

# Women in Development: A Means or an End?<sup>(1)</sup>

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## I. Introduction

Although the concept of 'women in development' has drawn much attention in the development field over the last few decades, it does not necessarily mean that women have been put in a right position in development. Women have often been treated as a means for income growth rather than as an ending point for development; This may happen because the objective of development is not correctly and appropriately described. Although there is conceptual clarity that development is not tantamount to income growth, in practice, income is still widely used as the main normative criterion to assess development. In the field of development policies, more and more emphasis is given to the non-economic concepts such as human development, participation, and role of women, but in many cases they are emphasized because they are considered to contribute to the income generation of poor people or national economic growth. In terms of capability, only those aspects that contribute to economic growth are promoted, while others, however important they may be for human development, are neglected. The result of this oversight is that capability is often subordinate to income growth. For example, democracy, which is closely related to important aspects of capability, is often considered as a luxury good that can be enjoyed only after economic development is achieved<sup>(2)</sup>. Along these lines of thinking, 'participation' of women can mean long hours of hard work in poor-conditioned factories<sup>(3)</sup>. Health and education for women may be improved to make women more efficient and more productive in factories, however

women are mostly regarded as one of many production factors<sup>(4)</sup>. Their individual rights may be completely out of scope.

This paper discusses several cases of Thai women. In Southeast Asia, women are generally described as being more active in industry than women in South Asia. In rural Thailand there are many rural industries in which women take central roles with men in the supporting position. Women work actively and subjectively, and it is very pleasant to talk with women who have highly developed their capabilities. But in the same rural areas one may also find depressed women with whom it is difficult to talk as pleasantly as those mentioned above<sup>(5)</sup>. They seem to lack subjectivity and are often forced to work hard. In this case, the slogan 'women in development' may simply put women in a more difficult situation. As is often pointed out in relation to micro finance, it may be men who use the money that women borrow from micro finance projects for their own pleasure, and it is women who are forced to work hard to repay the money.

This paper argues that such cases can be avoided if we correctly understand what development and poverty are, and describe our targets based on this understanding. To come to this point, the capability approach seems to be conceptually and practically better than any others, particularly if we reference a concrete list of capabilities (e.g. Nussbaum)<sup>(6)</sup>.

The organization of this paper is as follows: In the next section, Section II, we briefly discuss conceptually why a list of capabilities is needed in application. In Section III and IV, we show successful cases of women in rural Thailand and discuss their limitations. In Section V, we discuss how both NGOs and the government can have various impacts on women either positively or negatively according to their understanding of development. Unless the purpose is appropriately described, in terms of capability, the same policy and the same development project can either promote or deteriorate women's well-being. Section VI shows how

the situation of women is changing in Thailand. The final section is the Conclusion.

## II. Why We Need a Concrete List

Although the theoretical importance of the capability approach is now widely recognized, the conventional idea that human well-being is mainly determined by income level is still pervasive. For example, poverty is still often defined as 'low income' rather than as the deprivation of basic capabilities. This results in policies that focus on poverty alleviation to increase the income of the poor. By looking at poverty in terms of income, we often put some important aspects of poverty, such as discrimination, out of scope. Poverty is watched in a superficial way and efforts are concentrated to increase income, leaving the real problems untouched. Concentration on income aspects averts our eyes from social problems and often results in the further deterioration of the well-being of the poor<sup>(7)</sup>. By substituting income problems for real problems, those who may be actually responsible for the poverty are overlooked as the gaze shifts from those who deprive the poor to the poor themselves<sup>(8)</sup>.

Setting development targets in terms of income creates two sources of ambiguity: the first is concerned with the conversion from income to achievements or well-being, and the second is concerned with the effects of policies on income. In the first point, it is needless to say that income data in developing countries is very unreliable. Furthermore, as Sen argues, the diversity of human beings makes the conversion so complex that income alone is a very difficult way to appropriately measure human well-being and freedom.

"To take an illustration, the extent of comparative deprivation of a physically handicapped person vis-a-vis others cannot be adequately judged by looking at his or her income, since the person may be

greatly disadvantaged in converting income into the achievements he or she would value<sup>(9)</sup>.”

Unless it is assumed that every person has exactly the same ability of converting income into achievements<sup>(10)</sup>, ambiguity will remain. To the contrary, the capability approach removes this ambiguity by bypassing income aspects and focusing directly on achievements and achievable functionings as our ultimate domain of evaluation.

The second point is not difficult to understand if we think of the packages of so-called poverty alleviation policies which usually include a wide range of development projects. Even though many of these policies might not have taken poverty into consideration, they were reclassified as projects for poverty alleviation simply by renaming them when the international development industry shifted toward poverty alleviation. This was able to happen because poverty is considered in terms of income and, because it is not so difficult to show that any development project can increase the income of “the poor” through an econometric method. However, if we evaluate these projects in terms of the capability of the poor, many of them will have nothing to do with poverty or perhaps even worsen the well-being of the poor. Thus the capability approach has a very practical usefulness as a way to scrutinize these development projects<sup>(11)</sup>. If policy targets are given in terms of functionings and capabilities, policies can be directly derived from the targets. For example, if poverty criteria are given in terms of basic functionings such as, “being adequately nourished, being in good health, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality,”<sup>(12)</sup> development efforts will be concentrated in order for the poor to achieve these functionings. The relationship is simple and direct.

In spite of the merits of the capability approach, the income approach is so pervasive that it tries to take capability into its framework, arguing that capability is important for economic growth. In this way, economic growth remains the supreme goal. For example, basic functionings such

as, “being adequately nourished, being in good health, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality” are important because of their contribution to improve the efficiency of labor force, not for their own sake.

In the same way, the role of women in development, is often emphasized as a means for economic development rather than as an end to development itself. Women are treated as a factor of production to be made full use of for the purpose of generating income. As a result, women may suffer from excessive hard work. In terms of income, women may receive the same amount of income as men, and the income approach may evaluate it as a success; But it might be actually at the cost of women’s hard work<sup>(13)</sup>. In fact, as a caretaker of the family, women may work harder than men. But a problem is that women’s well-being is not at the center of the concern. Some aspects of women’s capabilities and their achieved functionings may be improved as a result of development policies such as education and nutrition, but neglecting other aspects may deteriorate women’s well-being, thus strengthening the existing unequal gender relationship.

Both the income approach and capability approach may give priority to women’s capability, but a clear distinction between the two is the income approach’s neglect of other important functionings, including the so-called complex functionings in terms of Sen, such as “being happy, having self-respect, taking part in the life of the community.”<sup>(14)</sup> In the case of poverty alleviation, neglecting these aspects often worsen the life of the poor by depriving them of these complex functionings, such as losing confidence, depending on others, and being humiliated by arrogant attitudes of development experts toward the poor. The same can happen for women’s human development. The idea to regard women simply as cheap labor will emphasize basic functionings such as education, skill training, health, nutrition, etc. to make women more efficient and more productive. In terms of Nussbaum’s capability list, the functionings such

as life and bodily health will be promoted but others such as “bodily integrity” and “senses, imagination, and thought” will be neglected<sup>1(5)</sup>. A possible consequence is to make women work like slaves. However women may be treated, development projects will be appreciated only if income level increases. For example, if the micro finance programs of an NGO are available only to women, their husbands may force their wives to borrow money, and it could happen that husbands spend the money while wives return the money by working harder than ever before, though this is not always the case. Household income may increase as a result of the hard work of women and the micro finance may appear very successful, but the reality is that this relationship is not fair. The NGO that supplies micro finance may offer training courses for women and women's capability may be promoted, but if the real purpose is to secure repayment, it is not for the sake of developing women's capability.

In spite of these problems of the income approach, those who persist in the income approach criticize the capability approach, saying that these complex functionings cannot help being neglected because they are not measurable or because they are out of the scope of ‘economic’ development. However, the fact that these functionings are not measurable does not mean that we can neglect them. Our emphasis on these may be followed through the creation of measurable data as the history of economics shows. If these functionings are put out of the scope of economic development theory, the applicability of theory will be very limited. We need the capability approach to put development in the right position and it is important to utilize a concrete list like Nussbaum's to make it practical.

### III. Women and Commercial Activities in Thailand

In the previous section we have discussed that development policies which neglect complex functionings lead to the deterioration of the well-

being of women. This section shows how women's capabilities can be developed without such policies. Our case here is women who are making triangular pillows in Northeast Thailand<sup>(16)</sup>.

In Thailand like other Southeast Asian countries, women generally take active roles in daily life. In rural areas you can see many women selling goods in market, and there are many women's groups actively engaging in economic, social and cultural activities. A woman's position in family business is often equal to that of men. Women as well as men are often moving a long distance to see their relatives<sup>(17)</sup>. Opportunities for education are given equally to women and men. Parents are taking good care of daughters because sons will leave home but daughters will remain, especially the youngest one is expected to live with her parents to take care of them. However, this does not mean, of course, gender discrimination is nonexistent in Thailand. In government offices, for example, fewer chances for promotion are given to women and higher ranking officers are dominated by men. In the political field, women have far fewer chances than men. Only a small proportion of politicians are women. Even village chiefs are dominated by men.

Most of the rural activities in Thailand clearly reflect the gendered division of labor, that is, men engage mainly in agriculture, fishing, hunting, construction of houses and infrastructure, while women engage in agriculture and household activities such as weaving, sewing, cooking, and sometimes commercial activities such as selling their products in local market. Although both men and women engage in agriculture, agriculture is usually regarded as a male activity and the female role is secondary. On the other hand, many rural industries are related to female activities such as food processing, weaving and sewing while men's activities are very limited such as bamboo products<sup>(18)</sup>. Selling their products at a local market, neighboring towns, and sometimes to distant cities is a role of women. In a primitive stage of commercialization, women brought their products to sell or exchange with other products when they

visit their relatives and friends who live in distant villages or visit distant famous temples. Therefore production and marketing of rural industries are closely related to women. In these circumstances, government promotion policies for rural industries tend to depend on women's groups, which is a reason why we can see so many women's groups in Thailand.

Leadership is always important to organize the production process and those who take leadership roles are usually women<sup>(13)</sup>. They need support from villagers to produce goods in a group. On the other hand, Thai women are very cooperative in the community. This is another reason for the government to encourage women to establish female groups to promote rural industries. Financial support from the local government also accelerated the establishment of new groups. As a result, a large number of female groups emerged in Thailand such as a group for housewives, female occupational groups, and female agriculturist groups. There were, of course, active male groups but the number is very small compared with female ones. Men do not seem to prefer to do something in a group.

Our case to be discussed in this section is one of the most successful in Thailand, namely the production of triangular pillows in *Si Than* village in Yasothon province in the Northeast Thailand, the 'poorest' region in Thailand<sup>(27)</sup>. The triangular pillow, which is called *mon khit* in Thai, is used as a reclining cushion. This production started by the initiative of the villagers and developed independently with little supports from the government or from NGOs. In this process, women learn and solve problems by themselves, which made it possible to develop women's capabilities more fully than the cases with outside supports mentioned below. We will start by briefly describing history of the development.

The triangular pillow has a long history, perhaps several hundred years in Thailand and Laos. However, its production was perhaps very

limited, at least until the 1970s. An opportunity that encouraged women in *Si Than* to start making triangular pillows occurred in the early 1960s when a man of the village visited a temple in Bangkok and found a beautiful triangular pillow. He was so fascinated by the beauty that he wanted to have one. When he returned to his village, he asked his wife to make one for him but she could not. It was not easy to find out a woman who can make it but he finally found one. Then he asked her to teach his wife how to make it. As the technique was gradually spread to her friends and other women in the village, they made it for their own use or as offerings to a temple in the village. In 1964 a stranger came to *Si Than* from another province and saw the triangular pillow at a temple. He was also impressed by that, so he asked the villagers to make one for him with materials he had brought with him. Such cases continued and the triangular pillow of *Si Than* gradually became known to other villages and provinces. Many people visited *Si Than* to get one. When the women in *Si Than* realized that they could sell them at a good price, they began to make it for sale in the market in the early 1970s. Sometimes they went to distant towns to sell their products. This was the early stage of commodification. The production was still unorganized and sporadic and conducted only during farmers' slack season. There was no change in the traditional life style that women spent farmers' slack season by weaving traditional clothes and selling them in the market. The production of the triangular pillow was based on their traditional life style and the role of women remained within the traditional framework. Market expansion was needed to change the traditional life style and expand the role of women as well.

An occasion for expanding the market was the establishment of *Yasothon* Province in 1972, which was separated from *Ubon Ratchathani* Province. *Yasothon* was one of the smallest provinces in Thailand. To cope with the widening income gap between Bangkok and rural areas, the Thai government began to promote rural industries, and the *Yasothon*

provincial government chose to promote the triangular pillow. Men were not so keen on this idea because they believed that rural industries were traditionally women's work and were to be done by women. On the contrary, women enjoyed getting together as if they enjoyed festivals. However, local officers, who were mainly men, were not so keen to promote rural industries and the local government lacked the budget for such policies. What they could do was to send triangular pillows to exhibitions and contests of local products held in Bangkok or other big cities. This action had a significant impact on women, as women who took part in such governmental events began to feel more confident in their own abilities. As a result, women's position in the village gradually improved.

As the triangular pillow became well-known to the whole country through exhibitions and contests, its demand began to increase. Responding to the increase, more and more women in the village began to join the production and the number of production group increased. In 1977 there were four groups: Three were organized by female merchants<sup>(21)</sup> and one was a women's union. By the end of the 1970s, most of the households in *Si Than* were involved in the production. Men, on the other hand, did not take any important part in the production but only a few took supportive roles.

In the late 1980s the Thai economy suddenly began to grow rapidly, which continued until 1997 when the bubble economy burst. Due to this rapid economic growth, the demand for the triangular pillow increased so rapidly that the demand exceeded the capacity of *Si Than* village. People responded to this situation by farming out weaving process of production to surrounding villages. The production process can be divided into three stages: (1) weaving, (2) machine-sewing and (3) finishing. Weaving was conducted in *Si Than* to make the triangular pillow. But weaving was so time-consuming and painful that women preferred to stop weaving and to

buy clothes from other villages. Machine sewing and finishing processes were retained in *Si Than* because they were more profitable. Although there were some technical reasons for this division of labor, egalitarian arrangements among the villagers were needed to maintain cooperative relationships within the village.

As business expanded, more and more female leaders appeared. Some of them became pure merchants who accumulated capital and traded with both domestic and foreign merchants. However, their purpose was not just to seek their own profit but they also took into account their group members' well-being. Emotions and affiliation were also important factors for them.

The case of the triangular pillow shows how women's capabilities were developed by independent activities. This was made possible because they behaved within the traditional framework of gender division of labor, and this sets a limitation for this kind of activities for fuller development of women's capability. The political field is an example which traditionally belonged to men and in which women cannot easily enter. It is very rare for women to be elected even for village chiefs.

#### IV. Role of the Queen

As mentioned above, the growth of handicraft industries usually depends on the traditional gender division of labor. On top of this division of labor is the Queen who is very active and influential as a promoter of Thai women's culture. This section discusses how the Queen's support affects women's capability.

In the Thai royal family there is also a gender division of labor. While the King takes care of politics, agriculture and industry, the Queen takes care of culture, which includes traditional weaving. Influence of the Queen on the fashion of the upper classes is obvious. As the Queen wears

jackets made with traditional fabrics, women of upper classes also wear similar ones. Fashion magazines are full of such type of jackets. With an intention to promote traditional weaving, the Queen often visits rural areas and appreciates traditional fabric that local women weave. The fact that the Queen appreciates them has an important meaning that the value of the products is, in a sense, authorized, and once it is authorized, many people come to buy it. The appreciation of the Queen is the most effective advertisement in Thailand.

The Queen does not only appreciate products but also takes a more direct role in promoting traditional weaving and handicrafts. Ms. *Pranom Thapang* is one of the women whose capability was highly developed by the Queen's support. Ms. *Pranom* is now a very famous weaver of traditional cotton fabric called *teen choke*<sup>(22)</sup>. Her expertise made her district a very famous production area of traditional cotton fabric and related goods in Thailand.

In the mid-1950s, she was born in a little village in *Long* District, *Phrae* Province in the Northern Thailand. When she was a little girl, traditional weaving was not popular among the younger generation but still many women of her mother's generation kept weaving various types of clothes for their own use, such as blankets and shoulder bags. For younger generations, it was just painful and time-consuming work. They preferred to work in modern sectors and to buy clothes instead of weaving by themselves. However, Ms. *Pranom* was different. She liked to weave and began to learn how to weave from her neighbors when she was a little girl. An event that changed her life occurred in 1979 when the King and Queen visited *Long* District to present flags to village scouts. On this occasion, Ms. *Pranom* decided to present the Queen with a piece of *teen choke* that she just finished. Although the district office, which supervised the royal gift-presenting procedure, did not accept her gift for the reason of late submission, she managed to present it to the Queen. When she handed it to the Queen, she was asked a few questions. A few weeks later,

a Queen's secretary visited *Long* District and informed Ms. *Pranom* that the Queen was very interested in the fabric and gave her 2,000 baht to promote the weaving. She was very much encouraged and began to weave with her friends and worked hard to improve the quality of the fabric. She introduced new patterns, modified them, and created new ones. She was and still is very creative. She was often invited to the Royal Palaces in Bangkok and Chiang Mai to study and now teaches weaving.

Her products were successful not only as a culture but also as a business. As the demand for her products increased, her neighbors were willing to join the business. She taught her neighbors the skills in order to improve the quality. Her group could earn enough profit to sustain their rural life. They just wanted a small amount of money to supplement their income from rice farming during farmers' slack season. Weaving was not only for income, but also for some important functionings such as senses, imagination, thought, emotions, affiliation, etc.. By weaving, women knew their roles in the community, and acquired confidence in themselves. This is in sharp contrast with those weaving projects which concentrate on income generation as a poverty alleviation policy. Nowadays, there are many weaving projects but most of them neglect these important functionings, which means that women are treated just as labor rather than human beings. A problem of those projects is that they are evaluated in terms of income generation rather than human development.

Owning to the Royal patronage, Ms. *Pranom* was often invited to exhibitions held in Thailand and in foreign countries. As she became famous, many women came to see her to learn weaving, not only from the neighboring village but also from other provinces. Even young students in Bangkok, though they are usually not interested in weaving, came to learn weaving. Ms. *Pranom* was so kind and generous that she not only taught weaving but also provided accommodation for them. Her success stimulated women in other village to establish women's group and the district office also supported them. As her business grew, more and more

women's groups were established not only in her village but also in neighboring villages. She was so generous that she went for distant villages to teach her technique. Related industries, which use the traditional fabric to make handbags, key holders, shirts, etc., also emerged. The Industrial Promotion Department also promoted them by giving technical assistance and inviting them to the Thai Art & Craft Promotion Fair held every year.

A limitation of this model is the same as in the previous section, that is, it developed within the traditional Thai cultural framework. As mentioned in the previous section, it is not easy for women to proceed beyond this framework such as entering the political field. Ms. *Pranom* herself does not show any interest in politics. She is living in the traditional gender division of labor. In order to change the situation, we need a list of capabilities that includes political participation.

## V. NGOs and the Government

When NGOs and the government take part in rural development, their target should be the human development of all people involved rather than simply economic development. But in many cases these organizations often focus on economic development and neglect other aspects of human development. This biased idea leads to the practice that evaluation is done only in economic aspects or in terms of income. Such bias will be removed by substituting this practice with the capability approach but it is not enough. In addition to this, the relationship between people and NGOs or the government should be equal. If the relationship is between those who evaluate and those who are evaluated, it would directly affect the capability. If those who are evaluated are humiliated by the evaluation process or by those who conduct the evaluation, the former's capability will be seriously deteriorated by the humiliation. This section deals with two cases: The first is an NGO which struggled with

women to create a new design of triangular pillow and, the second is OTOP<sup>(23)</sup> which means 'one *tambon* one product' movement of the Thai government<sup>(24)</sup>.

*Kham Phra* is a village which is located about 30 Km away from *Si Than*. This village succeeded to sell their triangular pillow in the market monopolized by *Si Than*, supported by an NGO. The NGO advised women in *Kham Phra* to make triangular pillows and a women's group was established for the production. Due to the cultural similarity to *Si Than*, it was not difficult for them to make triangular pillows but a problem was to find out market for their product as it was very limited. Local officers bought them for their own consumption or for exhibitions<sup>(25)</sup>. They needed new ideas to differentiate their products from those of *Si Than*. Then the NGO recommended using natural dyeing, replacing chemical dyeing in the late 1980s. In those days, natural dying was becoming more and more popular in Bangkok, Europe, Japan and many other places. Villagers had the traditional technique. The role of the NGO was to find markets and bring market information to villagers. They took their products to department stores and souvenir shops in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and other big cities. Popularity of natural dyeing made the products of *Kham Phra* famous and they sold very well.

The relationship between the NGO and women was rather independent, each concentrating on marketing and production, respectively. It was very equal and not one between evaluator and evaluated. In this situation some women developed their capabilities as leaders. The success was and is still relying on the hard work of the leaders. They seem to give priority to the benefits of the group over their own. They might have adapted their preferences to the situation or they might have strong sense of emotion and affiliation. Such motivation can be both seen as both a strength and a weakness. The strength is that its members support the activities by devoting more labor than the extent that rational economic calculation predicts. The weakness is that it may

lack economic viability or sustainability.

When NGOs start rural handicraft projects, villagers tend to rely on them, however NGOs may try to confine their role to that of a supportive one. Because of this reliance, people will usually lose self-confidence. Even in *Kham Phra* some groups seem to depend on the NGO, losing self-confidence. To the contrary, a woman in the same village, who was successfully producing products such as shirts, handbags, key holders, using naturally-dyed traditional fabric employing several male workers, seem to have strong sense of self-confidence. Works that use leather as a material and big machines as a tool are taken by men who learned the skill during their work in Bangkok at modern handbag factories. This business is entirely based on the woman's initiative and she does not rely on others. She seems to have much self-confidence, contrary to those who depend on NGOs.

NGOs may be able to provide everything that poor people need for doing business such as financial support, supply of materials, skill training, marketing, organizational arrangements, etc. Some NGOs may provide basic education for children, health care and other social services for villagers. But if these activities make people more dependent on NGOs, people will not be able to have self-confidence. However their economic life may be improved, dependence on others will continue, lacking some important functionings.

The long efforts to promote rural industries culminated in OTOP, a nation-wide campaign for promotion of rural industries by the current Thai government. OTOP stands for One *Tambon* One Product movement, which literally aims to promote one product for each *Tambon* (or village). A huge amount of budget is allocated for this project and already has some effects as spending policy to stimulate the stagnant Thai economy hit by the Crisis of 1997. If a group is registered for OTOP, it will receive financial support from the government. But it is still women who actively

participate in this movement for the same reasons mentioned above, while men are generally not interested in OTOP because they want to be independent and are not good at making goods in a group. The products are evaluated in contests and are ranked such as 'five-star, four-star, etc.', or 'champion products', but most of the products are out of the scope of evaluation.

People seem to enjoy participating in this movement and gain confidence in themselves. Now so many groups are applying for OTOP that many products are registered for each village. It is not 'one village one product' any more but 'one village many products.' If women are competent enough, or if women succeed after struggling, or if women are enjoying making something in a group whatever the result may be, then women are subjective and remain the ends of development and women's capability will improve. But this is not always the case. If women are not competent enough and if provincial governments are in haste to have good results, which is important for their evaluation, the same policy can be top-down and women may be forced to participate. In this case, women become a means for OTOP. A case is weaving. Usually weaving is one of the most popular products and if a province has no weaving group, the provincial officers will try to establish one, irrespective of the willingness of the women and the quality of the product. Women with few skills and experiences have to struggle to meet the expectation, if they cannot reject the request. Their complaints seem to be reflected in the low quality of the products.

Another problem of OTOP is profitability. If many women's groups are producing the same goods, for example fried bananas, they have to compete with each other in the market and oversupply will decrease the price and squeeze profits. Women who have suffered losses may be embarrassed with a large amount of funds offered by the government and at a loss with expensive but useless tools and machines that they bought with the funds. To the contrary, women who do not take part in OTOP at

all seem to be much happier preparing for community festivals, for example. This contrast reminds us of the fundamental question: What is development? By seeking for a very small amount of money, some people are losing important functionings.

## VI. Industrial Change and Social Transformation

The gendered division of labor that agriculture is for men, while handicrafts and food processing are for women means that their weights can be changed as the industrial structure shifts from agriculture to the manufacturing sector. Agriculture already matured in Thailand in the 1970s when frontiers for agricultural land disappeared. Since then the agricultural sector has stagnated compared with urban sectors and the productivity gap has widened. This is an important factor when considering the large productivity gap between the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors and between rural and urban sectors. One of the policies to narrow the gap was the promotion of rural industries. Handicrafts and food processing became more important to add values to agricultural products. This industrial shift helped female groups to flourish even within the framework of traditional gender division of labor.

As weaving and other handicrafts, which are usually done by women, became more and more important as a source of rural income, the number of women became an important determinant of family income. In a weaving village, a family with a fewer number of women of working age can make less use of the opportunity of the weaving business. In this circumstance, some boys began to weave to help their mother, though such a case is very rare. Even if his friends may look down on him because he is doing women's job, the boy cannot help but weave in order to help his mother and for the family. The mother will plead to her son, saying that he is very obedient to his parents. The traditional gender division of

labor is gradually changing and it is led by income incentives<sup>(26)</sup>.

While development policies often strengthen the gender gap in rural areas, experiences in urban areas weaken it gradually. In modern factories which are guided by profit incentives, gender is not a problem if productivity is increased. Men also do not care for gender so much if the wage is high enough. An example is a modern sewing factory in which heavy sewing machines are used. The factory employs workers, irrespectively of female or male, if they are good at using the sewing machines. When they return to their village, some of them are working at sewing factories. In this case men behave like an ordinary man and are proud of their sewing skill. This also gradually changes the gender division of labor in the rural areas.

Weaving is painful work for women unless they are suited for it. They may want to stop it. On the other hand, outsiders admire traditional weaving and expect it to be retained or even developed more. Based on their own values, the outsiders may force women to undertake undesirable work in the name of poverty alleviation<sup>(27)</sup>. The outsiders give priority, often implicitly, to their own interests over women's well-being. In this way, women are not the end of development but a means to preserve traditional weaving.

However, it should be noted that profitability is not the only way to preserve traditional weaving. Some women keep weaving, even if the income may be lower than an employee's wage. A case is a small island named *Ko Yo in Songkhla* Lake in the Southern Thailand. *Ko Yo* Island is now very famous for its beautiful patterns of weaving. In the past, many women on *Ko Yo* Island wove and brought their fabric to big cities in the South such as *Songkhla* and *Hat Yai*. When a bridge was constructed to connect this island with towns by road, a big change occurred. The bridge originally intended to promote local industries and tourism on the island. It is expected that the island would attract an increasing number of

tourists as a tourist spot in the South, which would promote weaving. However, what was happened is the opposite. Many women stopped weaving and they went out to work in factories in towns because it was an easier way to earn money and weaving, one of the most important industries on the island, began to decrease. However, weaving did not completely stop. Some women kept weaving because they liked it and they had good skills. Their efficiency was so high that they could earn as much as a factory wage. As the Thai economy grew, wage level increased and the income gap widened. It may seem that they lost a chance to be factory workers. But this understanding reflects the idea that the factory worker is employment in the 'formal sector' and is more developed than the 'informal sector' such as weaving at home. This idea confuses human development with economic development. Some women prefer to work independently weaving at home, receiving many visitors, and talking with them about their culture. Richness of life cannot be evaluated by income alone but must take into account a much broader concept such as capabilities.

When the Thai economy grew rapidly in the 1990s, many people began to enjoy traveling, and the number of tourists in the South also increased, which contributed to weavers' income greatly.

## VII. Conclusion

This paper has discussed how women's capabilities are developed and affected by development policies, through the examination of some cases of rural industries in Thailand. Successful cases which did not rely much on the government or NGOs show how women's capabilities were highly developed within the framework of the traditional gender division of labor and determined by the culture. In this framework, women's capability was already high in the past in the fields such as trading, food processing, weaving and handicraft. Their abilities to organize a group

and to cooperate to produce goods developed leadership among competent women. Based on these conditions, the government efforts to promote rural industries further developed women's capabilities. However, a limitation of this model lies in the framework of the traditional gender division of labor. It is only within this framework that women were allowed to develop their capability but it is not so easy to go beyond this framework. One of the most difficult fields is politics, which has been monopolized by men. To overcome this difficulty we need a concrete list of our target like Nussbaum's list of capabilities.

In any case we need a concrete idea of capabilities as our target but Sen is very careful to show his list and just refers to some cases of them. If we do not have a concrete idea, the capability approach can be manipulated for other purposes that he did not intend at all. Economists tend to use it in the framework of economics. Since the income-centered idea of development is still pervasive, they economists accept the capability only if it is directly conducive to productivity improvement. We are not denying the possibility that economic growth leads to human development, but what we want to insist is that human development should be set as our ultimate target and should not be subordinate to economic development. Nussbaums' list shows us the reach of the capability approach, which is far beyond the scope of economics.

- 1 This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at a conference on the capability approach at Cambridge University 2002.
- 2 See Sen's criticism against Lee Kuan Yew. Sen [1999] p.148.
- 3 During the Meiji period (1868-1912), a large number of Japanese young women were mobilized to urban factories as cheap unskilled labor force.
- 4 This applies not only for women but also for men.
- 5 In Bangladesh some NGOs claim that the villages where they came into operation are very different from those where they do not. They will say that women in the former will talk to you very actively while women in the latter

will hesitate to show up and talk with you.

- 6 The list is as follows (See Nussbaum [2000] 78-80):
  1. Life: Live a life of normal length, not dying prematurely.
  2. Bodily Health: Good health, adequately nourished, having adequate shelter.
  3. Bodily Integrity: Being able to be secured against assault.
  4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought: Being able to use these senses.
  5. Emotions: Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves.
  6. Practical Reason: Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
  7. Affiliation: Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction.
  8. Other Species: Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
  9. Play: Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
  10. Control over One's Environment
    - (A) Political Environment: Participation.
    - (B) Material Environment: Being able to hold property.
- 7 I have argued this problem as a case study of ethnic minority people in Vietnam. See Ikemoto [2001].
- 8 An example is the argument that easily relates terrorism to poverty, even though it may be caused by other injustices.
- 9 Sen [1992], p.28.
- 10 We tend to assume that "all men are created equal." See Sen [1992], p.30.
- 11 This point was also discussed in Ikemoto [2001].
- 12 Sen [1992], p.39.
- 13 This is argued in terms of intra-household distribution in Nobuta (Shuto) [2000] related to Pakistani case.
- 14 Sen [1992], p.39.
- 15 When we were talking about self-respect of the poor, a development expert from an influential international organization commented to us that they do not have such things.

- 16 This section is based on Ikemoto [1996].
- 17 It is widely believed that Thai people spread from its origin in the southern China to the mainland Southeast Asia. In the northeast Thailand one of the reasons to move was to abandon the villages which were infected with malaria or to look for better rice fields. Through this movement, the human network expanded, which was useful for commercialization in the region.
- 18 This tradition is gradually changing as men are entering into jobs typically held by women in the modern factory, though the number is still small.
- 19 This is applicable in modern factories. Interviews in Japanese affiliated companies in Thailand showed that female leaders can manage a small production group much better than men. Both female and male workers seem to be more obedient to female leaders than male leaders, at least among the laborer's class. This may be because female leaders are more devoted and give priority to the benefits of her group than her own. Women seem to work to fulfill what her group members, either in village or in a modern factory, expect her to do. In some cases, this surely helps female leaders to enhance their capabilities but in others they have to struggle to meet the expectation.
- 20 Poorness here is measured in terms of income, which is often exaggerated. In terms of capability their life may not be so poor. See Ikemoto and Uehara [2000].
- 21 The merchants took various roles, not only as a pure merchant but also as an organizer and investor of production, money lender, and advisor for members' private life. They took a role similar to that of a leader of women's union. The difference was the latter was supported by the local government while the former was not.
- 22 This part is based on interview with Ms. Pranom and an article titled "The wondrous weavers of Phrae" in Sunthon [1997].
- 23 OTOP (one village one product), was started in Oita prefecture in Japan to promote rural products. The movement is now very popular among the Southeast Asian countries.
- 24 Tambon is an administrative unit which corresponds to village level. A tambon is usually composed of several natural villages.
- 25 Local officers had to buy traditional fabric to make jackets or skirts because

they have to wear them for promotion of local products on a fixed day of the week.

- 26 Thai society is very generous for the boys who are very willing to behave as if they were female. We can see such boys in weaving or sewing factories in rural areas from time to time, though not so often. Women in the factory treat them as if they were female and boys seem to be very enjoying the work.
- 27 The difference in value reflects factor endowment. For example, in a country like Laos where nature is abundant, nature may not be an objective to admire. The word *Thammasat* in Lao, which means nature, has even negative value when it is used in conversation with people from 'developed countries,' even though it has positive meaning among the Lao people. But for the people from developed countries where nature is scarce, nature is something to be admired and to be preserved. See Hara and Thongloun [2002].

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