About the Programme

The Regional Programme “Improving Women’s Human Rights in Southeast Asia” focuses on knowledge generation and exchange, stock taking and priority setting for advancing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in the region.

Supported by the Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD), the programme covers eight countries including Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

Expected Outcomes

The project works towards the realization of the following outcomes:

• Increased skills and knowledge of government officials and civil society gender experts on CEDAW compliance in development and monitoring new and revised legislative frameworks.

• Increased awareness among formal and informal justice system actors of CEDAW commitments.

• Strengthened monitoring and accountability mechanisms for implementation of CEDAW commitments.

Programme Achievements

Following are some key results of the programme that contributed towards deepening CEDAW awareness, knowledge and systems in 2013:

- At the regional level, the judicial colloquium brought together senior judges from 8 Southeast Asia countries which resulted in the establishment of gender equality committee within judiciaries and encourage the formation of a regional network of judges to promote continuing dialogue, knowledge and information sharing.

- In Timor-Leste, UN Women provided comprehensive technical facilitation and support to the working group. As a result, the Land Law included provisions ensuring non-discrimination against women and men with respect to land ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property.

- In the Philippines, UN Women provided platform for exchange and dialogue between government and civil society groups with focus on advocating WHR in Mindanao. As a result, UN Women has also been invited to contribute towards the development of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

- In Vietnam, UN Women supported a series of trainings for government staffs which resulted in an increase reference use of CEDAW and Human Rights knowledge in Law revision such as Article 187, Clause 3 of the Labour Code.

UN Women at a glance

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, the organization was established in 2010 to accelerate progress on women’s rights worldwide. UN Women’s efforts are based on the fundamental belief that every woman has the right to live a life free from violence, poverty, and discrimination, and that gender equality is a pre-requisite to achieving global development.

The project is generously supported by the Government of Canada

Protection and advancement of women’s human rights remains a central foreign policy priority for Canada. Canada is committed to the view that gender equality is not only a human rights issue, but is also an essential component of sustainable development, social justice, peace, and security.

One of the most effective ways of improving the status and well-being of women is by ensuring their full, equal and effective participation in decision-making at all levels of political, economic and social life. This approach promotes and protects women’s human rights while allowing society to benefit from the diverse experiences, talents and capabilities of all its members. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) has identified gender equality as a key objective of its development cooperation programme.

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**Background**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), often referred to as the international women’s bill of rights, provides a powerful framework and legal obligation for countries to move towards achieving gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To date, CEDAW has been ratified by 188 countries. Despite widespread ratification of the Convention, however, full implementation of its provisions is still a challenge. Concluding Observations by the CEDAW Committee, the 15-year Review of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2010 (Beijing+15), and the reviews of the achievements of the MDGs, all stress that State Parties need to improve the implementation of CEDAW in order to make gender equality a reality.

- It establishes that women have civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, which are to be enjoyed by women on an equal basis with men regardless of marital status.
- It considers discrimination against women as a human rights violation.
- It sets standards on women’s human rights. It obligates State Parties to protect, promote and fulfil women’s human rights.

**Programme Strategies**

1) **Advocacy and support for legislative change:**
The Programme supports reviews of national laws and policies to ensure compliance with CEDAW. Capacity development of gender advocates in the government and civil society, including national women’s machineries and women’s NGOs, is supported to enable them to play an active role in advocating for legislative change.

2) **Building national expertise on implementing CEDAW:**
The Programme supports capacity development of the executive, legislative, judiciary and civil society to understand and apply CEDAW and its Optional Protocol to guarantee women’s human rights. The Programme supports governments to improve their monitoring of CEDAW implementation.

3) **Network/institution building and strengthening:**
The learning and exchange of expertise on application of CEDAW is anchored through the development of national and regional networks and institutions. Examples of regional networks include the CEDAW Watch groups, the network of justices and judiciary institutions. To sustain capacities beyond the Programme period, partnerships with relevant training institutions and law schools that produce training materials are developed so that CEDAW is integrated into existing curriculums and trainings.

4) **Knowledge generation and dissemination:**
The Programme prioritised knowledge generation and sharing by leading the development of common methodologies and studies at the regional level.

5) **South-South exchange and cooperation:**
The Programme facilitates regional exchanges of experiences and expertise to support advancement of women’s human rights at the country level, in Southeast Asia and beyond.

6) **Further coordination with related initiatives**
such as DFATD funded regional project on “Regional Mechanisms to Protect the Human Rights of Women and Girls in Southeast Asia” and other UN Women programmes and with other UN agencies is a key element of the programme.

**Partners and Stakeholders**

- Key governmental agencies in the executive, judiciary and legislative arms
- Training institutions of the government
- National Human Rights Institutions and academic institutions
- Regional inter-governmental organizations
- Regional and national civil society organizations
- UN Agencies and development partners

“Women’s priorities and concerns must be addressed in the governance, justice, security, and recovery aspects of peace agreements. These concerns, such as quotas for women in elections, land and property rights, and the treatment of widespread sexual violence as a war crime, if addressed, can help build a more comprehensive peace.”

- Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Director of UN Women, 2014