

Gender Equality

Promotion in a Model Thai Public Agency

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the approaches for promoting gender equality within a model public agency, specifically the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB). This agency was recognized in 2024 as an outstanding organization in the protection of rights and the promotion of gender equality in Thailand, and was the only public agency to receive this distinction that year. This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing document analysis and in-depth interviews with key informants. The informants comprised nine executives and operational personnel directly involved in gender equality promotion within the model public agency. The results indicate that organizational practices are closely aligned with national policy directives and the mandates of parent organizations, with the agency structuring their operational framework around three principal dimensions of gender equality promotion. These dimensions include: (1) the reconfiguration of conceptual orientations, enhancement of knowledge and understanding, and cultivation of gender-equality through internal campaigns alongside broader public awareness-raising initiatives; (2) the development of policies, regulations, and institutional mechanisms to support gender equality, through coordination between legal units and internal departments, reinforced by policy instruments that emphasize incentives and inter-agency integration; and (3) the advancement of research and development to promote innovation. This is pursued through the establishment of integrated information and communication databases that support evidence-based decision-making, alongside knowledge management and collaborative initiatives with external organizations and network partners, supported by dedicated research funding. Overall, these findings show that the model government agency operates through a quality management cycle consisting of four stages: planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

Keywords : Gender, Gender equality, Thai public agency

Introduction

Sexual rights have long constituted a core dimension of the broader human rights discourse, as they embody the fundamental entitlement to live free from violence, discrimination, and coercion, rooted in the principles of equality, respect, and justice (Kritaya Archavanitkul, 2011). Sexual rights were formally recognized as fundamental human rights in 1994 in Valencia, Spain. They were defined as reflecting the principle that sexuality is an inherent attribute of all human beings, irrespective of sexual orientation, age, nationality, culture, or religious affiliation. The definition further includes the rights to sexual autonomy, the expression of sexuality, and the attainment of sexual satisfaction (Pakkapong Punthiya & Thanchanok Bejrananda, 2022). In practical terms, the past decade has witnessed a heightened societal engagement with issues pertaining to sexuality, both globally and within national contexts such as Thailand. This growing attention is particularly evident in relation to sexual health and has manifested across multiple domains, including academic scholarship, professional practice, and everyday social life. Concerns surrounding sexuality have expanded from individual-level experiences to include state-provided public services and social movements advocating for sexual rights and gender equality in various forms (Thanyaphat Thongmusit, 2019).

However, regarding gender identity in contemporary Thai society, although social acceptance has gradually increased, societal attitudes remain shaped by entrenched cultural norms and traditional belief systems that emphasize the congruence between gender and biological sex. Consequently, individuals whose gender identity diverges from their biological sex are frequently perceived as deviating from the norm. Prevailing social views and practices continue to classify such individuals as belonging to a distinct or marginal social category. This is reinforced by the definitions and norms established by social institutions, as well as by the construction of “otherness” in both formal and informal linguistic expressions.

Although Thai society may appear outwardly accepting in certain contexts, such acceptance is often accompanied by subtle forms of contempt, marginalization, and exclusion. Despite efforts to project an image of promoting rights and equality, the societal acceptance of individuals with diverse gender identities remains constrained. Levels of acceptance tend to depend on factors such as personal competencies, occupational roles, and socio-economic status, rather than reflecting a genuine recognition and validation of an individual’s self-identified gender (Pongsagorn Thinkhoto & Sunee Mallikamarl, 2023).

In addition, the *Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) 2023* published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) presents global evidence that gender bias remains widespread and continues to impede the realization of genuine gender equality worldwide. According to the report, Thailand is categorized among the countries where gender

equality has regressed. A comparison between the survey periods 2010–2014 and 2017–2022 indicates that gender-biased attitudes in Thailand have increased across all dimensions, underscoring the persistence of discriminatory norms within Thai society. It can be observed that Thai society still contains structural and cultural barriers that inhibit the full acceptance of individuals with diverse gender identities. Even when acceptance does occur, it is often conditional and contingent upon specific expectations (Supanat Datewitee, 2020). In terms of legal enforcement and the promotion of rights, although Thailand enacted the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 (2015) to safeguard individuals from unfair gender-based discrimination—including those whose expressed gender identity does not conform to their biological sex—the practical implementation of this legislation remains limited. Empirical findings indicate that the legal protections afforded to individuals with gender identities that differ from their biological sex are insufficient and do not comprehensively cover all groups with diverse sexual and gender identities (Araya Suksom, 2022).

Accordingly, there is a responsibility of the Thai public to uphold the principles of equality and justice by protecting individuals whose rights have been violated, as all members of society share an obligation to respect the rights of others. Furthermore, there must be sustained efforts to cultivate a societal understanding that sexual and gender diversity is a normal and natural aspect of human existence. The Thai public should ensure that equality is maintained in accordance with fundamental human rights standards to which all citizens are entitled, as well as in compliance with Thailand’s international legal obligations (Papon Budsayamarn, 2022).

In addition to ongoing efforts to address these challenges, another means of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of public-sector operations in this domain lies in the development of supportive strategic frameworks. At present, the Department of Women’s Affairs and Family Development under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security functions as the central governmental agency responsible for formulating policies and providing strategic direction for the implementation of gender equality initiatives. The Department has introduced the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (2023–2027), which serves as a guiding framework for relevant agencies to adopt and operationalize. The plan emphasizes three primary areas of focus: (1) transforming societal mindsets, strengthening knowledge, and fostering awareness of gender equality; (2) establishing policies, regulations, and institutional mechanisms that support the promotion of gender equality; and (3) advancing research and development to generate innovations that support gender equality efforts (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Department of Women’s Affairs and Family Development, 2023).

One noteworthy approach is the utilization of a “model success system” within organizational operations, which enables selected public agencies to serve as exemplary

models for others. In 2024, the Office of the Narcotics Control Board was recognized as an outstanding organization for its achievements in safeguarding rights and promoting gender equality. This recognition has prompted interest in examining the approaches used by this exemplary public agency in advancing gender equality. The intention is to identify strategies that may serve as transferable models for other public agencies seeking to strengthen gender equality within their own institutional contexts.

Research Objective

This research aims to examine the strategies and approaches employed to promote gender equality within a model public-sector agency.

Literature Review

Gender equality is recognized as a critical factor for sustainable development, as reflected in its designation as one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5). Many public agencies worldwide have adopted this goal as a key policy framework, linking it to human rights and democratic principles. A review of the relevant literature, particularly regarding its integration into public policy, provides deeper and more comprehensive insights into designing and implementing gender-responsive measures. The theoretical foundation of liberal feminism is especially significant in this regard, emphasizing reforms through legal and political institutions that enable women to access opportunities equal to those available to men while underscoring the primacy of individual rights and freedoms. This perspective asserts that gender does not inherently determine capability but is instead shaped by socially constructed norms that assign roles to women and men (Kritsanapong Sittipanya, 2022). In contrast, socialist feminism highlights how gender discrimination is embedded within capitalist economic structures. This perspective posits that patriarchal capitalism oppresses women both in their labor roles and in personal relationships (Eisenstein, 1978). From this standpoint, public agencies are urged not only to uphold legal rights and freedoms but also to support structural transformations—particularly those related to women’s access to economic resources.

In the Thai context, numerous policy-oriented studies demonstrate the concrete application of these theoretical perspectives. For instance, Jaray Singhakowinta (2025) analyzed the paradigm shift in Thailand’s gender equality policies and observed that even the current National Action Plan (2023–2027) remains largely grounded in a liberal framework, rather than addressing deeper structural differences such as class or diverse identity formations. Similarly, Thatchaporn Aungsuwitoon (2015) examined women’s movements in

Thai society that have sought to raise social awareness and exert pressure on the state to adopt more progressive and inclusive gender policies. More recent scholarship further argues that gender equality efforts should not only focus on disparities between men and women but also encompass individuals of diverse gender identities.

Beyond the critical perspectives discussed earlier, Thailand's efforts to promote and protect the rights of gender-diverse populations demonstrate significant progress, ranging from regulatory reforms to constitutional recognition. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (2017), Chapter 3 on the Rights and Liberties of the Thai People, contains several provisions prohibiting discrimination, thereby ensuring individual rights, liberties, and protections related to gender equality (Chalintra Prangthong, 2022). This constitutional foundation is complemented by the enactment of the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 (2015) and by institutional frameworks such as the Action Plan for Gender Equality Promotion (2023–2027).

Additionally, the Thai government has developed a suite of policy instruments to advance gender equality. These include the integration of gender perspectives throughout the policy process—from goal setting and policy formulation to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Key tools include Gender Analysis (GA) and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) (Peerada Phumisawat, 2020), which aim to ensure that public policies and resource allocation address gendered needs and impacts.

Furthermore, this study draws upon the “model success system” as an analytical foundation, in which exemplary agencies—recognized as outstanding organizations in the protection of rights and the promotion of gender equality—serve as role models for other public agencies. This institutional mechanism forms the core unit of analysis for assessing best practices and pathways for strengthening gender equality within the Thai public sector.

Research Method

To achieve the research objectives, document analysis was employed as the primary methodological approach. Key documents included the Action Plan for Gender Equality Promotion (2023–2027) of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), along with official memos, organizational records, and previous research studies. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with two executives directly responsible for gender equality planning: the Director of the ONCB Operations Centre (or their designated representative) and the Director of the ONCB Administrative System Development Group (or their designated representative), alongside other relevant operational staff. Furthermore, seven individuals involved in planning and performance evaluation—members of the Gender Equality Promotion Committee of the ONCB, recognized as a model government agency—were also interviewed. In total, nine key informants were selected using non-probability purposive sampling to address the research

objectives. The sampling strategy followed the qualitative method known as critical case sampling, which emphasizes selecting informants capable of providing rich, relevant, and insightful information (Prapaipim Sutheewasinnon & Prasopchai Pasunon, 2016). Within this framework, the selected informants comprised executives and committee members formally appointed by the principal agency to implement and adapt gender equality policies within the organization.

The researcher subsequently collected and synthesized the data to present findings aligned with the research objectives, employing content analysis as the primary analytical method. The study focused on examining approaches to promoting gender equality across three principal domains:

(1) transforming mindsets, enhancing knowledge and understanding, and raising awareness of gender equality; (2) establishing policies, regulations, and institutional mechanisms that facilitate the promotion of gender equality; and (3) advancing research and development to foster innovations aimed at achieving gender equality (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2023).

Research Results

The research findings regarding the promotion of gender equality at the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), derived from document analysis and interviews with key informants, indicate that gender equality initiatives are generally aligned with multiple levels of strategic frameworks and public-sector operational plans. These begin with the 20-Year National Strategy (2018–2038) as the highest-level framework and extend to secondary plans such as the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023–2027), which under Strategy 2.1 emphasizes creating opportunities and fostering social equality.

Within the model public agency, however, the promotion of gender equality begins with a collaborative interpretation by the core operational team, facilitated through a committee responsible for developing the agency's Gender Equality Promotion Action Plan. This process entails defining the term “gender” within the agency's specific context, as well as interpreting the concepts of “equality” and “equity.” The understanding of these concepts is then aligned with the agency's context, and personnel comprehension is evaluated.

The study found that the term “gender,” as interpreted within the agency, was understood primarily in relation to sexual and gender minorities rather than male dominance. This interpretation was integrated with the agency's core responsibilities, which include coordinating policies and plans, managing operations, supporting information dissemination,

conducting academic work, and developing personnel engaged in drug prevention and control at both national and regional levels.

Given its role in collaborating with external agencies, gender equality planning extends beyond internal organizational processes to include “other groups” or stakeholders, particularly service users, as well as various networks such as the business sector, civil society, and the broader public. An analysis of the findings suggests that the agency’s approach follows the Deming Cycle (PDCA cycle), commencing with a planning phase.

In planning activities related to gender equality promotion, public agencies must align their initiatives with the Department of Women’s Affairs and Family Development under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, as well as with their parent organization, in this case, the Ministry of Justice. Project details are subsequently refined to correspond with the three principal dimensions of the gender equality promotion approach:

1. Transforming Mindsets, Knowledge, Understanding, and Awareness of Gender Equality: This involves campaigns and public relations initiatives that begin within the organization, complemented by programs aimed at raising societal awareness.

2. Policies, Regulations, and Mechanisms to Promote Gender Equality: These are implemented through the agency’s legal functions in collaboration with internal units. Furthermore, the adoption of model approaches, combined with positive reinforcement mechanisms, facilitates inter-agency cooperation and integration.

3. Research and Development to Foster Innovations for Gender Equality: This dimension comprises two components. The first focuses on internal system development, including the creation of databases containing gender equality-related information and communication channels to support evidence-based decision-making through knowledge management activities. The second emphasizes collaborative development with external agencies and networks, particularly through the allocation of academic and research funding to support initiatives undertaken by external organizations.

Following the completion of the planning stage, the subsequent phase involves the implementation process, commonly referred to as the policy execution stage. When analyzed within the framework of the Deming Cycle, this corresponds to the “Do” phase, which entails the execution of the planned initiatives. Key informants emphasized that the primary focus should be on ensuring that responsible personnel, as well as supporting staff, fully understand the objectives of the initiatives. All stakeholders must recognize the importance of the programs and be guided by clear operational approaches, facilitated through a well-structured framework in which tasks are assigned according to each unit’s area of expertise. For instance, under the first primary plan, which emphasizes transforming mindsets, understanding, and awareness of gender equality, a gender equality curriculum is developed for all levels of the agency—including staff, operational personnel, and executives—in collaboration with

academic institutions or specialized units. In addition, strategic partnerships are established to disseminate knowledge regarding gender equality promotion to various external networks.

Following the execution phase (i.e., the policy implementation phase), key informants indicated that the agency assesses outcomes to review implementation progress. This evaluation is intended to identify emerging issues and to implement corrective actions, thereby establishing standard operating procedures. In the context of the Deming Cycle, this corresponds to the “Check” phase. The model public agency employs a systematic approach to evaluation, which includes defining supervisory units and establishing performance assessment procedures with clearly defined timelines, while also involving a range of stakeholders in the process.

Finally, following the review of work outcomes, the model public agency emphasizes the identification of improvement strategies and the analysis of root causes to prevent the recurrence of issues. The insights gained from this process are utilized to inform more effective future planning. In the framework of the Deming Cycle, this corresponds to the “Act” phase. The agency implements this process by establishing clear timelines and designating a primary responsible individual to oversee and follow up on the implementation of improvements.

Discussion

In the discussion, the findings were analyzed in relation to existing literature. This aligns with the study by Sirintip Suwannarat (2017), titled *“The Study on Bureau of the Budget Officer’s Awareness of Promotion of Gender Equality Policy and Implementation,”* which provides recommendations based on its findings. These recommendations emphasize the importance of promoting participation from all members within an organization to support gender equality through effective communication mechanisms, fostering an understanding of how to advance gender equality, and raising awareness regarding the responsibilities of individuals in charge of gender equality initiatives. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that personnel are informed of new policies and measures, and have access to opportunities and resources. It is also important to promote knowledge exchange to improve processes and methodologies, including the dissemination of policy information and plans, operational reviews, and the development of a supportive organizational environment. Furthermore, budget allocations should incorporate considerations of gender diversity.

These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Rattree Prangmat (2019) in the study titled *“Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights and gender equality at the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Thailand.”* The study aimed not only to examine the level of acceptance of gender diversity among officials but also to analyze the policies and approaches for promoting gender equality within the organization.

The research highlighted that government agencies should implement policies to support and promote gender equality for gender-diverse individuals, similar to private sector practices. Policy recommendations emphasized the need for active participation of gender-diverse individuals in concrete activities within the agency, rather than relying solely on directives or abstract policies from central government authorities.

These insights align with theoretical concepts of equality and equity, often collectively referred to as “equitable equality.” Equality generally emphasizes treating everyone the same, regardless of individual differences. In contrast, equity, particularly from a legal perspective, does not require complete uniformity in treatment. Rather, it emphasizes equal treatment for those in comparable circumstances and differentiated treatment for those whose conditions materially differ. For example, a system in which everyone pays the same amount of tax regardless of income reflects an equality-based perspective, whereas an equity-based approach would adjust obligations according to differences in income. As Tanachai Suntonanantachai (2017, p. 57) noted, equity entails treating individuals with the same substantive conditions similarly, while providing different treatment to those with differing conditions. Therefore, issues related to gender diversity often fall within the scope of “equitable equality.”

This research underscores the importance of fostering concrete understanding and awareness regarding the promotion of gender equality under conditions of diversity, highlighting the critical role of individuals responsible for gender equality within organizations.

Conclusions

The research findings indicate that the promotion of gender equality within the model public agency demonstrates alignment not only with multiple levels of strategic public-sector plans but also with the policy directives established by the primary responsible agency, the Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, as well as the policy framework of its parent organization, the Ministry of Justice. These policies are further operationalized and aligned with three principal dimensions of the framework for promoting gender equality.

The planning process involves transforming mindsets, enhancing knowledge, understanding, and awareness of gender equality, beginning internally with the development of campaigns and public relations initiatives aimed at raising societal awareness. Policy formulation is carried out through the establishment of laws, regulations, and institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality, which include positive reinforcement mechanisms and the development of information systems and social communication channels, in

collaboration with external agencies and networks. Budget allocation for academic and research purposes is emphasized to support these initiatives.

To ensure effective implementation, all stakeholders are required to recognize the importance of these initiatives, guided by clear strategies and a well-structured operational framework that assigns tasks according to each unit's expertise. Implementation plans are clearly articulated, with continuous monitoring of outcomes to identify issues, facilitate corrective actions, and establish standard operating procedures. Performance evaluation processes are structured with defined timelines and incorporate input from diverse stakeholders. Finally, following the review of performance results, the agency prioritizes the identification of improvement strategies and root causes to prevent the recurrence of problems. This comprehensive approach reflects best practices for effective promotion of gender equality within public organizations.

Policy Recommendations

The promotion of gender equality in public agencies should be elevated from project-based initiatives to the development of systemic mechanisms. Findings from model public agencies demonstrate that effective implementation requires adopting the Quality Management Cycle (PDCA) as a core operational framework encompassing planning, implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement. It is therefore recommended that all public agencies employ this approach in conjunction with positive reinforcement measures—such as awards, commendations, or the incorporation of gender-equality performance outcomes into organizational and personnel evaluations—to create system-wide incentives.

Furthermore, strengthening gender equality initiatives requires establishing a coherent coordination and integration system across agencies. This includes collaboration with legal, public relations, human resources, and strategic planning units to ensure the development of aligned and complementary measures. Such an approach may be regarded as a “holistic” model that integrates actions across policy, operational, and organizational-cultural levels.

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