

## Lesson Learnt: Women Peace Network from Southern Border Provinces of Thailand

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### Abstract

The lesson learnt originate from the Southern Border Provinces' Women for Peace Network Research that produced by the Office of Peace and Governance, King Prajadhipok's Institute, under budget provided by "UN Women", and the network alliance, by taking into account the importance of peace building process and security in Thailand's southern border region.

The objective of this research aims at promoting peace and security with the tools of the cooperation of force and power available, particularly among the women's groups in the southern border provinces, in order that potentiality, opportunity and readiness be created among the groups of women residing in the aforementioned region, whereby their collective participation shall be carried out and factored in into the peace building process. In addition, the research project also compiled a collective data/information base of knowledge of the Southern Women Community Network, the summary of major points in the lesson being learnt, as well as the learning exchange of major issues, in order to move forward to the 7 policy recommendation points, which are comprised of the following: 1) Women and Politics 2) Women, Economy and Occupational Creation 3) Women, Judicial Process and Human Rights 4) Women, Religion, Education and Culture 5) Women and Relief and Recover 6) Women and Alleviation of Violence 7) Women's Participation in Peacebuilding through focus groups by means of peace (in 4 particular areas, that is, Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, all being southern provinces, and 4 districts in the other southern province of Songkhla, which are Saba Yoi (Malay: Sebayu), Thepha (Malay: Tiba), Chana (Malay: Chenok) and Na Thawi (Malay: Nawi)).

The target groups of research are comprised of women affected by the violence, women from public sector, women from civil society network organizations, representatives from Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre, volunteers from village public health units, representatives from local administrative organizations, religious leaders, female

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community leaders, teachers and academicians locally and from other areas. There are total 300 female leaders' networks within the research area.

The scope of research content in regard to the peace building process through female leaders in southern border provinces has been produced by summarizing and compiling professional advice and opinions of the technical review group, which were provided during their meetings, with the following dimensions being the focus:

- 1) Women and creation of the atmosphere in which knowledge and experience on the topic of Peace is to be exchanged.
- 2) Rights and fairness to women (politics, economy and occupation, education, religion, culture, judicial process and human rights, remedy).
- 3) Establishing women's cooperation networks in Thailand's southern border provinces.
- 4) Providing knowledge in support of pushing forward the female elements into the peace building process

### **1. Women's Conflict Situation from Deep South of Thailand**

Ever since 2004, following the increasingly aggravated conflicts within the areas of Thailand's southernmost, the role of female Muslims in the region has witnessed the dramatic change, from once a homemaker within their own households to playing part in the society at large (in fact, regardless of racial origins and faith). Women witnessed their own loved ones being in trouble, apprehended, brought to court of law, found guilty of crimes related to homeland security violation and sentenced so as to serve time, or in some cases, their loved ones being released without charge or after serving time, some of them becoming fugitive, or accused of being accomplice in anti-government movements, as well as loss of lives of their loved ones (fathers, husbands, sons).

The incidents have created a turning point within society positively and negatively and affected women in the southern border provinces. Therefore, it is necessary to learn more as to how their ever-changing roles may be of use to peacebuilding and to prevent women from being victimized by any of the violent situations. For this reason, numerous processes has taken shape within the areas, be it communication of what had happened being carried out, legal education being obtained for the benefits of justice and fairness, learning about peace, or self-defense and weapons training. However, from these viewpoints, it remains insufficient for the positive change in the end; therefore, women empowerment must continue.

***Condition of Violence:***

Personal Level: Comprised of four (4) parts: 1st part: Certain government officials exercise their powers and take actions without taking into consideration the sensitivity and delicate matter of regional, unique identity, people's rights and abuse of power, 2nd part: Act of violence by people whose ideology, thoughts, belief and faith differ from those of the state, 3rd part: Act of violence driven by the fount of conflicts of interest among dark forces, organized crimes, etc., 4th part: Act of violence arisen from hatred and personal vengeance.

Structural Level: Despite the administrative structure and governance based upon decentralization, for some reason are remain limitations in terms of responding to unique identity, needs and wants, as well as expectations of the local residents due to certain restrictions by both internal and external factors, thus resulting in unfairness, injustice, discrimination, and lack of self-governance and local administration in essence, such as the development not in conformity with the local community's way of life, lack of sufficient education which would have allowed the majority of local residents to be able to challenge and even win over secular and religious circumstances.

Cultural Level: Fundamentally, Malay Muslim residents were reportedly made to feel alienated from the Thai society at large because of the perception that their own identity had been oppressed by some of the prejudiced and suspicious government officials, as well as non-acceptance by the general public; which prompted some of those local residents to ally with or support the insurgency-related violent acts, and which also served as a pretext for the unrests by the separatists in disguise of Malay Muslim identity.

Therefore, it remains necessary to respond to the problems in a peaceful way and find solutions to insurgency-related violence by peaceful means of peace dialogue.

**2. Research Methodology**

The research methodology is qualitative and research sampling are 300 women's leaders in Deep South of Thailand in 4 particular areas, Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, all being southern provinces, and four (4) districts in the other southern province of Songkhla, which are Saba Yoi, Thepha: , Chana and Na Thawi. The reasare comprised of women affected by the violence, women from public sector, women from civil society network organizations (Civic Women's Network), representatives from Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre, volunteers from village public health units, representatives from local administrative organizations, religious leaders, female community leaders, teachers and academicians locally

and from other areas. The qualitative method process are through dialogue process and in-depth interview.

### **3. Roles of Women in the Conflict Areas**

Angkhana Neelaphaijit (2010: 8-14) has provided the following categories of women's groups in regard to Thailand's southernmost unrests:

- 1) Women affected by government officials' acts of violence.
- 2) Women from the households affected by unknown armed troops' actions.
- 3) Women in the violent groups or manipulated to become anti-state.
- 4) Armed women in the government units.

Given the aforementioned categories regarding the conflict situations in southern border provinces, those women may be considered to be either victims or those who inflict pains and exercise violence themselves. Therefore, it is important for the peacebuilding process to begin with the participative role of those local women while equally indispensable is the necessity to determine effective strategies and policies on Women and Peacebuilding in southern border provinces in concrete form.

The impacts form conflict situations for women in Deep South of Thailand are composed of

#### ***1) Physical Impact***

Many seemed to assume that women were not actually the target of politically-related acts of violence. The truth said otherwise: Women had become the no. 1 target of violent actions as witnessed in the highly elevating figure of the female victims of violence by weapons from 2004 to 2012. Nevertheless, the relatively good thing was that, obviously, in 2013 the figure was found to be in decline conflict impact on Women in Deep South

Year of the Insurgence	Women		Total
	Killed	Injured	
2004	11	50	61
2005	21	137	158
2006	37	207	244
2007	89	233	322
2008	29	118	147
2009	47	209	256
2010	40	150	190
2011	55	179	234
2012	57	205	262
2013	29	143	172
2014*	15	19	34

Table 1: Illustration of the Number of Women Directly Affected from January 2004 to March 7, 2014

## *2) Mental/Psychological Impact*

The majority of women in southern border provinces were more or less psychologically affected by the unrests in the region in multiple aspects and statuses, whether it be in terms of being victimized themselves, losing their loved ones, moving forward to become household leaders following the apprehension of their husbands. According to the information compiled during the discussion of the focus group on the topic of Thailand's southern border provinces' children and women's rights in June 19, 2014, various concerns among these women were cited as follows:

- Concern over the threats posed by local authorities during blockades, etc.
- Concern over family members being harmed.
- Concern over the pressure caused by hostile environments.
- Concern over the fact that wives of the convicts were living harsh lives.
- Concern over the fact that there have been orphans and widows due to the incidents.

These elements caused pressure and psychologically affected women in the region. In addition, it could become even worse without earlier taking good of one's own situation, especially in terms of depression, stress and high anxiety. For good measure, even the wives of

government officials harbored fear for their husbands' safety and those whose husbands once had been taken under custody were also worried about their spouses' well-being.

Moreover, conflict situations in southern border provinces of Thailand generate the strong roles of women. The important women roles after conflict situation can categorize in 4 roles:1) human rights activist 2) relief and recovery 3)family leader 4) Military Service.

#### **4. “Peace dialogue” as a tool for searching peace building and peace network**

“Peace Dialogue” involves all concerned sectors each of which must provide for focus groups and venues in which discussions may be carried out in different levels and so doing attentively with empathy and in right speech while being respectful towards other distinct viewpoints. Whereas peace dialogue may not lead to all problems being fruitfully solved, at least it could help build confidence and trust, tolerance and focus upon cooperative measures rather than blaming each other in vain.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand (2013) has proposed the idea about peace dialogue that, “Peace dialogue is not negotiation. The result expected from the series of negotiation could be a set of agreements whereas peace dialogue is intended to create the favorable, peaceful atmosphere within the southern border provinces. The example may be seen in the agreements between the Thai government and BARISAN REVOLOSION NASIONAL MALAYA PATANI (BRN) dated February 28, 2013. One of the significant elements under such circumstances is mutual trust between the two conflict parties -- which is quite a challenge to make happen. If the discussion took place by coercion, it would not be beneficial because mutual trust, which is important on long-term basis, did not take place.” Apparently, Chaiwat Satha-Anand focused upon the issue of discussion taking place within non-pressure atmosphere with mutual trust being promoted in process.

In conclusion, peace dialogue is strategically intended to be focused upon mutual trust and understanding, leaving all prejudices behind in the name of peace-building framework, thus in a sense being virtually equal to having a sense of ‘empathy’ by which one, being in other’s shoes, see through the stranger’s world and finally understand it in the way that other people witness it with their own perception. In fact, representing a subset and an integral part to the more complex paradigm of ‘peacebuilding’ process per se, ‘peace dialogue’ is comprised of a series of communication in pursuit of possibilities, discussion and negotiation prior to finally coming to agreement. Such process may be officially or unofficially, directly or indirectly allocated as well.

## **5. The Results and Conclusion of Research**

The researchers have organized “peace dialogue” within the four (4) specific provinces of Thailand : Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Sonkhla. The summarized version and policy recommendations are as follows:

### **1) Women and Politics Issues**

#### **Problems and Obstacles**

- 1) Muslim women are not provided with any of women-oriented, specific platforms or stages in politics; therefore, issues regarding women have failed to gain attention and never reached to the point of finding effective solutions due to influence by the male-dominating authoritarian environments.
- 2) In terms of political operations, Muslim women tend to be considered in unfairness to be inferior to their male counterparts, the later of whom are believed by myth to be more suitably characteristic of political jobs and activities.
- 3) In certain Muslim households, for women to be considered excessively active in social activities could possibly inspire discontent to those households’ male leaders.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- 1) Providing the open space or platform exclusive for women and women’s issues where those interested in politics and/or those with political posts are allowed to share opinions.
- 2) Mass media and public sector should increasingly help project the “more” positive image of socially active Muslim women to the public.
- 3) All sectors should encourage women to become active in participating in decision-making process with respect to various issues in different levels.
- 4) Specifying the ratio of female to male participants in politics.

### **2) Women, Economy and Occupational Creation Issues**

#### **Problems and Obstacles**

- 1) The government seems to have missed the correct point in their effort to find solutions to economic problems; for instance, solving the problems of deserted rice fields with Hevea or rubber tree plantation, which in turn has affected ecological system and surrounding environments.
- 2) Lack of monitoring and follow-up, as well as no performance appraisal conducted, resulting in the discontinuation of supports originally provided by certain agencies from the public sector.
- 3) Marketing-related problems such as extremely high costs of transportation, etc.

#### Policy Recommendations

- 1) The government should ensure that rules and regulations be clearly established prior to the policy announcement; for instance, Women's Development Fund.
- 2) Local administrative organizations should promote and support women's occupations, including setting up the Sub-district (Tambon) Occupational Training Center.
- 3) Banks should grant lower interest rates for loans or extend the repayment period especially for women/women's groups.
- 4) Promoting women to run the socially-oriented businesses.
- 5) Women's empowerment and the likes should be implemented, such as providing the English-language education in response to the upcoming ASEAN market.

### 3) Women, Justice/Judicial Process and Human Rights Issues

#### Problems and Obstacles

- 1) Unfair and injustice prevalent ranging from apprehension to deliberation process, causing inequality in the area.
- 2) Local residents find the judicial process carried out by the state unacceptable.
- 3) The judicial process and human rights activities have proven "not" strong enough", providing the gap for wrongdoing and abuse of authority and powers by exploiting the local residents, especially the uneducated.

#### Policy Recommendations

- 1) The government should be sincere and determined to provide solutions to the southern border provinces' problems, as well as being earnest in their implementations.
- 2) Personnel recruitment in light of the southern border provinces-related projects and activities by the authorities should be conducted in fairness and with efficiency.
- 3) The deliberations period in judicial process by the court of law to become shorter while still remaining in the scope of justice.
- 4) The government, private organizations and allies from the popular sector should take part in cooperating in shifting and changing the attitudes of the masses in regard to access to justice and revision/amendment, commencing from providing the knowledge in the relevant issues for local residents within the conflict areas.

#### 4) Women, Religion, Education and Culture Issues

##### Problems and Obstacles

- 1) A core curriculum with respect to general education in primary and secondary/high school levels is not widespread; fundamentally, students are educated in religious disciplines rather than general education.
- 2) Fashion is overstated by teenagers; on contrary, the youth were supposed to dress properly according to tradition and culture.

##### Policy Recommendations

- 1) Provincial/sub-district and municipal organizations to promote education to the youth, are encouraging the means of creating occupation, employment, social and cultural affairs.
- 2) Non-formal education, as well as the opportunity to create one's own occupation, must be provided for the underprivileged in light of equality and calibration.
- 3) Mosque, temple and shrine are to provide religious teachings, building morale and promoting ethical and religious activities, as well as spiritual practice, etc.
- 4) All stakeholders parties involved are to come to mutual understanding in different, religious teachings, building morale and promoting ethical and religious activities, as well as spiritual practice faiths while promoting the expansive of comprehensive education in light of peacebuilding.
- 5) Placing importance upon motherhood and children's education by providing children with healthy living environments, as well as pushing for the role of mother and family to become the country's national policy.

#### 5) Women and Relief and Recovery Issues

##### Problems and Obstacles

- 1) Community leaders are uncooperative unless they receive brokerage fees and/or allowance.
- 2) The authorities are reportedly inefficient and missing the points in their operation.
- 3) Inequality of monetary aid in regard to relief and recover supports depending upon the variety of types of the victims: local government officials themselves, local residents in general and the relatives of the “opposite” parties and insurgents.
- 4) Failure to cover the entire area of information dissemination and the lack of contacts with the victims prevents them from receiving the correct and sufficient amount of information and intelligence regarding relief and recovery supports, as well as some of those affected by the incidents not belonging to any relevant networks.

- 5) A certain number of existing projects have become redundant and lack continuation between the successive ones and their predecessors, thus preventing sustainable development from taking place, resulting in the unproductive use of budget.
- 6) Internal conflicts among the victims entitled to financial supports in terms of incompetent allocation of relief funds awarded by the authorities, et al; for instance, the deceased happened to have numerous spouses and the support has been being provided for one of them only, while in reality all of them were affected by the death of their husband.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- 1) Direct and efficient dissemination of information on those affected by the incidents are to be carried out.
- 2) Presentation must be made in clear and effective fashion because in providing relief aid, in reality, there are many agencies involved with overlapped duties and responsibilities, as well as unclear information, which is more likely to have led to fruitless results in the end.
- 3) The victims must be allowed to finally stand on their own through the instrumentalization of occupational creation.

## **6. Women and Violence Reduction Issues**

#### **Problems and Obstacles**

- 1) Violence in Thailand's southern border provinces in familial level: women having conflicts with their own families, not enough time to take care of children, husbands' discontent/misunderstanding, etc.
- 2) Violence in Thailand's southern border provinces within communities: disaccord, sectarianism, being suspected to be persons of interest in espionage.
- 3) Illegal narcotic substances are also another factor in promoting violence; finding solutions will help alleviate violence.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- 1) Supporting women's groups to put an end to violence through the tool of integrated participatory activities.
- 2) Providing strength for those in need, commencing from smaller groups of local residents, to larger communities and provinces, through women's groups, which serve as a key player – 1) with budgetary supports granted by local organizations 2) tools and equipment, as well as coordination, by public sector 3) knowledge, training and skill sets by civic societies and religious organizations.

3) Working on moving the issue of violence and alleviation of violence into the agenda of national policy on continual basis.

## 7. Women's Participation in Peacebuilding Issues

### Problems and Obstacles

- 1) Note that what the insurgency groups lack is a sense of unity, which has proven to hinder peace negotiation; in addition, the authorities are also in wants of a sense of unity as well (BRN), making it difficult and signifying as an obstacle to peacebuilding process.
- 2) Some local residents do not have faith in peace negotiation process between the state and the insurgency groups lack is a sense of unity, which has proven to hinder peace negotiation; in addition, the authorities are also in wants of a sense of unity as well (BRN), making it difficult and signifying as an obstacle to peacebuilding process.
- 3) Some local residents do not have faith in peace negotiation process between the state and the insurgency group due to their discrepancy in terms of ideology; in addition, there remain doubts as to whether or not the so-called representatives do have authority and powers to make decisions.
- 4) Government policies are not moving into the same direction, including the need to improve in the area of judicial process in light of further rounds of peace dialogue.
- 5) Both parties (the government and BRN) are not truly devoted to promoting more of the atmosphere favorable to peacebuilding process; both are also required to be more resolute in regard to violence reduction as opposed to, for instance, patrolling with heavy weaponries.
- 6) Peace dialogue has yet to reach and be involved local residents rather than the centralized authorities.
- 7) Lack of knowledge and understanding in peacebuilding process.

### Policy Recommendations

- 1) Providing open space for talks in accordance with the government's policy: those with different viewpoints and distinct opinions, including the insurgents (they are also stakeholders) are to be provided with the opportunity to participate in focus groups and peace dialogue, that is, politics over military forces.
- 2) Maintaining the peacebuilding standpoint and providing supports for peacebuilding process.
- 3) Learning and understanding the peacebuilding process on continual basis.
- 4) Establishing focus groups and discussions among female organizations within communities while being open to ideas and opinions.
- 5) Appointing female leaders and mainstays within communities and family units especially for peacebuilding.

## Conclusion

From the research results create the “Women Peace Network Model” (Illustration 1). The model focus on political, economic, social and cultural perspective of women and peace policies in deep south of Thailand. There are three timeline policy plans: short-term plan: establishing and coordinating in strengthening Southern Border Provinces’ Women for Peace Network in light of determining solutions to conflicts. mid-term Plan: providing the open space for focus groups and discussions among women’s group with different viewpoints and distinct opinions in regard to identifying the roadmap of peacebuilding: long-term Plan: Carrying out a reform and development of women’s role in peacebuilding in Thailand’s southern border provinces.

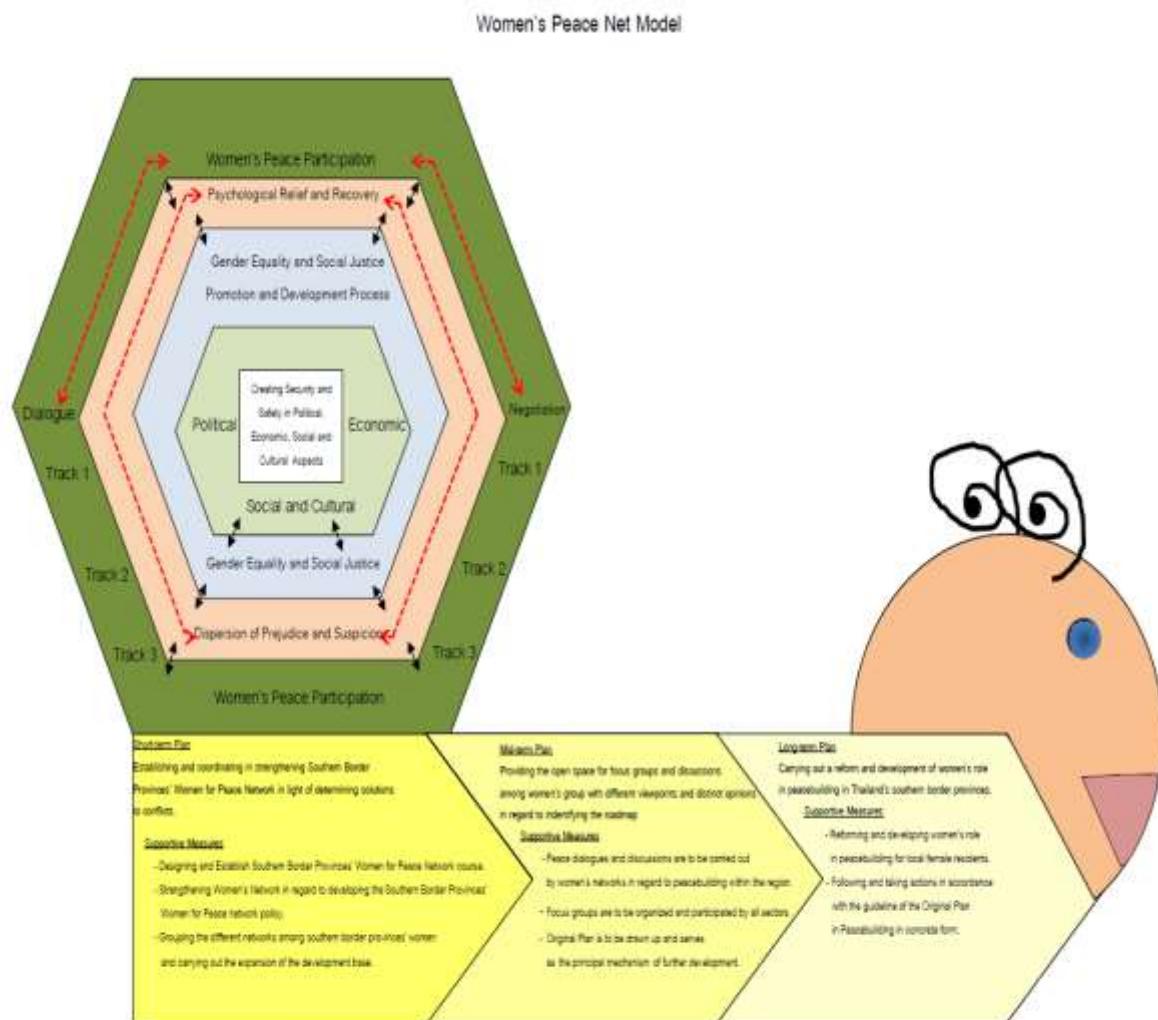


Illustration 1: Illustration of Women’s Peace network Model

**Keywords:** Gender, Peace building, Peace Network

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Apinya Tissamana, academic ,Office of Peace and Governance of King Prajadhipok's Institute, Thailand. My working areas compose of 1) Political conflict resolution 2) Environmental conflict resolution and 3) Gender and Peace building and Peace Network .Now I am researching on Peace Dialogue between inter-religious women from Southernmost of Thailand. I am fascinated in promoting peace through mediation and other conflict transformation processes. I have a strong willing to join this forum because ASIA PACIFIC MEDIATION FORUM (APMF) CONFERENCE is composed of the body of knowledge sharing in conflict resolution and transformation of Asia Pacific countries Region and this conference is effective academic community for academics and scholars for understanding conflict resolution and mediation

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