

Reducing Girls' Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS:

The Thai approach



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Cover photos:

Left: Girls at the Pang Lao School in the northern city of Chiang Rai participating in an AIDS education and awareness project.

Photo Credit: UNICEF/HQ97-0246/Jeremy Horner

Right: Teenagers at the Technical College of Phayao.

[Phayao is one of the provinces involved in projects described in this Case Study.]

Photo Credit: UNAIDS/Noorani

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Contents

Introduction	1
Why girls become prostitutes	1
The particular vulnerability to HIV/AIDS of sex workers in Thailand	3
Strategies for preventing child prostitution	4
Implementing the strategies	6
<i>Sema Pattana Cheewit (Sema Life Development) Project</i>	7
<i>The Thai Women of Tomorrow Project</i>	21
<i>Education Loan Fund Project</i>	38
References	45
Appendix A	47
Appendix B	51



Reducing Girls' Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS: the Thai approach

Introduction

HIV infection rates among teenage girls are often much higher than in teenage boys; the reason lies in girls' greater biological and social vulnerability. Compared with that of males, the female reproductive tract is more susceptible to infection with HIV and other STDs, particularly in younger girls. And girls often risk infection very early. Compounding the biological vulnerability of girls are complex and unhealthy societal expectations that mean girls and young women have less control over their lives and bodies than do their male counterparts.

In Thailand, too many girls find themselves at an early age in the sex industry, usually for lack of other options for earning a living. Young girls are desirable because they are thought to be "safe" and uninfected with HIV, but the risk of infection to them, and thence to their clients, is very high. This case study describes some responses to that problem, focusing on changing the attitudes of girls and their parents in regard to prostitution, and on providing a means for girls to avoid becoming sex workers through improved education and career opportunities. The approach described is also an example of an AIDS response that takes account of regional and demographic differences in the nature and scope of the problem in the search for solutions.

Why girls become prostitutes

The reasons that girls enter the sex industry in Thailand have received much attention; innumerable research studies have attempted to identify the causes of and propose solutions to this problem. The causes have been divided into those at the societal level and those at the family level. At the societal level, Thailand's rapid economic development is cited as one major cause (Guest, 1994; Kaime-Atterhog *et al.*, 1994).

When Thailand adopted an industrialized, export-led economy, one of the consequences was that agriculture—formerly the backbone of the Thai economy—was devalued. Farmers went increasingly into debt and many were forced to move from their land to search for work in urban areas, usually Bangkok or provincial urban centres. Those who remained in the rural areas tried various alternative family survival strategies, including sending their children to cities to earn the family income.

Thailand’s national policy, with its emphasis on economic growth, led at the same time to a rise in materialism in Thai society. Parental desires for a better, more comfortable standard of living—often fueled by mass media advertisements—led some parents to encourage their children into the sex industry as one means of attaining their material goals. Children who did not accede to their parents’ demands were regarded as ungrateful, since respect for one’s parents and providing for their care are paramount socio-cultural norms in Thai society, persisting even under Thailand’s rapid social and economic changes (Kaime-Atterhog *et al.*, 1994). In some rural villages, particularly in northern Thailand, where prostitution has become an acceptable occupation, families who do not sell their daughters may be seen as foolish by other members of the community.

More broadly speaking, the main reason for girls entering the sex industry is to satisfy their parents’ urgent need for money, in some cases not for more material goods but simply for the family’s survival. Earnings from unskilled labour are much lower than those from sex work. Thus, many parents decide to sell their daughters and earn quick money to provide for their immediate needs. Though girls may not want to become sex workers (SWs), many are forced or tricked into it. These children usually have little or no education and often do not live with their parents. Another group at special risk are children who live with a stepfather or stepmother (Ard-am and Sethaput, 1994). With weaker family ties and often less family support, they have become common targets for recruitment into sex work, through either force or deception.

The expectation that they will support their parents in any way they can is placed on daughters much more than on sons in Thai society (Boonchalaksi and Guest, 1994). A daughter’s duty is to earn a living

for the family to repay her debt of gratitude to the parents, while a son's is to spend time as a monk. Thus, the economic burden of the family is placed on the daughter's shoulders rather than on the son's. There is no reported incidence of the selling of sons by their parents, whereas selling daughters is quite common in some areas.

Indeed, the reasons males become prostitutes are different from those for females. A study conducted by Sittitrai *et al.* in 1994 on male bar workers in Bangkok found that 51 per cent were introduced to the job by their friends and 36 per cent by reading job advertisements. For male SWs, choosing this job is mainly their own decision. Even though there are far fewer male SWs than there are females (after a Ministry of Public Health survey in 1997, it was estimated that there are only 3 or 4 male SWs for every 100 females), national policies for preventing and solving the problems of sex workers give equal attention to both sexes. But different strategies are needed to cope with the different problems facing male and female SWs. This paper focuses on strategies for keeping girls from becoming prostitutes.

The particular vulnerability to HIV/AIDS of sex workers in Thailand

The first case of AIDS in Thailand was detected in September 1984. Early cases were found among male homosexuals; thereafter the disease spread rapidly among injecting drug users in 1987 and 1988, and then to sex workers and their clients. It has now extended beyond those groups to the general population. The sentinel sero-prevalence survey reveals that HIV has increased among all groups since 1989. In that time, the HIV prevalence rate for SWs has risen especially rapidly, from 3.5 per cent to 29 per cent in 1996 (AIDS Division, Ministry of Public Health, 1997). Among AIDS patients, heterosexual transmission is now the predominant mode of HIV transmission.

Although the rate of new infections has begun to slow, it has been estimated that by the year 2000 there will be 1.3 million HIV-positive persons in Thailand (National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) Working Group on HIV/AIDS Projection, 1994). A high rate of HIV infection among SWs means that it is not only the women involved

in sex work themselves who are at high risk of infection, but also their clients and others with whom they come into sexual contact. The problem is particularly severe in the northern part of Thailand, where the rate of HIV infection among SWs is alarmingly high. A 1996 survey of HIV infection among SWs in Phayao and Chiang Rai Provinces indicated that 54 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, of sex workers in these two provinces were HIV positive.

In addition, the risk of young girls' contracting HIV/AIDS is higher than that of adults, and especially for those girls entering the sex industry (Rushing, 1995). Estimates of the number of children involved in prostitution range from 13,000 to 100,000 or more.

Guest (1994) used an estimation technique to identify potential risk of becoming a SW, designating three levels of risk: no risk, low risk, and high risk. Factors considered were area of current residence, migration, co-residence and school attendance. Those children who live in rural areas, are non-migrants, are living with family members and are attending school are identified as the no risk group. Those children seen as the high risk group are migrant children who live in an urban area apart from their families and are not attending school. The middle category, the low risk group, are those who have some, but not all, of the four risk factors. Based on an estimation of these factors, Guest placed 1.7 per cent of the female population aged 11 to 17 in the high risk group, 68 per cent in the low risk group, and 30.3 per cent in the no risk group. Guest estimated that there were between 30,000 and 100,000 female child SWs. Among the low risk group, not attending school is the major factor: almost two-thirds of this group are not in school. The figures presented here are estimates, but there is ample evidence that child prostitution exists in great enough numbers to make it a significant social problem, one that also places such children at high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Strategies for preventing child prostitution

In 1992, a national effort was launched to eradicate child prostitution and to assist those at risk of entering the sex industry. At that time, the problem of child prostitution became a high priority for the

government, with several strategies implemented, including prevention, suppression, assistance, rehabilitation and legal measures to eliminate entry into the sex industry by children under 18. Preventive measures were viewed as best practice, in that they could substantially reduce the children’s risk of exploitation or of contracting a fatal disease. Some of the key strategies were these:

1. All children should receive nine years of quality basic education. Those impoverished children with no opportunity for further education need access to education and vocational training.
2. The quality of education must be improved to enable a child to think and uphold moral principles, and be able to choose a way of life with human dignity. The educational curriculum and vocational training must be relevant to the local environment and conditions, as well as to the demands of the labour market.
3. Girls and boys must have the same access to both formal and non-formal education.
4. Counselling and guidance services for solving family and youth problems and job selection must be provided in every school and to out-of-school children.
5. Recreational and social services should be provided so that children and young people can spend their leisure time appropriately.
6. Campaigns to raise awareness about child prostitution should be conducted to foster correct attitudes among parents, guardians, teachers and the general public.
7. Coordination with neighbouring countries in campaigns and publications about prevention and feasible solutions to problems related to the sex industry should be encouraged.
8. An inspection surveillance system should be set up to prevent coercion or deception of children into becoming prostitutes.

In response to the national policy, several projects have been implemented, of which *education* and *vocational training* are seen as among the best strategies to prevent young girls from entering the sex industry. A description of the current education system can be found in Appendix A.

Implementing the strategies

In order both to keep children out of the sex industry and to improve their lives in general, three major projects have been undertaken.

The first is known as the **Sema Pattana Cheewit (Sema Life Development) Project**. This project was initiated to help highly disadvantaged girls enrol in secondary school by providing them with scholarships of 3,000 baht (about US\$ 77) per year.* This amount was felt to be sufficient to cover all educational costs and other personal costs during the school year.

The **Thai Women of Tomorrow (TWT) Project** has the same objective as the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project and focuses on the same group of children, namely, girls who have finished Grade 6 and do not go further in their education. There is, however, greater emphasis on changing attitudes of girls and their parents towards prostitution and on vocational training as an alternative to school.

Finally, the **Education Loan Fund Project** also aims to help disadvantaged families, but it focuses on a higher education level. Children (both girls and boys) who finish Grade 9 and cannot afford to enter upper-level secondary school, or secondary school graduates who wish to continue to vocational school or university training, are eligible for a loan from the education fund. Girls in the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project are given priority consideration in the determination of loan recipients.

These three projects are interrelated, as will be seen from the details of each project presented in the following sections. Data on each project were derived primarily from in-depth interviews with project personnel and beneficiaries. Three provinces (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Phayao) were selected for collecting primary data on girls and teachers who participated in the projects. For the Sema Pattana Cheewit and Education Loan Fund projects, education officials at provincial and district levels, teachers and students were interviewed. For the Thai Women of Tomorrow project, the director and a committee member of the project were interviewed.

*Bath are converted to US\$ at the rate of 1 = \$0.02557 (official rate of 28.9.98) and rounded. Note, however, that due to severe exchange rate fluctuations in the 1997–98 period, comparisons based on this rate no longer accurately reflect actual spending power

Sema Pattana Cheewit (Sema Life Development) Project

The Sema Pattana Cheewit Project is the most broadly implemented of the strategies for carrying out the child prostitute eradication policy. In 1993, the Ministry of Education (MOE) conducted a survey of Thai SWs both in Thailand and abroad to uncover information about their hometown, age, education, reasons for becoming a SW, the channels used to find work abroad, and so forth. This information, along with data on villages with high HIV/AIDS rates as well as the number of students who finished Grade 6 but did not continue their education, were used as the basis for planning the intervention.

Eight provinces in the North (Chiang Rai, Lampang, Phayao, Chiang Mai, Prae, Mae Hong Song, Lamphoon and Nan) were identified as the target area, since they were the highest risk areas for girls entering the sex trade. These provinces also had high HIV/AIDS rates, as well as a high percentage of girls (43 per cent) who stopped their education after finishing Grade 6. After the target provinces were selected, the MOE organized a seminar to determine the causes of the problem by focusing on what factors encouraged girls to become SWs. From the seminar, five main factors were identified and later used as guidelines for selecting girls for participation in the project.

1. *Poverty.* Agricultural areas that are not suitable for cultivation lead families living in them into a cycle of poverty and debt.
2. *Materialistic attitudes.* There was competition among households to own a nice house and possess expensive material goods as signs of social status. Households who had their daughter(s) working in the sex industry and sending back income to buy goods and build new houses were accepted and recognized as successful families.
3. *Lack of education.* Survey data revealed that the majority of SWs had very little education. Over 95 per cent of SWs had only six years of education or less, while others had no education at all due to poor family economic circumstances. Even though the

government provided free education, the families still had to pay for food, books, travel costs and other education-related expenses not covered by the government.

4. *Agent persuasion.* Agents for brothels who seek out young, good-looking girls have several techniques to persuade girls and their parents that sex work is desirable. They may use either direct or indirect methods, depending on the attitude of the particular family. For those families who are not willing to send their daughter(s) to work in the sex industry, agents may initially promise to find the girls well paying jobs in restaurants or factories, but later force the girls into prostitution.
5. *Family difficulties.* Girls who live with a single parent, with other relatives or step-parents or in families with economic or drug addiction problems are at high risk of becoming prostitutes.

In May 1994, the Cabinet approved the implementation of the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project and provided 4,000 scholarships to day students at 2,400 baht per year (about US\$ 61) and 500 scholarships for boarding school students at 9,000 baht (about US\$ 230) per year.

Objectives and Targets

The Sema Pattana Cheewit Project aims to provide an education for girls in difficult circumstances so that they can develop in maturity, knowledge, and experience so as to be able to protect themselves from being deceived and so as to have a means of finding a socially acceptable job. The project's targets are these.

1. To prevent girls at high risk from becoming SWs, at least 500 girls are provided scholarships for boarding school.
2. To provide 4,000 scholarships for day students to further their education in schools located in their communities.
3. To prepare scholarships for students who finish Grades 9 and 12 so that they can attend vocational training.
4. To establish 94 Sema Pattana Cheewit centres in 94 districts in eight northern provinces. These centres will provide information and conduct campaigns to prevent girls from becoming SWs.

5. To establish a collaborative system for working with other concerned organizations.

Duration and Target Areas

The Sema Pattana Cheewit Project has three distinct phases. *Phase I* was implemented from 1994 to 1996 in the eight targeted northern provinces. *Phase II* (1997-1999) expands the project to other northern provinces as well as to Bangkok and *Phase III* (2000-2002) will cover high risk areas in the Northeast and the South of Thailand.

Implementation

Students participate in the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project in three ways: in boarding school, in day school and receiving vocational training.

Boarding School

Primary school teachers select students who meet the following criteria for boarding school participation in the project:

1. girls who are currently in Grade 6, residents of the eight target provinces in the North, who do not and will not receive other scholarships, and
2. whose families have one or more of these characteristics:
 - ▶ Father or mother is deceased, disabled or in prison and unable to take care of their children;
 - ▶ A broken family, where children have to live with either a stepfather or a stepmother or other relatives;
 - ▶ Family members or relatives are or have formerly been in the sex industry, or the community of residence has a number of persons in the sex industry;
 - ▶ Father or mother is a drug addict;
 - ▶ Family is otherwise in a situation that places the child at high risk of becoming a SW.

Day School

The selection criteria for day students are the same as for boarding school students except that the family is felt to be in a situation where girls can safely live with them, and the family will allow their children to go to school if they receive financial assistance.

The selection process consists of three steps. First, primary school teachers select candidates according to the guidelines provided by the MOE. Thereafter, each school sends the list of students to the district education office for screening. The district office forms a committee to select the number of girls according to a quota provided by the provincial education office. The district office list will then be sent to the provincial education office for finalization.

After the final list of students from each province is completed, it is sent to the MOE for approval. The MOE should take approximately 45 days for approval, after which scholarships are distributed to each province.

After receiving a scholarship, each student opens a savings account under her name and sends the account number to the district office. The provincial education office then transfers the scholarship funds to the girls' accounts. In order for a student to withdraw the money, at least two out of three persons (homeroom teacher, principal and student) must sign the withdrawal form.

For boarding school scholarships, the money is transferred to the bank account of that particular school. The money covers the cost of three meals a day, tuition fees, books, school uniforms and other education-related expenses.

Scholarship disbursement

The process of implementing the programme begins in early February, when the Ministry of Education announces the number of scholarships to be provided to each province, and each province determines the allocation of scholarships to each district and notifies the districts of that allocation. The district education office instructs each school to select girls to participate in the project under the conditions and

characteristics specified by the MOE. A committee in each school selects eligible girls and sends the prioritized list, including a waiting list, to the district education office.

The district level committee considers the list of students from every school and prioritizes it according to need. If the number of girls selected by the schools is greater than the number of scholarships offered, girls who are not in urgent need, that is, whose family environment does not put them at particular risk (according to the criteria described above under Boarding School participation), are put on the waiting list. The final list is then sent to the provincial education office. A provincial level committee reviews and revises (if necessary) the list and announces the names of the girls who are to receive scholarships. The final list is then sent to the MOE for recording.

By mid-April, the district education office must inform the schools the girls will enter about the process of receiving their scholarships. For three weeks in April, girls who receive scholarships for boarding school attend an orientation and training workshop to prepare them for the life in boarding school.

In mid-May, school begins. Girls open their bank accounts and send the account numbers to the district education office, which checks all of the account numbers and names of girls and sends them to the provincial education office. After the provincial office receives the funds from MOE, the money will be transferred to the account of each girl. The time between receipt of the account number and the transfer of the money is more than one month.

If students drop out or change schools, the school in which the student was originally enrolled must inform the district and provincial education offices. Girls on the waiting list will then be selected as replacements. School transfers are possible only for day students.

Vocational Training

Girls who do not want to study in the regular school system but who do want to train in specific areas are placed in suitable vocational training programmes. At present, three areas of training are offered.

- Agriculture training

Starting in 1995, an operational centre for agriculture accepted 106 students (boys and girls) who had finished Grade 6 for vocational training as part of a rural development project. Students are also enrolled in an out-of-school programme, and will graduate with a Grade 9 certificate after receiving agriculture training over a period of 18 to 24 months.

In 1996, the Ministry of Education assisted approximately 40,000 needy ninth grade students to continue their education to a higher level (Certificate of Vocational Education). The MOE subsidized tuition fees and provided free housing. Another 5,000 baht (about US\$ 128) per student per year was provided for raising cattle and growing vegetables for the duration of their study. Students could sell the training products for profit, to give them experience in making a living after graduation.

- Nurses' training

Mahidol University in Bangkok provides 40 seats each year for girls who have finished Grade 9 in the North to train as assistant nurses for one year. After training, these students work in Siriraj Hospital and Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University, for at least two years. They are then encouraged to go back to work in rural areas.

The Ministry of Public Health also offered seats for 50 students who finished Grade 12 in 1995 to train in nursing colleges under the Ministry, and another 80 seats in 1996. After training, they will work in public health centres or hospitals.

- Working while studying

At the beginning of 1996, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Dusit Thani Hotel (one of the leading hotel chains in Thailand), joined with the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project to organize a training programme for 60 students who had graduated from Grade 9 at hotels in Phetchaburi and Chiang Rai Provinces. There are plans to expand the project to other hotels in the Dusit Thani Kempinsky group in Thailand and in Europe. During their two years of training, students study general subjects via non-formal education through

Thailand's distance education system. Students receive a salary of 2,000 baht (about US\$ 51) per month. Graduates of this project are then recruited as staff for hotels within the Dusit Thani group at a salary of 5,000-6,000 baht (roughly US\$ 128-153) per month. It is planned that this project will be expanded to other companies.

Budget

Public Sector

The Thai government provides a budget to cover scholarships for girls in Grades 7 to 9. The amount spent for both day students and boarding students grew from about 21 million baht (about US\$ 537,000) in 1994 to just over 41 million baht (about US\$ 1,048,000) in 1997.

Private Sector

Several private businesses donate money to be used as a revolving fund for students attending nursing school and for personal expenditures for boarding school students. The total amount donated by mid-1998 was 8 million baht (about US\$ 204,600).

Evaluation of the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project

Relevance

Girls who are currently being supported by the project report that their scholarships are very important for their study. Most of the girls interviewed from three provinces (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Phayao) have a positive attitude towards education and report that they will continue their education regardless of whether they receive a scholarship or not. The money needed for their education could come from family support or from loans, or they may decide to work and be self-supporting. In any case, receiving a project scholarship helps to lessen the family's financial burden for education, thus reducing the amount of debt the families might have incurred. Teachers who have selected girls for this project noted that some girls had already been sold to an agent. The teachers had to convince the girls' parents or guardians to change their minds prior to offering the girls their scholarships. It is not too dramatic to suggest that this project may

save the lives of many girls and provide them an opportunity for a decent future.

Efficiency

Screening Process

Selecting the right girls is the most important step, to make sure that scholarships will reach the neediest children. In order for every school to use the same criteria, the project set standard selection criteria for each teacher to follow. From interviews with teachers in nine schools in three provinces, it was learned that 90 per cent of the girls selected conformed to the criteria set by the MOE. Data collected from 86 girls in these three provinces revealed that the majority were selected because of poverty (63 per cent), because their parents did not live together (19 per cent) or because they did not live with either parent (14 per cent). Other reported reasons, such as that the girls had good grades or their parents knew teachers in school, accounted for fewer than 5 per cent of the girls chosen.

Approval Process

The Provincial Education Office holds final approval of girls eligible to receive scholarships. Every province has established a provincial committee to make decisions based on the criteria and the quota allocated to the province. However, the provincial level makes only very small changes to the list submitted by the district education office. Thus, the district level plays a crucial decision-making role. Since they have all of the detailed information about each of the girls selected from each school, district education authorities can more suitably prioritize the list by selecting the neediest girls first, regardless of the quota for each school. Keeping the decision-making power at the district level is important; at the district level, officials have greater information and greater access to each school. If necessary, district officials can visit the girls' families to observe actual conditions. Decisions can thus be based on more immediate and accurate information.

Scholarship Disbursement Process

At the project's beginning, provincial authorities transferred scholarships to the district education office, which then paid each

student by cheque made payable to the girl's name. Students then opened a bank account and deposited the money. This process, however, was very slow: it took several months for the girls to receive the money. In some districts, girls received the first semester scholarship at the beginning of the second semester, which meant they had to use their own money for educational expenses during the first semester.

The MOE recognized the problem and changed the disbursement process, having new students open a bank account and transferring the money directly to each student account. This streamlines the payment process.

Overall, the students feel that the current disbursement system is satisfactory. About one-quarter of the girls said they had problems in receiving their scholarships, while about three-quarters said they were satisfied with the money allocation. Of 22 students who reported having problems, just over half said that the money provided is inadequate for one year of schooling, while the rest said that the money allocation was delayed. No student reported problems in withdrawing the money.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project's monitoring and evaluation process is implemented at every level. The Ministry of Education conducts a national survey on a yearly basis by sending questionnaires to every project province asking about dropout rates, implementation problems, and follow-up information on those girls who have finished Grade 9. Moreover, the monitoring team visits each province to help solve problems at the provincial level. Information collected is used to adjust and revise the project as needed.

At the provincial level, officials responsible for this project visit district offices for follow-up and monitoring. Likewise, district officials visit schools in their districts to collect information and provide guidelines for implementation and for addressing problems that may arise. Moreover, a reporting system set by the MOE helps the education office keep track of required information.

Table 1.

Sema Pattana Cheewit boarding school students finishing Grade 9 in 1996

What students did next	Number of students	Percentage
Study in academic programme	149	37.7
Study in vocational programme	83	21.0
Study in out-of-school programme	6	1.5
Study in the public-private cooperation programme	82	20.8
Work and study in out-of-school programme	11	2.8
Drop out before finishing Grade 9	4	1.0
Short-course training programme	2	0.5
Working	36	9.1
Got married	5	1.3
Unidentified	8	2.0
Lost contact	9	2.3
Total	395	100

Source: Special Education Division, Ministry of Education

Impact

In the first three years of implementation, 1994 to 1996, 1,395 girls received scholarships for boarding school and 11,500 girls for day school. Data were collected by the Ministry of Education about what the students who completed Grade 9 did after finishing their education

(for the first group of girls receiving scholarships in 1994). However, only data pertaining to boarding school girls are available. This information shows that of 395 girls who finished Grade 9 in 1996, 320 (81 per cent) continued their education in some form, two students took short training courses, 47 girls (12 percent) began working, and 4 (1 per cent) dropped out of school. Table 1 gives a breakdown of these figures.

The high percentage of girls pursuing an education after finishing Grade 9 indicates the measure of success of this project. As noted, girls recruited to be in boarding schools are those who have problems in the family and whose risk of being sold to an agent is very high. Boarding schools, which are located in provinces different from the girls' hometowns, take the girls away from home and their difficult family circumstances. From focus group discussions with girls who are currently holding scholarships in boarding schools, it appears that the girls want to study when they have a chance. The three-week orientation programme to prepare girls before entering boarding school helps them to adjust to life in school. Moreover, three years in school is long enough to provide knowledge of the dangers of getting HIV from becoming a SW, as well as to provide other means of making a living.

Sustainability

This project is funded by the government. Since project initiation in 1994, every Thai government has made a commitment to allocate a budget for it. The private sector and UNICEF participate by providing financial support for the training of students who want to work and study at the same time. Moreover, the Ministry of Education, together with the State Lottery Office, used lottery proceeds to set up a vocational training fund for girls who finish Grade 9. They set a target of 600 million baht (roughly US\$ 15,340,000), and use the interest from this fund to support short-course vocational training for 10,000 students per year. This part of the project is therefore potentially self-sustaining through the use of national support mechanisms from both government and the private sector.

Lessons Learned

After four years of implementation, the project processes have been adjusted in various ways to make them more efficient. Some of the lessons learned from project implementation are summarized here.

Student Selection and Scholarship Disbursement

The most important aspect of student selection is choosing the girls most in need to participate in the project. Teachers who have worked in their schools for a long enough time know the girls' family backgrounds and select the neediest or the girls who have problems at home. Yet for those teachers who are new to communities, or who may have little contact with them (such as teachers who commute to work and do not live in the communities), a mechanism should be developed whereby they can objectively assess the needs and educational desires of students. This could, for example, take the form of collecting family background profiles containing such information as family size, structure, income, migration history of family members, etc., for each child. Community members could be enlisted to assist schools in collecting information on each girl.

This information, along with the students' academic records, could be used to identify those girls who could best benefit from scholarships, for either school or vocational training, in line with the project's objectives. Selection should begin before the school year ends so that there is enough time for teachers to screen and nominate girls. If the time allowed for selection is too short, the school may make an announcement that anyone who is interested can apply. As a result, the objective of helping particularly high risk girls may not be achieved.

The disbursement procedure of transferring money to each girl's bank account has been found to be the most appropriate method. It cuts out unnecessary steps and shortens the time between approval and transfer of the money. However, the financial system at the provincial level must be made flexible enough to facilitate and speed up the disbursement process.

Responsiveness

Based on school interviews, it appears that the quality of data from the MOE’s monitoring questionnaire may be problematic, since several schools did not understand questions and provided incorrect information. For example, concerning the number of girls who drop out, many schools reported no dropouts because they had immediately replaced girls who had dropped out with those on the waiting list. Their understanding was that “dropout” referred to an unfilled position rather than to a girl who had left school. As a result, a very low number of dropouts appears in the official statistics, which in turn leads to insufficient attention to the issue of dropouts, the causes and the ramifications for the girls who leave school.

Data collected from nine schools in the three provinces found that 11 girls had dropped out, of a total of 346 students (about 3 per cent). Even though the percentage of dropouts is very small (and questionable), this group of girls needs greater attention. Based on information from the girls’ friends provided during a focus group discussion on the reasons for their dropping out, the girls who left school did so voluntarily since they wanted to go to work. Their work of choice was in the entertainment business: massage parlours, restaurants, etc., which places them at risk of becoming sex workers. Little has been done to follow this group of girls and help them to find other career alternatives in line with the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project’s aims.

In addition, the curriculum offered in school should provide more alternatives. Girls from poorer families may be at a disadvantage in terms of their educational ability, and they may not do well in a strict academic environment. Students report that their friends who drop out do so because they were bored with studying and unable to follow classes. If the school offered alternative programmes—such as vocational training in school and especially opportunities to acquire important life skills—these might help motivate girls to stay in school. Since the schools have no strategy to cope with girls who want to quit, it falls to each individual teacher to solve the problem. Some teachers may take it seriously and try to convince a girl to stay, but others may ignore the problem and simply replace one who wants to

leave with the next girl on the waiting list. It is thus important to have clear strategy for dealing with this issue, including guidelines for teachers to follow.

The district education office should serve as a centre of information about the girls' current situation both during their study and after they finish. Follow-up information about what the girls do afterwards is important, since it serves as an indicator of project success or the need for improved planning and implementation.

Information about the Education Loan Project (see page 38) or other available scholarships should be distributed to Sema Pattana Cheewit girls before they finish Grade 9, so that they can make plans to continue their education.

The Thai Women of Tomorrow Project

The Thai Women of Tomorrow (TWT) Project was initiated in 1992 by researchers at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University (CMU) in northern Thailand. After completing several studies related to the incidence of sex work, child prostitution and AIDS, their causes and effects, the researchers turned to finding practical solutions to these problems. Since it is crucial to prevent young girls at high risk from being pushed or pulled into the sex industry, the TWT proposal was submitted to the Women's Economic and Leadership Development Programme (WELD) under financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The first approved project, entitled *Reduction of Child Prostitution by Raising Consciousness and Attitudes among Children and Parents in Rural Society*, was started in 1993. This was the TWT's first phase aimed at testing an attitude change model. The project targeted rural primary school girls at risk of becoming SWs in two districts (Mae Jai and June) in Phayao Province, an area with major HIV/AIDS and SW problems. The project's objectives were to change the attitudes of both girls and their parents against prostitution and in favour of higher education and good occupations.

After the model was tested with satisfactory results, the project moved to Phase II, *Providing Educational and Occupational Opportunities through Public-Private Partnership*. This phase built a public-private partnership to provide opportunities for girls for continuing education and skills training. The partnership provided scholarship funds, skills training and job opportunities for girls after they finished their training programmes. Two provinces, Phayao and Chiang Rai, were the target areas and it was planned to expand the project to cover every province in the North and Northeast if the programme proved successful. The project received funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1993, as well as private donations.

The third phase of the TWT project started at the end of 1994 after support from USAID ended. In order for the project to be sustainable, three activities were initiated. The first activity aimed to build a relationship with the private sector and other nongovernmental

organizations for long-term support in providing scholarships to the students. The second activity was designed to transfer the idea and methodology of the public-private partnership to teaching institutions and public organizations, to link both study curriculum and training with the private sector. The third activity focused on strengthening media production and counselling to change the attitudes of young women and their parents regarding prostitution; this activity received financial support from the Government of Japan under the Small Scale Grant Assistance programme (SSGA).

Since the Faculty of Social Sciences at CMU is an academic institution, the fourth phase of the project then aimed to reduce its implementation role to that of academic support and continue the attitude change campaign. The fourth phase received support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) under the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). The last phase of this project is to establish a resource and research centre against child prostitution and abuse in northern Thailand. The centre's functions are:

1. Providing information about child prostitution and child abuse
2. Promoting and coordinating a network of governmental and non-governmental organizations and private agencies
3. Creating and using effective local media to change attitudes regarding child prostitution and child abuse
4. Promoting and supporting existing education and training institutes to adopt a comprehensive intervention module for combatting child prostitution and child abuse
5. Undertaking an evaluation of on-going interventions and building academic support for network members.

Details about each of the TWT project's phases are presented below as potentially useful for adaptation and implementation elsewhere.

Phase I : Pilot Test of an Attitude Change Model (1992)

Objective

To turn attitudes of rural girls and their parents against prostitution and in favour of higher education.

Target population

Primary school students in rural areas who are at risk of becoming SWs in two districts of Phayao Province.

Activities

The four primary activities undertaken in this phase were:

1. To survey attitudes of girls and their parents about sex work.
2. To produce a 3-part series video tape and attitude change materials.
3. To produce an attitude change manual including pre- and post-tests for the video tape, technical information for focus groups, counselling and home visits.
4. To recruit three teacher volunteers per district to be trained to work with students and their parents to change attitudes.

Phase II: Providing Education and Occupational Opportunities through a Public-Private Partnership (1993-1994)

In September 1993, CMU held a seminar on its pilot three-step programme to determine practical solutions for solving the prostitution problem in northern Thailand. The seminar's conclusion emphasized that a public-private partnership was the best way to gain cooperation from every sector of society to deal with the problem. Informal discussions with private sector representatives were held to formulate the nature of the collaboration. Several private enterprises showed a serious interest in this activity by offering scholarships, skills training and job opportunities. The project was expanded to cover two provinces, Phayao and Chiang Rai, with the aim of extending both educational and career opportunities.

Extension of Educational Opportunities

The extension of educational opportunities activity has two main objectives: (1) to provide girls in Grades 5 and 6 and their families information about the danger of sex work and AIDS, and (2) to provide girls from poor families who are at high risk of being lured into prostitution scholarships to continue their education through Grade 9. Scholarships of 3,000 baht (about US\$ 77) per year per student for 100 girls in two provinces in the North were offered by individuals and organizations in 1994. In 1995, the number of scholarships remained at 100, but it was increased to 300 scholarships in 1996 and thereafter.

The implementation steps for the first objective included: selection of counselling teachers in each district, for a total of 18 counsellors in the programme; training these counsellors to use media kits, focus group methods, person-to-person counselling, group counselling, and home visits; providing media kits (which include TV's and instructive videos) to counsellors, teachers, etc.; presentations by counsellors, development officers and public health officers, using the media kits, to target groups; and monitoring and evaluating activities by the provincial and district administrative committees and CMU.

The education extension activity began with an initial provision of scholarships, then establishment of a long-term scholarship fund. The initial stage included: (1) conducting a public relations campaign, (2) acknowledging donor companies and organizations and (3) creating links between students and donors. The long-term goal is to establish a Thai Women of Tomorrow Foundation at the national level to raise scholarship funds.

The provincial administrative committee is responsible for regulating, managing and distributing the scholarship funds. The district committee controls the selection of students and monitors the programme in accordance with the policies set forth by the provincial committee. The CMU Faculty of Social Science releases scholarship funds to provinces and acts as a cooperative agency between scholarship students and donors. The counselling teachers and school principals nominate students for the scholarships and monitor their educational progress.

Extension of Career Opportunities

This activity provides job training and placement. Four job training programmes are offered: (1) an assistant health worker career programme; (2) a modern fashion and design programme; (3) a secretarial and computer training programme and (4) an assistant jewellery cutter training programme. There is also a (5) special training skills programme for girls who are too young to enter the other four programmes.

1. Assistant Health Worker Career Programme

The objective of this programme is to provide an opportunity for girls graduating from Grade 9, and aged 16 or over, to become assistant health workers, employed permanently in hospitals and child or elderly care centres. The programme target is 200 young women per year in the priority provinces for training and placement in the health care field. Its implementation steps are the following.

1. The provincial administrative committee, public health, labour and public welfare offices consider the plan, training programme, and implementation steps in detail.
2. The district administrative committee identifies young women interested in this career in accordance with criteria and regulations established by the provincial committee.
3. The CMU Faculty of Social Sciences, together with provincial administrative offices and private organizations, suggest career training opportunities and research available jobs.
4. The Provincial Public Health Office, Provincial Labour Office, Provincial Public Welfare Office, Faculty of Social Sciences and private organizations recruit young women for the training programmes.
5. A pre-training orientation session is held for the young women who have been recruited.
6. The training programme lasts three to six months.
7. After training is complete, private organizations help provide permanent employment.

2. Modern Fashion and Design Career Programme

The objective of this programme is to help Grade 6 students aged 16 and over to pursue a career in modern fashion and design and to work permanently in factories. This programme trains 180 young women graduates per year. Its implementation steps are as follows.

1. Chiang Mai University, the provincial administrative committee and private sector organizations evaluate the plan, training programme, places for training, internships, and job placement opportunities.
2. The provincial and district committees, especially the Provincial Labour Office and Provincial Public Welfare Office, recruit young women in accordance with criteria and regulations established by the provincial administrative committee.
3. The young women selected attend a pre-training orientation session in order to develop an understanding of what they can expect during training.
4. During the three-month training period, the trainees receive free lodging, food, transportation and a modest allowance. The trainees are able to earn extra income if the trainers find them part-time jobs or an internship during the training programme.
5. Young women who pass the training programme will be placed permanently in the fashion and design factories in Chiang Mai and Lampang Provinces and be paid according to their skills but not less than the minimum legal wage.

3. Secretarial Career (Computer Training) Programme

This programme has as its objective to provide girls who have completed Grade 9 (aged 16 and over) with an opportunity to become a secretary. Fifty young women completing Grade 9 are trained for 250 hours in computer and other modern office skills. They receive certificates and support in finding suitable jobs. The implementation steps are as follows.

1. USAID, CMU Faculty of Social Sciences and private business jointly create the training plan, programme activities, programme site and training, as well as making provision for jobs after training.
2. The provincial and district administrative committees select young women who are qualified in accordance with the established criteria and regulations.
3. The girls recruited go through an orientation programme to help them understand the training and working conditions.
4. After training, students are tested and receive certificates.
5. All private and public agencies involved in the programme cooperate in providing internships and jobs for trainees.

4. Assistant Jewellery Cutter Training Programme

This programme provides young women who have completed Grade 9 with an opportunity to become assistant jewellery cutters employed permanently in gem and diamond cutting factories and companies. The target was set at 120 young women to train and place in permanent jobs with the Thai Gem and Jewelry Traders Association. The implementation steps include the following.

1. The district administrative committee and members of the Representative Committee from IQS (Public) Co., Ltd. (Gemopolis) in Bangkok recruit young women who want to undertake this career.
2. The Faculty of Social Sciences, together with provincial administrative offices and private organizations, cooperate with the Thai Gem and Jewelry Traders Association to provide jobs.
3. Pre-training orientation is provided for girls who are recruited.
4. The training takes place over six months at the Gemopolis Company, located on the outskirts of Bangkok.
5. After the training, the Gemopolis Company employed the young women permanently.

5. Special Training Skills Programme

Girls who are not eligible to apply for one of the four training programmes described above because of their age are at risk of being pressured by their parents to work. Moreover, girls who are accepted for scholarships to continue their education to Grade 7, or those who are accepted for training programmes, may also be under pressure during the period (approximately two to three months) before school starts or before the training programme begins. Agents use this time to approach the girls' parents and offer money for loans. The Special Training Skills Programme was created to give these girls a special training opportunity within the province for this crucial two-to-three-month period to prevent agents from pressuring the girls and their parents. The programme is implemented as follows.

1. Local teachers/counsellors identify emergency cases in which girls are seen to be at high risk of leaving immediately to enter the sex industry.
2. The teachers or counsellors contact by telephone the Faculty of Social Sciences. Together they devise an appropriate alternative plan of action in a detailed, timely manner.
3. Money from the special skills training programme is used by the teachers/counsellors to implement an immediate response to the needs of a particular girl in one of several training programmes, in skills such as hairdressing, cooking, cloth/umbrella painting or wood carving.

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Phase III : Strengthening Media Production and Counselling Potential (1995)

The TWT was able to strengthen its ongoing activities and extend its efforts over a wider area and target population in northern Thailand. In this phase, previous experience working with the attitude changing activities and the success stories of girls who finished training and found permanent jobs were incorporated into several packages of campaign materials.

Phase IV: Extension of Attitude Change Campaign and Academic Support (1995)

Three districts in each of four provinces in the North of Thailand: Chiang Rai, Phayao, Lampang and Chaing Mai were targeted for this phase. Two projects were implemented during this period: (1) a campaign against child prostitution and in support of the creation of new career attitudes, and (2) development of education standards and skills training for girls attending boarding school under the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project.

Campaign Against Child Prostitution and for the Creation of New Career Attitudes

This project is a continuation of activity from Phase II, which focused on a campaign to change the attitudes of girls and their parents about prostitution. Face-to-face discussions, focus group sessions, and home visits were among the campaign techniques used. Scholarships were also provided to girls who finished Grade 6 to continue their education for three more years. This activity was coordinated with the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project implemented by the Ministry of Education. Girls recruited by the TWT project were treated the same as girls who participated in the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project. The TWT project, though, focused more attention on girls who finished Grade 9, to encourage them to continue their education or provide short-course training and find appropriate jobs for those who finished training.

Development of Educational Standards and Skills Training for Girls Attending Boarding School under the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project

Boarding schools participating in the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project receive girls at high risk of becoming SWs, so that girls will be away from home to prevent their parents from forcing them into the sex industry. However, it was found to be necessary to provide girls in Sema Pattana Cheewit who were unable to follow the standard school curricula with other options. As mentioned earlier, girls from poorer families often have a disadvantage in terms of education ability, and may be unable to follow classes. Such girls would benefit if school had alternatives such as skills training that could be used to help them find jobs after finishing Grade 9.

Researchers in the TWT project, in collaboration with the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project, conducted research to help develop education standards and skills training for girls attending boarding schools. The project for development of educational standards and skills training for girls attending boarding school has four objectives:

1. To improve and develop education models and standards so that they satisfy the needs of girls and can be used by them to generate income after finishing their education
2. To test these models in participating project schools and assess their efficiency and effectiveness
3. To use the models as a skills training approach for girls in school and ascertain that they are appropriate for meeting local needs
4. To enable girls in this target group to earn some income during their education period.

Research activities and skills training in schools have been undertaken to accomplish these objectives.

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Evaluation of the Thai Women of Tomorrow Project

Relevance

This project's main objectives are to change the attitudes of girls and parents in the northern part of Thailand regarding prostitution and to provide a means for the girls to avoid becoming SWs through improved education and career opportunities. Before the AIDS epidemic, parents learned from the experiences of other families that selling daughters into prostitution was one way to improve their economic status and satisfy their material desires. Since such parents had very few other alternatives for earning a living, they felt that sending their daughters into the sex industry was a viable solution. Not every girl who entered into prostitution was in this situation, however. Many were deceived and promised good jobs in the city, as waitresses in restaurants or as housekeepers, but were subsequently forced to work as SWs. With the spread of AIDS and the realization that SWs are the most vulnerable group to HIV infection, many concerned organizations began taking this problem seriously. The TWT project concentrates on preventive strategies to address the AIDS problem by providing opportunities for girls to extend their education.

It is accepted in the Thai community that the longer a girl stays in school, the greater the probability that she will stay out of sex work. Available information indicates that Grade 6 graduates are more likely to enter the sex industry than Grade 9 graduates. Education is viewed as one of the best strategies to deal with the prostitution problem and hence reduce the vulnerability of girls.

The project stresses encouraging girls who finish Grade 6 to continue school for three more years. This group is too young to legally enter the labour force but they are open to being forced into the sex industry. Moreover, clients of commercial sex establishments often prefer young girls under the (often erroneous) assumption that they are free of HIV/AIDS. As noted, those children mostly come from families trapped in a cycle of poverty and debt. Brothel owners have networks of agents who seek out families with young daughters and tempt them with offers of money, and parents faced with economic pressures and a desire for consumer goods come to view their daughters as commodities

that can be traded. The girls obey their parents' wishes out of a sense of duty and to help secure the household income. Once sold, the girls are trapped in the profession and find it very difficult to escape. They are subject to abuse and face the danger of being infected with HIV. Thus, keeping those girls from being sold is a very important step.

This project was initiated in 1992, two years before the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project began. The CMU researchers were interested in finding solutions to the child prostitution problem in northern Thailand, where the rates of both prostitution and HIV are the highest in the country. This initiative should be viewed as a pilot project and, with respect to convincing girls and their families to continue their education, it has been successful. It was therefore used by the government as a model in implementing the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project and expanding it to other parts of the country with similar problems.

Efficiency

The project uses teachers trained as counsellors to monitor and discuss with girls their future education and careers. Teachers know the problems of each girl and they also meet with the girl's parents or guardians to discuss the situation and encourage them to continue the girl's education. Teachers in this case play an important role in identifying the target group. According to the project director, about 95 per cent of the girls selected to participate in the project are in the specified target group.

Since this project focuses on education, it collaborates directly with the Ministry of Education at both provincial and district levels, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of the Interior. These concerned agencies address such issues as training, job seeking, and selecting appropriate participants.

The project is administered by the Provincial Administrative Committee headed by USAID, the Thai government's Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC) and the Faculty of Social Sciences, CMU. The district administrative committee is the implementation agency. The administration structure is organized to be effective while maintaining flexibility in operations.

In developing its public-private partnership, the project invited participation from the public and private sectors in both implementing the project and providing financial support. For instance, J. Walter Thompson, an advertising firm, agreed to donate creative and production time to initiate a campaign in the target provinces. The company was also willing to provide scholarships for poor girls in the pilot project. Citibank offered part-time jobs in its Chiang Mai branch. Other companies such as IBM and AT&T also offered scholarships for poor girls. Newspapers and radio and television stations donated time to publicize the programme. Chiang Mai University's Computer Centre offered to provide, at cost, a computer skills and modern office operation training programme, and other companies in the local area provided additional training, accommodation, meals and jobs after training to girls participating in the project. However, the project's budget relied mainly on support from international organizations. A diagram of the partnership structure is presented in Appendix B.

At the beginning, the project was supported by CIDA to change the attitudes of the girls and their parents. The second phase was supported by both USAID and individual donors. One setback occurred when USAID withdrew from Thailand. Early in the project's life, USAID provided both scholarships to Grade 7 students and also per diem and accommodation expenditures for girls attending short-course training. Scholarships were 3,000 baht (about US\$ 77) per year for students in Grade 7. When the USAID office left Thailand in 1994, the project had only been implemented for one year, and the students who received the scholarships had not yet finished Grade 9. The project therefore had to reduce the students' scholarships by half, to 1,500 baht (roughly US\$ 38), and undertook a campaign to encourage the private sector and individuals to donate money.

Another difficult yet crucial part is to find proper jobs for girls after they finish their training. A job that can generate income at a satisfactory level is an incentive for both girls and their families. At the beginning, business sector participation in the project consisted only of a small scale garment factory in the local area that offered training and jobs. The advantage of this type of factory was that the girls were trained in the entire process of dress making; the disadvantage

is that the jobs are not well paid. The factory paid the girls much less than the minimum wage because they were “trainees”. The director of the project then contacted other, larger factories where wages were in accordance with labour laws. The girls were more satisfied with their monthly incomes and could send some remittance back to their families.

Originally, the project supported accommodations, per diem and meals for the girls (supported by USAID) and the factory provided training materials and other training related expenses. When the budget was cut, project personnel changed their role from financial supporter to that of middleman for factories who wanted trained labour. The project conducted campaigns in all of the factories in the region, stressing that the project could recruit qualified girls to be trained to work in the factory. The project director also went to meet with the factory management to gain their cooperation to offer training and jobs to the girls. At present, seven companies are participating.

Another obstacle encountered related to the culture of northern girls: they have to take a long vacation during the annual Sonkran Festival, during the Thai New Year (in April). For people in northern Thailand, this holiday is the most important of the year and they must return home for it. The vacation may take as long as 10 days. As a result, factories, especially those that must produce orders on schedule, prefer to hire girls who are not from the North.

Impact

The TWT project has successfully and effectively reached many of its goals and objectives. The project recruited volunteer teachers in six districts of Phayao and Chiang Rai Provinces, trained them and assigned them the responsibility of making attitude changes among girls at risk and their families. Effective packages of campaign media and methods were produced; for example, one set of video tapes contains interviews with anonymous girls who are actually working as SWs to let them tell of their suffering, the nature of which is usually unknown to villagers. When the girls and their families learn about how the girls might be abused, their attitude towards prostitution changes. Focus group sessions and home visits were also carefully prepared by TWT staff and

delivered to target groups by volunteer teachers. These methods were continued with at risk families in order to monitor, follow up and try to affect decisions about the girls' futures. As a result, a great number of girls and their parents changed their minds and decided to either continue schooling or join vocational training programmes.

The project provided more than 1,000 scholarships to girls who finished Grade 6. This means that these girls will not enter the labour market for at least three more years.

Another 425 girls participated in vocational training in four areas:

1. One hundred and forty girls attended the Assistant Health Worker six-month training programme at the Thai-Canadian Academy of the Care West Company. After training, they were employed by Care West and some private hospitals in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai with legal wages and benefits.
2. Seventy-five girls were trained for 250 hours at the Computer Centre, Chiang Mai University. They were then placed in secretarial positions at several established companies with reasonable salaries and benefits.
3. One hundred and fifty girls were trained for three months at the Wing Group in Sankanpang, Chiang Mai and Sahapatana Groups at Lamphun. They were then placed at several garment and leather-making companies in Chiang Mai with legal wages and benefits.
4. Sixty girls were trained in the Gemopolis and the General Diamond Companies, the leading jewellery cutting businesses. They were then employed as skilled jewellery cutters in these companies in Bangkok. The career is very promising and the benefits are higher than the minimum legal wage.

Sustainability

The project has been implemented for five years. The implementation strategies have been modified according to the changing situation. Since the project began in an academic setting, it has been oriented towards research. The intention was to develop a model that could be

transferred to other areas on a larger scale. The project might be self-sustaining if it fully develops its partnership with both public and private sectors. Chiang Mai University has served as coordinator and the focal point of implementation. If funding from international and domestic donors can be found, the project could share expenses for training and providing student scholarships. If funds are terminated, it must work more as facilitator, coordinator and organizer for companies to select girls for their training programmes.

Since this project is run by an academic organization, it has not been possible to expand it to cover the entire target population. As a result, after testing their model and learning important lessons from its implementation, the project's organizers have changed their role to that of resource and research centre against child prostitution and child abuse in northern Thailand.

Lessons Learned

1. The project's premise was that changing the attitudes of girls and parents is the most important factor for success. If parents and girls still have positive attitudes towards prostitution, it is difficult to convince them about the value of education. Even if the project can compensate the family by giving the children scholarships, the children might drop out of school before they finish Grade 9. The project therefore put its efforts into attitude changing activities, with scholarships and short-course training as supporting activities for those who wanted to have alternative ways of earning money. This strategy is crucial for the success of the project. Once families have negative attitudes towards prostitution, they will try to find other ways and means to earn a living regardless of the existence of this project. It is suggested that communities should be involved in the attitude changing activities. The project, in collaboration with NGOs, may train community volunteers in attitude changing strategies. Once the communities have this knowledge and absorb the idea of the danger of letting girls become sex workers, it is possible that the goals of the project will be accomplished.

This strategy is different from that of the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project, which puts more emphasis on the scholarships. If the effort and strategies developed by these two projects can be combined, the prospect of reducing the number of girls who enter prostitution will be better.

2. The short-course training provided for girls in rural areas had to be designed in accordance with the girls' abilities. The computer training programme may not be appropriate because it requires skills in English, one major weakness of students in rural areas. It is difficult for them to learn the material, and after they finish training their skills often are still not competitive with those of other well-trained persons. The training programmes that are best suited to the girls in this area are gem cutting and the garment industry. They can learn fast and get a well paid job after finishing their training. Matching the right training programme with the target population should be a priority.
3. Choosing the companies to participate in the project is another important issue. If the girls who finish training are placed in companies that exploit them with low pay or excessive work hours, it will discourage girls from such work and encourage them to become SWs, who earn much higher incomes. As a result, past practices may re-assert themselves, with prostitution again being seen as the most viable form of work for rural poor women. Selecting the right business partners and involving them in every step of the project, especially in the planning and implementation stages, can increase their awareness and understanding of the objectives of the project and may reduce the likelihood of exploitation.



Education Loan Fund Project

The Education Loan Project was approved in January 1996 to provide educational opportunities to students who are economically unable to continue their education after completing Grade 9. Human resource development and equal access to education for everyone are the project's major objectives. Since compulsory education in Thailand is six years, education to a higher level is thought to be up to individuals and their families. But families with limited incomes may decide to put their children into the labour market rather than sending them to school. As a result, they will be trapped in low paying jobs and unskilled work, unable to improve their quality of life.

This project offers low-interest loans to students to continue their education as far as the university level. Those who are eligible for loans must meet the following criteria.

1. They must be Thai nationals enrolled in a Thai educational institution, either in high school (regular or vocational), earning but not having completed a bachelor's degree or participating in out-of-school programmes.
2. They must not have a full-time job during their course of education.
3. Their family can have a total income of not more than 120,000 baht (about US\$ 3068) per year and the student must have a satisfactory educational record.
4. They must be free of bankruptcy.
5. They must not be sentenced to prison.

Students can request to borrow money to cover tuition fees, education-related expenditures and living expenses. The yearly expenditure for each educational level ranges from 53,640 baht (US\$ 1372) for high school or equivalent to 76,500 baht (US\$ 1956) for a bachelor's degree. Contracts are made on a yearly basis. After the first-year loan is approved, students are guaranteed to receive subsequent loans until graduation, unless they have educational problems and are unable to complete their studies.

Students must begin to pay back their loans two years after finishing their education. The loan reimbursement includes both interest and principal on the loan, and is paid back on a progressive schedule (Table 2). The loan should be completely paid off within 15 years (that is, 17 years after students complete their education). The interest rate is set at 1 per cent per year. The loan is terminated when all the money is returned or the borrower dies.

Table 2.
Percentage of principal to be repaid each year after finishing education

Year	Percentage of principal to pay back	Year	Percentage of principal to pay back
1	1.5	9	7.0
2	2.5	10	8.0
3	3.0	11	9.0
4	3.5	12	10.0
5	4.0	13	11.0
6	4.5	14	12.0
7	5.0	15	13.0
8	6.0		

Implementation Schedule

In March or April, a committee and working group are established at the provincial level to consider guidelines for the allocation of loans and the implementation process. Information is disseminated to every educational institution student and the general public about the loan project. In May, the educational institutions make announcements for students to submit their requests and then screen the request forms. The institutes compile a list of all students who wish to receive a loan and calculate the total amount requested.

In June, the provincial committee holds a meeting to deal with cases where the money requested exceeds the money allocated to the province. The committee may decide to allocate less money than requested by each individual, in order to spread it out to cover more students. The educational institutions inform students who are to receive loans to prepare a contract with Krung Thai Bank. In July, schools report the number of students and total money requested to the provincial education office, which in turn reports to the MOE and the Krung Thai Bank.

In August and September, the Ministry of Finance verifies all of the contracts and Krung Thai Bank transfers monthly stipends to each student account. The provincial working group then follows up on project implementation.

The project budget for the first year of implementation (1996) was 3000 million baht (about US\$ 76,720,000); 60 per cent of that amount went to the Ministry of Education, and 40 per cent to the Ministry of University Affairs. In 1997, the budget was set at 10,950 million baht (US\$ 280 million).

Evaluation of the Education Loan Fund Project

Relevance and Efficiency

This project's target population is students (boys and girls) who have completed Grade 9 and want to continue their education either formally or informally. The process of selecting students is carried out by a committee at each institute, under guidelines provided by the Loan Committee at the central office.

The project aims to help poor families regardless of the risk children may be in with regard to entering the sex industry. However, Sema Pattana Cheewit students receive priority in receiving education loans if they apply. Thus, although this project does not address the AIDS problem directly, it is viewed as a supporting project, helping to realize the objectives of the Sema Pattana Cheewit and Thai Women of Tomorrow projects.

However, with respect to the chances of girls under the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project in securing loans, the Educational Loan Project is not fully successful. During focus group discussions with these girls about why they did not apply for the loan, most said they did not receive information about it. Loan project announcements are made at the high school level. Students at lower educational levels receive such information only from indirect channels, such as television or radio spots. Moreover, students who are eligible to apply for loans must already be enrolled in a high school or higher level educational institution, which means that those who finish Grade 9 are unable to apply until they are already enrolled in a higher level educational institution. This process is different from that of the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project, where students who receive a scholarship know the results before they finish Grade 6; thus they are certain that they will have adequate funds to continue their education. The Educational Loan Project's process thus reduces the chances for poor students, such as those in the Sema Pattana Cheewit Project, who want to continue their education but do not have adequate information or are uncertain about getting approval.

Impact

With this loan money, more than 131,000 students studied in schools under the Ministry of Education and just over 21,500 students under the Ministry of University Affairs in 1996. The number of students receiving loans under the MOE increased to over 373,000 (up 185 per cent) in 1997 and over 65,000 (up 205 per cent) for students under the Ministry of University Affairs.

Sustainability

The project has been implemented for only two years. Its sustainability depends on whether the government has an adequate yearly budget. Moreover, it also depends on whether students who have finished their education and start to work will promptly pay back their loans, which repayments will be put in a revolving fund and allocated to new students. It is too early to tell the rate of default (i.e., failure to repay the loans) or its impact on project sustainability.

Lessons Learned

1. During the first year of implementation students did not understand the objective of the loan project and feared being in debt, thus the total loan amount requested by students applying for loans was less than the amount of money allocated. So informing the target population of the availability of funds and the terms of the loans is the first need. Moreover, each school should receive detailed information in order to answer any questions that students may have. The implementation process is rather complicated and details of contracts need to be accurate. Many schools did not understand the project’s process, which led to delays.

The students who received loans during the first year of implementation had to wait about a semester before their loan was approved. During the second year, when the students understood and learned from other students who had already received loans, the number of students who applied doubled and implementation was faster. Information dissemination and detailed implementation guidelines are crucial. NGOs can act as information disseminators to target populations, especially to the group in greatest need; this might involve identifying target groups and providing necessary information such as the availability of funds, the application process, the contract and repayment processes, and so forth.

2. It was found to be important to avoid words that might be obstacles for some population groups to apply for loans. For example, the word “interest” is not accepted by Muslims, thus reducing the chances for that group of students to apply for loans. The project therefore changed the word to “fee”, which was acceptable to the target population.

In interviews with students who received loans, they reported that they can concentrate more on their studies because they do not have to worry about earning money to pay for their education. They also said that they feel more responsible about finishing their study in order to get a job and pay back their loans.

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Appendixes
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Appendix A: Thailand's Education System

The reformed education system in Thailand is presented in Figure 1. Four government agencies are responsible for the formal education system: the Office of Prime Minister, Ministry of Education, Ministry of the Interior, and Ministry of University Affairs. Pre-university education is provided mainly by the public sector. At present, the formal school system in Thailand is divided into four levels: kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary. Compulsory free education is set at six years, equal to completion of Grade 6, though efforts are under way to expand compulsory education to nine and then twelve years. By Grade 6, most children have reached 12 years of age.

In 1990, secondary school enrolment was only 30 per cent and unevenly distributed across the total population (TDRI, 1991). Table 3 shows that children from farming families are least likely to rise in the education ladder, with only 14.5 per cent receiving a secondary school education, compared to 96 per cent for professional and business families and 24 per cent for labourer families. Poverty is seen as the main reason that children of farming families are unable to continue their education.

Table 3.
Gross Enrolment Rates for Children from Households of Different Occupations: Secondary and Tertiary Level (1985)

Occupation	Secondary	Tertiary	Proportion of total population
Professional and business	95.8%	57.7%	12.8%
Labourers	24.2%	7.1%	21.3%
Farmers	14.5%	1.7%	65.9%

Source: TDRI, *The 1991 Year-End Conference, Educational Options for the Future of Thailand, Volume 1:7.*

With respect to gender, boys have slightly more opportunity than girls to pursue higher education. In 1990, 38 per cent of boys continued their education to Grade 7 as against 36 per cent of girls. In 1992, the figures were higher, 48 per cent and 46 per cent, but the gender differential was only slightly smaller. Table 4 breaks these figures down by region.

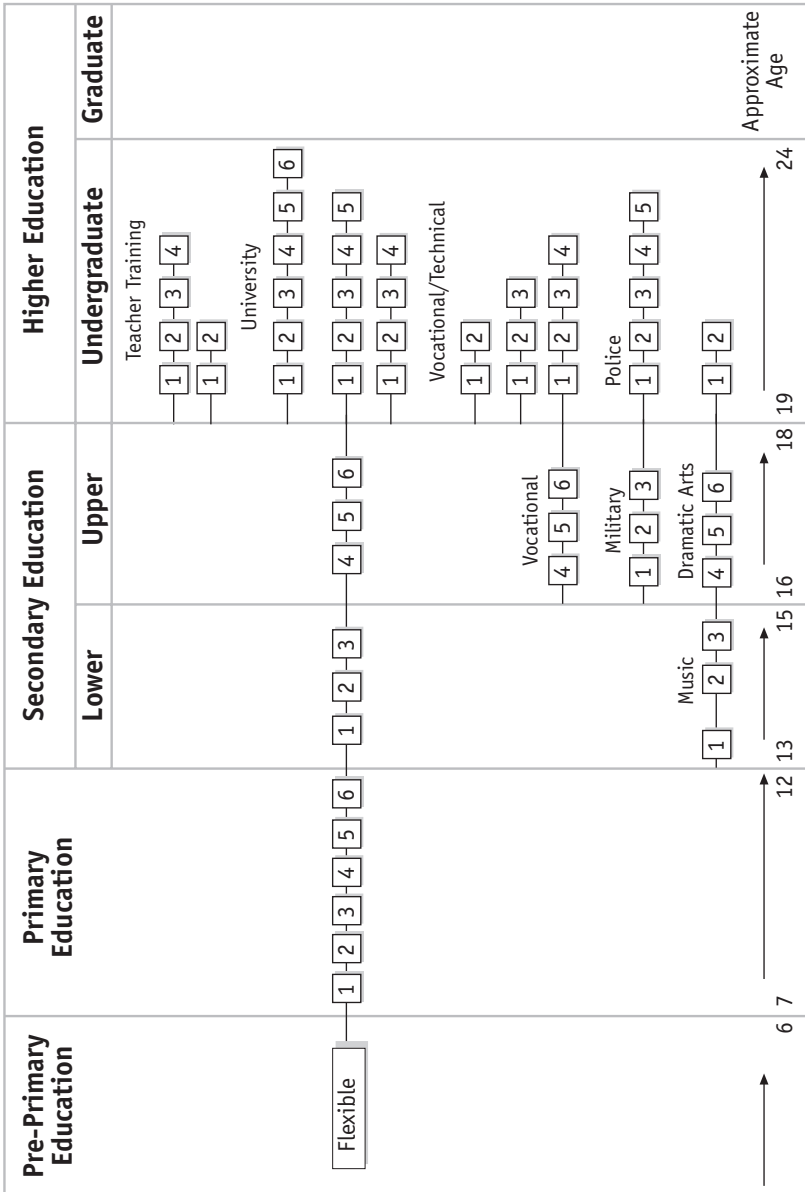
Table 4.
Continuation Rates of Boys and Girls from Grade 6 to Grade 7 (1990–1992)

Regions	1990			1991			1992		
	Boys	Girls	B>G	Boys	Girls	B>G	Boys	Girls	B>G
Bangkok	75.8	75.5	0.3	76.1	74.7	1.4	76.2	74.2	2.0
Central	48.6	47.1	1.5	53.2	52.2	1.0	58.1	56.9	1.2
South	38.4	35.9	2.5	42.1	39.4	2.7	45.5	43.3	2.2
North	35.9	33.5	2.4	41.1	38.7	2.4	46.8	45.2	1.6
Northeast	26.0	23.4	2.6	31.1	28.6	2.5	38.3	36.1	2.2
Whole Country	38.3	36.3	2.0	42.9	40.9	2.0	48.4	46.6	1.8

Source: Office of National Education Commission, 1995. Evaluation of Extension of Education Opportunities: Secondary Education level, Table 14, p.52.

The environment surrounding this situation is changing, however. Parents acknowledge that a Grade 6 certificate is no longer sufficient for employment in the labour market and the difference in wages between workers with and without secondary education is obvious. In addition, children who finish primary school are usually too young (about age 12) to legally enter the labour market (the age of legal entry is 13 years). Thus education beyond primary school is clearly seen as important for their children’s future; the main obstacle to advancement is the cost. The 1992 Children and Youth Survey conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) showed that 53 per cent of children aged 12 to 14 who were not attending school had no financial support, while 20 per cent said they had to work to earn a living; only

Figure 1.
The structure of the Reformed Education System



10 per cent reported no interest in further study. The average direct cost, including fees, books and materials, uniforms, transportation, etc., is about 1,425 baht (about US\$ 36) per year for lower secondary school.

Responding to this low secondary enrolment rate, the MOE began two projects:

1. Extension of Basic Education to the Lower Secondary Level, initiated by the Department of General Education;
2. A Pilot Project for the Extension of Educational Opportunities, initiated by the Office of the National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC).

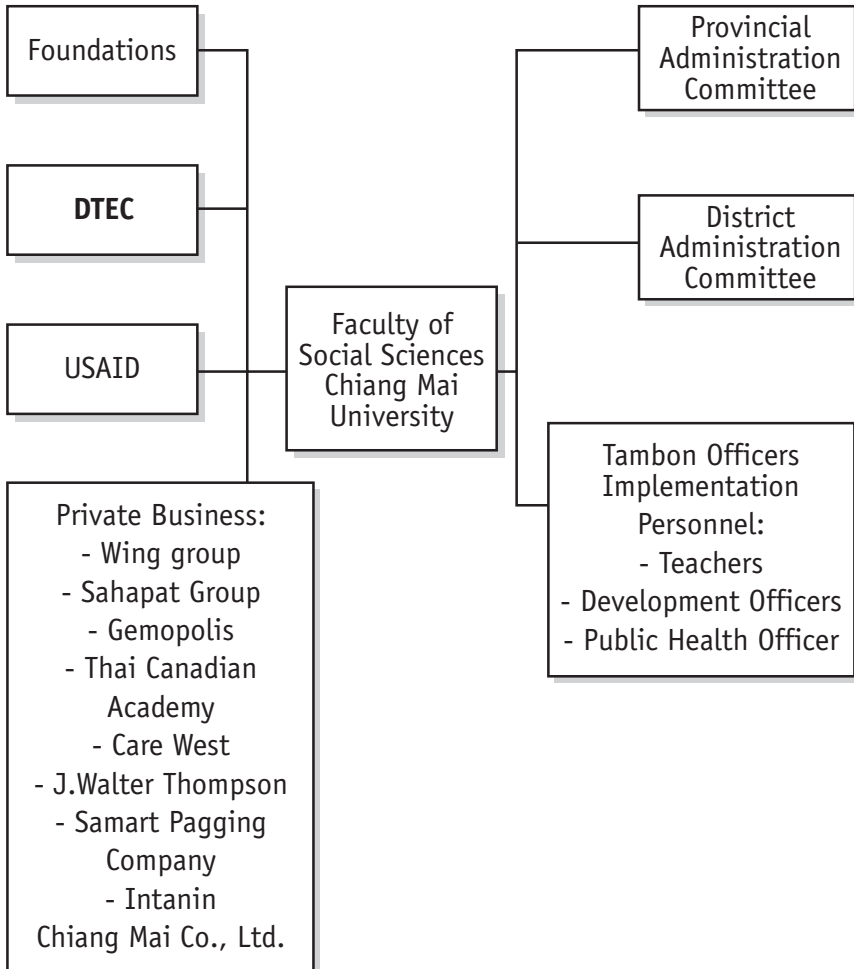
After these projects were implemented, the secondary school enrolment rate increased markedly, from 30 per cent in 1990 to 85 per cent in 1994, according to data from the National Education Commission.

However, children from poor agricultural families, the most vulnerable group, remained at a disadvantage, because these two government projects covered only costs related to tuition fees, free uniforms and textbooks. Travel and meal expenses, as well as costly but required uniforms for other activities such as physical education and boy scouts/girl scouts, were not provided. Moreover, a study by the Office of the National Education Commission noted that personal costs for education are about two and one-half times greater than direct education costs. This is compounded by the indirect cost of loss of income when children are in school rather than working on the farm or in other jobs.

Appendix B: The Thai Women of Tomorrow Project Partnership Structure

The structure of the Thai Women of Tomorrow Project is laid out in the following diagram:

Thai Women of Tomorrow Partnership Structure



The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is the leading advocate for global action on HIV/AIDS. It brings together eight UN agencies in a common effort to fight the epidemic: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank.

UNAIDS both mobilizes the responses to the epidemic of its eight cosponsoring organizations and supplements these efforts with special initiatives. Its purpose is to lead and assist an expansion of the international response to HIV on all fronts: medical, public health, social, economic, cultural, political and human rights. UNAIDS works with a broad range of partners – governmental and NGO, business, scientific and lay – to share knowledge, skills and best practice across boundaries.

The first case of HIV/AIDS in Thailand was detected in 1984. Early cases were found among male homosexuals, and the virus then spread rapidly among injecting drug users, before affecting sex workers and their clients. It has now extended to the general population.

In Thailand, too many girls find themselves at an early age in the sex industry, usually for lack of other livelihood options. This case study describes some responses to that problem, focusing on changing the attitudes of girls and their parents with regard to prostitution, and on providing a means for girls to avoid becoming sex workers through improved education and career opportunities. These approaches include the Sema Pattana Cheewit (Sema Life Development) Project, the Thai Women of Tomorrow (TWT) Project and the Education Loan Fund Project. The approaches described are also examples of AIDS responses that take into account regional and demographic differences in the search for solutions.



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