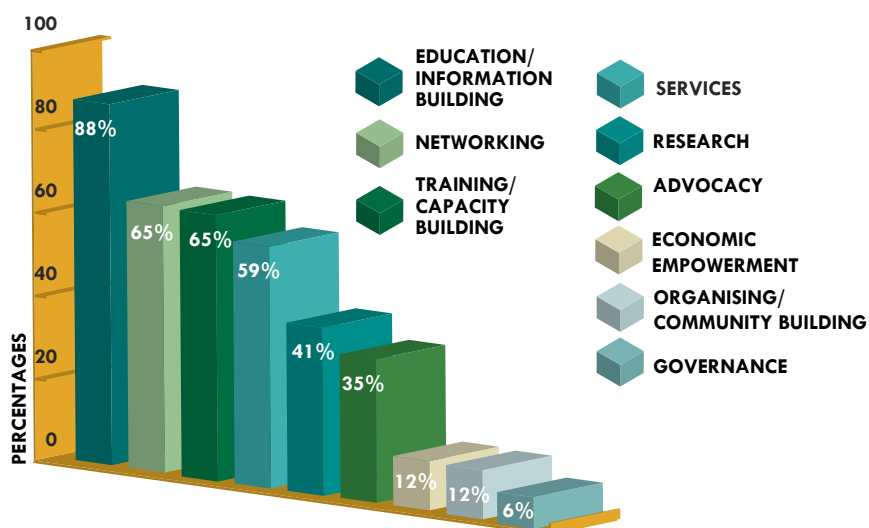
STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN

Out of the 14 groups who responded to this question, 10 groups (71%) mentioned that service delivery was the strategy employed by the organisation in communicating with their beneficiaries, particularly the grassroots women. This strategy is closely followed by education or consciousness-raising (9 groups or 64%), training and capacity-building (8 groups or 57%), networking and linkages (7 groups or 50%), advocacy and mobilisations (6 groups or 43%), research, publication, and documentation (5 groups or 36%), and economic empowerment (4 groups or 29%). Only two groups (14%) mentioned organising and community-building, and only one (7%) mentioned governance as a strategy used in communicating with grassroots women. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of strategy in communicating with grassroots women.

FIGURE 3. STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=14)
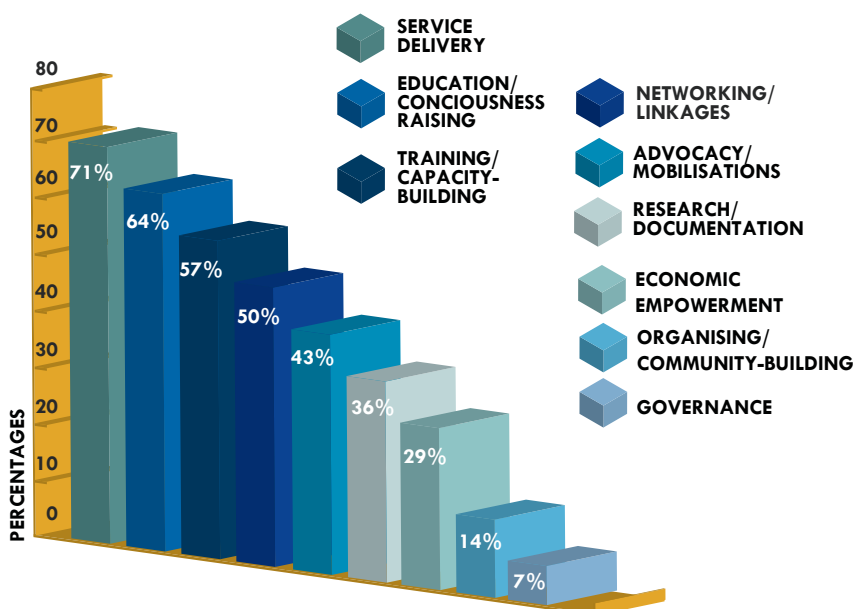
USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

As for the uses of these communication tools, the top uses were for education (94%), administrative and training (69%), advocacy (38%), and announcements (31%). Figure 4 shows the percentages for each use.

FIGURE 4. USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=16)

EDUCATION

ADMINISTRATIVE

TRAINING

ADVOCACY

ANNOUNCEMENT

PERCENTAGES

100

80

60

40

20

0

94%

69%

69%

38%

31%
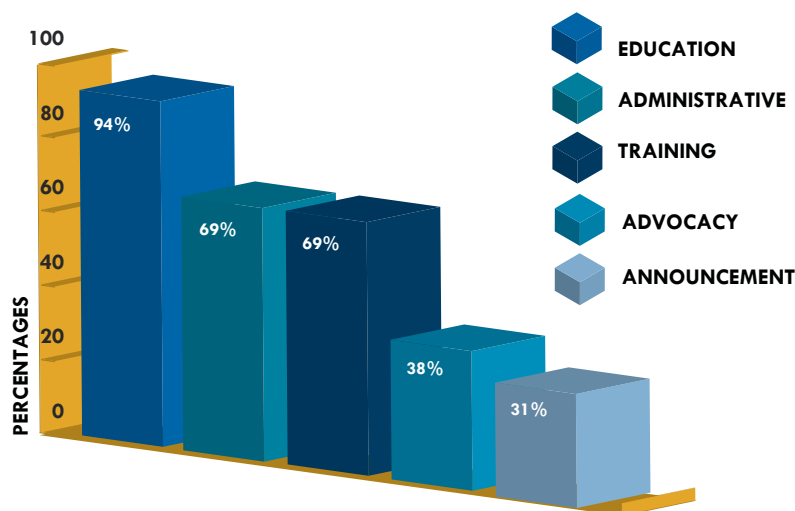
Fifteen out of 16 groups answered that the communication tools in general are mainly used for education. One center launched an educational media campaign for women that aimed to arouse them to talk about the different issues that caused women problems. As one informant shared:

"The project of Women's Information Centre provided advice to Thai women who were to go abroad. The centre launched educational media to women and this media would arouse women to talk through case study about the different issues (that) caused women('s) problem(s). Moreover, we produced special media for specific target group such as media for women and youth girl in slum, women in rural area, and women worker. We launched a series media called *Walking to the Future* that collaborated and expressed about women('s) topics such as women and work, women and health, and women and improvement, thus, through this kind of learning, it would raise public awareness about women issues. This media, besides arous(ing) women to exchange their experiences and share their ideas about the topic, will lead to the best solution of each topic."

Eleven out of 16 groups answered that the communication tools in general are used for administrative and training purposes. They use the telephone, letters, and other print media to communicate and coordinate with related organisations in inviting guest lecturers and target audiences. Also, they use these tools for running their trainings in different topics like AIDS awareness, reproductive health, migration, laws, and leadership skills. One informant said, "Mostly, meeting and training courses. There are some communicative tools such as manuals and tools for training courses about gender, about SME development, about laws, and about leadership skill. We try to develop various courses into manuals."

COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS

The top communication tools used by most groups are film and video (16 or 94%), landline phone (15 or 88%), radio (15 or 88%), the Internet (12 or 71%), poster (12 or 71%), computer (10 or 59%), and fax machine (10 or 59%) (See Figure 5 for the breakdown of the top communication tools used by intermediary groups). In contrast, only three or less groups used the following communication tools: flags (18%), placards and streamers (18%), dance (12%), leaflets (12%), comics (6%), and magazines (6%).

Intermediary groups in Thailand prefer audio-visual media when interacting or reaching out to the grassroots women and children. Some of them stated that the films they show have different themes and issues, from trade and prostitution to reproductive health. These films range from feature films to documentaries and are produced by both local and foreign companies and also by intermediary groups. The organisations reported that they prefer films and videos because they spark the interest of these women: "It works because people can see picture(s), hear voice(s) and songs. They also see what they have never seen before." Also, according to an informant, films and videos reveal truth and raise awareness among the villagers: "The technology help(s) to reveal the truth in motion picture which raise(s) more awareness among the villagers." Organisations often use these technologies as in workshops, seminars, trainings, and various fora discussing women's agendas.

However, in spite of their frequent utility, groups also cite the limitations of film and video. Film's reliance on electricity, as well as the budget constraints of some groups, poses problems and limitations to its utility. One group reported using the easy-to-use media like the *Kub-Fai* for support: "*Kub-Fai* (is an) innovative package which can be given to villagers and they can use (it) easily by themselves. By this innovative package, the villagers can manage the process by themselves. We are the observers and (we) discuss what we have learn(ed) after the process with the villagers." One informant said that she rarely uses the VCD, explaining, "it seems useless, as we don't have (a) sound system. And most importantly, we didn't really know how to use them."

FIGURE 5. COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS (N=17)
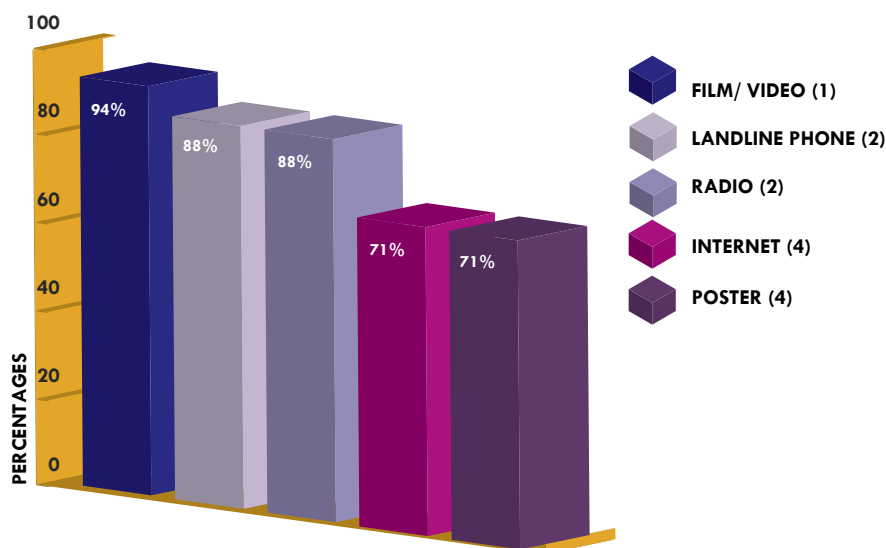
Landline phones and community radios are also considered powerful tools in reaching their beneficiaries, as reported by 15 groups (88%). Landline phones are seen as tools of communication and coordination. They are used when arranging discussions between networks such as Roi Et, Sakhon Nakorn province, and other remote areas. With the use of the telephone in contacting other groups, they can meet, talk, and exchange technical knowledge and experience. An informant said that using the landline phones in contacting volunteers allowed for better attendance in activities as compared to writing a letter:

> "We can reach people in remote area(s) right away via phone. They will be informed of exact date, time, and place so they can prepare people. (The) main problem is to (make) people attend the meeting. If we send an invitation letter to them we do believe that no one will come. But if we phone them, the result will be different. They will be able to manage things on time."

Landline phones are also available and used by women seeking assistance, help, services, and even counselling for HIV infected patients. The groups also see the landline as a tool in helping women who were forced into prostitution to escape:

"Telephones (are) main tools for women to escape and to be released from forced prostitute(ion) because they call the police, or call their relatives, then their relative(s) contact us for assistance so we call the organisation at the destination country; finally, they are released from the miserable incident. Therefore, telephone is very influential for solving the forced prostitute(ion)."

Aside from songs, drama, and their own community program, the radio is widely used for disseminating information and advocacy on issues such as children's rights, trafficking, drugs, health, problems of the community, and parenting. Invited speakers from other agencies, intermediary group representatives or even leaders discuss the given topic. The community radios reach beneficiaries who have neither televisions nor landline phones. Thus, "the community radio can directly access our target groups in the rural areas. Moreover, some of our volunteers are being part of the community radio so this maybe our channel to (easily) express our vision and mission."

Listening to radios is also better for elderly women. In addition, it is preferable for women as it allows them to simultaneously work while listening. One informant stated:

"In fact, the elderly rarely watch television but they enjoy listening to the radio. So radio media can be used with a group of women. For example, when someone (is) awarded, villagers will pay attention to them (it) and tell others who are going to be interviewed and talk on the radio. They will help spread the news. If villagers listen to the radio they can do other things simultaneously like working which makes them have much pleasure."

The use of the Internet and posters are the next utilised tool among the intermediary groups. Twelve groups (71%) reported Internet usage. The vision, mission, and activities of some organisations are posted in their websites. They mentioned that the fastest and easiest way to gather information is through the Internet. E-mails are also used in communicating with other intermediary groups.

Posters, on the other hand, are frequently used for spreading community issues like children's rights, women issues and community safety. Also, posters are used for special events like International Women's Day and Earth Day. The groups report that because posters are easy to give and do not depend upon other tools, they are effective. Groups can also reprint posters and distribute them to relatives, friends, and neighbours, though one informant mentioned that posters can be easily drenched by rain and blown by winds.

The computer and the fax machine, as reported by 10 groups (59%), are the fourth most-mentioned tools used among the intermediary groups. The computers are used

primarily to connect to the Internet and to get information. Also, they reported using the computer in trainings and presentations. Some organisations also provide computer courses for children and adults. Just like landline phones, radios and e-mails, fax machines are used to communicate and coordinate with other intermediary groups and beneficiaries instead of telegraphs.

Looking at the top communication tools used by intermediary groups, films, videos, community radio programs and posters are used for disseminating important issues for awareness to the beneficiaries while landline phones, the Internet, and fax machines are used to contact and coordinate meetings and events with beneficiaries and other intermediary groups.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN

The tools most accessible to grassroots women as observed from the responses of the intermediary groups are the radio (62%), landline phones (31%), and theatre (15%). These tools and their respective percentages are seen in Figure 6. Note that the total number of groups that answered this question was only 13.

FIGURE 6. COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=13)
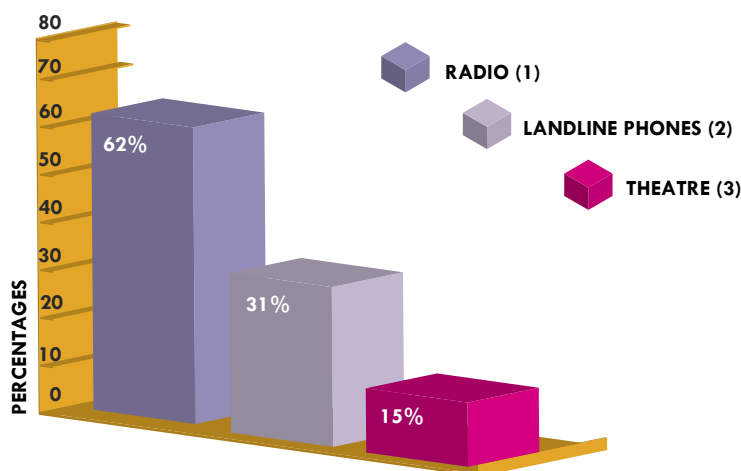
The radio gathered the highest frequency in the category of communication tools most accessible to grassroots women because the community radio can be directly accessed by the target groups and beneficiaries in rural areas. Also, there are many community radio

stations in their partner areas. This is followed by the use of landline phones. Whereas mobile phone signal is still unavailable in remote areas, public telephones are installed in some village thus allowing groups and beneficiaries to contact one another.

The third tool deemed most accessible to grassroots women is community theatre. In one area, a community theatre project had staged performances that ran for about half an hour to an hour, including 5 to 20 minute dramas. In this project, there were around 10 performances with estimated spectators of about 150,000-160,000 around Thailand.

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS LEAST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN

Some identified the cellular phone and the computer as the least accessible tools for grassroots women (Note that this was only mentioned once.) Cellular phones are rarely used because there appeared to be many provinces without network signals. The computer is also rarely used, except for the local authorities of Tambon Administrative Organization. No clear and specific reason was given as to why the computer was rarely used.

MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND REASONS WHY THE TOOLS WERE EFFECTIVE

The film or video, posters, radio, and the theatre were perceived as the most effective communication tools as reported by 3 out of 9 organisations (33%). They are effective because they are visually stimulating (6 out of 11 or 55%) to their target beneficiaries. Videos can disseminate information even to children and illiterate adults. One informant reported:

> "For children, it should be animation presenting some easy to understand stories. It should be made to easily disseminate information to illiterate adults as well. For example, a play produced in forms of VCD have plot telling story from the beginning until the end…"

Posters and stickers are also perceived as effective compared to newsletters when they are large and clear. One informant said, "Pictures and posters work pretty well. But they must be enlarged and clear. Villagers said that if the alphabets on these two media are too small they won't see and read them." Another informant reinforced this, "We rarely make newsletters. We produce poster and sticker. Now we are making more posters because they are the more effective media in local community."

The community radio is seen as effective because aside from disseminating news, it can also promote culture by playing local songs and recounting native stories. One informant explains:

"As for me, I consider community radio as a very important media to villagers in present. When they go for working in the fields, they would like to listen to radio which program is all about their own community, not about others from city or Bangkok. The community radio can (provide) response to community needs and provide channels for villagers to communicate. It's a prime media sector that should be supported. Not only for disseminating informative news, the community radio can be an effective channel to promote cultures in local communities which need to be revived such as local song, local story-telling."

One informant gave an example called the *Mor Lam,* a traditional Isan folk singer. According to the informant, "People like it and understand the content so well. In the future we plan to use this traditional performance as the media to encourage people to practice the organic agriculture."

But for some groups, drama was the most effective. Unlike the radio, drama provided a two-way communication or interaction. An informant explains this interaction:

"Drama showed the best result. When we acted, we saw the audience. At least we knew whether they were interested or no(t). It reflected the answer. If the audience stared at the drama, it showed their interest. But if they talked, it meant they weren't interested in what the drama showed. It was (a) two-way communication. It showed about the (interest of the) audience that we couldn't see if they are interested by radio."

Drama training also provided target beneficiaries with confidence and empowerment. One informant said, "Because of our drama training process, they are empowered to gain more confidence to speak out and they get their own power back." Moreover, drama also brings a wide variety of arts and therefore, is a powerful medium.

Both radio and drama were effective for the organisations because they are culturally appropriate (4 out of 11 or 36%). Rural villagers also listened to the radio for entertainment while working in the fields: "They are singing while they are working!" Also, music and dance, which are incorporated in drama, reflect the lifestyle of the people. Music and songs seemed to also be effective among the children and youth. Drama was also perceived to be effective because it is interactive (4 out of 11 or 36%).

Figure 7 shows the most effective communication tools while Figure 8 illustrates the reasons why these tools were considered effective. Two out of nine organisations who responded to this question also mentioned landline phones, songs, and TV as effective communication tools. Other reasons why a certain tool was perceived effective were clear target focus (27%), wide reaching coverage (18%), writing format (18%), and affordability (9%).

FIGURE 7. MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=9)
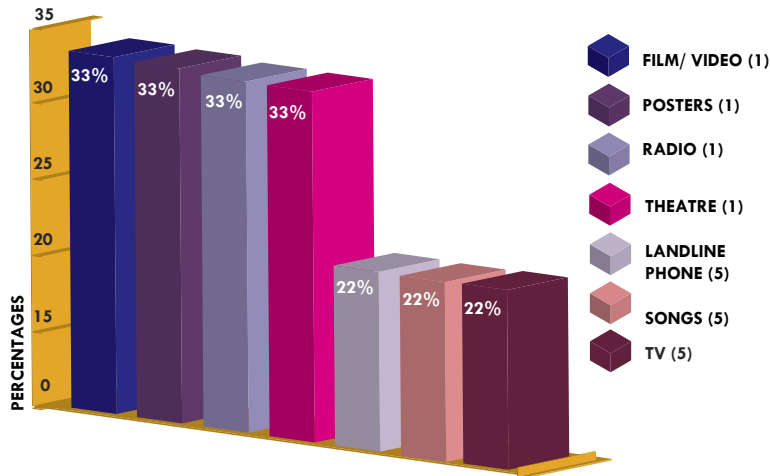
FIGURE 8. REASONS WHY A TOOL IS EFFECTIVE (N=11)
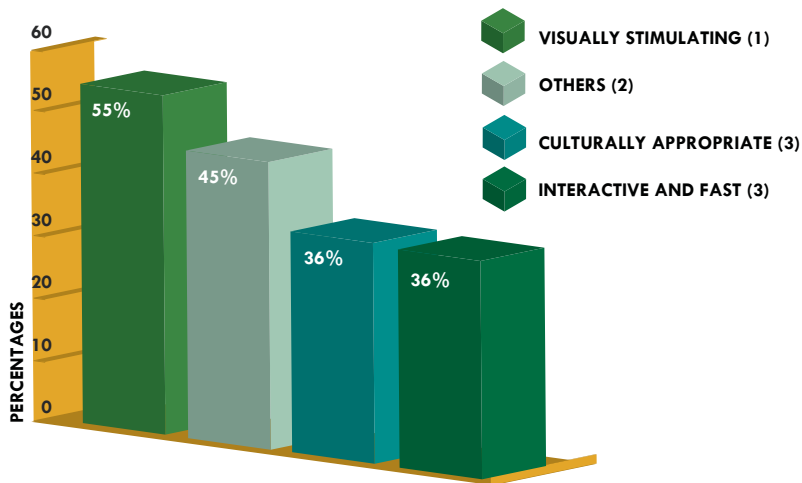
LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND REASONS WHY THE TOOLS WERE INEFFECTIVE

Figure 9 shows the least effective communication tools as reported by 11 organisations while Figure 10 shows the reasons why these tools were ineffective. The Internet was deemed as the least effective tool, as cited by five groups or 45% of the sample, followed by the computer (4 groups or 36%) and print media and the radio (2 groups or 18%).

FIGURE 9. LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=11)
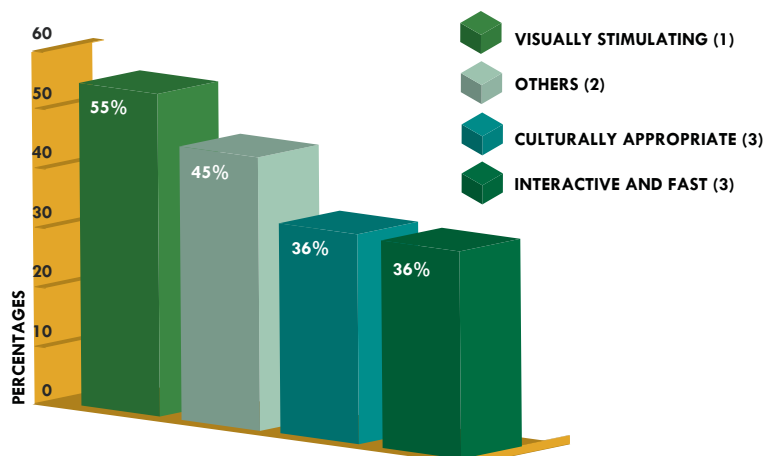
FIGURE 10. REASONS WHY A TOOL IS INEFFECTIVE (N=12)
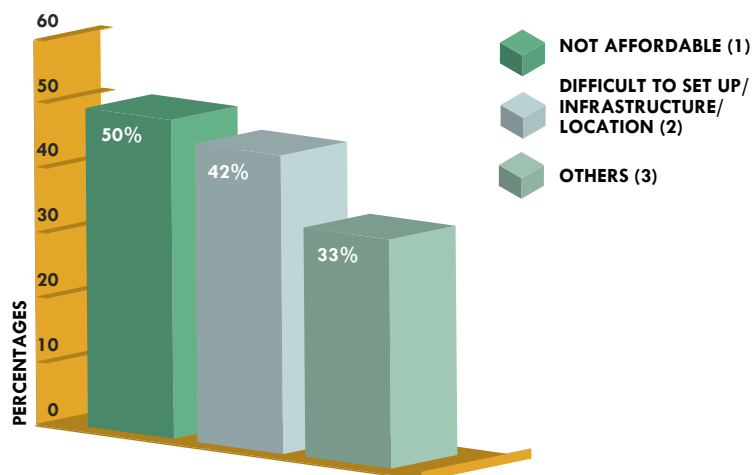
Six out of 12 organisations (50%) mentioned that tools were deemed ineffective because they were unaffordable. Limitations on budget and electricity seemed to be disadvantages for using the Internet and the computer in rural areas. Moreover, target beneficiaries do not have equipment like computers in their own homes. One informant expressed:

"It doesn't mean that they can't use them, but they have no equipment. If they have ones, why don't they use these electronic tools? It is not difficult to use. But they have no equipment and their work has nothing to do with these equipment so why (do) they have to learn about these equipment (?) It is better for them to learn how to be a good dancer, a DJ, or a cashier? It is more proper to learn something relevant to their life. Or if they have to use other electronic tools it is better for them to learn how to use a calculator because computer can be used for e-mail and Internet. That is enough. Besides, it is no need for them to have their own computer."

Five out of 12 organisations (42%) who responded to this question said that location, difficulty in setting up, and lack of infrastructure were reasons why these tools where not effective. Limited coverage and cultural inappropriateness (25% of sample) and the lack of skills training, interactivity and visual stimulation (17% of sample) were also cited as reasons why a tool was deemed ineffective. One informant expressed the lack of skills-training among the target beneficiaries: "This new media is the technology that needs a period of time to learn how to use. As a result, it becomes a restriction for people at (the) grassroot level because they have not much time to learn (it) thoroughly."

ANNEX

COMPLETE TABLE OF FIGURES

TABLE 1. TYPE OF ORGANISATION (N=17)

Type	f	/	%
1. Grassroots in general	7		41
2. Women in general	6		35
3. Grassroots women	3		18
4. Others	1		6

TABLE 2. MISSION / THRUST OF ORGANISATION (N=17)

Mission/ Thrust	f	/	%
1. Education/ Information-Dissemination	15		88
2. Networking	11		65
3. Training/ Capacity-building	11		65
4. Services	10		59
5. Research, Publication & Documentation	7		41
6. Advocacy/ Mobilisations	6		35
7. Economic Empowerment	2		12
8. Organising/ Community-building	2		12
9. Governance	1		6

TABLE 3. STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH BENEFICIARIES (N= 4)

Strategy	f	/	%
1. Service delivery	10		71
2. Education/ Consciousness-raising	9		64
3. Training/ Capacity-building	8		57
4. Networking/ Linkages	7		50
5. Advocacy/ Mobilisations	6		43
6. Research, Publication & Documentation	5		36
7. Economic Empowerment	4		29
8. Organising/ Community- building	2		14
9. Governance	1		7

TABLE 4. USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=16)

Uses	f	/	%
1. Education	15		94
2. Administrative	11		69
3. Training	11		69
4. Advocacy	6		38
5. Announcement	5		31
6. Others	4		25
7. Research	2		13
8. Service	1		6

TABLE 5. COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS (N=17)

Tools	f	/	%
1. Film / Video	16		94
2. Landline	15		88
3. Radio	15		88
4. Internet	12		71
5. Poster	12		71
6. Computer	10		59
7. Fax	10		59
8. Book	9		53
9. Print (General)	9		53
10. Theatre	8		47
11. Newspaper	7		41
12. Song	7		41
13. Stickers	7		41
14. Cellular Phone	6		35
15. TV	6		35
16. Newsletter	5		29
17. Others	5		29
18. Pamphlets	5		29
19. Photo	5		29
20. Letter	4		24
21. Miscellaneous Papers	4		24

TABLE 5. CONTINUED

Tools	f	/ %
22. OHP	4	24
23. Slide	4	24
24. Flag	3	18
25. Placards/ Streamers	3	18
26. Dance	2	12
27. Leaflets	2	12
28. Comics	1	6
29. Magazine	1	6

TABLE 6. COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=13)

Tools	f	/ %
1. Radio	8	62
2. Landline	4	31
3. Theatre	2	15
4. Cell phone	1	8
5. Computer	1	8
6. Film	1	8
7. Newsletter	1	8
8. TV	1	8

TABLE 7. MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=9)

Tools	f	/ %
1. Film / Video	3	33
2. Poster	3	33
3. Radio	3	33
4. Theatre	3	33
5. Landline	2	22
6. Song	2	22
7. TV	2	22
8. Book	1	11
9. Comics	1	11

TABLE 7. CONTINUED

Tools	f / %	
10. Computer	1	11
11. Newsletter	1	11
12. Pamphlet	1	11
13. Photo	1	11
14. Print	1	11

TABLE 8. LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=11)

Tools	f / %	
1. Internet	5	45
2. Computer	4	36
3. Print (General)	2	18
4. Radio	2	18
5. Book	1	9
6. Cellular Phone	1	9
7. Film / Video	1	9
8. Landline	1	9
9. Letter	1	9
10. Newsletter	1	9
11. Pamphlet	1	9
12. Poster	1	9
13. Slide	1	9
14. Song	1	9
15. Sticker	1	9
16. Theatre	1	9
17. TV	1	9

TABLE 9. REASONS WHY A COMMUNICATION TOOL
IS CONSIDERED MOST EFFECTIVE (N=11)

Reasons	f /	%
1. Visually stimulating	6	55
2. Others	5	45
3. Culturally appropriate	4	36
4. Interactive	4	36
5. Clear Target Focus	3	27
6. Wide-reaching coverage	2	18
7. Written Form	2	18
8. Affordable	1	9

TABLE 10. REASONS WHY A COMMUNICATION TOOL
IS CONSIDERED LEAST EFFECTIVE (N=12)

Reasons	f /	%
1. Not affordable	6	50
2. Difficult to set up/ Infrastructure/ Location	5	42
3. Others	4	33
4. Limited coverage	3	25
5. Culturally inappropriate	3	25
6. Not interactive	2	17
7. Lack of skills/ training/ literacy to use it	2	17
8. Not visually stimulating	2	17

EMPOWERMENT

The Key Informant Interviews revealed that in Thailand, communication is believed to be a powerful tool. Hence, there is fear that it would get out of hand, thus leading to efforts to control this tool. Both the government and business sectors are afraid to lose control of media, and therefore, try to appropriate their power. Likewise, husbands are threatened when wives "speak out." Therefore, for women to have a voice, they must often solicit the consent of their family.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

The following organisations in Thailand believe that empowering women and communities lies in economic independence.

For example, the Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre is a fund-raising institution that distributes money for projects to promote women's economic independence. The provincial administration office and other sources provide funds which they distribute to their networks, who then accomplish the work. Once they receive funding for a certain issue, they alert their partners, who have allied interests.

Empower Foundation and its many independent centres also find financial sources for several projects. They have several independent centres that share the same policy and mission, but each centre works independently. It finds financial sources and organises many activities on its own. However, each centre has freedom to manage and run its organisation.

Similarly, the Center for Labour Information Service and Training also conceives of empowerment as encouraging the community to be more confident and help them in managing their own funds.

The Northeastern Women's Network also does fund-raising work with other intermediary groups that work for women's issues. They find money for issues dealing with out-of-system women, labour, or women's roles in politics. Once they get funding on each issue, they inform their network members. Moreover, they maintain connection with other organisations working for women such as the Foundation for Women, the Partners for Women Development, and the Foundation of Asia.

In their effort to promote women's economic independence, the Northeastern Women's Network focuses on marketing and product development. Together with the villagers, they manage a shop named "Mea-Ying shop" at Khon-Kaen Province and at Ja-tu-jak Market in Bangkok. Their members also said they joined the network for economic reasons, initially becoming part of the group because they had their own handicraft product to sell, in an effort to take advantage of the group's marketing plan.

THE PROBLEM OF MONEY: HINDRANCE TO EMPOWERMENT

The Center for Girls laments how women often lose out in the budget allocation in the Tambol[1] Organizations because the projects they suggest are often about interpersonal relations and people-oriented services, which do not get as much funding as those proposed by men, which often involve infrastructure development.

This contributes to the vicious cycle of women's powerlessness. Since there are fewer women in the Tambol Organizations, there are fewer of them who can suggest women-oriented projects. It is therefore a struggle for women to get funding, since their ideas are often left unheard.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Empowerment is also conceptualised in terms of political participation, specifically along the following dimensions: (1) acting as consultants to the government, (2) engaging in leadership and governance, (3) enforcing government responsibility, and (4) advocating

---

1.   Tambol Authority Organizations (TAOs) were created in 1997 in Thailand. A Tambol (sub-district or 'county') is composed of a cluster of seven to ten rural villages. Comprised of appointed and elected village leaders, the TAOs practice governance over and raise resources for their member villages. While the institution of TAOs can be attributed to the government's aim to be more connected with people on the ground, the TAOs do not necessarily ensure that the views of local people are considered.
      Strengthening communities: Grassroots governance initiatives: experiences from rural Thailand. Thailand.
      Accessed April 10, 2007 from www.iog.ca/publications/tambol.pdf__

for women's rights through legislation. This is accomplished in the various levels of government.

Moreover, an important parallelism across countries emerges in terms of political participation: if the Philippines has the *barangay* and Fiji has the *tikina*, Thailand has its own *Tambol*. There is emphasis on engaging in the community at this level in order to truly effect change.

ACTING AS CONSULTANTS TO THE GOVERNMENT

The Northeastern Women's Network believes that women are empowered through political participation. They campaign and hold trainings for women's rights and women's political participation. They also gather women's proposals for political reform as well as train the women so they can take part in the Tambol (subdistrict) Administrative Organization. They also engage in international mechanisms such as writing the shadow report to the CEDAW Committee. They also coordinate with other organisations regarding the platforms that they draw out from the women in the community.

Additionally, they organise platforms and do research regarding the effects of government policy on women and communities. The Northeastern Women's Network also has the task of organising and strengthening the alliance network of the labour and informal sectors. They advocate for laws relevant to the issue of labour. In fact, whether there is a project grant or not, they always strive to empower the alliance network and to advocate for related policies and laws. They also work for improvements in the work environment, making sure that conditions of work are safe and systematic, thus ensuring the welfare of their members.

ENGAGING IN LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Center for Labour Information Service and Training also empowers people by specialising on labour issues and using this expertise to work with the government.

Through engaging in governance, the Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre seeks to empower women. They lecture during the campaigns of women senators, discussing their opinions regarding what they believe the role of the senators should be. They also provide and solicit anonymous suggestions on women leaders.

The Center for Girls explains that although they would have wanted to encourage women to go into politics, their initiatives failed because this practice was not socially acceptable. Although some women were willing to run for office, they often lost in the votes. Moreover, very few women have the privilege or interest to join politics. Between cooking food for their husbands in the morning, sending their children to school and working in the fields, the women do not seem to have time for politics. As such, they left politics to men. This is why, according to them, there are only a few women leaders in the Tambol Organization.

ENFORCING GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

There is also a conception of empowerment as that of enforcing government responsibility. The Community Theater Project does this by urging government agencies to provide villagers with the opportunity to access and "have their own media." They believe that the government should not be afraid that the villagers will become aware of political issues and in turn, protest against them.

ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS THROUGH LEGISLATION

The Friends of Women Foundation also advances women's rights by looking at how the law is enforced. Since they deal with issues regarding violence against women, they also provide them counseling apart from legal assistance.

The Woman Study Center also empowers women by making them understand their rights in terms of the law. They address the issues of "sold women" when they go to trial and while their cases are in progress.

The center also arranges training programmemes to teach women how to use the law in favor of gender equality while also teaching them feminist perspectives. For this, they use codes of law and other articles as references. They believe that the law, aside from opening eyes to the reality of patriarchy, could also be used as a tool for fostering equality between men and women.

COMMUNITY ORGANISING / SOLIDARITY BUILDING

Many of the Thai intermediary groups believe that networking and alliance-building are key to empowering women and communities.

For example, the Northeastern Women's Network has projects with the Thai Health Organization. For their project with the Community Conservation Foundation, they work in the northeastern part of Thailand. Their projects with UNIFEM have partners in the four areas of Thailand. In their work with UNIFEM, they address the issue of labour in the informal sectors. Since 2002, they have also partnered with UNIFEM to promote community network development.

This network states that their programmes aim to: "(1) empower women in the alliance network, (2) strengthen the alliance network, (3) tackle the issue of out-of-system labour, [and] (4) advocate for issue-related policy and laws." They also serve as coordinators and contact persons, thinking of ways through which the various groups can work together.

Another group that is also very active in networking is the Women Study Project. To empower women, they work with the government as well as intermediary groups that focus on women and human rights. They also arrange meetings for events like End Violence Against Women's Day and invite guest lecturers for training seminars. They also speak on behalf of women's issues when other groups invite them.

The Community Theater Project believes that networking, coordination and cooperation enhances people's "quality of life." They also believe that media facilitates this.

Community Theater Project also believes that, with over ten children's drama groups in their community, "all children appreciate expanding their network." Apart from networking, they also focus on capacity building.

The Daughter Community Center also believes in being proactive in the community. They penetrate villages and do networking in the source countries. They also support children by getting them involved in activities that involve interaction such as sports, drama or cultural performances.

Providing protection and helping children faced with violence lie at the core of the Center for Girls advocacy. Additionally, they also work as coordinators encouraging women's participation. The group also observes that being part of the Tambol network also confers certain privileges. According to them, being acknowledged as a member of the Tambol Organization has made it easier for them to implement their projects: "When we coordinate with heads of the village, our concepts were accepted. It was assumed that being [a] member of [the] Tambol Organization guarantees our ability. It caused no problems dealing with community leaders. It was easy when we were accepted by the village." They also discovered that networking provides solutions to their problems: "When we get problems, we could communicate and ask for help."

In the past, they often dealt with plenty of conflicts due to controversies surrounding advocacies for rape victims. Some of their members were hit and threatened. They reported that working with the police and other allies greatly reduced this problem.

Networking also allows the group to form a volunteer "watch group" from the children and youth sector, community leaders, and any group in general: "They could be teachers, sanitarians attending the knowledge training." After being trained by the group, the volunteers are sent to work as watching chain. If any problem occurs, the volunteers call to get help. The Center for Girls also supports the women and children by giving activity trainings in the villages and in other places where they are requested to do so.

The Payao Province Woman Network also believes in the value of working closely with others, emphasising the dynamics of the network which enables them to take action. Since they are not part of the government, they use their networks to approach the grassroots women and support women in the Tambol Administration. They also believe that in line with this, they must enrich the potentials of the community by enhancing their leadership skills. They accomplish this by raising awareness in community forums and by motivating the villagers to participate and interact with one another.

Similarly, the Foundation for Women also alludes to the importance of a sense of belonging for empowerment.

The Friends of Women Foundation believes that networking provides solutions for many obstacles and gives great benefits to their foundation. Hence, when faced with problems, they seek advice from other professionals and organisations on how to address the issues. In turn, they also recommend specialists and professionals to other organisations. They also work in the field for activities called "Case Conferences," in which they coordinate with multi-professionals such as social workers, doctors, nurses, attorneys and other intermediary groups.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY/ SELF-TRANSFORMATION

According to the KIIs, the majority of the Thai NGOs define empowerment in terms of individual agency.

CREATIVITY, FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE

The intermediary groups interviewed also empower women by allowing them to be creative and to realise their potentials. They do this by teaching women the value of social responsibility, enabling these women to help their friends and communities and increase their participation in society. This empowerment also takes the form of independence, so that long after the group's intervention has been completed, the group remains confident that women can face their problems and situations, not as victims, but as active participants.

For example, the Sunflower Group believes that one can cultivate self-development through creativity, which leads to heightened self-worth. As such, they give trainings such as making artificial flowers, dolls, planting, and so on. This new-found confidence, aside from making one well-adjusted to society, also translates to a desire to help others.

For Fai In See, empowerment also means being self-starting, independent, confident and brave. This means that women are able to organise things on their own, handling issues and activities by themselves. More importantly, this, as with many other KIIs, also means having the courage to confront their husbands on a personal level. This trend is found in the other Thai KIIs, such as in the Thai Community Foundation.

The Women Health Advocacy Foundation also views empowerment as liberation or independence. They aim to free women from the cultural shackles that frame and bind them. They do this by providing them information and building on their potentials.

The Friends of Women Foundation also looks at empowerment as freedom from grief and oppression. This takes the form of enforcing justice against perpetrators of VAW. The organisation counsels abused women so they can free themselves of the notion that the abuse was their fault, and they will know that "what happened to them doesn't decrease their value as a human being."

Aside from teaching them women's inherent value and rights, the group also empowers women through modelling –by showing them new alternatives through illustrations of the helpful experiences of women who were in similar situations. Like the Women Health Advocacy Foundation, they also believe in fostering self-reliance, mentally rehabilitating these women in order to strengthen their attitude.

The Northeastern Women's Network defines empowerment as in women agriculturists and weavers becoming strong and taking on important roles in the community. By becoming independent, they also eventually take on leadership roles.

The "Operation for the Community and City for Better Living in the Southern Region" project of the Thai Community Foundation sees empowerment as autonomy. That is why the foundation believes in teaching the community to learn from their own work: "The

organisation truly believes that people learn from what they do. So, in order to empower them we have to give them a chance to do what they have faith in and what they love to do." This includes giving them the opportunity to make their own mistakes and explore their interests. Instead of the group training them, it is up to the people themselves to cull out lessons from their own work. After working, the group then sets up a meeting to conclude and "wrap up" whatever lessons they have learned. This, according to them, is the way to empower people.

The Payao Province Woman Network is also wary about the division between the personal and the political, about the media representations of women and about the actual attitudes of people towards issues of gender equality. They explain that although mass media emphasises equality between men and women as stated in the law and in the nation's development plan, this appears to be quite problematic based on the actual behavior of the people. Although grassroots women take on leadership roles, they are still required to stick to roles such as being a subservient wife and mother to the family.

The Foundation for Women believes that once women are cured from their issues, they have the potential to become catalysts for change, thereby spurring them to volunteer for the community. As such, for this group, empowering people means "providing them information in order to be able to solve their own problems." This is a healing process wherein troubled women are given opportunities to recover from their problems and start a new leaf. After their recovery, women become part of the group, giving them a sense of belonging and a chance to actively participate in facilitating social change. Their method of empowering women is "to use the ideas of women who we worked with that encountered the same problems." For this, they target and empower women who are facing similar difficulties but are already active volunteers in the community.

RECOGNISING VALUE AS A HUMAN BEING

The Sunflower Group works with people with HIV. They empower and work with people on an individual level, adapting their services to address each particular HIV patient's needs and strengths. Exercising an individualistic approach to development, the group addresses the weaknesses and cultivates the strengths of each patient.

Moreover, once the group sees that the person has improved, they let the person do the activity by herself: "Our group would just back them up when they need it." However, the group also provides support for the people who "fall down, until they can stand by themselves." They believe that everyone can develop herself regardless of education or ability, by their sheer value as a human being: "Every human being is equal in value and prestige, whether they are HIV patients or not." The group's task then, is to make the patients realise this.

The Woman Study Center focuses on human rights and gender. They work against the negative stigma regarding women sex workers, upholding their natural dignity and human rights. They want other people to see that prostitutes are a manifestation of a patriarchal system.

Empower Foundation is also bent on educating society to treat sex workers as equals, "just like any other person with rights." They argue:

> "We look at women as any other human being. They have social rights. When they fall ill, they must receive medical treatment like other people... Their work, whatever that may be, is like other jobs. So what we have done for those in the sex trade is just like we are working with one group of people which is like other persons in society. They have legal rights equally."

The Daughter Community Center also believes that empowerment involves teaching women and girl children the value of their worth, as well as their rights. Through their community radio programme called "Phood Ja Phasa Dek," they encourage children to form their own opinions and urge adults to listen to the children. Aside from teaching the children about their rights, they also teach the children the limitations of these rights-based approaches. They teach the children the value of duty, emphasising that claiming one's right should not interfere with others. They also encourage people to question gender inequalities, compelling them to raise their own questions about the issue.

SPEAKING OUT

For the Community Theater Project, the role of the media is invalidated if people lose their own agency in the process. Media is not just for recruiting people, nor is it only for the constant production of images. The important thing is bringing out every villager's empowerment by showing them their "own ability and power to communicate."

Therefore, they believe that the government should give the villagers an opportunity to experience new media, not only by teaching them to play a musical instrumental, as what was done before, but also by giving them a chance to proclaim what they have to say through the mass media, as a DJ or producer of their own programme.

South Resource also views empowerment in terms of being given the chance to communicate and to speak out. By giving children opportunities to participate and show their capacities, South Resource aims to help achieve development for all. Thus, when they are not given the chance, the community loses out. The group believes that confidence in asking questions should be developed in community members as opposed to being silenced by fear and shyness. It is also a matter of targeting men and women differently, adapting to the divergent cultural factors that affect the condition of both. Part of this is looking into specific factors that hinder effective communication for men and women.

The Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre also sees empowerment in terms of transformation, of moving from a state of fear to one of bravery. They also define empowerment as daring to come out and express one's thoughts and feelings. Empowerment is being able to see with clarity and understanding, and then conveying these thoughts in public.

The Foundation for Women also emphasises the importance of creating a comfortable environment where women can feel free to share their problems, removed from shame. This is especially important for cases of sexual and domestic abuse and unwanted pregnancies, which often have socially charged, shameful connotations. The way the foundation encourages women to speak out is by listening to them without judging, encouraging them to continue with their lives.

They also arrange the platforms through which women who face similar issues can share their experiences. Every year, the Foundation asks women returning to Thailand from the United Kingdom, Germany and other countries to share their experiences and problems while they were abroad. Platforms are usually arranged with around 10 participants. This is so that other women who share the same problems "can learn systematically by the cases." Empowerment for them is also allowing women to make their own decisions, not forcing them to speak out when they do not want to, but providing them an avenue where they can be heard if they decide to speak out. The Foundation also arranges for women to be interviewed on TV programmes and also encourages women to tell their stories through photos.

SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

Most of the intermediary groups who participated in this study acknowledges the fact that empowerment entails a change in the social structures that affect the lives of people. As such, these intermediary groups are engaged in advocating for different social issues. To illustrate, the Northeastern Women's Network advocates for policies regarding labour protection, occupational safety and women's rights. They have worked together with the international labour organisation, who gave them funding to develop the economic circumstances of women and to eradicate poverty. They also promote health care and build on women's potentials and leadership skills. Additionally, they focus on alliance-building and specialise in a holistic, multidimensional approach, interpreting a project creatively in regards to how it should be implemented.

Moreover, it appears that empowerment as societal transformation also entails changing the way society views certain individuals and issues. For example, the Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre works against society's belief that rape is the victim's fault by showing the dynamics behind the issue. Also, the Woman Study Center and the Empower Foundation seek to alter society's negative view of sex workers, so that they are viewed in a more respectful and more tolerant manner.

Another important dimension in societal transformation involves making society members more understanding of other members. This is manifested in the need to make husbands and families more understanding of the involvement of women in advocacy work. Respondents narrated how most of them also encountered apprehension from their husbands, who were worried about their behavior: "Men usually think that women often behave themselves very badly when they come out. A husband will be worried that his wife would do the same as he. When we come out, it's normal they will be worried about us."

Despite these fears however, the group believes that it is important for women to prove themselves and forge on. The sincere desire to help motivates them. The organisation states that they do not want to encourage stubbornness, or cause fights between husband and wife. It is rather that they see and fortify the links between working for family and working for the community. The more violent a society is, for example, the more susceptible their daughters are to rape. In the end, transforming the family is also transforming the society. This is why the group urges women that want to join them: "If you want to be like us, find time to visit us and convince your husbands that you can do it."

Societal transformation also involves sharpening the skills through which society members become more aware of the issues that surround the community. For instance, the Daughter Community Center, through their activities that focus on educational management, activity arrangement and quality of life development, teaches women how to read events that happen in society, in the hope of making them more involved in the life of the society.

EMPOWERING INFORMATION

Nine themes emerged on the meaning of empowering information for Thai intermediary groups. Information is empowering when it is [1] accessible or suitable to the community, [2] accurate or based on research from the ground, [3] transformative or leads to change, [4] by means of interactive dialogue; [5] useful; [6] based on trust, [7] based on continuity and repetition, [8] nonjudgmental, and [9] targets women.

1. Accessible or suitable to the community
2. Accurate or based on research from the ground
3. Transformative or leads to change
4. By means of interactive dialogue
5. Useful
6. Based on trust
7. Based on continuity and repetition
8. Nonjudgmental
9. Targets women

The KII interviews convey dialogue as an important element for empowering information. It is necessary to make the other person comfortable, confident, and relaxed. They also emphasise listening and providing information about rights.

Because many of these intermediary groups deal with heavily stigmatised issues like VAW, prostitution, and domestic violence, a nonjudgmental stance is necessary. Empowering information also does not designate what is right or wrong, but enables one to see the complexity of issues. It empowers women to make decisions for themselves. Influence also depends on the rapport one has with the women and the communities.

In terms of language, it is interesting to note that there was no mention of issues in translation, as opposed to Fiji.

USEFUL

The Woman Study Center views empowering information as providing useful information. Through training programmes, they stimulate the women to search for more knowledge, especially those who are interested in playing an important role in politics. Whether they get into politics or not, the usefulness of information can allow them to tell other people about it and enable them to fight for their rights in the event that these are violated.

The Daughter Community Center believes that the information's utility renders it empowering. This utility involves "giving [people] ideas, attitudes and the way to live." Although it may not exactly help to protect them, at least "it can make them see through things" and challenge them to do something about their condition. Providing follow-up information is also often necessary, as the group still provides guidance even for the women who have left their shelter. The centre also provides the local people, with knowledge about law, careers, health and other problems.

Rather than providing purely academic knowledge, the Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre empowers women through career-training and skills-building programmes. For instance, they work with the Institute of Skill Development to organise activities like cooking or arranging flowers for women, so that they can take these skills to their villages, thus promoting job creation.

TAILORED: CONSIDERING ONE'S AUDIENCE

The Thai Community Foundation believes in the necessity of communicating with people using their own words at their own level: "The best way is to sit and talk with people at [the] grassroots level." They believe this facilitates greater understanding and also encourages people to communicate more often: "[our work] depends on practical communication and its frequency." Frequency is also important because repetition is often necessary when talking to the grassroots, due to their lack of access to formal education. The Thai Community Foundation reflects: "They are different from the middle-class who are educated and don't need interpretation and implication for the hidden meaning." Aside from this, one also has to consider one's audience, noting their different occupational background. "For example," they state, "to talk to a group of housewives is different from talking to a group of women merchants."

The Center for Girls also believes that empowering information is that which is phrased in a language that local people can understand. They also believe in the efficacy of participatory media, which can come in different forms so long at it reaches the targets. For the Center, communication means sending messages that are comprehensible to receivers. Therefore, information must be adapted to the level of communication.

BASED ON TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

For the Woman Study Center, information is empowering if it is sensitive to the needs of the people that one converses with. For this, two-way communication is necessary, as it is about sending and receiving. With one-way communication, one fails to get feedback and reaction.

They also report that listening to the people allows them to gain insights on how to solve a problem in a way that is tailored to the community. This is important in the group's experience since "there are many times that we learn problems from the groups who attend in training. We can then adjust our method and continue to help people in the areas." The Sunflower Group also believes that true listening is key to empowering information.

BASED ON RESEARCH FROM THE GROUND

The Center for Labour Information Service and Training agrees that empowering information comes from two-way communication. They state that this communication should not be top down, but rather from the ground up.

Before disseminating empowering information about HIV, the Sunflower Group first seeks to address and contend with the stigma that only promiscuous people contract HIV. Hence, the group leaders must first go into the site or the community to evaluate the pervading thoughts about the disease and then come back to report what they witnessed. The initiatives that they will prepare for the community will then be based on this research from the ground, making sure that the efforts that will be undertaken will be based on what the community needs.

Moreover, the Women Health Advocacy Foundation also believes that empowering information is based on data that is collected from the villages. "They tell us what we should and what kind of work needs to be done." According to them, it is the duty and responsibility of the group to get as much information as possible from the community in order to make a decision.

The Northeastern Women's Network also believes that empowering information is that which encourages dialogue with the people and is attuned to their needs. The Sunflower group also believes that empowering information is done in consultation with the government, other allies, and related public organisations. Since there is always a dearth of knowledge and expertise, dialogue and cooperation are always necessary. Advice, recommendations, coordination and active participation from all people involved is crucial.

TARGETED SPECIFICALLY TO WOMEN

The Northeastern Women's Network has been working with women, especially women workers, as a main target group. They have observed that men get the major share of development projects while women get left behind. For instance, they state that there

are more men than women in the working process for development, as in conferences, seminars and educational tours, such that if one does not specify that women comprise the main target group, men become the majority in development work. Thus, there appears to be a need to emphasise their work for development and empowerment with women as the target group.

BASED ON RELATIONSHIPS

The Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre also thinks that the greater rapport one has with the community, the greater is one's influence: "It's human nature. When they benefit from us, they'll love us. When they love us they will believe in what we say." Thus, it is easier to instill knowledge this way. The rapport between the organisation and the grassroots women is built by providing the target audiences with information that would be useful to them.

The Center for Girls believes that part of gaining rapport is becoming an established leader or soliciting the assistance of the leaders of the community: "When we coordinate with heads of the village, our concepts were accepted. It was assumed that being [a] member of Tambol Organization guarantees our ability. It caused no problems dealing with community leaders. It was easy when we were accepted by the village."

Because networking is an important key to empowerment, empowering information involves knowing the right person to approach in view of advancing one's causes. The Woman Study Center believes that when people know one another, they can utilise the organisation's mechanisms and contact one another when they face problems. This is important with regards to organisations that focus on rights protection, such as the Consumer Protection Organisation and the lawyer council, since these channels will be useful to them in the future.

TRANSFORMATIVE

The Women Health Advocacy Foundation defines empowering information as not only involving a simple giving of information, but moreover engages in telling others what cultural value needs to be changed: "For example, when talking about health information, we won't just tell them the aspect of a disease you should cure, we will provide them more than that. We will tell them the value and culture found there or which cultural value needs to be changed."

NONJUDGMENTAL

For the Women Health Advocacy Foundation, empowering information is not judgmental. It does not prescribe strictly right and wrong answers, but rather enables one to see the complexity of the issue and its many dimensions. It empowers people by resisting firm boundaries between right or wrong. Instead, it provokes questioning about

such binaries. For example, the group helps generate information regarding the advantages and the disadvantages of a certain treatment method, thus empowering the person to make decisions for herself.

WORKING WITH CULTURAL FACTORS

PREJUDICE

Since the Sunflower Group works with HIV patients, they have to deal with much negative prejudice against people who are afflicted with this immune deficiency. To address this, the group makes it a point to conduct research on the community that they are targeting for information-dissemination and education. They do this by immersing themselves in the community, with the aim of assessing people's beliefs about HIV. Only after that do they think of ways to address the needs and problems by using the research gathered to improve their work.

Empower Foundation also laments that people who write about prostitution do not even start with basic research and that the attitude of some researchers about the issue of sex work is biased from the beginning:

> "Your researches bring no benefit to our group. If it happens like this your professors should change their attitude first before sending someone to talk to us. You need to search for some information before the interview starts. But you do nothing. You come with empty hands. This shows that those researchers pay no attention to the information at all. When they want to make a research they simply send their people here to gather information to add in the space of their thoughts."

They believe that this ivory-towered premise makes most of the research undertaken on the subject of prostitution useless, antiquated, and under-utilised. They explain how the discourse of research on prostitution is unfair and shows no respect to the 1997 Constitution, which states: "women and men are equal. All people are equal no matter if they are men or women, or they belong to any races or religion. But researchers view prostitutes as not human." They explain that they are growing tired of explaining to researchers who collect information from the group but exert no real effort to learn about the issue. Hence, this makes the interviews repetitive and futile. "As long as their attitude still disrespects the policy and concept of organisations that work for the community," they explain, "we will not invite them to glean the information from our organisation since we have no more time for those researchers. We have our time only for our community."

The Foundation for Women also empowers women by inspiring them to correct prejudices and misunderstandings. They discovered that one way of doing this was by encouraging them to tell their stories through photos. The group narrated how surprisingly, when the women were trained how to use the camera, some of them came up

with amazing pictures expressing their unique point of view. Some women who attended their trainings also became photographers in their local area, so the training resulted in practical employment as well. According to the Foundation, this medium has the power to redeem prejudices and misunderstandings. With the three provinces in the southern part of Thailand portrayed as extremely violent by mainstream media, giving the Muslim women living in the area a chance to express their way of life through pictures would remove much of the negative stigma. It would show people the peaceful aspects of traditional Muslim cultures and customs, as well as the area's many beautiful resources, such as its waterfalls and beaches.

Moreover, because it is hard to negotiate against cultural values, Fai In See believes that children should be trained from an early age: "When we only try to intervene as adults, it becomes harder." In particular, they believe that the children must be educated about their roots so that they can grow up to be adults who know about tradition and history. Currently this is being ignored, with all efforts exerted towards educating adults instead.

EMPOWERING TOOLS
COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN GENERAL

The following section discusses the significance and challenges involved in the use of various communication tools.

NETWORKING

Networking is important for many Thai intermediary groups. For the Community Theater Project, the media's value lies in facilitating networking because it is being included in an "allied network" that brings about a better quality of life, and media may or may not play a crucial role in this. It is seen as just one of the techniques that could bring about coordination and cooperation. As the Community Theater Project states: "The media is just a tool for communication among alliance network."

The Woman Study Center also believes they have a role in bridging communication between women and policy makers: "We are the medium helping two people talk." Local people elucidate on the problem that they face while policy makers seek to understand these issues in order to translate these to policies. Given this, tools are important in inspiring dialogue among different groups.

PARTICIPATORY MEDIA

For the Foundation for Women, women's empowerment could also be fostered by media through its capacity to disseminate information. Media is most empowering when it is participatory. As an intermediary group, they believe they could serve as a bridge, a meeting place where women and technology can develop together. They also believe that, in order to be effective, media should develop according to women's ideas. Because

of this, they give women the chance to appropriate the medium for themselves: "We let women participate and create the appropriate media for herself. Without women's ideas on media, communication will not be effective." The Foundation's aim of bridging women and technology is illustrated in the photography workshops that they hold for women. With the advent of the digital camera, the Foundation says that they would like to do this training again in the future, especially given photography's practical and social implications, allowing women to gain employment and at the same time, enabling them to shed light on prejudices and misunderstandings.

CHALLENGING MEDIA CONTROL

In Thailand, mainstream media is still subject to sensationalism, often exacerbating the condition of women. The Friends of Women Foundation believes that if media are not used for commercial or profitable gains, they will be more beneficial: "Communication has infinite benefits, but you have to use it in the right way to the right targets, instead of using it for any commercial purpose."

Community Theater Project also agrees that media would be more empowering if it is not controlled. They believe that media control is a major problem for Thailand today:

> "For example, some of the government TV, radio and newspaper are controlled by businessmen. When the media is controlled, it has less freedom. The consumers, including women and villagers, get the information controlled by ones who hold monetary power. That's why it's very important for civil society to get into to, seize more segments of mainstream media in order to diversify the content."

Taking power over the mainstream media out of the hands of the state and into those of civil society is a primary goal.

FOSTERING AWARENESS THROUGH MEDIA

The Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre values media for its capacity to foster awareness. They hold marches and parades to let society know what they are doing. Through parades, they believe people get to hear their words. Moreover, upon seeing their banner, "they know it's the Friends of Women Foundation who parades along the road."

The Payao Province Woman Network believes that media is also crucial for public relations. Print media, moreover, is necessary because it facilitates the learning process.

ADAPTING TOOLS AND CONTENT TO DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

The Center for Girls feels that it is important that one can use tools with flexibility, adapting them to suit different situations if necessary. The vital element is the compatibility of the tools with different conditions:

"It depends on the situation and should suit the locality... These tools were used and adapted to match our works quite well and it worked. The projector, as an example, wasn't used at first time because we were in community, we had paper and board. But if the projector was adapted to show outdoor movies like in the past they have outdoor big screen showing cinema at night. We could use it to show information sent to children at night. It could be [a] good idea. But it depended on the situation and it must suit [the] local area. It didn't mean projector could be used anywhere and anytime."

Part of adapting communication tools to different situations involves allowing people to have fun while learning. The Payao Province Woman Network also believes that media becomes effective if it is enjoyable: "They loved these activities and they could communicate with topics they knew to other people."

The Community Theater Project also believes that people, particularly women, need exposure to various forms of media, as each tool has its own power. They believe that media exist so that people can be well-informed.

LIMITATIONS IN THE USE OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The Center for Girls admits that a major challenge in utilising tools involves the groups' lack of necessary specialisation and technological skills: "The problem is that we couldn't produce the media as we need. Sometimes we don't directly specialise on production, format, plot." This challenge presents itself especially in situations when presentation effects matter heavily in grabbing the audience's attention: "We could only see the mediums that are colorful and could attract the audience."

Another limitation concerns the need to match a tool with a specific target audience. Fai In See believes that print, TV, radio and new ICTs are not effective to use for grassroots women given that many of them are illiterate such that their husband and children usually have to help them read. They also cannot use these tools in catering to the elderly women who do not know how to access these.

The use of new ICTs also presupposes access and ability for those who would like to use them. For example, as in the experience of the Southern Region Project of the Thai Community Foundation, new ICTs are inaccessible to the grassroots because it takes a long time to learn how to use these tools. Time and education is a luxury these groups cannot afford. It also takes practice and constant exposure to the media, both of which remain inaccessible. They report: "It takes more than 10 years for people at grassroot[s] level to communicate with the new technology media. It's not suitable right now."

The Community Theater Project also believes that it takes time to integrate the use of these media to the community life. This is a constantly expanding process which involves getting more and more people to participate and share the work in the target communities. As such, it is "a long term and continuous work." It also takes time to foster understanding about the different media. Before the community started running community drama, for

example, the people had no idea about it: "They merely thought it's about communism or mobilizing students to protest." In the long run, however, it provides fruitful benefits to society.

CHALLENGES WITH FUNDING FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

The Community Theater Project also observes that, in terms of the media, almost 100% of the financial support they have been given came from international organisations. Though the government acknowledges its importance, the development of media and new ICTs is not supported financially. This is despite the fact that in power struggles and coup d' etats, media infrastructures are the first to be seized in order to gain control. Businesses also acknowledge the power of media in selling the products. Thus, media are often controlled by government and business sectors.

The Woman Study Center echoes this observation of how the government does not provide support for media development: "We get funds from foreign and domestic non-government organisations, not from the government. Most of them are international organisations that support women's affairs." However, the Community Theater Project explains that this support from international organisations is not specifically focused on communication with local groups, but on other problematic issues: "Not a lot of them support us in communication fields. So we'd like to ask for any agencies to pay more attention on work about the media."

Intermediary groups like the Community Theater Project call on the government to provide the people with access to the media. They believe that the government and other institutions should not be afraid that the media's power would be used against them. As the Community Theater Project explains, "they don't give us support because they think making the villagers smarter makes them more aware of what the government is doing, as well as capitalism, thus, inciting protest." Rather than looking at media development as a threat, the government should look at it as a means to empower the villagers.

In addition to challenges from the government's lack of support for media development, funding from the communities also appear to be scarce. However, the Center for Girls observes that the villagers did not support the fundraisers that they held not because of a lack of desire, but because of a lack of funds: "There was still little fund support by the local people in the community. It didn't mean they were not interested but they didn't have much money."

ORAL COMMUNICATION

South Resource finds oral communication empowering because it brings about clarity and greater understanding between two sides, no matter how oppositional both parties appear to be. It gives a person a chance to question the other person, thus leaving room for dialogue.

Fai In See agrees that the importance of conversation is that it gives an opportunity for listening. This gives the group a chance to input suggestions from the villagers. It also gives them an opportunity to reach out to the person's family and relatives as family is an important venue for change. The Thai Community Foundation also values oral communication because it gives the speaker a chance to adjust to her audience, considering their differing backgrounds

The Promotion of Women Status Club believes that person-to-person communication is still the most effective medium, as it provides two-way communication. They use words to deliver the message directly and indirectly. Directly, they rely on knowledge dissemination though their radio programme and various kinds of media. Indirectly, they also rely on the people who listen to them sharing this information with other people through their networks.

THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS

Fai In See considers performance art as perfect for empowerment because it is engaged with listening. "People like it and understand the content well." In the future, they plan to use traditional performance such as that of Mor Lam, an Isan folk singer, to encourage people to practice organic agriculture. This kind of media is suitable for those aged 35 years old and up, especially those whom radio and TV cannot reach.

Fai In See also believes that utilising tradition and culture is effective in empowering women and communities. This is because delivering their message through local tradition and culture shows their support for the community's traditional and cultural beliefs. As such, the performance and the culture serve to promote each other. They do this campaign in many annual fairs in the provinces, including the Red Cross Festival to promote local flora like cotton and tamarind, the Winter Festival at Wang Sa Pung District, the Flower-Blooming Festival at Phu Ruea District, and the Phaya Chang Nang Phom Hom Festival at Phu Luang District.

The Center for Girls, through their drama groups called *Kao-Jii*, also uses theatre to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS as well as to provide sex education. Through it, they also explain how sex should not be seen as a shameful act and advocate for safe sex. They believe drama also makes people realise that their current understanding of a situation may be incomplete. For example, a school did not want to accept a child because he was infected by HIV. This mirrored people's beliefs that one could contract AIDS simply by going to the same school as a child with HIV. Through drama, the group garnered empathy for the child and succeeded in modifying their misconceptions. The group was proud to report that since then, the local people have eliminated their biases and have accepted the child back to school.

Drama is the group's preferred medium because they believe that participatory media works best. Drama also showed the best results since reactions or feedback from the audience is immediate: "See, the audience makes you gauge better whether they are

engaged or not. It reflected the answer... It showed about the audience that we couldn't see if they are interested by radio. More two way communication."

For them, what is empowering is not the media itself, but the process behind it. Drama is one medium that is process-oriented. To empower the women, the community involves the women and the youth in its procedures and pre-productions to provide them knowledge regarding how to solve problems, while at the same time helping them to brainstorm and troubleshoot. As such, the women and the youth get to experience how it is to conceptualise and produce dramas. This way, little by little, they get to learn from and improve on the whole experience. Aside from bringing out the participants' potentials, drama provides one way to communicate with outsiders.

The Community Theater Project also uses drama to expand their reach, incite community participation, and empower villagers. They are also one of the few groups with a mission to use drama not just for art's sake but also for the service of society.

PRINT MEDIA

According to many of the Thai KIIs, print is seldom seen as empowering in itself. It is to be used only as a reference, something that one can take home to study again. It is only for reinforcement and should not be used as the main mode of communication.

These limitations on using print media can be traced to the high illiteracy rate in the country, according to Fai In See. "They don't understand the pictures and contents provided. Mostly, they see only the natural scenes." However, Fai In See reports that the texts in pictures and posters work pretty well as long as they are enlarged and clear: "Villagers said that if the alphabets on these mediums are too small they won't see and read them."

The Woman Study Center also uses codes of law, lecture articles and documents and training programmes as references to teach women how to use laws to advocate for gender equality. In addition, they also used print media to teach them feminist perspectives and reveal patterns of social inequality. The Woman Study Center also uses print materials as a supplement for training programmes: "Documents and materials help people not to forget what they learned."

BOOKS

South Resource believes that books can also help reform society's misconceptions on prostitution, making them more sympathetic about the women's conditions. For them, books also foster harmony and empathy. Books also help transform people's thoughts, educating them and provoking them to ponder on important questions – making people think about what they would do if they were in the women's shoes.

The Community Theater Project is also planning to develop a handbook on how to run community drama and activities that teach life skills. Since a book can be copied several times and can also be published in handbooks by other organisations, information

in books will have a wide reach. Also, since books fuse print and visuals, an interest in utilising comics was also expressed.

FILM/VIDEO

The Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre states that capitalism and patriarchy are still the dominant ideology in movies. However, the group also sees video as a medium that encourages women's potential. Although it has limitations, such as where it can be set up or shown, the VCD is accessible and easy to understand. According to South Resource, unlike songs, this medium can be more elabourate in its explanations. Aside from being interesting, this medium can also be easily re-shown.

The Sunflower Group believes that the problem of VCDs lies in its lack of immediate response. It does not allow interaction with one's audience, as it only allows for one-way communication. Given these limitations, the VCD should not be used as a main communication tool but should only be used to complement interpersonal interaction. Thus, the use of VCDs should be accompanied by an analysis concerning whether this medium is suitable for the target group. The group believes that "if we distribute information on that VCD without target analysis it will cause negative results, rather than positive results." On the other hand, South Resource believes that the use of VCDs is empowering since it allows the same access to men and women.

TELEVISION

Mainstream television will only provide great benefit if there is widespread access to the means of production. In addition, Fai In See observes: "Cable TV yields less effect because people have to pay more to install it. It is also difficult to use."

The Payao Province Woman Network also criticises how TV shows like "kitchen housewife programmes" reinforce domestic stereotypes of women. Sadly, they observe that not one channel in Thailand promotes women's potential.

South Resource agrees that all of Thailand's channels, "including Channels 7, 3, 5, 9 and even ITV attract audiences with nonsense soap opera." For example, TV dramas about law courts do not really illuminate what justice and law courts are really like. This is unfortunate since for many audiences, drama conveys ideas better than speaking. The organisation expresses their desire for programmemes to be more like their conception of Chinese and Western-produced programmemes as these programmemes inspire viewers to contemplate on significant issues and realise their complexity. They lamented that TV dramas rarely tackle issues about the environment, human equality or public participation. However, they cite the dramas of Ms. Preeyanuch's Pao-jin-jong Production as an exception.

The Center for Girls also believes that TV is a rich source of role models, even better than the radio because of its visual appeal. They wish that the children could produce their own programmemes and see their accomplishments aired on TV.

RADIO

One strength of radio is its attractiveness for the youth. Additionally, people can listen to it while they work on other things. However, the radio can be more empowering if it includes more programmemes that focus on relevant and empowering information, instead of just airing music. Fai In See expresses this view by stating: "Mainstream radio and community radio provides news and information to villagers and they appreciate it. But what should be added in the radio programmemes are the useful things and important knowledge, not only the songs."

The staff of Ammatcharoen Women's Friend Centre expresses their willingness and desire to do this; however, they do not have the necessary support, money or time do so:

> "I really want to do it but I am not ready and always get urgent work to do. I do everything by myself as my friends are not ready to help me. Each of them has her own role in community so I manage everything myself. Many communities persuade me to do so but I'm not ready. I have to look after my family and also have to earn a living. If I got paid, I would probably do that."

In addition, they also expressed apprehension that they might not be listened to.

Fai In See believes that radio and television appeal to groups belonging to the 35 years old and below bracket. Both tools also exert strong influences on teenagers' opinions and thinking processes, according to South Resource. However, this power appears to be wasted because: "Right now, [audiences] are surrounded with nonsense programme on TV and nonsense songs on the radio." They think this is unfortunate and wish to advocate for a policy-making body that will look into the intellectual content of these media:

> "If the contents on media are not proper, the teenagers will slowly absorb these bad ideas. For example, if they see everyone in a TV programme speaking rude words they will get used to it and repeat those rude words. If they see some bloody and heartless scene, they will think that violence is normal. And since environmental awareness is not broadcasted, people will be oblivious to it."

TELEPHONE/ CELLPHONE

Fai In See reports that the telephone is rarely employed because of a lack of skills among current and potential users. The grassroots women explain that since they do not know how to use this tool, they are afraid to use it: "Only leader uses it." It is also common for the villagers to deliver notes by hand because mobile phones are not available.

However, groups like the Daughter Community Center still believe that it is important to establish a hotline centre with organisation networks in the source countries.

The Payao Province Woman Network also finds the use of mobile phones problematic, since it is subject to fads and arbitrary fashions, thus forcing the youth to spend more than

they should. They report that it is also being used to promote pornography even among young users: "They are necessary for communication, but they're being used for other purposes."

COMPUTER

The Operation for the Community and City for Better Living in the Southern Region Project of the Thai Community Foundation believes that PowerPoint presentations make the audience understand more effectively as compared to only talking or using paper. They believe that new ICTs speed up the learning process and make information more accurate.

INTERNET

Fai In See believes that new information technologies cannot be used with the female elderly since they are usually intimidated by it. The Sunflower Group also believes that "New ICTs don't reach or serve grassroots women." Various intermediary groups believe that it reaches academics, professionals and the middle class, but not villagers or grassroots women.

On the other hand, the Foundation for Women agrees that the Internet makes reporting faster so that "when some women or girls are missing from the villages, they use the Internet to ask for help from the foundation. We then contact the organisation in destination countries." Seeing the potential of the Internet in speeding up the reporting of human trafficking, the foundation endeavours to train its pool of volunteers in the rural areas to use the Internet as a tool to report information regarding victims of human trading .

HOW GRASSROOTS WOMEN VIEW COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND EMPOWERMENT IN THAILAND

FGD INTERMEDIARY GROUP PROFILE

The Foundation for Women (FFW) is a non-governmental organization providing services to women and based in Bangkok, Thailand. FFW implements activities by applying human rights principles aiming at respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of individual women and girl child.

BACKGROUND

FFW was formed in 1984 when we established a Women's Information Centre, providing advice to Thai women who were to go abroad. In 1986, we opened a women's shelter for victims of domestic violence. In 1988, FFW expanded its activities with the launch of a community-based education project (Kamla) to inform people about the problems of child prostitution and to counter the propaganda spread by agents working for international and national trafficking networks. The Kamla project was illustrated in the UN Plan of Action Combating the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 1992 as an example to combating child prostitution by launching public education.

In 1991, the experience gained from the community-based work led to the launch of the "Weaving New Life" project. The project combined the public education/media production work of FFW with the training of village residents as volunteer development workers to assist women and children in their communities.While working for gender

equality/equity and social justice, FFW encourages the participation of women and community in solving their problems and collaborating with authorities at all levels in shaping plans and policies that affect the lives of women and children.

FFW respects the right to self determination of individual women and aims to assist women to achieve equality and justice by providing information and support to enabling them to make informed decision and take control of their life. FFW produces educational material to publicise and promote the recognition of women's human rights. While the services at FFW are available to everyone, we give a special emphasis in our work to rural women, young women, women workers, women and children vulnerable to forced prostitution and international trafficking, victims of domestic and sexual violence.

(Excerpt from: http://www.womenthai.org/eng/aboutus.html)

FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN: THE NETWORK OF NETWORKS

With attendees from FFW Nong Kai Province, FFW Pang-nga province, the Network of Andaman Women, IMPEC (Inter Mountain Peoples' Educational Center), the Coordination Group for Children and Juveniles Development in Lampoon Province, the Organisation of Women Relation for Peace in the South, the North-East Woman Network and the Amnatchareon Women's Friend, the Foundation for Women (FFW) unites a myriad of women's groups from different areas, each of which also deals with diverse issues and interests.

Aside from the common goal of working for social justice, these women's groups also share another commonality. They either approached or were approached by FFW. FFW's scope and network is so far-reaching that some women in the FGD just met each other for the first time. Women working with areas from the South expressed excitement at the prospect of meeting and learning from women coming from the different regions. For others who had been working with the group for some time, however, the discussion was a dialogue with familiar friends and allies.

The Foundation for Women is a network of different organisations from different regions dealing with various issues that impact the community: HIV/AIDS, violence against women, peace and security, tribal conflict, labour issues, environmental preservation, human trafficking and prostitution, and many others.

The group also works with the North East Woman Network regarding environmental issues ranging from how to curb pollutants from factories to how to implement rehabilitation and disaster relief for tsunami victims. They also help the Tambon Administrative Organization promote education on HIV and AIDS.

Dedicated to uphold the rights of those who are the most marginalised in Thailand, they also bring attention to the issues of tribeswomen, "whose rights have long been repressed by community's culture."

Working with the "Seven Hill Tribe Committee," the Foundation has made it easier for other groups, like IMPEC, to integrate themselves into the tribal community, which accepts

only "people in the family." Moreover, without their network and their media campaigns, the issues of the Hill Tribe community would not have been brought to the attention of other groups and of the larger community.

FFW'S VARIOUS ROLES AND ADVOCACIES

FFW has helped other women's groups like Amnatchareon Women's Friend (AWF) Centre by giving the group direction and vision. An FGD participant from the group believes that AWF would now be defunct if the Foundation didn't intervene. AWF originally started as a support group where women could discuss family issues. Previously, the organisation nearly collapsed, with many of its founding members retiring, thereby reducing its membership to as little as four members. Around 1987, after researching about the group, FFW visited them and decided to conduct a forum with them. Through the forum, the FFW taught AWF about the general history of the Thai women's struggle and how they could position themselves within it. They also helped them flesh out and articulate their mission and vision. Additionally, the Foundation helped AWF to focus their projects and align them with their mission. Furthermore, the Foundation also served as a role model and promoter for AWF, advertising their activities through posters, brochures and videos about prostitution. The Foundation also provided AWF members an avenue to speak out, emboldening them to express their views freely. Now, AWF is more enduring, believing that, as part of FFW, "they will meet until they pass away."

In a strike against the Thai Kriang factory, the FFW also brought the female labourers in protest to the attention of the government. As a woman FGD participant who was a member of the labour union relates, the FFW provided housing, food and other necessary supplies to the protesters and accompanied them through the night. In 2000, after the factory closed down, she moved to work for FFW, staying with the group up to this day.

Another member who was hired by FFW as a researcher later became a trainer, teaching grassroots children and youth about resistance to prostitution, as well as AIDS prevention, environmental preservation and effective governance.

The Women Relation Group for Peace is an organisation of women afflicted with violence in the Southern regions, specifically in Takbi. This organisation also receives financial support from FFW. Based on its aim of assisting orphans and providing occupational support, the group educates the community regarding legal issues and the protection of their rights. Through their cooperation with these peace and community-building groups, the FFW shows their support for organisations that are dedicated to passion and caring, despite a lack of financial resources.

When the devastating tsunami struck Thailand, the Foundation also sent a delegation to visit the victims and provide them with consolation, advice, and funding. The communities were also informed about resources that they can access for therapy. Acting as both mediator and consultant, the Foundation also helped the network of Andaman women coordinate with organisations that can provide assistance for the widows and women affected by the tsunami tragedy.

With the Mekong region serving as a major hub of trafficking, the Foundation picked up more than twenty women in the airport in 2006. The women were deceived and cajoled to enter the sex trade industries in Japan, Malaysia, Italy and the Netherlands. The Foundation, acting as the women's agents, called for compensation, knowing that the Ministry of Culture had allocated 100 million baht for them. They also assisted other alien immigrants in their journeys back to their own countries. Discovering that the Thai women were alienated from their communities and families upon their return, the Foundation also helped their reintegration into community and family life.

FFW's community interventions also contributed to the "immensely improved" situation in the South, where tension between Buddhists and Muslims has led to a series of ruthless killings. The FFW can be credited for arranging interfaith dialogues and open fora attended by people representing different religions. As one participant relates, these activities were quite successful in promoting empathy amidst diversity: "This made us understand each other more. We also perceived the problems of women in other parts of Thailand from the meetings. The organisation's activities make us realise that women in other regions are also facing various problems."

Working for the Foundation is not without sacrifices, however. Sometimes, the women volunteers get paid in bananas, rice and sugar cane from the villagers that they work with, as these are the only resources that the villagers can provide to show support for them. One participant who works for the Foundation also notes: "My family earns less income because I work in FFW, but I still do it because I believe it's important. [Through being in the group], I gain strong moral support. Eventually, I wish my family and my community will understand me."

Under FFW's watchful and guiding eye, victims are eventually empowered to speak out and become advocates themselves. In a way, being enlightened about common injustices inspires them to contribute to their country. Such is the case of a member from the Organisation of Women Relation for Peace in the South. Shortly after the Foundation started giving aid to victims of violence in the Southern provinces, she became one of the victims of violence herself. She relates, "in an attempt to assist ourselves, we then established the Organisation of Women Relation for Peace." Since then, the Southern Organisation has been cooperating with the Foundation, using the network as an avenue to learn from the other areas in the country. Indeed, most of the women who work in the Foundation have been victims of the system that they are fighting against in one way or another: "Women are currently targeted, so they've become more cautious."

COMMUNICATION TOOLS
LETTERS

An example of the danger women face is the alienation, criticism and stigma they face as women advocates, as illustrated by their need to use letters. Even though the telephone is seen as a medium that provides easy and immediate access, many women explain that

they prefer to use letters instead. In order to legitimise their attendance in meetings and fora, the women use letters more often because they are perceived to be more official and to provide "proof that the woman is not going somewhere else to do something bad." This practice appears to be rooted in the negative stigma suffered by women feminists in Thailand as they are often criticised for being outspoken. Everyone in the FGD confirmed that there are many rumors circulating about them. Thus, the value of letters can be seen in its use as evidence for the husband or the community, substantiating women's participation in group functions and events as opposed to the use of the group as an alibi for "any improper purpose." As one participant explains: "I consider the letter as very important. It provides me evidence for my husband. If I only receive the information via telephone, he will question me a lot, but the letter confirms that it is really about work."

Another woman who works with and belongs to the Hill Tribe community explains that it is also no different in their culture. "I too get blamed by my community for going out, but I never give up," relates a member who has been working with the Foundation for more than 20 years. She asserts that she has is not doing anything wrong and hopes that eventually, the communities will be more open and understanding regarding her advocacy. The women also cited the letter's utility as a supporting document in applying for a leave whenever there is a conference, since the Foundations' other volunteers have different day jobs and often juggle multiple responsibilities.

FORA AND MEETINGS

Fora, which the Foundation holds up to five times annually, are the most effective form of communication for FFW. In addition to serving as recruitment sites for new members, the forum also provides an avenue to make information more understandable. For instance, the forum provides a venue to inform people about the draft for the constitution. Fora provide a way for the group to get more people to understand complex documents: "Sometimes, people do not understand issues in the documents we give them. Having talks with us, they understand these issues a lot more and they are able to tell others about it."

As one participant from Amnatchareon Women's Friend explains:

> "The Foundation provides [a] platform for law academics who give us knowledge and illustrate some points we do not understand. As poorly educated local villagers, we cannot understand academic analysis and ambiguous texts in codes. When we attend fora, the academics explain to us how those texts can be interpreted and how they affect our lives. They always ask for our opinions, but without directing our thinking, which we admire."

Thus, it appears that through the fora, people get to understand issues and discourses better, in turn leading to greater confidence, as reported by an FGD participant who claims to have only reached grade four.

FFW's oral communication takes the form of national, regional and local fora, as well as meetings. These activities are deemed empowering because they foster solidarity by showing the members' concern for one another and by providing them a "chance to feel closer" to one another. Also, it provides an opportunity to recharge and to reflect on the causes that one is fighting for, as well as to realign one's vision with that of the Foundation's. The Foundation's education campaigns about laws and other legal issues affecting women also teach these women about how to protect their rights. Moreover, these activities help them to improve their self-esteem and since "we have more confidence every time we share our knowledge and experiences in fora, we become smarter."

In addition to fora and meetings, other forms of oral communication also facilitates in the resolution of certain issues that concern the Foundation. Another FGD participant explains how talking one on one with the target person and dealing with the people that directly affect the families and the community appears to be the most effective way to handle certain situations, such as controversial environmental issues.

In terms of limitations, other participants cited language barriers as a challenge to oral communication. To overcome these challenges, one organisation solicits the services of interpreters during fora and meetings, in case translations become necessary. In court hearings, the FFW also has to assign interpreters to translate for the tribeswomen. Communication is also a problem for hill tribe areas: "We need to visit them or go to ChiangDao District ourselves." These factors led to the establishment of the Hill Tribe Center in Lampang province to assist the women and children in the tribes.

However, these limitations prove to be very minimal in view of the fora's potential to provide an opportunity for women to correct unfounded negative views about the South. They explain that because of mainstream television, which tends to exaggerate violence in the region, there is a need to challenge and revise the negative, sensationalised image in order to facilitate real understanding:

"I found that some of our friends in the Northeast had some misconceptions about the situation in the South. They perceived the situation through news programs on television depicting a not so accurate picture. We told them that what they learned from TV were just partly true. They did not understand and we started to explain to others about real situations. Together, through documents and talks, we have discussed and analysed news about Southern incidents in the mass media."

Thus, "the fora provide an opportunity for us to explain about the real situations and the movements required to resolve the conflict in the area." Joining fora and meetings makes it possible for people to see other people's perspectives on a certain situation, for instance allowing some participants in a certain fora to "feel more relieved after we hear that the situations are not that harsh." Moreover, participants get to feel more confident as they are encouraged that their help and support will go a long way for the community. As one participant remarks, "The fora really work because we can get raw information from the talks."

VCD

Videos are also used by the Foundation, showing them in schools and workplaces to warn people about illegal child-recruitment, to inform the public about the sex trade and to show the origins and the faces involved in the issue. The VCDs vividly illustrate how children as young as grade six are recruited into prostitution. The videos also allude to mistreated children working in the brothels of Phuket.

However, videos also face challenges brought about by the language barrier. As an FGD participant from the culturally diverse Southern region explains, "to be understood and shown in the South, conversation in the videos must be translated and subtitled in five languages." As such, language differences pose a challenge to the accessibility and effectiveness of videos.

PRINT

The Foundation has been very sensitive to the needs of illegal and/or trafficked migrants, making their brochures available in the languages of five different countries including that of Burma, Laos, China and Cambodia. As they explain: "These brochures are distributed to labourers who enter our country so that they can acknowledge our labour registration process and the rights of women labourers."

The booklets produced by the Foundation also include profiles of concerned organisations, as well as other necessary information for overseas migrant workers. They include contact details of the Thai embassies in other countries and are available in both Thai and English.

Despite this, however, they still have to take time to patiently explain the contents of the printed materials to women, since, as they discovered recently upon dealing with four victims of human trafficking: "They cannot understand Thai documents, I cannot use any printed media to communicate with them. Instead, I have to spend hours explaining their cases and providing advice."

TRADITIONAL TOOLS

Apart from these tools, Amnatchareon Women's Friend also uses theatre to support their campaign against domestic violence, portraying the dynamics of violence which occur in families. The Organisation for Women Relation for Peace in the South also uses role play because it "helps them communicate better than public speaking," reflecting the situation more clearly.

Additionally, Amnatchareon Women's Friend also uses *Mor-Lum* (a traditional song mostly written in the Northeast dialect). Through these songs, which generally appeal to the older population, they refer to current and pressing issues and call for an end to violence against women and children.

MEDIATORS FOR MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT

The Foundation for Women also plays the role of the mediator, both for media and governance. They explain how they have to understand the content of media so they can explain it to the grassroots women. In explaining information from certain media, the Foundation explains information in two stages – first, by showing the media to the communities and second, by explaining the issues and discourses contained in the media. The FFW is also responsible for soliciting for financial support and for providing volunteers who are more knowledgeable in new media that can help out in advancing a specific cause.

The Foundation also mediates for the government, explaining how "those who are affected hardly talk to government agencies. They prefer to talk to us, as they feel more relaxed to tell us their stories." They report how, according to the women they talk to, officials are not perceived as reliable and approachable. A woman in the FGD even remarked how recruitment for illegal trafficking was even traced to a local government official based on a case that they previously handled. For them, this goes to show the crucial role that civil society plays in Thailand: "Without them, the country will not progress."

NOTIONS OF EMPOWERMENT

FFW believes that empowerment begins with women being made to recognise their rights. This is also why the group puts up fora which familiarise women with laws that can protect their rights.

As a large women's coalition concerned with different aspects and composed of different religions, age, classes, positionalities and belief systems, FFW makes its members consider the word 'woman' in a broader meaning, considering how the term encompasses mother, wife, doctor, advocate, teacher, volunteer, social worker and many other identities.

For the participants, empowerment is the capacity to help and transform the community, to open people's eyes and to push their limits, eventually making them understand the need for openness, diversity and solidarity. Thus, the Foundation also regularly trains their staff to be moderators, fortifying their legal knowledge and awareness of history and current affairs.

A participant from the Network of Andaman Women also relates how the Foundation helped her develop from an ignorant local villager to an educated, courageous and outspoken member of the Foundation who is ready to help and face any difficulty. Indeed, as one participant noted, developing its staff's potential is the strength of the Foundation. Therefore, they define empowerment as the confidence and assurance that grants them the power to help others.

POWER IN NUMBERS

The members feel empowered because of being in the network because in the Foundation, "even the little knowledge they have makes a big difference." One participant

explains how, working for the Foundation for Women, "our group gets more acceptance from the community when we mention that we work with the Foundation. I am not sure that we would have received the same credit, had we chosen to join another organisation."

Despite the dangers that plague these women, they still continue in their advocacies, with the FFW staff providing them moral support: "This makes us feel stronger. … We have the strong will to keep working because we know we don't deal with our problems alone." They are also encouraged by the dedication of their leaders and their chairperson, who sometimes visits or accompanies the field officers to their areas of responsibility. One participant described the Foundation's leaders through this remark: "They do not just sit in the office and wait for reports."

Aside from having people to emulate as role models, the Foundation is also a vital refuge when the women are plagued with verbal and nonverbal opposition in their family or community for being "improper," "radical," or "anti-progress." "Being accepted provides us deep moral support," the women chorused.

The network has also proved invaluable for women who have been laid off from their jobs for protesting and standing up for their rights. It assures them that they have done nothing wrong and gives them an alternate support group to turn to, making them feel that "although there is no one in our community who may understand us, there is always someone else in other parts of this country who do."

The Foundation also recognises and accepts the women for the valuable work they accomplish: "When faced with severe problems that we cannot solve by ourselves, it is good for us to always have someone to consult with." Their willpower comes from the awareness that whatever these problems may be, they have the capacity to cope. More often than not, through the network, their skill and awareness also becomes recognised and applauded in the community.

Through the network, the women's good deeds are amplified, contextualised, and given value, ensuring them of the worthiness of the causes that they are fighting for. Thus, according to its members, FFW's legacy "will be a blueprint for the next generation to follow."

THAILAND SYNTHESIS

CONTENT SYNTHESIS

- A total of 17 organisations from Thailand were interviewed for this study. Most of the organisations in the sample responded that they provide services to and take on the issues and concerns of grassroots communities in general (41%). Other groups focused on women in general (35%), catered to grassroots women in particular (18%), and one group reported that they have broader and other target beneficiaries and counts grassroots women as only one of its many beneficiaries. Many organisations (88%) reported that education and information dissemination is part of their mission or thrust. Many were also set up for networking (65%), training and capacity building (65%), and services (59%). A number of groups were also involved in research, publication and documentation (41%) and advocacy and mobilisations (35%). Service delivery (71%) was the strategy employed by the organisation in communicating with their beneficiaries, particularly with the grassroots women. This strategy is closely followed by education or consciousness-raising (64%), training and capacity-building (57%), networking and linkages (50%), advocacy and mobilisations (43%), research, publication and documentation (36%), and economic empowerment (29%). As for the uses of the communication tools, the top uses were for education (94%), administrative and training purposes (69%), advocacy (38%), and announcements (31%).

- The top communication tools used by most groups are film and video (94%), landline phones (88%), radio (88%), Internet (71%), poster (71%), computer (59%), and fax

machine (59%). Intermediary groups in Thailand prefer audio-visual media when interacting or reaching out to the grassroots women and children. Some of them stated that the films they show have different themes and issues and they prefer films and videos because they spark the interest of these women. Landline phones are seen as tools of communication and coordination while the radio is widely used for disseminating information and advocacy on issues. The top communication tools used by intermediary groups, such as films, videos, community radio programmes and posters, are used for disseminating important issues for awareness to the beneficiaries. On another note, landline phones, the Internet and fax machines are used to contact and coordinate meetings and events with these beneficiaries.

- The tools most accessible to grassroots women as observed by the intermediary groups are the radio (62%), landline phones (31%), and theatre (15%). The community radio can directly access their target groups in rural areas and there are many community radio stations in their partner areas. This is followed by the use of landline phones. There are public telephones installed in the village so that they can contact other groups. Community theatre projects reach estimated spectators of about 150,000-160,000 around Thailand. Some identified the cellular phone and the computer as the least accessible tools for grassroots women. Cellular phones are rarely used because there are many provinces without a signal while the computer is used for administrative purposes only.

- The film or video (33%), posters (33%), radio (33%), and the theatre (33%) were perceived as the most effective communication tools. These tools are considered effective because of their stimulating visuals (55%) and their ability to disseminate information even to children and illiterate adults. Posters and stickers are also perceived as effective compared to newsletters when they are large and clear. The community radio is seen as effective because aside from disseminating news, it can promote culture through playing local songs and story-telling. For some groups, drama appears to be the most effective. Unlike the radio, drama provided for two-way communication or interaction. Drama training also developed confidence and empowerment for target beneficiaries. Both radio and drama were effective for the organisations because they are culturally appropriate (36%).

- The Internet (45%) was the least effective tool in interacting with grassroots women as mentioned by intermediary groups. It was followed by the computer (36%), then by print media in general (18%), and the radio (18%). These communication tools were ineffective because they were deemed unaffordable. Limitations on budget and

electricity seemed to be a disadvantage for using the Internet and the computer in rural areas. Location, difficulty in setting up, and lack of infrastructure were also reasons why these tools where considered as ineffective. Limited coverage and cultural inappropriateness (25%) and lack of skills training, interactivity and visual stimulation were also mentioned as reasons why a tool was regarded as ineffective.

THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

5 main themes emerged on the meaning of empowerment for intermediary groups in Thailand: [1] economic independence, [2] political participation, [3] community organising or solidarity-building, [4] individual agency or self-transformation, and [5] societal transformation.

- **Economic independence** was viewed largely in terms of intermediary groups accessing money for women's projects and helping women do business.
- Interestingly, **political participation** was seen as intermediary groups acting as consultants to the government, advocating for women's rights through legislation, and engaging in leadership and governance. Among the groups' women-specific activities were training women to access their rights and participate in local governance, gathering women's proposals for political reform, and conducting research on effects of policies on women.
- **Community-organising and solidarity-building** in Thailand focused on intermediary groups organising and strengthening alliances and community networks, as these groups believe that networking provides solutions for many obstacles and benefits for their organisations.
- **Individual agency or self-transformation** had the following dimensions: (1) self-worth/awareness (e.g., recognises her value as a human being), (2) personality (e.g., develops confidence and courage), (3) expression (e.g., shares her own thoughts, feelings, and experiences), (4) independence/freedom, (5) control (e.g., makes her own decisions), and (6) rights/society (e.g., becomes a leader and practices social responsibility). Being able to confront one's husband was specifically mentioned as part of the transformed self. Gaining liberation from cultural shackles that bind and freedom from grief and oppression were unique meanings to agency as well. A specific issue raised was removing the negative stigma against women sex workers and women survivors of violence.
- **Societal transformation** for the intermediary groups in Thailand entails changing social structures that affect people's lives, altering the way society views certain individuals and issues in the hope of making people more understanding of others,

and sharpening the skills through which society members become more aware of the issues that surround the community.

WHEN IS INFORMATION EMPOWERING?

9 themes emerged on the meaning of empowering information for Thai intermediary groups. Information is empowering when it is [1] accessible or suitable to the community, [2] accurate or based on research from the ground, [3] transformative or leads to change, [4] by means of interactive dialogue; [5] useful, [6] based on trust, [7] based on continuity and repetition, [8] nonjudgmental, and [9] targets women.

WHEN ARE COMMUNICATION TOOLS EMPOWERING?

Communication Tools In General. Intermediary groups in Thailand valued communication tools for facilitating networking and bridging communication. A theme that emerged is how each tool has its own power. As such, there is a tool that is compatible or suitable for every situation. Communication tools were also viewed as effective if they are enjoyable. Tools are most empowering when they are participatory or include the women themselves. Among the problems cited in the use of communication tools include literacy and skills requirements. As such, some tools were considered not suitable for grassroots women given the special technological skills needed. In addition, it takes time to integrate new tools into communities because of the learning required. A specific issue raised by Thai intermediary groups is the lack of donor support for the use of communication tools. A more macro concern that was highlighted concerns the control of mass media by government and business which inclines the content of mass media for commercial purposes only.

The main themes on the empowering potential of **Traditional Communication Tools** are outlined by tool:

- **Oral Communication** - oral communication is most empowering because of two-way/person-to-person communication, which brings about clarity, understanding and opportunity for dialogue
- **Theater & Performing Arts** - theatre is empowering because it uses tradition and culture and is particularly suitable to older audiences (35 years old and up); it is engaging and has immediate impact; participatory theatre further empowers the women or the community themselves.
- **Print Media** - print is seldom seen as empowering given the high illiteracy rate and is used largely as reference or supplement to training (of the different types of print media, **books** were mentioned).

- **Film/Video** - film/video, though accessible, interesting, and easy to understand, lack personal interaction and immediate feedback; mainstream film are filled with dominant ideologies that promote capitalism and patriarchy.
- **Television (TV)** - mainstream television can be empowering if there is access to its production; however, its content is generally not useful and is filled with gender stereotypes.
- **Radio** - radio can be influential especially to younger audiences (35 years old and below); however, the content of mainstream radio is not useful.
- **Telecommunications** – (not mentioned)

The main themes on the empowering potential of **New ICTs** are as follows:

- **Cellphone** – the use of cellphone is rare because of lack of skills and inaccessibility.
- **Computer** - the computer is useful for intermediary groups in making presentations that makes the audience understand more effectively.
- **Internet** - new ICTs or the Internet are believed to be not suitable for grassroots women; new ICTs are inaccessible to grassroots women and will require years to learn; new ICTs are useful to intermediary groups in networking with organisations in other countries.

For Thai intermediary groups, **oral communication** was considered most empowering for grassroots women because of its two-way or interactive process. **Theatre and performing arts** was likewise empowering given its traditional use in Thai culture. **Theatre** was specifically cited for appealing to older audiences. **Film**, **TV**, and **radio** were *potentially* empowering but were heavily critiqued for their mainstream content. As such, mainstream **film**, **TV**, and **radio** are not empowering; instead, these tools are seen as further promoting patriarchy. **Print media** was not considered empowering. **Telecommunications** was not cited at all.

Compared to **new ICTs**, the **traditional communication tools** in terms of **oral communication** and **theatre** were considered more empowering for grassroots women in Thailand. Though intermediary groups find the **computer** helpful in making presentations and the **Internet** useful for networking, **new ICTs** are not considered empowering to grassroots women. There is even a belief that **new ICTs** are not suitable for grassroots women. **New ICTs** remain inaccessible and will take years to adapt. The **cellphone** was also considered as not empowering given skills requirements and accessibility problems. As such, Thai intermediary groups find **traditional communication tools** more empowering than **new ICTs**.

FGD SYNTHESIS

Discussions with the Foundation for Women (FFW) members showed that traditional communication tools, such as fora and meetings, are still seen as most effective because they facilitate dialogue among participants. In addition, they cite face-to-face interaction as key to their development work with communities. Furthermore, they explain advocacy work as requiring communication with different and numerous audiences. Given this diversity and quantity in terms of target audiences, they try to overcome language barriers through soliciting the services of translators or interpreters.

Intermediary groups were viewed as playing different roles in the lives of their beneficiaries. For instance, intermediary groups provide support to their communities, assisting them in terms of organisational development, resources and moral support. Intermediary groups also facilitate dialogue for better understanding, as such promoting diversity and empathy. The participants also cited the need to build trust among the community in order for the group to perform these roles, especially given the negative stigma attached to feminism.

Consistent with the participants' views that traditional communication tools are still the most effective tools for interacting with grassroots women and other beneficiaries, the participants made little mention of new ICTs.

For the participants, empowerment pertained to enabling people to recognise the multiple identities and rights of women. Empowerment also entails the capacity to help and transform the community by making people understand the need for openness, diversity and solidarity.

Thailand

COMMUNICATION — TRADITIONAL TOOLS STILL
FACE to EXPERIENCE KEY EFFECTIVE
FACE = KEY
TRANSLATION = OVERCOME LANGUAGE BARRIERS
MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

IMPACT of I.G.
• Leader oriented
• Suppt
• Diversity/Empathy
• Facilitates dialogue
• Negative stigma of feminism
• Trust

VIEWS of NEW KTs • No mention
• Could play role to facilitate
with media or government

• Notions of Empowerment
• Capacity to transform community positively
• Recognize multiple needs of women
• Rights

FGD

WWW

EFFECTIVE

ACCESS

TOP

FILM

POSTER

WHAT IS EMPOWERING?

UNIP IS EMPOWERING WHEN?

COMM TOOLS TO REACH GRASSROOTS

1. Accessible
2. Accurate
3. Transformative
4. Through dialogue
5. Useful
6. Trust
7. Reports
8. Non-judgment
9. Target women

Self agency

Economic

Political

Solidarity

33% 36% 45% 62% 31% 15% 88% 41%