Welfare Services in Thailand

Origin of organized social welfare

The history of social welfare can be traced back for centuries in the form of charity or the humanitarian concern of people, deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy. This is evidenced by the fact that Thai people never fail to help each other in time of distress.

Buddhist monasteries have marked their place in the development of social welfare in Thailand. They perform their secondary function that has greatly contributed to the social welfare of the people in a variety of areas particularly in education, training, employment and rehabilitation long before social welfare was officially established in Thailand.

Family instruction plays an important role in establishing an individual framework of social welfare. While babies and young children are generally cared for by grandparents or other elder members of the family, it is customary for Thai people to take good care of the elderly in their families. The concept of gratitude is well ingrained in the mind of people since their early childhood. Generosity–at-heart is also an underlying national characteristic that results in the willingness to help those in need. This can be witnessed in Thailand’s tremendous efforts to shoulder the inevitable burden of refugees in Thailand after the fighting in Indochina in the past two decades.

However, it was not until 1883 that the first social welfare organization, the Red Cross Society, was founded by the royal initiation, to help wounded soldiers. During the preceding year, the first orphanage had also been set up. In 1910, one of the leading private welfare agencies, the Poh Teck Tung Foundation, was established. The establishment of the department of Public Welfare in 1940 demonstrated the prime concern of the government for the welfare of the Thai people. The Department has been restructured and become the Department of Social Development and Welfare after the reform in the public sector took place in late 2002.

Since the establishment of the former Department of Public Welfare, private social welfare agencies, taking the form of associations, foundations, groups and organizations have flourished in response to increasing welfare problems, and the needs of people. As a result, the National Culture Act enacted in 1942 to control came into force and intensive social welfare programmes were put into operation. The significance of social welfare is increasingly recognized and constitutes an integral part of national development policy.

Existing Social Welfare Programmes

The wide variety of social welfare activities in Thailand fall under the jurisdiction of government departments, state enterprises and local self-government bodies. Apart from these, the non-government sector is also involved in provision of social welfare services. It does not only participate actively in the provinces to help the people in distress but also take the initiative in developing new services. These concerted efforts have been developed and expanded ceaselessly to satisfy humanitarian concern and to fulfil the basic human rights of the people.

However, The Department of Social Development and Welfare is the principal government agency, extending its services to needy and distressed people throughout the country. The nature of its welfare programmes is remedial, preventive, curative and development in order to enable people being helped to become productive citizens. Its services are extended to specific target groups of children, women, the elderly, the disabled, the destitute and discharged mental patients, the disaster victims, needy families, poor and homeless persons and the hill tribes. Detailed
information of the Department covering its establishment, vision, mission, personnel and budget, structure of organization, its affiliated organizations and services available will be provided in the next section. On the other hand, non-governmental social welfare organizations (NGOs) play a supportive role of the government organizations. It is estimated that, there are over 3,200 NGOs in the country, with operations ranging from rural and slum development to primary health care and development of women and children. Major coordinating bodies for NGOs are the National Council on Social Welfare under the royal patronage of Her Majesty the King and the National Council of Women of Thailand under the royal patronage of Her Majesty the Queen. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations follow the same concept which is “To help people to stand on their own feet”.

**Department of Social Development and Welfare**

**Background information**

The Department of Social Development and Welfare was established on October 3, 2002 as part of a reform in the public sector. It is one of four main agencies under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security which is comprised of the Office of the Permanent Secretary, the Office of Women’s Affairs and Family Development, the Office of Welfare Promotion, Protection and Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups and the Department of Social Development and Welfare. There are also two state enterprises and one public organization.

**Structure of organization under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security**

![Diagram of Ministry of Social Development and Human Security](image)
Over the last four decades, Thailand had experienced an uninterrupted series of rapid social, economic and political changes. The economic crisis that began in 1997 affected the entire population. People from all walks of life were unavoidably impacted. The effects spread throughout all social institutions: nation, community, and most importantly, family. Problems arising from the crisis include increasing unemployment and stress. Some could not cope with their individual problems and, therefore, adopted indecent life styles which aggravated or led to other social problems such as crimes, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, prostitution, an increasing divorce rate, and neglect of children and older persons. The Department of Social Development and Welfare has provided assistance by making social work and social welfare services available for the general public with focus being on those who are socially distressed, as they are the priority.

Target population under service coverage

According to the survey and an estimate by the National Statistical Office, it was found that the total population in Thailand in the year 2001 was 62.3 million. Out of these, about 31 million needed help and were under social work and social welfare service coverage.

- Children and youth (less than 25 yrs.) 3.80 million
- Women 0.37 million
- Older persons 5.99 million
- Destitute (homeless/beggars) 0.01 million
- Persons with disabilities 4.82 million
- Disaster victims 3.44 million

Among those who were under service coverage in need of care, protection, rehabilitation and development, priority had been given to children and youth less than 25 years old, followed by women, older persons, the destitute, persons with disabilities and disaster victims. The hill tribes, members of Self-help Land Settlements, HIV/AIDS infected individuals, patients with chronic diseases and those categorized as low-income.

Duties and responsibilities

The main duties of the Department are to provide social work and social welfare services for the disadvantaged, the needy, the destitute, persons facing social problems; to assist and solve problems faced by each individual by offering residential care and referral services; and to give support to local communities in an attempt to encourage them to be involved in providing social welfare services for the target groups which include the disadvantaged, the poor, the destitute and those who are in distress. The aim is to ensure that such target groups facing various social problems can become economically self-reliant with an emphasis on human dignity.

It is the responsibility of the Department to develop efficient forms and methods of rendering social work and social welfare services to each target group to meet the standard that has been set. It also offers technical support, information technology, and advisory services, including the follow-up and evaluation of performance by local authorities and agencies involved.
in the provision of social development and social welfare services. For persons or specific target
groups that encounter social problems, it provides social welfare, counseling services, assistance
and other support to enhance their ability to cope with problems. It is also important to maintain
regular contact with involved agencies for referral services.

It is also the responsibility of the Department to promote and facilitate the networks
of service provided to each target group and each target area. The Department must organize and
promote activities under various special projects, such as Royal Initiative Projects and activities
that respond to inter-country agreements and commitments, and to perform other activities as
specified by laws or orders given by the Minister of Social Development and Human Security or
the Cabinet.

**Vision**

Based on the duties and responsibilities as earlier mentioned, a vision has
subsequently been developed by the Department aiming towards its intended achievement.

“To be the core organization for social development and provision of social welfare
services, network promotion and support with the aim to improve and ensure standard and
thorough service coverage leading to a better quality of life and self-reliance among the target
department of social development and security of the society as a whole.”

**Mission**

Bearing in mind the successful future outcome, the mission of the Department is
- To develop and provide systematic and comprehensive social welfare services
  that are at a level of high standard.
- To prevent solutions to problems and work to prevent them while protecting and
developing the potential of target groups.
- To strengthen the system of social development to enhance the security of
  individuals, families and communities.
- To solidify the networks of social development and social welfare services in all
  involved sectors, and
- To create more effective and efficient organization management.

**Strategies**

The policies of the Royal Thai Government and the overall strategies of the
Ministry of Social Development and Human Security serve as guidelines for the Department of
Social Development and Welfare to develop its own strategic approach. Further implementation
of such strategies will lead towards the optimal benefits for the target population.

The strategies as formulated by the Department are to:
- Develop and improve the systems and patterns of social development and
  provision of social welfare services to have thorough coverage and be in compliance with the
  conventions, declarations, commitments, agreements already in place for the actual problems and
  needs of the target groups;
- Develop the criteria for standard of services and conduct systematic follow-up
  and evaluation of past performance;
- Initiate and revise rules and regulations in order to ensure relevancy with the current situation;
- Promote security, problem-solving, and self-reliance of individuals, families and communities;
- Strengthen, support and enhance involvement of networks in all sectors of society;
- Reinforce and improve the quality of the ethics and morals of personnel;
- Improve information systems on social development and social welfare for the management of organization to a set standard, that is effective and efficient; and
- Develop the structure and management of organization towards a modern approach to public administration.

**Personnel and budget**

Regarding personnel, the Department of Social Development and Welfare is generally staffed by government officials and hired workers. The latter can be divided into two categories: permanent hired workers and the temporary hired workers.

As for annual budget allocation, the total budget the Department of Social Development and Welfare receive each fiscal year can be broken down into four main categories: personnel, administration, investment and subsidy.
The Department of Social Development and Welfare has a number of organizations under its supervision and control located at both central and local levels. It has three main line organizations: the Bureau of Social Welfare Services, the Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children, and the Technical Promotion and Support Offices.

Other supporting agencies include the Central Administration Division, the Internal Audit Unit, the Public Service Management Development Group, the Foreign Affairs Co-ordination Group, the Co-ordination Group for Welfare Services in Highland Communities and the Co-ordination Group for Welfare Services in Specific Areas.

At local and regional levels, there are implementation agencies which include Residential Homes, Self-help Land Settlements and Hilltribe Welfare and Development Centers.

**The Bureau of Social Welfare Services**

One of the main line agencies at central level is the Bureau of Social Welfare Services. It has six divisions and sub-division charged with different duties and responsibilities. There are also other affiliated organizations under the Bureau located in Bangkok, near-by provinces and in local areas. They include such programs as residential homes for persons with
disabilities, the destitute and older persons. It also provides non-institutional care for other target groups such as the disaster victims, low-income families, and HIV/AIDS infected individuals.

The role and responsibility of the Bureau is to promote and support the provision of social welfare services, to develop the standard of services to be further used by its affiliated organizations, and to render services through its organizations to the target groups including youth, women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, the disadvantaged and the socially distressed persons in households in areas under their service coverage.

The Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children

Another main line agency at central level is the Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children. It is comprised of four divisions and sub-divisions. Under the Bureau, the implementing units are residential homes for children and women located in Bangkok, near-by provinces and in local areas.

The role and responsibility of the Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children is to serve as a focal point for the co-ordination among the networks of concerned agencies for the protection and welfare of victims of trafficking of women and children. It is also charged with the responsibility to conduct relevant studies and analyses of means for preventing human trafficking and to provide welfare assistance, protection, and vocational development for women and children who are victims of human trafficking.

It also seeks a solution and preventative measures to the problem. A further attempt will be made to ensure that the issue of human trafficking is fully recognized and addressed by the general public and the Government. The intended result will be a decision to incorporate this critical issue into the national agenda for action.

Other responsibilities are to promote the implementation of national laws, international conventions and declarations relating to women and child welfare, protection against violence and human trafficking and to promote adoption placement for children.

The Technical Promotion and Support Offices

The third main line agency is the Technical Promotion and Support Office. At present, there are a total of 12 regional offices located in 12 provinces nationwide including Bangkok. For each regional office, there are a number of provinces ranging from five to seven under its service coverage.

These regional offices are responsible for providing technical support and advice, identifying and developing plans for services to support implementing agencies at field level and conducting supervision and evaluation of past performance of implementing agencies. Other tasks include supporting the establishment of networks and co-ordination for social welfare services and the involvement and strengthening of community-based organizations at grassroots level to ensure that proper services are available for the target population which will encourage a better quality of life and sustainable self-reliance.

Supporting agencies

Apart from the main line agencies, there are also supporting agencies comprised of a number of division or groups. One of them is the Central Administration Division. It has a total of six sections and sub-section charged with different duties and responsibilities.
In addition to the Central Administration Division, there are five groups and one unit which play a coordinating and/or supporting role to facilitate activities carried out by line agencies and to ensure that such activities will proceed smoothly and effectively.

At local level, the organizations under the Department of Social Development and Welfare are comprised of 88 residential homes which offer services for different target groups, 44 Self-help Land Settlements and 14 Hilltribe Welfare and Development Centers. They focus their services on some specific target groups such as members of Self-help Land Settlements and the hill tribes who are ethnic minorities living mostly in the remote and inaccessible highlands of northern Thailand.

**Services provided**

On the whole, services provided by the Department of Social Development and Welfare cover a variety of target groups from children and youth, women, persons with disabilities, the destitute, older persons, disaster victims, low-income families, HIV/AIDS infected individuals, members of Self-help Land Settlements, the hill tribe people, and victims of human trafficking and socially distressed persons. It also offers a 24-hour counseling service via a hot line which people in distress can dial for help. Services for each group can be summarized as follows:

**Children and youth:** Services are available for those who are orphaned, neglected, abused, exploited, lost, street children and children with behavior problems. They will be provided with residential care, counseling and guidance services, cash and in-kind support and foster home care. Other services include adoption placement for children and support for child care and child welfare centers owned and run in the private sector. Assistance is also available in the form of temporary schools and day-care centers set up in areas under service coverage of Self-help Land Settlements, Hilltribe Welfare and Development Centers and in slum areas.

**Women:** Women especially those who have limited or no access to education and considered to be a high-risk group, welfare and vocational training will be provided in Welfare Protection and Vocational Development Centers and in Welfare and Vocational Training Centers for Women. Services are also extended to cover young girls in communities who will be provided with vocational training and employment assistance services.

**Persons with disabilities:** They are provided with services according to the national law. Services for persons with disabilities include residential care, vocational training in residential homes, Vocational Development Centers for People with Disabilities, and counseling service and family welfare assistance. Assistive devices are also provided for persons with disabilities to facilitate their daily life activities. In addition to equipment, a further effort will be made to promote employment placement of disabled persons and to provide a monthly allowance for those who are poor and their disability is so severe that they can no longer be self-reliant.

**The destitute:** The types of services available to them include institutional care, family assistance and temporary shelters.

**Older persons:** Those who are poor or neglected with no means of support will be provided with residential care in Homes for Older Persons and non-institutional care in Social Service Centers and Service Centers for Older Persons. Further attempt has been made to make services more accessible for older persons by sending mobile units to visit older persons at their residence and by involving communities in service providing. A more recent approach being implemented is to encourage urban and rural communities to set up service centers for older persons in temples.
**Disaster victims:** Services provided will focus on welfare and rehabilitation. These include sending the victims home and providing them with welfare assistance and vocational development.

**Low-income families:** They will be provided with counseling service and family welfare assistance. Assistance is particularly focused on promoting the formation of groups with common interest for income-generating activities.

**HIV/AIDS infected individuals:** Assistance provided is in the form of residential care in homes for children and women. Further assistance is provided for their families and a monthly allowance for each HIV/AIDS infected individual.

**People in Self-help Land Settlements:** They will be provided with assistance which involves granting membership to promote their legal status and rights to land ownership. Members will be provided with employment promotion, vocational and social development and improvement of basic infrastructure.

**The hill tribes:** Welfare and development services are provided through provincial Hilltribe Welfare and Development Centers. The hill tribes who mostly practice shifting cultivation are encouraged to settle permanently in land allocated for them where essential services can be provided. Support is also given to enable them to be registered as Thai citizens so that they can have all the rights they are entitled to. Various activities are implemented to promote employment, social and basic infrastructure development and the conservation of natural resources and environment. In addition to that, a group of Buddhist monks known as “Buddhist Mission” has been sent to work in tribal communities. Their duty is to render development and welfare services, with special concern for the promotion of moral development and a sense of belonging among these ethnic minorities.

**Women and children who are victims of human trafficking or socially distressed persons:** The Department of Social Development and Welfare has developed four areas of measures in dealing with the problems facing these target groups:

- On preventive side, several measures have been developed and implemented. Welfare and Vocational Training Centers for Women have been set up to provide institutional care and vocational development for the target group. A project entitled “Creating New Life for Rural Women” focuses on women in rural areas. Another project involves a campaign to promote anti-prostitution.

- For legal measures, every possible effort has been made to keep plans or activities in accordance with relevant rules and regulations as well as the Memorandum of Understanding on Common Guidelines of Practices for Agencies Concerned with Cases where Women and Children are Victims of Human Trafficking of 1999.

- Concerning protection and assistance measures, reception homes and Welfare Protection and Vocational Development Centers have been set up for women and children who are victims of human trafficking. These include counseling services and guidance for dealing with problems, as well as assistance for Thai women in distress abroad.

- Measures have been taken to facilitate and strengthen coordination among concerned agencies and to follow-up on activities under the Project on Trafficking in Women and Children in Mekong Sub-region. Efforts for a public relation campaign have been made to inform the general public of the activities and progress of the project. Activities also include cooperation with concerned agencies for welfare protection, care, rehabilitation and assistance for women and children who are victims of human trafficking. This includes both Thai and non-Thai nationals.

Cooperation is further extended to cover the repatriation of victims to their home countries. Meetings with concerned agencies are organized with public, private, or international organizations to exchange views and experiences.
Factors affecting provision of services and major challenges

It can be concluded that the outcomes of the activities of the Department of Social Development and Welfare depends on many factors. The factors which affect the provision of services can be divided into two types: internal and external.

The former consists of a limited budget, an integration type of approach, incomplete information systems and limited opportunities for personnel to develop and enhance their potential. These factors are controllable and the Department of Social Development and Welfare has made a determined and unfailing effort to find means of dealing with them.

As for the external factors, they include several limitations caused by legal rules and regulations, the government’s policy and the current trend of globalization. Other global forces and a reform in the public sector emphasized the devolution of power. These factors are beyond the control of the Department.

Changing of social problems in the present Thai society is another key factor that the Department of Social Development and Welfare must deal with. The changing of demographic structure, such as an increasing active labour force and the number of women and older persons, and a decrease in the number of children have considerable impact on social problems that already exist. The current methods of providing services will come under review and be adjusted to cope with such changes.

In addition, the current social problems tend to be more complicated, more diverse and more severe. Whether they involve HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, neglect of children and the elderly, it has become more difficult for the Department to handle problems effectively.

Such external factors as rapid globalization, trade liberalization and the trend of world community have a powerful effect on Thai society. These global forces lead the country to be constantly in contact with the world community. They also influence the formulation of policies as well as the translation of policies into actual implementation by various organizations in the public and private sectors. In performing duties and responsibilities effectively, the Department of Social Development and Welfare has recognized this and is prepared to adjust its strategic approach in providing services to keep pace with rapid changes in a dynamic world.

Future guidelines

Bearing in mind the current situation, problems or difficulties encountered and challenges that the Department has to meet, a guideline for future performance has been developed taking into consideration several key areas that need to be improved and strengthened. These include:

- a review and adjustment of management within the organization
- human resource development
- the formulation and development of network, follow-up and evaluation systems
- enhancement of information systems
- creation of the social welfare service standards and indicators

It also needs to further look into the possibility of making services more accessible and supporting involvement by local communities and the establishment of a local mechanism that will allow individuals and community-based organizations to take an active part in development of their own families, communities and society.
Despite the changes in the society and challenges that are involved, the Department of Social Development and Welfare maintains a strong determination and unfailing effort to review and make necessary changes on occasion to ensure that its role, responsibility and performance will be flexible with changes. It maintains strong determination to develop the society and create human security for the public in general and for those facing social problems. Ensuring that the general public will enjoy optimal benefits from services it provides is the ultimate goal of the Department. It is quality services that will enable people who are in distress to cope with problems, develop a better quality of life and eventually become self-reliant on a basis of human dignity and security within the society.