

Piloting Community Approaches in Southern Thailand

Knowledge Management Note

KM Note 2

Gender and Development in Thailand's Conflict Areas

Background and Rationale

In January 2004, a century-long struggle in Thailand's southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiw was that had been dormant for decades broke into open violence. Since then, killings and bombings have been regular occurrences, affecting over 9,000 people, widowing nearly 1,000 women, and orphaning over 1,200 children.

In 2007-2008, the World Bank through the State and Peace-Building Fund (SPF) provided technical assistance to the Royal Thai Government to help understand the conflict and recommend ways to facilitate conflict resolution in these areas. To complement the conflict study which focused on community-based development challenges, additional funds were obtained from the World Bank (Gender Action Plan: Just in Time) to develop a gendered understanding of dimensions of the conflict and existing or potential sources of peace and resilience. Both studies informed the design of a second phase to pilot community approaches in the conflict-affected areas.

This note, the second in a series of brief, operationally relevant pieces meant to inform a broad range of stakeholders about the design, implementation, and results of the pilot project, is a summary of a longer report entitled "Gender Needs Assessment in Conflict-Affected Areas in Thailand's Southernmost Provinces."¹

Gender Needs Assessment Objectives

The objectives of the gender needs assessment were to:

- Add value to and complement the SPF-supported conflict study by 1) providing better understanding of the ways men, and women are affected by the

conflict, and 2) determining the needs of men and women directly affected;

- Add to the body of knowledge regarding women, men, and their families affected by the conflict as well as the government's policies in addressing the conflict; and
- Provide input to the implementation of the Piloting Community Approaches in Conflict Situation Project.

Approach, Target Groups, and Sites

The gender needs assessment was conducted from August 2008 to June 2009 by a team headed by Ms. Penpuck Thongthae, a social science lecturer at Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus in Southern Thailand and guided by a panel of gender experts representing academia, multilateral development agencies and civil society organizations.

The needs assessment covered 12 sub-districts classified by government as red or yellow areas in the conflict-affected provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiw. Focused on those most vulnerable as a result of the violence and conflict, the needs assessment involved 25 individuals in each of four groups – Muslim women, Buddhist women, Muslim men and Buddhist men – all of whom were directly or indirectly impacted by the conflict. Key characteristics of targeted individuals were males classified by government under the "risk" group, women whose husbands or children were classified under the "risk" group, males under investigation who have been released from custody and their wives and children, persons who have lost family members or relatives, and persons injured and those indirectly affected by the conflict.

¹ Social Development Notes East Asia and Pacific Series. No. 127/May 2010 (socialdevelopment@worldbank.org).

Key Findings

The gender needs assessment produced the following key findings from its two parts: a review of gender relevant literature specific to the region, and a report of focus group discussions.

Literature Review

The team reviewed 17 documents on women's issues in the South written over the past 30 years on topics such as culture, religious beliefs, economics, development, participation, conflict and violence, and needs.

The literature indicates that Malayu-speaking Muslim women in southern Thailand follow Islamic rules and practices in their roles and duties toward husbands and families, and seek to preserve their cultural identity through marriage, language, dress and rearing children. Many continue a long Malayu tradition of participating in economic activities, including small businesses, market trade, rubber tapping, and more recently factory work. Outside work provides space for Malayu-speaking Muslim women to interact with Buddhist women. The dual roles of homemaker and worker outside the home restrict the opportunity for further education. Limited education results in low and variable earnings.

Women who participate in development projects are likely to have been previously involved in various community groups such as savings, cooperatives and weaving groups. Buddhist women are more likely than Muslim women to participate in community development activities while Muslim women pay more attention to local and national elections. Muslim beliefs and practices pose some limitations on Muslim women's public participation, including constraints on women talking with men other than their husbands and the lack of opportunity to participate in meetings held after Friday ramaat at the mosque attended only by men.

Recent research reports increasing numbers of women affected both directly and indirectly by violence and that women bear great burden. Sustaining family economic well-being falls on the woman after the death or injury of her husband. Some women whose family members are involved in legal cases struggle to earn an income and provide safety for other relatives, while fighting to clear the family name.

Women in general do not support violence and are potential peacemakers to help with the healing process. They are seen to work well in providing support to affected persons and families, but require additional help to increase their involvement.

Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Focus group discussions and individual interviews revealed changes in the roles of affected men and women, and identified four major categories of needs: security needs, social needs, economic needs and physical needs. Muslim men are expected to take the lead in all key family issues as well as participate in community activities. Increased scrutiny of men by security agencies prevents the gathering of men, even for support group purposes, and restricts access to work opportunities. Those unable to work due to severe injuries experience drastically reduced self-esteem and roles within the family and community.

While occupational status among Buddhist respondents is relatively stable, the percentage of Muslims engaged in commerce or business is half the pre-violence levels. Levels of unemployment, the number of women reporting their occupation as housewife, and the number of day laborers all increased among Muslims.

Widows have to assume new roles to earn additional income for the family. With the support of outside organizations, many affected women are able to form support groups. Where male relatives are accused of involvement in insurgent activities or jailed, some women have learned to access the justice system and legal support and are voicing their concerns. Since 2004, more women and especially widows are taking leadership roles in communities and at the national level.

Security Needs. All focus group participants indicated their primary need as safety and an end to the conflict. Travel is severely restricted. Stress has led to an increase in health issues. There is a collective feeling of injustice and human rights violations and mistrust of government and security officials. Buddhist respondents felt that they did not receive treatment and compensation equal to their Muslim counterparts.

Social Needs. Buddhists and Muslims co-existed

harmoniously with mutual respect for each other's cultural and religious practices for decades. Since the resurgence of violence in 2004, those affected by the conflict experience social isolation and discrimination from others within their communities and even families. Compensation for specific groups has caused discord within communities.

Economic Needs. Safety and security concerns have resulted in reduced income due in part to shortened working hours and fewer employment opportunities, and increased debts to cover food, educational and legal expenses. Respondents requested occupational and business training and access to microcredit to start small business at or close to home.

Physical Needs. All respondents reported high levels of stress. Some Muslim women reported inadequate nutrition. All participants experienced difficulties sending their children to school primarily due to costs. Quality of teaching and learning is negatively affected by reduced school hours and conflict-related distractions.

Recommendations

Based on the literature review, focus groups, and interviews, the gender needs assessment offers the following general and operation-specific recommendations to help lay the groundwork for peace and reconciliation:

- Strengthen measures that build trust and confidence in public security and justice among local communities;
- Build on the perceived potential of women as peacemakers capable of bridging cultural and religious divides;
- Expand the opportunity and public space to ensure the inclusion of women in community decision-making through simple adjustments in the time and location of meetings;
- Establish a help post where women can receive information and advice on how to implement tasks traditionally undertaken by men;
- Address the physical and mental health needs of impacted families of all religious and ethnic backgrounds;

- Develop support mechanisms for male victims of violence;
- Provide occupational training tailored to needs and market demands;
- Link conflict-affected women and men to organizations that provide small loans and business training;
- Ensure scholarship funds for students from families who lost a breadwinner or have limited income; and
- Train all government officials and security staff on cultural and traditional beliefs and practices of Malayu-speaking people prior to deployment in the south.

In the design and implementation of the Piloting Community Approaches in Conflict Situation Project, the assessment suggests the following:

- Conduct gender-sensitive community development training for facilitators, provincial coordinators and project staff to create awareness and understanding of gender needs and concerns in the conflict-affected areas;
- Mainstream gender sensitive aspects in the Operational Manual;
- Ensure the inclusion of men and women from various groups, particularly those affected by the conflict, in discussions and decisions on community activities while recognizing their limitations;
- Inform concerned government agencies of specific recommendations from the study;
- Through the Peace-building Partnership Fund support civil society organizations and networks that assist conflict-affected persons and families, especially men who may isolate themselves;
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on input, output and outcome indicators; and
- Document and disseminate lessons learned.

Influence on Project Design

As intended, these recommendations informed important aspects of the design of the Piloting Community Approaches in Conflict Situation Project. The objectives and findings of the gender assessment were shared during the project launch with the management and staff, including community facilitators and provincial coordinators, of the Local Development Institute, the project's executing agency. As a result,

- The team of community facilitators is comprised of nine women and nine men;
- Through the CACS Project block grants are made directly to communities and sub-districts/municipalities for local development activities that members themselves identify, propose, implement, monitor, and sustain. The block grant social preparation and sub-project planning process is designed to include community members from all different groups within an area using various mapping tools and understanding gender sensitivities such as meeting size, time, and location;
- The CACS Project also provides grants through its Peace-building Partnership Fund (PPF) to civil society organizations and their networks for innovative approaches and partnerships that promote trust, peace, and development. Workshop discussions were held to explore how gender dimensions could be mainstreamed into each of the six steps of the project's block grant and PPF preparation, implementation, and monitoring processes;
- Target beneficiaries of PPF grants include both women and men affected by the conflict;
- Relevant project monitoring indicators are gender disaggregated; and
- A series of local, national and international consultations allow the broad dissemination of findings.

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Knowledge Management Note Series Titles

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