

A Situation Analysis on Mass Media and Child Rights in Thailand

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1. Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) specified in article 12, 13 and 17 on the rights of the child to form his/her own views freely, to be able to express, seek and impart information and ideas of all kinds and from a diversity of sources (The United Nations, 1989). Following the guidelines of the CRC the Thai government proclaimed its National Declaration on Children (NDC) in August 1991. The National Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in Thailand (1992-2001) in order to carry out the goals and objectives of the CRC and the NDC was put forth in 1995.

The child's right to communicate is guaranteed as a basic human rights for the first time, universally and in the Thai society. Article 8 of the National Declaration on Children specified that;

“Children must have the opportunity and be able to express their opinion with a conscience for public good, they must be able to participate in activities beneficial to the society....”

(National Declaration on Children, 1991)

The Declaration also guaranteed that children must be able to have access to all basic social services provided by the state and the private sector (article 9), that children must be protected from any public expose of wrong-doings or accusations and that they must receive different treatment than those provided for adults (article 10).

These are the starting points for our situation analysis on Mass Media and Child Rights in Thailand. The objectives of the analysis are to document the followings;

1. To provide a brief overview of the situation of the mass media and child rights in those aspects stipulated by the CRC and the NDC
2. To outline existing policy, implicit or explicit, at various levels on the mass media and child rights
3. To map out some of the critical problems on the communication rights of the child
4. To make recommendations towards protecting and developing these rights

2. An overview on the communication rights of the child in the Thai context

Although the communication rights of the child are clearly guaranteed at the international level in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. And these same rights are specified in the National Declaration on Children and in the National Plan of Action they are often violated in practice. This section provides an overview on how the communication rights of the child are protected and developed or vice versa.

2.1 The right and freedom of expression

“..the child should be assured the right to form his/her own views and the right to express those views freely in all matter affecting the child”.

(Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

The right and freedom of expression are seen in terms of how much and what kinds of accessibility children have in relation to the usage and editorial control (direct or indirect) of the mass media.

a) Children’s participation in the mass media

There are 4 kinds of children’s accessibility which indicate if children have the opportunity to express themselves openly and freely in all matter;

- children audience as contributor
- children participate in the editorial staff or children as producer
- children as actor/actresses in the media or children’s imagery in the media product
- child-to-child or media by children

children audience as contributor

When we take a close look at the narrative form of children’s magazines and children’s page in the newspapers we can see that the space for children’s participation is very limited. For example, the

analysis of 6 children's magazines during 1985-1992 shows that letters to the editor and game page take up between 5-10% of the whole magazine. The rest is cartoon, feature, fiction such as short story and novel, news and interview. Advertisement takes up between 2-25% (Somanas Sucharitakul, 1993).

The situation on television as opposed to the print media is quite different. Children's programme such as Pungnoi Show, Bandit Noi, are produced with a distinctive objective for children's participation. Debate and quiz and competition programmes such as Tow Karom Mathayom Suksa, Klakid Klatham, 180 IQ and Galileo Game build the programme around the concept of participation and interaction within the programme and with the home audience.

children participate in the editorial staff or children as producer

Urban upper and middle classes children tend to have more opportunity in taking part in the editorial staff. Sieng Dek magazine (of Kukang business media group) and Jiew Jaew Jao Loke programme, for example, have children on their editorial staff. The trend is opening for more participation such as the children's programme on the new ITV station. The 'participatory' concept is becoming fashionable and is promoted in a positive way for children. However, children's participation is restricted under the control of adult staff because these are seen as 'media for children' and not 'media by children'.

children as actor/actresses in the media or children's imagery in the media product

In recent years, children's participation in advertisement and family dramas on prime-time television are highly commercialized. Children's imageries are made into commodity. This means that they act out the part without having any control of the production. Nearly 30% of prime-time television advertisements have children as their presenters. These 30-second clips are shown repeatedly at every 20-30 minutes intervals that they become normalized. They were meant to create the 'children's appeal' which would not only be eye-catching but would be interesting enough to stimulate consumption of the product. Children who participate in these productions work under unusual stress and extreme heat and lighting condition which is damaging to their health. Their skin might be burnt and in some cases, children are injured by accidents (Seminar on advertisement and children, 1990).

Children actors/actresses also have to work long hours and sometimes, skip classes to meet production deadlines. It might be argued

that this is a good learning experience for children. But it is doubtful if this kind of expression genuinely represents the right and freedom of children. In addition, how do we take care of the effect on their study and the negative effects on their emotional and psychological development?

child-to-child or media by children

The above classification on accessibility demonstrates that the working definition of children's media remains largely within the confine of 'media for children'. On the one hand, the space for children's participation is limited to a small percentage within the entire range of the media channels. Furthermore, it is limited to only a few genres such as quizz and game. On the other hand, the highly commercialized children's imageries in the media bring out the question if they are really 'media by children'. This leaves a great deal of room for developing participatory media which children's voices could actually be heard.

It is only in recent years that the notion of 'media by children' or 'child to child' which provides the opportunity for children to speak amongst themselves has emerged. The Non-Formal Education Department and the Foundation for Children's Development together organized the Child to Child Radio Workshop in 1994 as an experimental programme during the summer vacation. Children who attended the workshop were able to create their own programme, write their scripts and produce the programme with minimum guidance from the organizers. Young listeners from the rural areas wrote to comment the programme as well as to participate in the programme. The successful attempt to demonstrate that programme built on the concept of 'media by children' is possible should be applied further by media practitioners, development workers and academics.

b) The mass media silencing and victimizing children

The right of the child to speak for his/herself in the news on matters that concern their needs and well beings are largely curtailed by the professional code of practice. The existing social and media structures exclude children from being news and information sources. In routine practice, adults, government officials on education, and sometimes, teachers, are the key news sources for matters such as education reform, new method for university entrance exam, local school admission, improvement of facilities for children in school and in the community, etc. We rarely hear the voices of the children although they are the ones who are affected. There are, however, some exceptions such as on

Children's Day or certain campaigns which involve children. On these occasions the voices of children are played up in the media.

For the under-privileged children they often appear in the news and television talk programmes as victim of violence in the family and in the society. Although the story has a sympathetic tone but the presentation has little regards to the identity nor the feeling of the children. There are several seminars organized by consumer group, academic and government and non-government organization in 1995-1996 on the victimization of women and children in the media. This is due to the fact that rape cases reported in the newspapers rose from 37 in 1992 to 113 in 1994 and the way these cases are re-presented in the media have exerted more violence on the victim.

Children offenders or suspects and victims are exposed in these cases with neither the effective protection from the law nor the professional codes of ethics. If the child is arrested for rape or murder the media would unhesitantly label the child a 'criminal'. Pictures of the child suspect are published in the front page although this is against articles 93 and 98 of the Youth and Family Court and the Criminal Codes (1991).

For children who are victims of family and social violence they are put on trial in front of the public. On television, for example, small children who were raped by their fathers were asked to relate their stories to the audience. In hoping to inform about the violation of the right of the child the media have exposed these children and coerced them to go through the ordeal in front of a large group of studio audience. The serious question is how do the media resolve this kind of dilemma so that the public would be better inform while not adding further injuries to the children?

2.2 The right and freedom to seek and receive information and ideas

"..the child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice."

(Article 13, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

The right and freedom of children to seek and receive information and ideas depend primarily on the family and the kinds of media on offer. If the child's family is knowledgeable and supportive he/she would have a greater opportunity to enjoy this right. Another key condition is whether the child falls within the category served by the mainstream or alternative media. If he/she is part of the intended audience he/she would have the choice to select the kind of medium and content suited to the individual need.

However, the concrete conditions impinge upon the actualization of this right and freedom are;

a) The level of family income

Lower income families spend most of their income on food, shelter, medical care and other basic necessities more than on education and media for their children. There are statistical information of family spending on children's basic needs such as on health and medical care in the Indicator for Children and Youth Development (The National Bureau for the Promotion and Co-ordination of Youth, 1994). But there is no published statistics available on how much lower, middle and upper classes spend on media artefacts.

From the study on children working in gas stations in Bangkok the finding shows that they have very little money to spend on the media since they have to spend on basic necessities and send some savings to their parents. These children share the few comic books (5-20 baht/copy) and audio-cassette tapes among themselves (Sakolkarn Insai, 1995). Although they want to further their education they neither have the time nor the knowledge on how to find the right information.

For other groups of under-privileged children such as the homeless, prostitute and child labour in sweatshop factory they lack the opportunity to seek and receive information and ideas for their mental, spiritual and occupational development due to their low income and restrictive living condition.

b) The literacy and skill in media reception/consumption

To be able to seek and receive information and ideas also depend on the level of literacy and interpretative skill in media reception (Foundation for Children's Development, et al., 1991, 1995). Children who have 4-6 years of primary education find it difficult to read novels and features. They prefer comic books which communicate mainly via the visual images. They must seek the media with simple narrative forms since their skill in media reception is under-developed. Under-privileged

children who are illiterate and semi-literate are faced with difficulty when exercising this right.

c) The coverage and breadth of media distribution

The geographical location of the audience is another condition impinge upon how children seek and receive the media. While most of the print media are distributed in the big cities and urban areas in the provinces the electronic media have a wider penetration in the rural areas. Via this distribution structure the majority of rural children are excluded from the mainstream print media. One alternative is to seek from school libraries. But there is no guaranteed that school libraries in the rural areas are able to provide sufficient services for children.

Taken into account the socio-economic conditions of children and the marketing strategies, the wide penetration of radio and television does not carry programmes intended for rural children. They either have to watch programmes produced for urban, upper and middle classes children or programmes for adults. In the areas where media hardware is needed such as video recorder/player, audio cassette player and multi-media computer set the opportunity is further reduced due to their economic constraint.

It could be seen that rural and under-privileged children are severely discriminated from seeking and receiving the mainstream mass media. What little reading materials, audio cassette and children's play produced by independent artists, alternative theatre groups and non-governmental organizations could reach only a small number of these children. This is one of the most critical areas in the protection and development of the communication rights of the child. Special plans, programmes and activities are needed to assist the implementation of the rights of the rural and under-privileged children.

2.3 Diversity of media content

“the state shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.”

(Article 13, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

Research on media reception demonstrated that children spend an average of 2-3.35 hours a day on viewing television and less than 1 hour

for reading (Amara Pongsapich, et al., 1988). The time spent on media reception, as a result, impinge upon time spent with parents, relatives, on outdoor activities and household work (for physical and social development).

A review on the quantity of media for children shows that the print media is the strongest sector of locally produced media artefacts (there are more than 20 large publishing houses on children's books and magazines) and radio is the weakest sector with only one national children's programme produced by Radio Thailand (broadcast on AM) and a small number of music programme for teenage audiences. Open-to-air television provides an average of 6% of its air time to children's programme. While a large section of the print media concentrates on information and education television aims at entertainment, fun and game for children. These television programmes are made up of locally produced variety programmes, quizz and game on the one hand, and Japanese and American cartoons on the other hand (Foundation for Children's Development, 1997).

a) print media

The media genres of most of the locally produced content are limited to comics, picture books and story books for small children and novels and some features for teenagers. Magazines provide a combination of comics, features and fictional series and games on the environment, Thai culture and topics related to the school curricula (Somanas Sucharitakul, 1993). The number of children's magazines amounts to less than 5% of the total 150 titles of magazines. For urban, upper and middle class children there are picture books which are more expensive and highly glossy. The inexpensive comic booklets are popular among rural children and young workers in urban areas. But urban children prefer Japanese cartoons which cost between 30-80 baht.

b) radio

Radio features poorly on the diversity scale. There is a lack of programme for children of all ages and hence a shortage of creativity and diversity. Among 494 radio stations, most of which broadcast 24-hour a day, there are less than 10 national and regional programmes for children. These are weekly, half-hour children's story programmes, religious programmes and variety which mix music with talk. In the past, Education Radio allocated 9% of its air time for children's programme. But this no longer holds true. For commercial radio producers they admit that they are not interested in producing children's programme. It is

evident that radio has been overlooked as a children's medium (Uajit Virojtrairatt, 1993).

c) television

The bulk of children's programmes tend to be on the open-to-air television. There were 64 programmes in 1993 made up of locally produced variety, quizz and game, documentary and imported programmes such as Japanese cartoons and feature films (Narakorn Tiyanon, 1993). The figure in 1997 shows that they take up only 6% of the total air time while advertisement takes up to 15% of air time. Most of the programmes are broadcast during the early evening slot and early weekend mornings. Although rural children are included as part of the target audience (for marketing and advertising purposes) they are not the primary audience whom the producers meant to communicate with. Hence, rural children are totally un-represented in the locally produced programmes. They are only occasionally represented in the early evening drama for teenage audience. Urban children whose family subscribe to cable or have access to satellite television have more choice of cartoons, feature films and documentaries.

d) cinema

Rural children go to roving cinema (rural commercial cinema) and open air cinema during religious and other community festivities. They have to watch the same movies as adults. These are Hong Kong, Thai and American movies mainly on sex and violence (Foundation for Children's Development, 1995). In the city, urban children watch both Thai and American films. The local film producers now cater to the needs of urban teenagers and have been able to compete well with imported films. Most of the themes are romance and friendship and some family tragedies.

e) multi-media

The new technology is a booming sector and there are local software such as games, encyclopaedias, etc. for children. But the cost is still high for the large majority of urban and rural children. Most of the better equipped schools provide multi-media courses as part of their curriculum.

f) Alternative media

There are alternative theatre groups such as Makampom, Maya and Krajok-ngao producing children's and community plays for under-privileged and rural children (although they are based in Bangkok). They

also provide training and organize workshop which children get the opportunity to participate in some of the plays.

The Foundation for Children's Development, Children's Foundation, Foundation for Disabled Children and the Foundation for Women occasionally publish comics, story books for child workers, child prostitutes, and other groups of under-privileged children.

Media content produced by these alternative groups are expressly communicating with under-privileged children, children in especially difficult conditions and some rural children. But they are small, independent artists whose contribution in this area needs public financing and extensive community support in order to accomplish what they set out to do. The urgent question is how do we organize these scattered effort to better serve the under-privileged and rural children in protecting their communication rights?

In sum, Table 1 shows that on the diversity scale of media channels and content urban children are better provided for in all of the media channels - print, radio, television, cinema and multi-media, as well as in the diversity of genres. They also have access to a wide range of international programmes on cable and satellite television and other new information and media technology. Rural children have lesser opportunity compared with urban children. And the under-privileged children have the least opportunity to express themselves, to seek and receive information and ideas from the mainstream media industry.

3. Policy and activity on the rights of the child and the mass media

3.1 Government policies, plans and programmes

During the 1st and 2nd National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966, 1967-1971) the emphasis on children's development was on providing and extending services on health care, education and social welfare. A survey on the needs and deficiencies of basic services for children and youth was carried out in order to establish baseline information for a 5-year plan on children's development (1967-1971). After the proclamation of the International Year of the Child in 1979 the National Bureau on the Promotion and Co-ordination of Youth and the National Commission on Education together launched the Long Term Children's Development Plan for children aged between 0-14 years and 15-25 years in 1980-1981. It was in the 1980s that systematic development programmes and planning for children were being implemented.

a) policy guidelines on the mass media and child rights in the 5th - 7th NESD Plans and the National Development Plan for Children and Youth (1982-1996)

Particular attention on the mass media and children did not arise until the drafting of the first National Development for Children and Youth (1982-1986) guided by the 5th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986). The emphasis on children's development in this plan was placed on 7 major areas; nutrition, physical development, psychological development, intelligence and basic skills, social, cultural and ethical development, occupational development and the mass media. The plan also indicated 3 major groups for urgent assistance; rural children in poverty, children in slum areas and children in difficult situations. In the 6th Plan (1987-1991) the emphasis on the mass media was dropped and the area on politics and government was added. The 7th Plan (1992-1996) continued with the direction laid out in the 6th Plan but collapsing politics and government with social, cultural and ethical development. In this plan special significance was given to 4 groups of children. These are; children whose rights are violated (rape and violence in the family, child labour, child prostitute), children who are neglected (poverty stricken, homeless, children of construction

workers, slum children and children of ethnic minority), children who mis-behaved (drug addict, extra-marital pregnancy) and disabled children (physical disability and intellectual disability). By categorizing children according to their rights It could be seen that the concept on the right of the child is gradually being introduced into the official plan. And programmes for their implementation are developed.

In the Five Year National Development for Plan Children and Youth (1982-1986) which was an elaboration of the children development section of the 5th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) the policy on the mass media and children was spelled out. These are;

1. To set the ratio of children's content in television, radio and newspapers in order to provide information, education and entertainment for children development. For example 10% of the total air time should be set for information, knowledge and entertainment which are suitable for each age group
2. To extend the services of educational radio in disseminating information and knowledge to reach children in every area
3. To emphasise on folk and local media in the learning process of children in school and outside of school on child rearing, child development, youth, women, nutrition and other areas of children development
4. To stipulate for the organization of media practitioners as a measure of professional and quality control, and to support consumer groups in their effort to promote and monitor the quality of the mass media.

In 1982, the government and the National Broadcasting Executive Board (NBEB) stipulated that programmes broadcast during 4:00-6:00 p.m. should be beneficial to children and children's programme on television be broadcast between 6:00-6:30 p.m. For 5 years (1982-1986), television was blackout for 1 hour each evening, during 6:30-7:30 p.m., for energy conservation (due to extreme drought condition since 1981). The measure was lifted to make way for news and social programmes. In 1989, the NBEB requested all television stations to broadcast children's programmes between 6:30-7:30 p.m. At present, most of the children's programmes on weekdays are broadcast during 4:00-7:30 p.m. But this does not mean that the entire 3 ½-hour slot is designed for children's programme (see appendix). There was no regulation on the quantity or

the quality of children's programme on radio, children's magazines or children's page in the newspapers.

b) policy guidelines on the mass media and child rights in the 8th NESD Plan and the National Development Plan for Children and Youth (1997-2001)

In the present plan (the 8th Plan, 1977-2001), there has been a reformulation of the major emphasis areas for children and youth development. These 6 areas are;

1. physical and psychological development
2. intellectual, knowledge and skill development
3. religious, ethical, cultural and national identity (Thainess) development
4. education and occupational development for the modern economy
5. development of consciousness and participation in natural resources and the environment
6. development on community participation and politics and government in a democratic system.

In this plan the child and the mass media is not an area of emphasis in its own right but is written into the plan and objective of some of the above critical areas as a means to reach these developmental goals. And the special target children in the previous plans were subsumed under the 1st goal set by the National Development Plan for Children and Youth (1977-2001) that "*all children should have equal rights in receiving the basic services in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child*"

In the section on the strategies to create a social environment suitable for children's development the mass media was part of the strategy to develop child rights, law and judicial justice. It stipulated that there should be immediate measures for the improvement of "*...unsuitable advertisements for children and youth*" (National Development Plan for Children and Youth, 1977-2001, no. 2.6, p.23).

The mass media are viewed as part of the leading social institution to enhance children's development. To promote the role of the mass media it is necessary to;

1. support the production and distribution of various kinds of media suitable to the development of children and youth
2. create a consciousness among media practitioners to protect, not to violate, the rights of the child
3. honour media producers whose works enable the development of children and youth
(National Development Plan for Children and Youth, 1977-2001, p.26)

c) policy guidelines on the study of the role of the mass media in children's development (1992)

The committee on the study of child rearing and education, set up by Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun in 1991, to compile a situational analysis and make recommendations on child rearing and education for children between 0-12 years wrote a separate report on the role of the mass media in children's development. It was the most comprehensive policy guidelines on the mass media and children. It laid down the central framework for the analysis on the diversity, accessibility and accountability of the media producers, media content and children and those involved in children and development. The study showed how the mass media have deep effects on; the physical, behavioural, intellectual and cultural development of the child. It analysed why certain kinds of children's genres are not produced and why some groups of children are not being served by the media industry.

The report proposed 8 areas of critical recommendations. These are;

1. The empowerment of the consumers
2. The media literacy skill through media education
3. The co-operation of the business sector and the media industry
4. The professional development of education and media institutions
5. The development of research and knowledge on children and the media
6. The support of the state and its agencies
7. The reformation of media law and related mechanism
8. The establishment of an independent commission on children and the media (The role of the media and children's development, 1992, pp.15-21).

The above recommendations are extensive and comprehensive. They remain the most up-to-date guidelines for short and long term planning, and for future development of various programmes of activity.

When compared with other areas of children development in the National Development Plans the mass media fall behind in having consistent policy. It could be seen that this is also the sector which lacks the plans and programme of activities to carry out the policy. One of the more consistent activity is the Distinctive Children's Media Award organized since 1981. But on research and monitoring of the mass media for children which are the basic activities in all areas of children development the mass media sector remains the weakest. In the Indicator for Children and Youth Development (1994) there was little baseline information on media for children and there was no indicator to see how the situation has improved or deteriorated.

3.2 Legal provision

There are legal provisions against libel, moral debasement, pornography in the media. But these are for the general public. We find hardly any legal provision protecting against the violation of child rights in the media.

a) sex and violence in the media

The general concern on the effect of sex and violence on children has been a long drawn debate here and elsewhere. So far, the research literature provides evidence on both the direct behavioural impact and indirect cultivation effect on the forming of attitudes, worldview and identity of children. Small children tend to imitate the actions and languages of their tv friends and heroes/heroines. While pre-teens and teenagers tend to experiment with the role model, the gender relationship and emotions generated by the media (Amara Pongsapich, et al., 1988).

There are censorship law on sex/pornography and violence on the print media, film and video, music on radio (not audio cassette). However, there is no separate clause on the protection of children. The censorship laws protect against moral debasement for adults and children alike.

The specification or classification of media content to match its audience is not practice despite constant pressure from media commentators and development workers. They call for the film industry to set a standard rating system to guide children and parents. And for publisher to classify their books and magazines according to age groups.

These are basic information and protective measure to assist in regulating children's reception on sex and violence.

b) media report on child offender and victim

The Youth and Family Court and the Criminal Codes of 1991 stipulates against any publicity of the pictures, voice of children suspect, or any information about the case which would reveal the identity of the child (article 93). It also prohibits against revealing the identity of the child in publicizing the verdict (article 98).

But in the case where the child is the victim or the defendant there is no law protecting his/her identity. The media, both print and electronic, take advantage of this vacuum to play up the news story on rape, child abuse and child murder. A number of non-governmental organizations on children and women are attempting to lobby for the legal protection of child victim in these kinds of offence in recent years.

c) advertising

The Food and Drug Commission pre-censors advertisements on food and drug. And the Consumer Protection Commission screens advertisement on puffery and mis-information. However, there is no special section on protecting children from the harmful effect of advertisement especially on children's food such as sweets, snacks, soft drinks, and fast food. There is neither any stipulation on child presenter in advertisement.

Since 1993 radio is un-regulated on the ratio of advertising and other kinds of media content. Television could advertise for 10 minutes/hour. But there is no regulation on the ratio of advertisement on children's programme. The producer usually puts 2-3 breaks into a half-hour programme and insert the logos of the advertisers on the props and any space available. In this way, the programme is over advertised and children are bombarded with advertising messages throughout the programme.

d) National Broadcasting Commission (NBC)

The National Broadcasting Commission (previously the National Broadcasting Executive Board-NBEB) does not have special guidelines or legal provision on children's media. It was only in the 1980s that the NBEB carried out the government policy on the specific time (6:00-6:30 p.m.) allocated to children's programme.

3.3 Non-governmental organizations

In recent years, non-governmental organizations on children, women and human rights are actively lobbying on the protection and development of child rights in the media. Their activities concerning the media are in 3 major areas;

- a) campaigning against child rights violation by the media
- b) publishing and promoting for more quality media for children
- c) informing the public on the state of the rights of the child

These non-governmental organizations work in close co-operation with consumer groups, members of parliament, government agencies and international agencies on children, the office of the attorney general, the Journalist Association of Thailand and educational institutions. Their activities have put some of the current critical issues on the official agenda.

3.4 Education, professional and media organisations

Education institution does not do much research or provide courses on children and the media. Unlike many countries in Asia, Europe and America there is no research/professional institution, either public or private, established in the area of children and the media in Thailand. Research is carried out variably by the National Research Council, the National Bureau for the Promotion and Co-ordination of Youth, the Behavioural Research Institute, Srinakarinvirote University, the Social Science Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University. Lacking a coherent policy guideline on the direction of research the scattered findings could not form any significant indicator which would lead to an informed analysis of the situation.

Media organizations do not have special guidelines on producing media for children. Most of the media organizations see children's content as un-profitable. If they choose to produce children's media they prefer imported material to the locally developed content. Japanese and American cartoons, feature films, etc. are tested in the international market. Hence, the popularity is guaranteed. On the contrary, local content needs time to develop and research which might cost more investment. But success is not guaranteed. The NBC does not set any guideline on the percentage of local content vs imported content on any of the media channels.

The professional codes of ethics set out very broad guidelines on reporting on facts and truth, to honour the trust of news sources, and to report with an aim for public good. Without any legal provision to protect the child victim/defendant this leaves a great deal for individual

interpretation on how much should be reported. In practice, it proves that professional judgment was used to victimized children more than to protect them.

3.5 Community and consumer group

The Co-ordinating Committee for Non-governmental Organizations on Basic Health works as a consumer protection group. The committee publishes the Smart Buyer Magazine to monitor consumer products and how they manipulate buyer's need. The magazine gives special attention to children's advertisements and other media content on children. It also co-produces Kon Prungni (The Next Generation), a consumer protection programme, on channel 9. These are small steps towards the empowerment of the consumers and community on the question of the right of the child and the media.

4. Critical areas of concern on the rights of the child and the mass media

“Children are seen but not heard.”

“The child is the property of the parent”

These are some of the beliefs on children which lead to certain practices of child rearing and, consequently, violating the rights of the child (Vitit Muntarbhorn & Taylor, 1994). In one extreme, children are sold into cheap labour and girl child is sold into the sex trade. There are approximately 175,000 child labour aged between 11-14 (NESDB, 1990) and 20,000-200,000 child prostitute under 18 year old (Unta Nopakhun, 1989. National Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in Thailand, 1995 and Centre for Child Rights Protection, 1996). They become the modern day slaves of the industrial economy. These children live under conditions without any basic rights including their rights to seek and receive information and the right to express themselves. Other groups of under-privileged children such as the homeless, the disabled, ethnic children, refugee children, are faced with a lack of media aimed to inform, educate and entertain them.

Our overview shows that the paternalistic attitude towards children has violated their rights to be protected and to self-development. The media industry, by taking advantage of the situation, has apparently commodified children in their production process. In addition, the deep-seated attitude in the media industry couples with the free market economy runs against the provision of sufficient, balanced, good quality and diversified media content for different groups children. They are several steps removed from actualizing a universal service concept for children's media.

The critical areas of concern pointed out in the country's report on the Implementation of Convention of the Rights of the Child submitted to the UN committee on the Rights of the Child in 1996 were - media violence on children and the problem of the quantity and quality of children's media. This is in line with the concern of the non-governmental organizations who constantly monitor the situation on media reporting and the exacerbation of sex and violence on children in the media. The followings are some of the critical areas of concern which require urgent rectification.

4.1 The commodification of children and their images

The paternalistic attitude towards children is not confined within the family but underlies the whole range of cultural, social, political and economic institutions. The media, notwithstanding, further victimized these children who are already fallen to the structural discrimination in the Thai society. Pictures of child labour and prostitute during a raid often appear as front page news. Their identity is revealed one way or another in the news story. This is a violation of Article 10 of the National Declaration on Children. But the attitude of professional journalism often goes for 'news that sells well' rather than for the protection of the rights of the child (Workshop on media education, 1991, Child information and mass media : problems and solutions, 1995, Seminar on violence against children and women in the news, 1996).

At the other end of the spectrum the communication rights of children from the upper and middle class family are neither protected nor promoted in a positive way. For instance, a number of children appear as models in advertisements and television serial drama. Although they become part of the labour force in a different manner than those who become child labour they also have to work long hours, under hard conditions as adults do (Seminar on advertisement and children, 1990). Their images might or might not be a truthful representation but what happens in reality is that these children are being commodified at a very early age (some only a few days or a few months old). Despite the glorification amongst their family and social networks it has, nonetheless, exacerbated the existing paternalistic attitude in the Thai society.

4.2 The exclusion of rural and under-privileged children

At present, the media industry is operated under the free market system and the government does not regulate to protect and develop the rights and freedom of children. The children's media sector must compete with other sectors for survival and profits. Thus, the prevalence of the commercial logic over and above the communication function of the mass media. The children's media sector is much smaller despite the fact that there are 22.5 millions children and youth between 0-18 years which make up about one third of the total population. It is evident that children have lesser accessibility and lesser diversity in media content compared with adults.

If we follow through by asking how well children of all ages are served and what kinds of content are provided for children we find that rural children and the under-privileged children are discriminated from receiving a wide range of mass media. While children from upper, middle classes in urban areas have greater opportunity in seeking and

receiving information and ideas from the media and the arts because they are the main target groups for major advertisers and children's media producers. The majority of children in the rural areas and the under-privileged children become secondary or tertiary audiences, and some are not being served at all by the media industry due to their low economic and social status (see table 1 for more detail).

On the question of content, the print media concentrate largely on information and education while television aims at entertainment, fun and game for children. Although children also enjoy watching news and educational programmes such as documentary on natural science and the sciences there is only a small percentage of these kinds of programmes. For rural and under-privileged children who are illiterate or semi-literate information and knowledge from the mass media is a supplement to literacy and occupational development. But they find little on offer that serves their needs (Sakolkarn Insai, 1995, Prapaisri Supipo, 1997).

The free market system and the growing commercialization of the mass media has also taken its toll on the education sector of state radio and television. The former philosophy to utilize radio and television for education is eroded in an era of privatization. The Non-formal Education Department and the Public Relations Department whose educational radio and television aimed at educating and informing rural children are already set for privatization (Amara Julawong, 1992 & Uajit Virojtrairatt, 1989, 1995).

5. Recommendations

“...to encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and culturally benefit to the child, and to have particular regards to the linguistics needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or whois indigenous, and to develop appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being..”

(Article 17, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

From the above review of the situation of the mass media and the communication rights of the child and the government policies and guidelines, legal provisions, and programmes and activities of the private sector two major critical problem areas are identified in section 4. Section 5 proposes 3 groups of recommendations;

- a) to address the question of the commodification of children and their images
(5.1 and 5.2)
- b) address the question of the exclusion of rural and under-privileged children
(5.3 and 5.4)
- c) to address the long term question of media literacy for children and adults
(5.5)

5.1 Legal protection on child victim and media reporting

5.1.1 State

- (1) Make amendments in the Youth and Family Court and the Criminal Codes of 1991 to protect the right of child victim/defendant from being exposed to any publicity outside and inside the court. The media should be penalized if this provision is violated.
- (2) Provide special training for the police and court personnel to adhere strictly to the legal provision on the right of child victim/defendant.
- (3) Prohibit photograph taking, video recording and audio recording of child victim/defendant if and when the mock up of the incident is being carried out.

- (4) Draw up special stipulations on children in advertisement for the Food and Drug Commission and National Broadcasting Commission in order to protect the child from being commodified.

5.2 Professional standard on presentation of children in the media

5.2.1 The mass media

- (1) Media professional organizations, print, radio & television, must provide guiding principles in addition to the existing ethic codes to guaranteed that the rights of the child offender and defendant are protected in media reporting of all forms.
- (2) Media professional organizations, print, radio & television, must provide guiding principles on advertisement on children in its effort to protect their rights and not to commodify them.
- (3) Media professional organizations, print, radio & television, must provide guiding principles on children's performance in its effort to protect their rights and not to commodify them.
- (4) Each media organization must have its internal codes on how to report on children in criminal cases and regarding sex and violence.
- (5) Each media organization must have its internal code on how to screen advertisement that display children's images.
- (6) Each media organization must have its internal code on children's performance for adults, and a separate code on children's participation.

5.2.2 The teaching institution

- (1) Carry out research on how children are being presented in the news, advertisement, film and drama and other genres.
- (2) Organize seminars for media practitioners on the adverse effects on the violation of child rights in media reporting.

5.2.3 The family and the public

- (1) The family and the public should form a Children's Media Consumer Protection Group to monitor the professional standard on the presentation of children in news report, advertisement, film and drama, etc.

5.3 Equal access and quality media content

5.3.1 The state

- (1) Promote the production of children's media by state and private organizations in different geographical locations emphasizing the content on social and moral learning, creative thinking and artistic values.
- (2) Stipulate that all general radio and television stations (not special target stations) should provide at least 15% of its air time to children's programmes on the suitable time-slot for children. These programmes should attend to the language and cultural needs of both the urban and rural children, and children of ethnic minorities.
- (3) Allocate one national radio frequency for a children's station. Air time and programming should be shared between the various regions. The programme content should serve the social, cultural and language needs of children in each of these regions.
- (4) Tax incentive should be used to promote children's media production. For example, lower the import tax of paper for children's book from the present 20-30% to 0%. Give tax exemption for children's programme on radio and television.
- (5) Promote special postage and delivery rate for children's books and magazines. Explore new means in order to expand the distribution system to reach children in all areas.
- (6) Set up a Children's Media Evaluation Committee in order to monitor and evaluate children's media content. The Committee should provide guidelines for quality production. It should also conduct public opinion survey to form its evaluations and guidelines.

5.3.2 The teaching institution

- (1) Provide training for media practitioners in children's media production in variety of genres to serve different groups of children.
- (2) Develop well qualified practitioners with a conscientious mind on children.

5.3.3 The private sector

- (1) Advertise in children's media in order to support the production of such media.
- (2) Support research project on children's media to build up the knowledge for future development.

5.3.4 The family and the public

- (1) Support the production of quality media for children.
- (2) Monitor the media to improve the long term quality and responsibility of media producers.
- (3) Help campaign for wider distribution and diversified content of the media for children.

5.4 Special provision for children in the rural areas & under-privileged children

5.4.1 The state

- (1) Allocate special budget to set up a fund for the production of media for rural and under-privileged children.
- (2) Promote special educational programme for children on educational radio and television.
- (3) Support the production of children's media by alternative groups and independent artists.
- (4) Promote participatory and child-to-child media production through a diversity of genres and languages.
- (5) Provide tax incentive for donors who contribute to the above public fund on children's media production.

5.4.2 The teaching institution

- (1) Regional education institutions should develop curriculum on children's media and help in developing the kind of production most suitable to children in the region.
- (2) Monitor and do research on children's media in the region on the specific needs of children and evaluate the quality of the media.

5.4.3 The private sector

- (1) Contribute to the fund on the production of media for rural and under-privileged children as a means of social participation.

- (2) Contribute to the setting up of children's media library/center for rural children and under-privileged children.

5.4.4 The family and the public

- (3) Contribute to the above fund and campaign to generate a conscientious and caring public for the intellectual and cultural well-being of rural children and under-privileged children.
- (4) Contribute to the setting up of children's media library/center for rural children and under-privileged children by way of donation, management of the center or be part of the media screening committee.

5.5 Media education for children, family, teachers and media professionals for long term development

5.5.1 The state

- (1) Develop media education as a course or part of a course within the school curriculum at the primary and secondary levels in order for children to understand the effects of the media, to read the media critically and to be able to participate as communicator in the future.
- (2) Stipulate for the media rating standard in order to assist children and parents for proper selection of media content.

5.5.2 The teaching institution

- (1) Teacher's training institutions should provide courses on media education for trainers so that teachers can develop media literacy skills for children in the future.
- (2) Media criticism and media education should be a foundation course for students in media studies and media productions.
- (3) Promote activities related to media criticism, such as book and film club, drama club.

5.5.3 The mass media

- (1) Provide programme/content on media education to educate the public on the effects of the media and how to read the media critically.
- (2) Organize seminars and visits for children, family and the public in order to provide an understanding on the production process of the media.

5.5.4 The family and the public

- (3) Participate in media activities together as a family and guide children on how to read the media critically.
- (4) Learn media literacy skills from special courses or the mass media in order to be able to select quality media.

To see the communication rights of children as a basic right with the mass media as instrumental to the materialization of these rights is the very first step to the understanding that the media is part and parcel of the basic provision for the mental, psychological and cultural survival and development of children (Asian Declaration on Child Rights and the Media, 1996).

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Appendix

Number of Television Set by Region* (1990-1991)

Bangkok	1,385,788
Central (except BKK)	2,082,832
North	1,619,069
Northeast	1,954,431
South	<u>955,364</u>
Total	<u>7,997,484</u>

* National Statistics Office, 1991.

Rural Children's Preferences of Television Programmes* 1991

<u>Cartoon</u>	<u>Children's Programmes</u>	<u>Drama</u>
1. Ninja Hatori	1. Chiwit Na Ru	1. Phra Chai Mongkol
2. Killing Turbo	2. Chao Khun Thong	2. Wanida
3. Dragon Ball	3. Nu Tam Dai	3. Mani Acha

-Cartoon : Children preferred humourous and adventurous Japanese cartoon

-Children's : Children preferred entertaining, fun and games in locally produced Programmes children's programmes

-Drama : Children preferred humourous, Thai folk tales, and short drama, and identified themselves with the major characters

* Walairat Punwasin (1992) A Study on Rural Children's Need Preferences of Television Reception in Surin Province, MA thesis, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

Ratio of Broadcasting Time of Children's Programmes on Open-to-Air Television*
1997

	Mon-Fri	Sat-Sun	Total
Channel 3	9 hrs 33 mins (9.41%)	4 hrs 10 mins (10.16%)	13 hrs 43 mins (9.63%)
Channel 5	4 hrs 27 mins (3.70%)	30 mins (1.11%)	4 hrs 57 mins (3.00%)
Channel 7	7 hrs - mins (7.04%)	2 hrs 25 mins (6.00%)	9 hrs 25 mins (6.74%)
Channel 9	5 hrs 35 mins (4.65%)	5 hrs 3 mins (10.52%)	10 hrs 38 mins (6.33%)
Channel 11	5 hrs 40 mins (5.63%)	1 hr 5 mins (2.62%)	6 hrs 45 mins (4.75%)
Total	32 hrs 25 mins (5.98%)	13 hrs 3 mins (6.05%)	45 hrs 28 mins (6.00%)

Channel 3 and 9 allocated the highest amount of real time for children's programmes

* Calculated from the total broadcasting time of each station
The Foundation for Children's Development, April, 1997.

A Comparison of the Ratio of Broadcasting Time of Children's Programmes on Open-to-Air Television, 1993 and 1997

	Mon-Sun* 1993	Mon-Sun 1997	Change
Channel 3	13 hrs 15 mins (10.63%)	13 hrs 43 mins (9.63%)	+ 28 mins (- 1.00%)
Channel 5	6 hrs 20 mins (5.19%)	4 hrs 57 mins (3.00%)	-1 hr 23 mins (- 2.19%)
Channel 7 mins	12 hrs 10 mins (9.22%)	9 hrs 25 mins (6.74%)	-2 hrs 45 (- 2.48%)
Channel 9	10 hrs 30 mins (10.94%)	10 hrs 38 mins (6.33%)	+ 8 mins (- 4.61%)
Channel 11	11 hrs 30 mins (12.47%)	6 hrs 45 mins (4.75%)	-4 hrs 45 mins (- 7.72%)
Total	48 hrs 45 mins (9.69%)	45 hrs 28 mins (6.00%)	-3 hrs 17 mins (- 3.69%)

Channels 11 and 9 showing the largest decrease in percentage of broadcast time for children's programmes in 1997

Channel 3 and 9 air approximately the same amount of time (over 10 hrs/week) for children's programmes during 1993 and 1997 but on Channel 9 the percentage in 1997 dropped sharply from the figure in 1993

In 1991, all channels broadcasted an average of 4 hrs/week of children's programmes or approximately 5% of the total broadcast time

* Orapin Sak-iam (1994) Uses and Gratifications of Children who Watch Children's Programmes, MA thesis, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

A List of Children's Magazine* 1994

<u>Name</u>	<u>Start Publication</u>	<u>Duration up to 1994</u>
Chaiyapruk Cartoon	1955	39 years
Sieng Dek	1984	10 years
Suan Dek	1989	5 years
Puen Mai	1989	5 years
Dino-sarn	1990	4 years
Baan Dek**	1991	3 years

* Somanas Sucharitkul (1994) A Study on the Production Strategy of Children's Magazines (1985-1992), MA thesis, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

** Baan Dek closed down in 1994.