



Enhancing inclusive infrastructure: A review of gender equality in CoST Thailand

By Maria da Graça Prado

September 2020



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Supported by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Prosperity Fund's
ASEAN Economic Reform Programme and the United Nations Development Programme's
Promoting a Fair Business Environment in ASEAN



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CGD	Comptroller General Department
CoST	CoST – the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative
GEA	Gender Equality Act
ILO	International Labour Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a gender audit, investigating the level of gender equality within the people working for CoST – the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative, Thailand (CoST Thailand). The CoST Thailand programme is supported by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Prosperity Fund's *ASEAN Economic Reform Programme*, the United Nations Development Programme's *Promoting a Fair Business Environment in ASEAN* (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the Comptroller General Department (CGD), Thai Ministry of Finance and the Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand (ACT).

The audit combined a desk review with semi-structured in-depth interviews with professionals working for CoST Thailand. The investigation focused on three research questions:

- What is the gender demographic representation in CoST Thailand?
- What is the level of gender awareness and gender barriers in CoST Thailand?
- What diversity strategies are applied or endorsed by CoST Thailand?

The gender audit is the first of its kind, not only in CoST Thailand but within the entire CoST global programme. Two levels of impact were envisioned. For CoST Thailand, the study created a baseline to measure local progress in promoting gender equality. For the CoST International Secretariat, the audit created an opportunity to revisit CoST core features in the light of gender equality issues.

A challenge with the audit was that CoST Thailand is not a legal entity. It is managed by two organisations which are responsible for employing staff and consultants who deliver the programme. These are the CGD, which is responsible for establishing the disclosure framework and commissioning the assurance process, and ACT, which is in charge of engaging citizens and the media. The findings and conclusions of the audit need to be viewed in this context.

Key findings are as follows:

- The female representation found in CoST Thailand is high, with 50% of women participation on average. In qualitative terms, CoST female professionals reported an equal level of participation and weight in decision making within the programme.
- The staff responsible for CoST Thailand perceived both CGD and ACT as gender-neutral employers, offering equal access and opportunities. According to interviewees, decisions related to hiring, retention, promotion and training of professionals involved with CoST, as well as decisions to allocate workload, are not influenced by gender.
- The level of gender awareness identified among those working for CoST Thailand was high, showing a common perception of interviewees that men and women have equal roles in society and in the workplace.
- Gender obstacles to promotion ("glass ceiling" situations) were not raised in the interviews and difficulties to reconcile family and work were reported only by a minority of the interviewees.

- A point of concern was identified in relation to the low female participation and engagement in public hearings that are part of the CoST assurance process.

Key conclusions are as follows:

- Although positive and highly commendable, the gender balance found in the CoST Thailand programme is attributed to circumstances that are not directly related to CoST.
- Factors that contribute to the positive gender balance include: the nature of the skills required for most of the roles (e.g. administrative, managerial, accounting, data analytical and secretarial) attract more female applications; CGD already has a high concentration of female staff; and the low budget available by the host organisations to spend on CoST staff leads to selection of more junior staff yet to experience glass-ceiling situations.
- Although responsible for setting out the programme's policies and processes, the CoST Thailand multi-stakeholder group is not directly involved in contributing to gender equality. Evidence includes: lack of a gender equality policy; no budget for tackling gender matters; no partnerships with local gender organisations; and no system for capturing the gender dimension of the programme or its outreach activities.
- At present, the lack of a gender policy and related strategy does not compromise the gender equality of CoST Thailand. Moving forward, the multi-stakeholder group can adopt a more proactive approach in developing a gender policy and identifying opportunities gender mainstreaming in the programme's activities.
- Two main risks have been identified by the research. One is that as the CoST Thailand programme evolves, its maturing female workforce may begin to face barriers to promotion. The other is the low level of female participation and engagement in the CoST Thailand assurance public hearings.

As a result of the audit, CoST Thailand is invited to:

- Develop a system to capture female representation in the organisations carrying out CoST Thailand work (ACT and CGD), as well as in relation to outreach activities, including assurance public hearings, seminars to publish assurance conclusions and open-house events.
- Identify how the participation of women can be improved at assurance public hearings and other outreach activities. The experience of CoST Uganda and CoST Honduras can offer valuable guidance to CoST Thailand with this task.
- Create a gender annual review to measure the progress of CoST Thailand gender initiatives.

Based on the findings of the audit, the CoST International Secretariat also expresses its commitment to:

- Provide a steer to all CoST members in the form of new guidelines and an updated model terms of reference for CoST multi-stakeholder groups that will encourage the participation of women on groups and among professionals and consultants carrying out CoST work.
- Develop guidelines on improving participation of women at community and civil society activities and include gender in the training and public awareness indicators of the CoST logframe.
- Include gender participation as part of the evaluation diagnostic tool currently in development by the International Secretariat, which will identify improvements to the governance of a CoST member programme.
- Continue to promote the CoST *Safeguarding Policy* (CoST, 2019) to CoST members, including through a webinar series, emphasising gender issues, equality of opportunities, non-discrimination on outreach activities and the grievance procedure provided under the policy.
- Review how the CoST approach to transparency and accountability can contribute towards gender and socially inclusive infrastructure.



1. INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations (UN) Women:

Equality between women men (gender equality) refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development, (UN Women, 2020).

The above definition captures the core elements of the modern concept of gender equality:

- a parity of responsibilities and opportunities
- a human right
- a requirement and indicator of sustainable development
- an issue that also concerns men.

Gender equality has a quantitative and a qualitative dimension. The first refers to an equal gender representation that is achieved by a balanced level of participation between men and women. The second relates to an equal weight in the process of influencing planning and decision making.

Gender issues remain a global challenge. The *Global Gender Gap Report 2020* showed that global gender disparity in terms of economic participation and opportunity was 57.8% (100% is parity) and the rate of inequality related to political empowerment was just 24.7% (World Economic Forum, 2019: pp 15–16).

To address such challenges, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports partners to eliminate gender inequalities by working to ensure that all development efforts take into consideration the needs and rights of women.

This gender audit was conducted under the auspices of the UNDP regional project, *Promoting a Fair Business Environment in ASEAN* (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) (UNDP, 2020), with funding from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Prosperity Fund, to assess the level of gender mainstreaming found in CoST Thailand. The purpose was to identify the local programme's strengths and challenges from a gender equality perspective.

CoST is a leading global initiative that addresses the challenges of corruption, mismanagement and inefficiency by working with government, industry and civil society in 19 countries across four continents to promote data disclosure and open contracting in public infrastructure. Informed citizens can use the disclosed data to hold decision makers to account and help drive reforms that improve the performance, efficiency and quality of infrastructure.

The CoST approach is based on four “core features”: [disclosure](#) of data from public infrastructure projects in a standard format, independent [assurance](#) of the data where key issues and areas of good practice are highlighted; [multi-stakeholder working](#) bringing together government, the private sector and civil society to improve transparency; and [social accountability](#), working with the media, civil society and citizens to promote the issues in the public domain. The first three features are already well established and the fourth is now being introduced in mature programmes as part of refining and improving the CoST approach.

CoST provides a flexible approach that supports implementation across diverse political, economic and social contexts. Its members at a national and sub-national level decide how this approach needs to be adjusted to meet their specific priorities. This includes using the CoST approach to contribute positively towards more inclusive infrastructure and to address the everyday challenges that women face. It can be achieved, for example, through improved participation of women on local multi-stakeholder groups and in social accountability activities held by the programme, where women can have a voice in how infrastructure is designed and delivered.

This gender audit is the first of its kind not only in CoST Thailand but within the entire CoST programme. It aimed to help identify the gender demographic representation, both quantitative and qualitative, of CoST Thailand, serving as a diagnostic tool to evidence the differences between men and women in roles, activities, opportunities, responsibilities and access. This can then stimulate a process of ongoing benchmarking to measure progress in promoting gender equitable solutions by CoST Thailand.

This audit also assessed the level of gender awareness and/or gender barriers found in CoST Thailand. This analysis will allow the programme to identify root causes of gender

inequalities that may be embedded within it and to identify potential opportunities to increase the participation of women. The audit will also provide an opportunity for the CoST International Secretariat to consider the CoST core features and programme implementation through the lens of gender equality.



2. AUDIT APPROACH

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This audit followed the International Labour Organization (ILO) participatory methodology that promotes organisational learning on mainstreaming gender (ILO, 2012). Focusing on staffing, structure and implementation, it combined a desk review with interviews of professionals working for CoST Thailand.

The desk review aimed at identifying the level of gender division found in the Thai labour market as a baseline for the evaluation of CoST Thailand. A review of literature and policy reports was carried out for this purpose.

A total of 15 interviews were then conducted between 24 June and 4 July 2019. The interviewees included all professionals conducting CoST work in Thailand except for one, as well as representatives of the multi-stakeholder group and other CoST bodies, so a full picture of female participation in CoST Thailand could be obtained.

List the roles of interviewees and the investigation and interview questions are attached as [Annexes A and B](#). Interview questions were adjusted to the context of each interviewee and were open-ended.

Field observations complemented the analysis so information could be put in context and cultural aspects considered. Interviewees' responses are anonymous and the identity of interviewees will remain confidential to CoST Thailand.

The audit focused on the following questions:

- What is the gender demographic representation in CoST Thailand?
- What are the levels of gender awareness and gender barriers in CoST Thailand?
- What diversity strategies are applied or endorsed by CoST Thailand?

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The main challenge with this audit was that CoST Thailand is not a legal entity. It is managed by two organisations which are responsible for employing staff and consultants who deliver the programme.

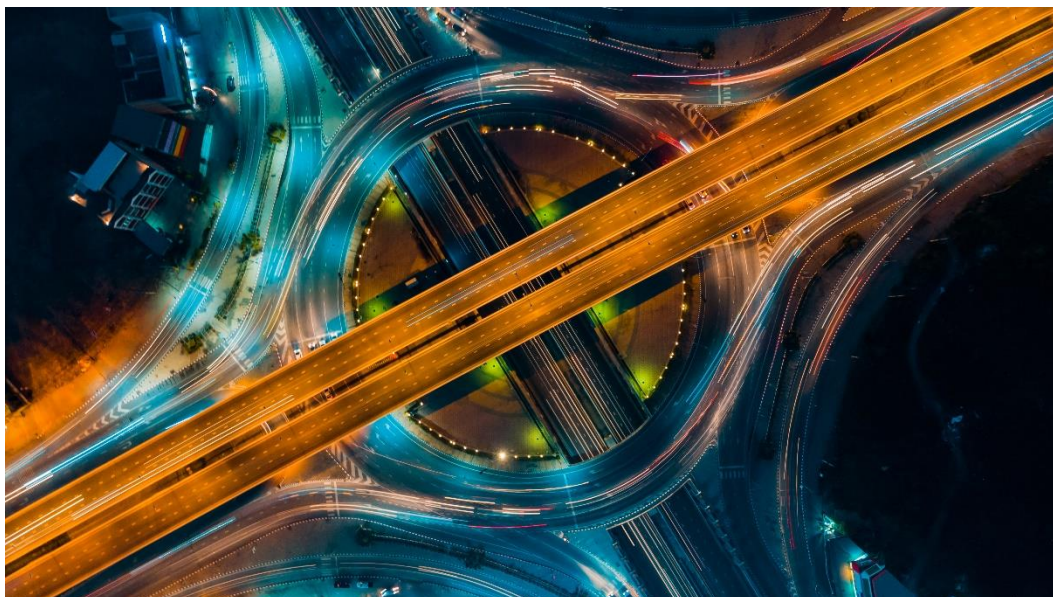
In Thailand, CoST is still in early stages of implementation and remains as a relatively small programme. It is embedded in well-established Thai host organisations, one being the Ministry of Finance.

There is a channel for the programme to influence gender matters via the CoST Thailand multi-stakeholder group, which can provide guidance to the host organisations and encourage adoption of diversity policies and strategies applicable to their staff and consultants. But there are limitations to the work of the multi-stakeholder group and the findings and conclusions of this research should be viewed in this context.

Another challenge was the cultural factor, including verbal communication and language barriers, which was overcome by the use of female translators during the interviews. Female translators were employed to create an atmosphere of trust and comfort necessary to allow gender issues to be honestly communicated by women. Translators signed non-disclosure agreements to preserve the confidentiality of the research ([Annex C](#)).

After the conclusion of the interviews, a collective workshop (as recommended by the ILO methodology) was considered unnecessary as perceptions about the programme had already been established.

Due to time constraints it was impractical for the researcher to interview local communities close to projects subject to assurance. However, the researcher was able to attend a public hearing on 26 June 2019, where community representatives of one project were present. This allowed the researcher to assess the typical dynamics of such meetings and the interaction of stakeholders. Past public hearings were also available online, enabling accurate perception despite lack of direct interviews with community members.



3. GENDER DIVISION IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN THAILAND

Thailand shows an impressive track record in terms of human development progress in recent years. Between 1990 and 2017, Thailand's human development index increased 31.5%, going from 0.574 to 0.755. Inequality, however, did not follow the same positive trend. In 2017, the human inequality coefficient recorded in the country was 15.5% (UNDP, 2019).

Inequality seems to be reflected in gender issues. Although Thailand shows a low gender inequality index of 0.393 (UNDP, 2019), a gender gap below average (Fleischer et al., 2018) and a female participation in the labour market of 60.5% compared to 77.3% for men (UNDP, 2019), disparity in gender participation and opportunity continue to exist in certain circles and sectors.

Evidence includes not only one of the smallest female parliamentary participations in the world – 16.2% according to the *Global Gender Gap Report 2020* (World Economic Forum, 2019: p 333) – but a labour market still marked by gender occupational segregation.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), female employment in the industry is currently concentrated in low-skilled occupations, with 85% of the total female labour force in Thailand classified as relatively unskilled (ILO, 2019). This includes jobs in sectors such as garments and textiles, tourism, retail, food and beverage, manufacturing and services. ILO also assessed that between 2001 and 2010, men were 2.7 times more likely to be employed in higher-quality or higher-skilled employment than women (ILO, 2013).

The fact that women are mostly employed in low-skilled jobs creates an additional challenge in the country. According to EY (2018), women in Thailand are 1.5 times more likely to occupy jobs at high risk of automation than their male counterparts.

On the other hand, the economic participation of qualified female professionals has been growing in Thailand. In the early 2000s, statistics from the National Statistical Office showed that women workers were concentrated in commerce, services and manufacturing (see [Annex D](#)) (Suriyasarn and Resurreccion, 2002). In 2020 the reality is different: the latest *Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2019: p 333) indicates that Thailand leads the world with parity for women in professional and technical roles, which demonstrates a positive trajectory with good prospects for female professionals in the country.

Although recording positive change, Thailand is not immune from the existence of glass ceilings preventing equal access to highly skilled positions. An empirical study carried out in the country by Hansatit (2014) demonstrates the presence of invisible barriers holding women back from top management positions:

Although the women in this study sometimes initially disagreed that there is a glass ceiling for women in management, by the end of their interview, many had recalled their own experiences or the experiences of others that suggested otherwise ... They added that other male managers were more likely to be awarded with a promotion if the opportunity came up ... The participants from this study recognised, identified and verbalised that the glass ceiling does in fact exist in their organisations.

Even if female participation in the labour market in Thailand is high in quantitative terms, as suggested by the aggregate statistics shown above, the quality of that participation in terms of the types of work accessed by women may still be problematic. Invisible barriers seem to continue to exist in some sectors, with female workers concentrated in low-skilled jobs. This is combined with glass ceilings which can hinder female prospects to reach top and higher-skilled roles.

To overcome the problem, the Thai Government passed a Gender Equality Act in 2015 (Royal Thai Government, 2015). This aimed to: introduce policies, measures and action plans to promote gender equality in public and private entities; provide assistance and compensation to the victims of unfair gender discrimination; and disseminate knowledge on how to prevent unfair gender discrimination. The Act reflects the concern of public authorities to assure gender-equal treatment in Thailand.



4. FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN CoST THAILAND

4.1 CoST THAILAND GENDER DEMOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

Two organisations share the management and oversight of the operation of CoST Thailand: the Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand (ACT), a network of anti-corruption activists with strong roots in the private sector, and the Comptroller General Department (CGD), a body of the Ministry of Finance that manages revenues and expenditures.

ACT's role in CoST Thailand goes back to 2014, when ACT received a mandate from the Thai Government to assess CoST's potential added value to support the country's anti-corruption efforts.

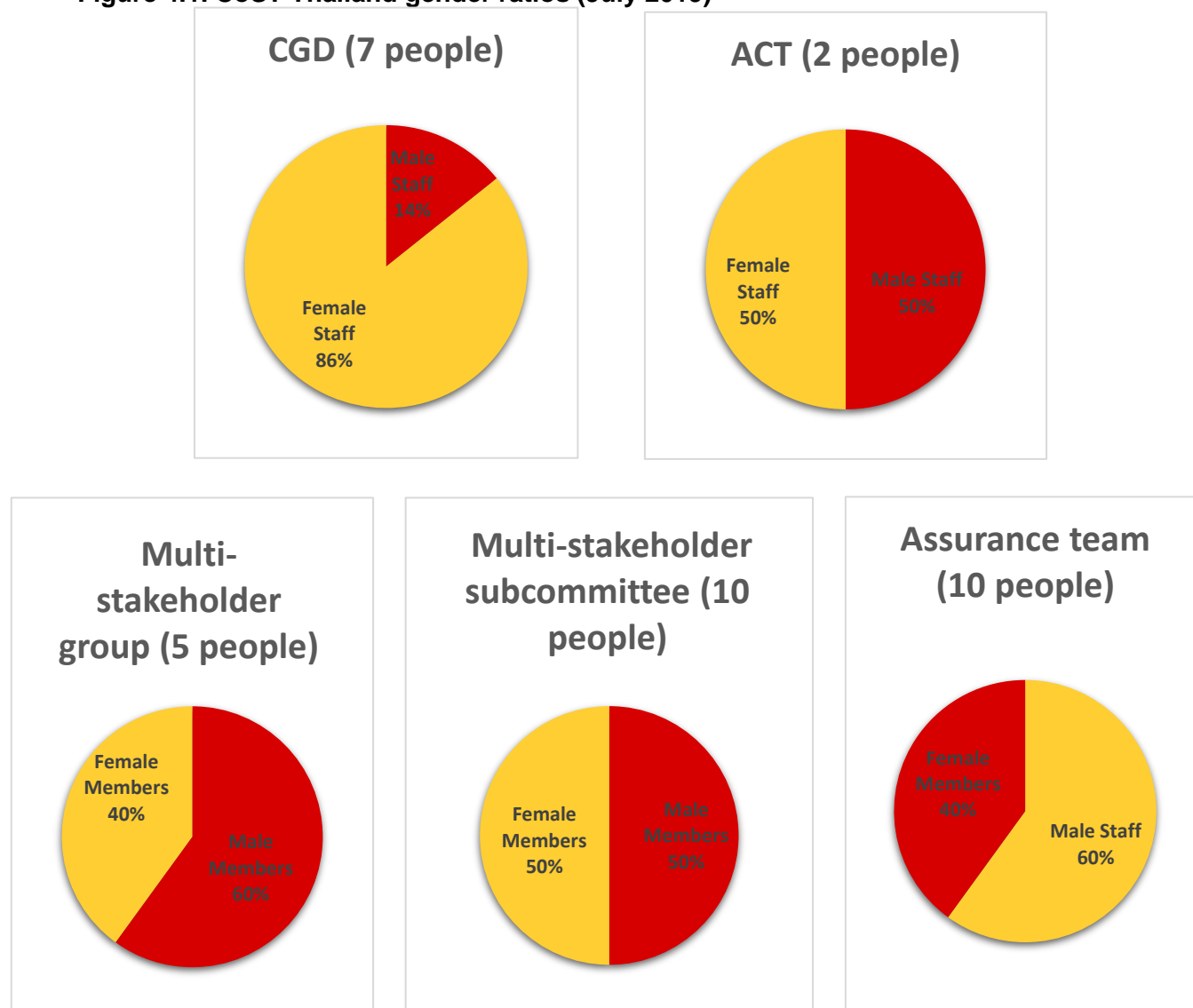
The application to join CoST followed ACT's assessment of CoST and was presented by the State Enterprise Policy Office of Thailand. Government leadership of CoST later shifted to CGD, where CoST's national secretariat is currently based. Both CGD and ACT have staff dedicated to CoST work. At the time of the research, seven individuals were allocated to CoST work in CGD and two in ACT.

Apart from ACT and CGD, two additional bodies carry out CoST work. One is the multi-stakeholder group, which is made up of representatives of government, industry and civil society. It monitors implementation of the programme and is responsible for the programme's policies and practices. The other is the assurance team, an outsourced group of expert engineering professionals periodically retained by the CoST Thailand secretariat to perform independent reviews on a sample of infrastructure projects.

In CoST Thailand a multi-stakeholder group subcommittee was also implemented as part of the programme's governance. This consists of members appointed by multi-stakeholder

group representatives and supports the group's work. At the time of the research, the multi-stakeholder group was being restructured and had only five appointed members while the subcommittee and assurance team had 10 each. After the research the multi-stakeholder group composition for the 2019 term reached 14 members, three of whom were women. The gender demographic ratio of CoST bodies in July 2019 is represented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1. CoST Thailand gender ratios (July 2019)



All female professionals working for CoST Thailand were graduates, with 67% having a bachelor's degree, 22% a master's degree and 11% a doctorate (Figure 4.2). The most common subject studied was business administration, at 44% (Figure 4.3).

The age of the female staff working for CoST Thailand ranged between late 20s and middle 40s. The majority were single women in their late 20s (78% of interviewees total).

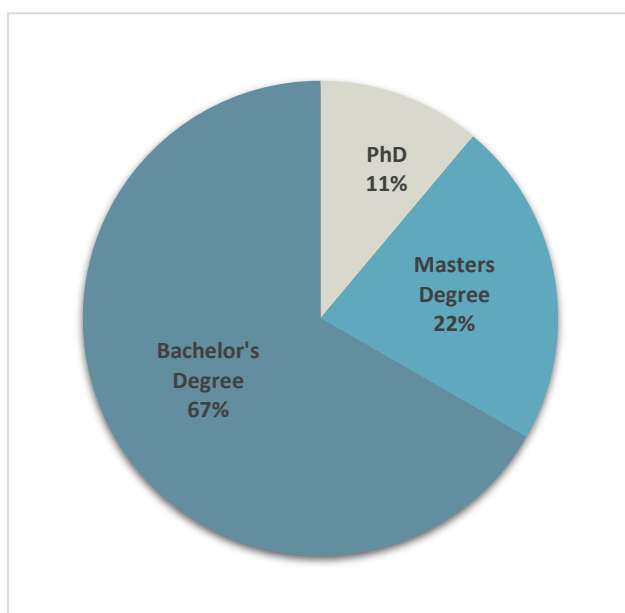


Figure 4.2. CoST Thailand female academic background

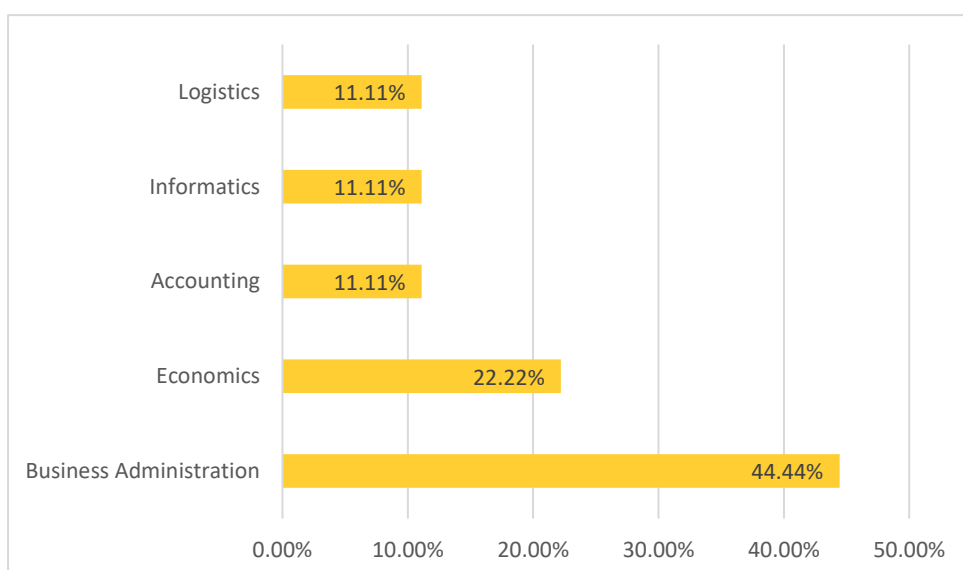


Figure 4.3. Field of study

4.2 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN CoST THAILAND

Figure 4.1 shows a high quantitative female representation within CoST Thailand. When questioned in interviews whether this high representation was standard in the Thai context, interviewees considered the fact that most of the work developed by CoST Thailand – mainly administrative, managerial, accounting, data analytical and secretarial tasks – tended to attract more female professionals.

Another explanation for the high female representation was the fact that one of the bodies

that host CoST in the country (CGD) is a public department, where female employees are prevalent in Thailand (see [Annex D](#)). The non-profit sector also tends to attract more female professionals (World Economic Forum, 2016: p 32).

Most interviewees could not confirm whether similar female representation would occur in other workplaces. But a relevant consideration raised in interviews was the high percentage of female students in the courses they attended. Between 70% and 80% of students in business and management courses attended by CoST Thailand workers were female.

Interviewees also mentioned that engineering and construction jobs would traditionally attract more male professionals. Courses where similar knowledge is taught (logistics and informatics for example) had a lower female attendance in university degrees carried out by professionals carrying out CoST Thailand work (around 60–70% male attendance).

The perception of the interviewees was consistent with the lower percentage of female representation in CoST bodies where technical expertise of the infrastructure sector is predominantly required, such as in the assurance team. But even here, the female representation was 40%.

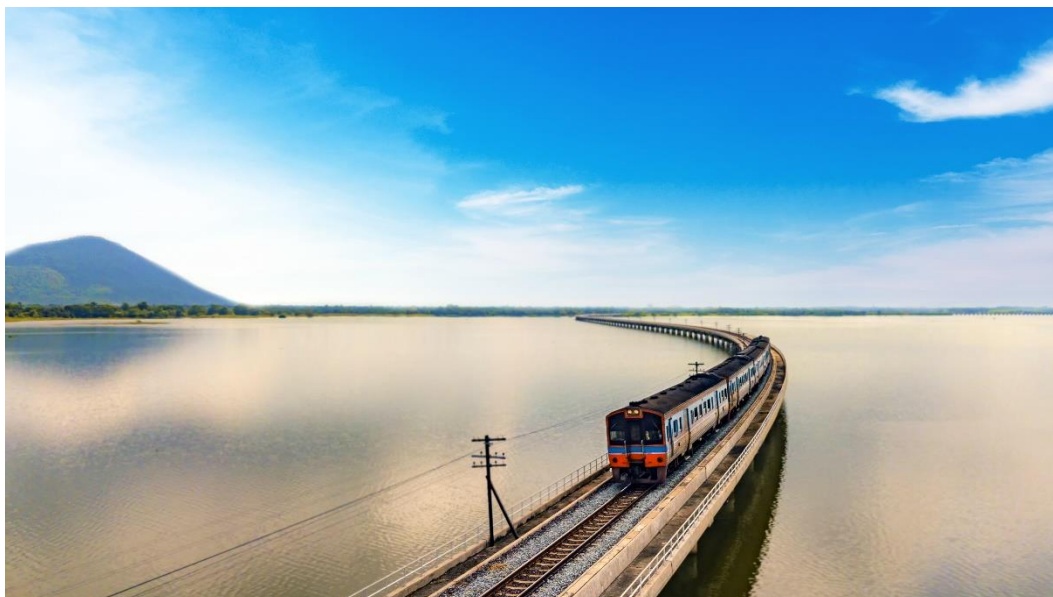
The main reason given by interviewees to explain the prevalence of young professionals was the relatively low budget available by the host organisations to hire personnel, resulting in roles being fulfilled by junior staff. When combined with the nature of the skills required for these roles (management, data analytical, secretarial as explained above), the result is a concentration of young female professionals.

It is worth noting that such reasoning may only be valid for ACT hiring, as CGD is a public entity where hiring and allocation of personnel to CoST is defined by internal policies. For the assurance team, the selection of team members was decided directly by the team's director and project manager (both male) with no influence from CoST Thailand's secretariat. The selection was based on the skills and capabilities required for the job. The lower percentage of females on the team (40%) was explained by the need for the team to visit sites in the provinces, which apparently discouraged female professionals from joining.

In terms of qualitative participation, the interviews revealed that female professionals engaged with CoST Thailand are free to voice their opinion in the work environment. Young professionals shared the same perception, even when working with older male colleagues. Interviewees suggested that male and female professionals have the same weight in decision making and no concern was raised by female interviewees in this regard.

Female staff seemed non-stressed, engaged and valued in the workplace and were not concerned with any form of gender bias on how the work was allocated or performed. Two female staff from CGD complained of work overload and long working hours, but this was attributed to budgetary cuts within the Thai Government and not the CoST programme. As reported by the interviewees, the temporary work overload in CGD affected all employees in CGD, both male and female, and was not limited to staff involved with CoST work.

Comparing CoST Thailand to the characteristics of the labour market provided in Chapter 3, the programme is positioned above average, particularly in terms of the skills of the female labour force.



5. GENDER AWARENESS AND GENDER BARRIERS IN CoST THAILAND

5.1. GENDER AWARENESS

The level of gender awareness found within CoST Thailand was high. Most of the interviewees, both male and female, knew of the 2015 Gender Equality Act and its general protection granted to women (Royal Thai Government, 2015). A perception shared among male and female employees was that the Comptroller General Department (CGD) and Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand (ACT) were gender-equal employers that treated individuals based on merits and skills, with no gender discrimination.

Most of the interviewees believe that views in Thailand on the role of women in the marketplace had changed over time. When compared with their parents' and grandparents' generations, all interviewees noted a transformation in the perceived role of women in Thai society, from household carers to the professional and social equals of men.

Interviewees cited education as a relevant transition and empowerment factor. Acquiring education, including education abroad, has equipped female professionals to compete on an equal footing with men in the marketplace, helping to overturn old cultural parameters. The perception is consistent with recent surveys (e.g. Nikkey Asian Review, 2017), and the fact that CoST Thailand staff are educated to a high level.

Although showing a high level of gender awareness, most of the interviewees recognised they had not received any specific gender training, either related to the Gender Equality Act or concerning the CoST *Safeguarding Policy* (CoST, 2019), which contains gender equality provisions. One interviewee reported having studied the topic, but as a student and before joining CoST.

The interviewees suggested that the high level of gender awareness does not translate into

a specific, technical or in-depth knowledge of the subject. The lack of training on gender themes opens an opportunity for CoST Thailand to focus on capacity building.

5.2. GENDER BARRIERS

5.2.1. Glass ceilings

No gender-related obstacles to promotion (“glass ceilings”) were specifically mentioned in interviews. Technical training was offered equally within the CoST Thailand programme regardless of gender, and it was clear that women could reach top positions in the programme – particularly at CGD. However, two observations should be made.

First, female presence in the top roles at CGD cannot be attributed to CoST Thailand but rather to CGD internal management procedures. Furthermore, female staff working with CoST Thailand were mostly young professionals, so obstacles to career progression were not yet apparent.

However, a female interviewee in her 40s, who was married and had children, reported difficulties in reconciling her household duties with work. This pushed her to work after regular hours to compensate for time dedicated to family matters. A male interviewee believed women in top professional positions would require an ability to combine two busy ‘careers’, and a female interviewee added women tend to ‘disappear’ at a certain level of seniority. CoST Thailand should therefore bear in mind the real challenges its female workforce will face as they reach higher positions and/or acquire greater family obligations.

Salary gender gap could not be assessed by the research as there were no male and female professionals in similar positions to allow a specific comparisons. Apart from the *Safeguarding Policy* provided by CoST International Secretariat (CoST, 2019), there is no specific policy or set of recommendations prepared by the CoST Thailand multi-stakeholder group to assure gender wage equality. However, CoST Thailand is not a legal entity and wages policies are determined by the host organisations.

5.2.2. Low level of gender representation in outreach activities

Outreach activities in the CoST assurance process include community public hearings, where contractors, procuring entities and representatives of local communities meet with the assurance team to discuss issues raised during project implementation. They have been a key factor in improving project communication in Thailand and reducing the level of conflict among stakeholders, with positive impacts for project implementation.

In June 2019, a public meeting took place on the road expansion and flyover construction project at Bor Win Industrial State Intersection in Chonburi Province. The researcher was invited by CoST Thailand to attend the meeting as an independent observer.

An immediate concern was the absence of female representation in the meeting. Three representatives of the local community were present, but they were all male (Figure 5.1). There are many reasons why female representation may have been absent of the meeting – household or family duties, the timing of the meeting being close to lunchtime, clashes with working hours and the location of the meeting are just to name a few. This does not necessarily mean that the female voice was not incorporated into the message conveyed by

the male representatives. While it is not accurate to assume that female opinion was not represented simply because community women were not physically present, the optics created by Figure 5.1 can be problematic.

As evidenced in [Annex D](#), infrastructure is a male-dominated sector in Thailand and continues to be perceived as such. This perception was confirmed by interviewees, who mostly said construction was a ‘male activity’. Because such view is so ingrained in social perception, Figure 5.1 can reinforce old stereotypes concerning the division of social roles between men and women in society and within the infrastructure sector.

Videos of other public hearings available on CoST Thailand’s Facebook page (CoST Thailand, 2020) have also been assessed (see [Annex E](#)). While they generally show a small female presence, women mostly sit at the back of the room and have a low level of engagement compared to men.

Whereas CoST Thailand had no control over attendees of public hearings, the CoST *Safeguarding Policy* (CoST, 2019) commits it to challenging discrimination in the provision of services. CoST Thailand and its multi-stakeholder group therefore have a role to play in changing unequal representation, in this case by identifying how the participation of women could be improved in the assurance meetings. This would ensure that female voices can be heard and incorporated in the process of delivering public infrastructure.

No generalisations are meant, particularly since not all recordings of public hearings were available for analysis (in special hearings from 2018 were not available in full). CGD and the assurance team informed that they have not controlled the names of the attendees of the hearings, making it impossible to assess with certainty the male/female ratio.

The experience of other CoST programmes in Uganda and Honduras could support CoST Thailand in this regard. In Uganda, the programme has helped to facilitate dialogue, increase trust and highlight key issues on infrastructure projects by bringing together local government and citizens during community events known as ‘barazas’. Here assurance findings are highlighted alongside other issues raised by the community.

Simple actions adopted by CoST Uganda to engage with the female audience in the barazas are showing positive results. In the planning stage priority is given to locations with easy community access alongside considerations regarding childcare, support for transportation



A CoST Thailand public hearing in June 2019 with no female representatives from the community

and facilities such as access to toilets. Mobilisation also helps to increase female participation. Announcements of the CoST barazas are made on the local radio, public notices are displayed in the community, and pick-up trucks circulate the community using sound systems to communicate logistical information and key messages from the assurance reports. According to CoST Uganda, this is a way to prepare the communities for the barazas, so they arrive knowing what to discuss and are willing to share their own experiences of the infrastructure project in question. Local leaders are also called on, providing a trusted voice and helping to promote the event.

During the barazas, CoST Uganda encourages women and young girls to voice their opinion, by giving them priority to talk in the question and answer session. Persons with disability receive a similar treatment so that minority groups are properly represented and their opinion is heard. CoST Uganda also collects on the attendees to help monitor gender, age and occupation, as well as the contact information of the participants for any future follow-up or engagement. In the three barazas developed by CoST Uganda, an increase was observed in the number of female participants as well as in the quality of their engagement. Barazas are always conducted in the local language of the community.

In Honduras, CoST managers keep updated records of gender participation for all events (internal and external) held by the programme. This includes MSG meetings, capacity building workshops, seminars conducted by the assurance team, civil society training, report launches.

Good practices relating to gender inclusion are identified during the assurance process and assurance site visits are advertised well in advance to help ensure a female presence. Similar to in Uganda, CoST managers in Honduras have observed an increase in female participation in training events, particularly in the programme's 'school for social accountability' which trains citizen transparency commissions to monitor infrastructure projects.

6. COST THAILAND DIVERSITY STRATEGIES

The research indicates that while gender equality is part of the general culture of CoST Thailand, there is no specific policy or related strategic planning to address the subject. No guidelines from the CoST Thailand multi-stakeholder group exist to provide objective criteria for hiring, retention or promotion of professionals engaged with CoST Thailand, or to secure gender wage parity. There is also no orientation from the multi-stakeholder group to determine the development of outreach activities in accordance with gender equality parameters.

The interviews also suggested a low level of knowledge and expertise of the professionals involved in CoST Thailand in terms of gender justice issues. There is a breadth of understanding of general aspects, but no depth of understanding on how gender should be mainstreamed in the programme's activities.

CoST Thailand is also not making use of policies prepared by CoST International Secretariat. The lack of awareness and knowledge of the content of the CoST *Safeguarding Policy* (CoST, 2019) was widespread, even among multi-stakeholder group members. Only one female interviewee was aware of the policy, but she could not correlate it to gender equality matters. When questioned about channels to report breaches of gender equality opportunities or sexual harassment, interviewees (both male and female) had no knowledge of the grievances section provided under the policy.

No budget is allocated to develop or promote gender awareness (for example training) or to tackle gender barriers within the CoST Thailand programme. No partnership or association exists with national or international gender and women's organisations that could support the programme to develop gender policies and strategies. There are also no internal mechanisms or systems to capture the gender dimension of the programme or its outreach activities, including public hearings.

The lack of diversity strategies in CoST Thailand is the main challenge identified by this research. Nevertheless, interviews showed that gender issues are not consciously considered as part of programme decisions and activities, with no policy or action plan designed by the CoST Thailand MSG to increase awareness or to secure the promotion of gender equality within the programme's bodies and activities. The use of social media channels to promote public hearings that show a low level of gender diversity and engagement can send a conflicting message in relation to the programmes' gender values.



7. IMPACT OF THE FINDINGS

7.1 IMPACT FOR COST THAILAND

The CoST Thailand would need to prepare for its future growth, developing its own gender policies and strategies to assure gender equality and to anticipate potential gender obstacles that can be faced by a mature workforce.

Examples of gender equitable solutions discussed in interviews revealed four measures for female professionals: avoidance of a glass ceiling in the workplace, closer follow-up on maternity leave, specific training on the Gender Equality Act (GEA) (Royal Thai Government, 2015), and sponsorship of extra-curricular courses.

1. Avoidance of a glass ceiling in the workplace would involve:

- adopting flexible working hours (including working from home) for female professionals with a family
- more flexibility at the workplace to allow female professionals a balance between family duties and work obligations, and
- sponsoring coaching sessions, with high-ranking female professionals from other organisations, for guidance on how to balance family-work life. The example of successful female professionals in the marketplace would help with lessons learnt on how to overcome obstacles and glass ceiling situations.

2. A closer follow-up of female professionals on maternity leave would be needed to:

- help female staff in the adjustment process, post maternity, and
- help women to 'remain' in the workplace and keep their careers, post maternity.

3. Specific training on the GEA would also be important.

- Although awareness of the GEA was high amongst interviewees, the interviews captured an informational gap on the exact GEA content. A similar informational gap relates to the CoST *Safeguarding Policy* (CoST, 2019), which remains unknown by most professionals carrying out CoST Thailand work, including multi-stakeholder group members.

4. Sponsorship of extra-curricular courses would be needed to:

- develop the skills of female professionals
- enhance their capabilities, and
- keep female staff competitive vis-à-vis their male colleagues.

The feasibility of these four measures would need to be considered by CoST Thailand. However, as CoST Thailand is hosted by two organisations (Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand (ACT) and Comptroller General Department (CGD)), some of these four measures may need to conform with internal organisational rules. For example, adopting flexible working hours may depend on CGD working policies.

In any event, CoST Thailand is invited to reflect on which of these four measures can be applied without risk of overlapping with ACT and CGD policies. For example, at public hearings, monitoring the number of attendees, disaggregating attendees by gender, and increasing female presence and engagement, are efforts that can be reconciled by ACT and CGD policies. However, the budget for these activities could be considered by CoST Thailand.

As an ongoing process of benchmarking to assess progress in promoting gender equitable solutions, it is advisable that CoST Thailand provides continuous follow-up measuring the progress of gender equality and identifying strategies to promote a gender-balanced environment, including outreach activities.

7.2 IMPACT FOR COST INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

The findings of this gender audit open opportunities for the CoST International Secretariat to rethink the implementation of the CoST programme.

First, the perception that the CoST *Safeguarding Policy* (CoST, 2019) may not be sufficiently promoted by CoST member secretariats creates the need to strengthening the communication addressed to staff, consultants and local stakeholders engaged with CoST.

Having webinars and written material to cover the *Safeguarding Policy* is essential to clarify the scope of the policy and the protections granted to female professionals developing CoST work. More than explaining the provisions of the policy alone, emphasis should be put on the grievance procedure applicable in cases of gender discrimination, including information of how to start a grievance.

Developing a diagnostic baseline as carried out in CoST Thailand seems key to understand the landscape of gender issues in each CoST member. Measurable gender indicators (including disaggregating training and public awareness quantitative indicators by gender) have an essential role to map and monitor gender strengths and challenges.

A third consideration from the findings is the role of the International Secretariat to improve participation of women in country programmes, not only in outreach activities, but in the composition of multi-stakeholder groups and in the selection of professionals and consultants carrying out CoST work.

Tackling gender equality and assuring gender inclusion within CoST is a strong key message that the International Secretariat is committed to pursue. This is not only because having gender matters addressed by CoST will likely attract the attention of potential new donors, but also in light of evidence showing that gender discriminatory institutions can harm growth by lowering female labour participation and productivity (Ferrant and Kolev 2016).

By advancing gender matters and understanding the linkages between CoST and inclusive infrastructure, CoST can serve as a micro-level gender empowerment tool. The Theory of Change of CoST already considers the empowerment of stakeholders as a key element to spark change. The gender perspective will add another layer of empowerment to stimulate change from the inside-out.

Take the case of Thailand as an example. CoST can contribute not only by pushing a gender equal environment within the programme and its outreach activities, but also by advocating that similar conditions are propagated elsewhere in the country. Evidence indicates that female workforce in Thailand are still concentrated in low-skilled roles and that gender obstacles are still present. CoST diversity strategies can put the attention on gender matters and broaden the scope of impacts that CoST can trigger in members.



8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two old Thai proverbs: “Women are buffalos. Men are humans” and “Men are like an elephant’s front legs and women like the hind legs”, summarise the inferior way that women were previously seen in Thai society and how they were compared to working animals or limited to following men around.

These proverbs are no longer representative of present Thailand, which currently sees a reduction in the gender gap, the advent of the Gender Equality Act (GEA) (Royal Thai Government, 2015) and by an equal footing between men and women in the marketplace.

Although positive changes have occurred, research indicates that female professionals in the marketplace continue to face gender obstacles and a major portion of the female labour force remains restricted to low-skilled occupations.

In this context, a gender audit was carried out to investigate the level of gender mainstreaming within CoST Thailand. The purpose was to identify the strengths and challenges from a gender equality perspective.

The investigation combined a desk review and field interviews carried out on staff responsible for CoST Thailand, and focused on three research questions:

- What is the gender demographic representation (both quantitative and qualitative dimensions) identified in CoST Thailand?
- What is the level of gender awareness and gender barriers found in implementation of CoST Thailand?
- What diversity strategies are applied or endorsed by CoST Thailand?

8.1 CONCLUSIONS

The following are the conclusions from the gender audit on CoST Thailand.

- A high percentage (50%) of female participation was identified in CoST Thailand. In qualitative terms, CoST female professionals reported an equal level of participation and weight in decision making within the programme. From an observation standpoint, CoST Thailand female professionals seemed non-stressed, engaged and valuable in the workplace.
- The staff responsible for CoST Thailand viewed both CGD and ACT as gender-neutral employers, offering equal access and opportunities. According to interviewees, decisions related to hiring, retention, promotion and training of professionals involved with CoST work, and allocating workload were not influenced by gender, but based on skills, capabilities and availability.
- A high level of gender awareness was identified amongst those involved in CoST Thailand, showing a common view by interviewees that both men and women have equal roles in society and in the workplace.
- Gender obstacles and glass ceiling situations were not raised in the interviews and difficulties to balance family-work life were reported only by a minority of interviewees.
- A low female representation and engagement in public hearings was identified that are part of the assurance process.
- Although overall positive perception, the gender balance found in CoST Thailand is attributed to circumstances that are not related to CoST directly. Factors that contribute to this outcome include: the nature of the skills required for most of the roles developed in the programme (mainly administrative, managerial, accounting, data analytical and secretarial tasks that attract more female applications); the fact that the Comptroller General Department (CGD) has a high concentration of female staff; and the low budget available by the host organisations to spend on staff for the CoST Thailand programme, leading to the selection of a more junior staff that do not experience glass ceiling situations.
- Although responsible for setting out the programme's policies and processes, the CoST Thailand multi-stakeholder group is not directly contributing in creating a gender equal environment within the programme. Evidence includes: the lack of a gender equality policy for the programme; no budget dedicated to tackling gender matters; no partnerships with local gender organisations; and no mechanisms or system within CoST Thailand to capture the gender dimension of the programme or of the programme's outreach activities.
- At present, lack of a gender policy and related strategy does not compromise the equality of the programme. Moving forward, the CoST Thailand multi-stakeholder group can adopt a more proactive approach in developing a gender policy and identifying opportunities that improve gender participation.

- This consideration is particularly relevant as interviews have showed that: gender issues are not consciously considered as part of programme's decisions and activities; and professionals developing the CoST Thailand programme can develop a more in-depth understanding of how gender should be mainstreamed in the programme's activities.
- Two main risks have been identified by the research. One associated with gender obstacles that may be faced by a mature female workforce as the programme evolves. A second risk relates to the low level of gender participation and engagement in the assurance public hearings.

8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations from the gender audit for CoST Thailand.

- Develop a system to capture the female representation identified in the bodies carrying out CoST Thailand work (Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand (ACT) and CGD in relation to the professionals involved with CoST, the multi-stakeholder group and the assurance team), in relation to outreach activities of CoST Thailand, including public hearings developed by the assurance team and other activities or events (such as seminars to publish assurance conclusions, open-house events, etc.).
- Identify how the participation of women can be improved at CoST assurance public hearings and other outreach activities of CoST Thailand. Experiences by CoST Uganda and CoST Honduras can offer valuable guidance to CoST Thailand with this task.
- Create a gender annual review to measure the progress of CoST Thailand gender initiatives.

Based on the findings of the audit, the CoST International Secretariat also expresses its commitment to:

- Provide a steer to CoST countries in the form of new guidelines and an updated model terms of reference for a CoST multi-stakeholder group as to encourage participation of women on groups and amongst professionals and consultants carrying out CoST work.
- Develop guidelines on improving participation of women at community and civil society activities and disaggregate training and public awareness quantitative indicators by gender at member and international levels in the CoST logframe.
- Include gender participation as part of the evaluation diagnostic tool currently in development by the International Secretariat, which will identify improvements to the governance of a CoST member programme.

- Continue to promote the CoST *Safeguarding Policy* (CoST, 2019) to CoST members, including through a webinar series, emphasising gender issues, equality of opportunities, non-discrimination on outreach activities and the grievance proceeding provided under the policy.
- Review how the CoST approach to transparency and accountability can contribute towards gender and socially inclusive infrastructure.

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