

Research Paper

On

**“Encouraging the participation of women in  
Political life in the Sub-national level”**

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## **I- Introduction**

In Cambodia, women make significant and tangible contributions to the political, economic and social development of the country. These contributions are vital to the wellbeing of families and communities, and important to national and local development. In many households, they hold the primary responsibility for nutritional care, education, and health protection of their families and through this the community at large. However, Cambodian women often have poorer access to education, health care, employment and business opportunities compared to men<sup>1</sup>. Traditionally, they have played a lesser role in political life than men, which curbs their active participation in becoming involved in decisions that directly affect their lives and well-being.

Many people are optimistic about the benefits of increased women’s participation. They believe that women’s representation in political life will bring about further development in their community as women leaders are seen as more committed and engaged with the community; they prove more effective in local leadership and connecting with people in the community in terms of women’ social and economic affairs<sup>2</sup>. The active participation of women and women’s leadership can help work towards improving living standards for all Cambodians and accelerate the achievement of CMDGs, one of which is Goal 3: Promoting gender equality and empowering women.

The promotion of women’s participation in decision-making remains a key challenge to be addressed. Challenges include traditional beliefs that stereotype women as not well suited for

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<sup>1</sup>Lara Grisffith (2010), Strengthening Democracy and Electoral Process in Cambodia. UNDP Cambodia

<sup>2</sup> Kim & Ojendal(2012) ‘A Gendered Analysis Of Decentralization Reform in Cambodia’CDRI, Phnom Penh

high-level positions and decision-making. The additional burden women face in their role as care givers and in undertaking household work remain considerable barriers for women to participate fully in political life. This paper will explore factors such as these that contribute to the lack of experience in leadership and management in politics and public office<sup>3</sup>.

## **II- The importance of decentralisation reform for promoting the participation of women in political life**

Decentralisation reforms are strongly political and rearrange how power is structured in society, moving from top down planning and implementation of decisions and services to bottom up approaches that stress empowerment of all in decisions that affect their lives. In this respect, they allow for broader opinions and voices to enter the debate on local issues, helping to address the needs of those who may have been previously marginalised. In this way, as well as improving local infrastructure, deepening democracy and improving service delivery, reforms address gender equality in local political life and promote equality in local decision-making<sup>4</sup>. Despite these changes, many cultural and governance practices may be deep-rooted and difficult to change, facing resistance from traditional views and ways of organising political life. Even though women at the local level are very active in small-scale economic matters and in the household, it may be the case that there is a continued perception that political roles are appropriate for men only<sup>5</sup>.

In the words of the IULA's Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government:

Local government is in a unique position to contribute to the global struggle for gender equality and can have a great impact on the status of women and the status of gender equality around the world, in its capacities as the level of governance closest to the citizens<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ministry of Women's Affairs 2009.*Neary Rattanak III*, Five Year Strategic Plan 2009-2013.

<sup>4</sup>Kim and Ojendal (2012)

<sup>5</sup>Frieson 2001, cited in Kim and Ojendal (2012)

<sup>6</sup>Byrne and Spencer 2005, cited in Kim and Ojendal (2012)

The success of democratic decentralisation may be seen to rest upon the involvement of all indecision-making and political life, with the interests of women vital to this. According to the UNDP Status Report 2010, local governments are the most significant political arena for the poorest people in the region, and they also have an important role in encouraging women's political participation. However, decentralisation does not automatically lead to greater involvement of women in politics, and some deep-seated problems may have to be overcome if women are to both participate and have a full and effective voice in local decision-making.

### **III- International experience of promotion of women in political life through decentralisation reform**

In the Asia-Pacific region, we can see that in some national governments in the region women have reached the top level of leadership, but there is still a long way to go to improve women's representation in decision-making roles at lower levels of government. For example, by 2010, women's representation in the highest tier of sub-national government, provincial and regional assemblies<sup>7</sup> (Figure 1) was only 37% in India, 30% in Afghanistan, 29.4% in New Zealand, 27.8 % in Australia and 23.8% in Viet Nam. At lower levels, the figure is less: in Afghanistan 15%, Philippines 19.8% and New Zealand 16%<sup>8</sup> (See Annex, Figure 2).

The achievements of decentralization in empowering women is influenced by the political environment of the country and the interaction among various actors at the local level. In Cambodia, although there has been a significant increase in women's participation at different levels and in different institutions of government, including the Senate, National Assembly, Capital, Provincial, Municipal, District, Khan and Commune/Sangkat Councils and Board of Governors, women representatives in the executive branch of government remain low. In 2008, the Prime Minister initiated an affirmative action policy for appointments of women as Deputy Governors in every Province and District. There are currently no women serving as provincial governors, but 20% of deputy provincial governors and 29% of deputy district governors are

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<sup>7</sup> UNDP Women in Local government in Asia Pacific Status Report (2010)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

women<sup>9</sup>. At the lowest level of sub-national authority, the commune, numbers of women holding seats has increased, however the total is still low. In the first mandate of commune council elections in 2002 the percentage of women in the commune councils was 9.4%, and 15.1% in the second mandate. The integration of the Cambodian policy on SNDD, involving refocusing all aspects of sub-national governance, meant that in the third mandate the percentage of women was up to 17.7% <sup>10</sup> (Figure 3). However, it is particularly of note that women are not well-represented in senior decision-making positions at the national level and in provincial and district administrations<sup>11</sup>.

Although the participation of women at all levels of decision-making has increased, leadership in Cambodia remains principally male. Many questions remain about women's participation at the sub-national level, such as how do women in political power contribute to better local level development, especially in regards to issues related to women and children? Do these women in power have any difficulties performing their duties? And what can be done to better promote their role?

#### **IV- Policy and legislation framework**

The Royal Government Cambodian (RGC) has made it a priority to empower women at all levels throughout the country, especially in rural areas, in an effort to improve living standards and encouraging the participation of women in decision-making. Several laws have been developed and adopted to achieve gender equality, empower women and ensure that their rights, freedoms, and welfare are protected.

Gender quality and gender considerations are enshrined in legislation and policy. Some of these include:

- The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia 1993 states that *“women and men have equal rights including human rights in all aspects of socio-economic, cultural and participate actively in political lives of the people of Cambodia”*.

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, July 2012, Women's Political Participation in Cambodia : Policy/mechanism, Progress and lesson learnt

<sup>10</sup> NEC Updated, 2012

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2012), Women's Political Participation in Cambodia: Policy/mechanism, Progress and lesson learnt

- The RGC's Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Empowerment, Equity and Efficiency Phase II (2009-2013) states that "Women are backbone of the economy and society" and recognizes the interconnection between gender equality, women's roles, poverty reduction and socio-economic development of the country. The fourth rectangle is capacity development and human resource development. This is divided into four development commitments, reflecting the RGC's priorities on gender equality and women's empowerment across all sectors, such as strengthening the quality of education, enhancing health services, implementation of gender policy, and implementation of National Population Policy<sup>12</sup>.
- The National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2006-2010 and its update for 2009-2013. The NSDP emphasizes the necessity of implementing gender policy and mainstreaming gender. In addition to providing employment opportunities, promoting education and skills training for women and protecting the rights of women in employment, a key task for RGC is to promote women's role and capacity in politics and decision making by increasing the ratio of women at all government levels and conducting advocacy at all levels throughout the country<sup>13</sup>.
- The five year strategy (2009-2013) from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, called *Neary Rattanak III*. It focuses on five strategic areas, including promoting women in governance and decision-making, along with a gender mainstreaming program for nation policy, reform programs and sectors and a set of cross-cutting interventions.

Cambodia is a signatory to a variety of conventions and international agreements. These agreements commit the RGC to promoting gender equality in all sectors. Priorities are given to eliminating gender disparities in education, health, economy, legal protection and decision making<sup>14</sup>. They include:

- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1990

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<sup>12</sup>Ministry of Women's Affairs (2009). *Neary Rattanak III*, Five Year Strategic Plan 2009-2013.

<sup>13</sup>Ministry of Women's Affairs (2009). *Neary Rattanak III*, Five Year Strategic Plan 2009-2013.

<sup>14</sup>Ministry of Women's Affairs (2008). Cambodia Gender Assessment: "A Fair Share For Women", chapter 7: "Gender disparities in politics and Public decision making"



- Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) 1995
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the ASEAN Region 2004
- The Cambodia Millennium Development Goal (CMDGs). This commits the RGC to eliminate gender disparities in waged employment in all sectors, increase representation of women in decision making and public administration, and eliminate of all forms of violence against women<sup>15</sup>.

## **V- Promoting the role of women through decentralisation legislation**

Through the 2001 Law on Administrative Management of the Commune/Sangkat, the RGC established the commune level as the key level for democratic development. This law allowed a provision for a woman councillor to take charge of women's and children's affairs. The commune/sangkat council is also to select a woman to be village chief or deputy chief. The strategic framework for D&D in 2005 represented the second phase of the D&D reform, carried through with the 2008 Organic Law which allowed for indirectly elected councils at district/*khan* and provincial/municipal levels. The strategic framework recognizes the importance of gender considerations when it states "the reform will introduce systems and procedures and ensure that people, especially women, vulnerable groups and indigenous minorities can participate in decision-making at Capital/Provincial and Municipal/ District/ Khan and Commune/Sangkat levels"<sup>16</sup>. A number of articles in the 2008 Organic Law deal with gender issues and clearly articulate the principle of gender equality and women's rights and empowerment. The law provides the basis for the promotion of women's roles, participation and representation in politics and decision-making at the Capital/ Province/Municipal/District/Khan and Commune/Sangkat levels<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Planning (2005) 'Achieving the Cambodia Millennium Development Goals Update; Royal Government of Cambodia.

<sup>16</sup> National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD) 2010-2019

<sup>17</sup> National Program for NSDD 2010-2019, Annex 2, Gender Mainstreaming for Sub-national Administrations

Furthermore, the RGC has established a 10 year timeframe under the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (SNDD) 2010-2019 in order to enhance women's role in sub-national level and promoting gender equality, stating that SNDD could only be effective and sustainable when the gender equality issue is adequately addressed. Both the national program and its first 3-year Implement Plan (IP3) have their own gender strategies with the overall goal to achieve a gender-responsive local government as well as local development that promotes gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of the SNDD process<sup>18</sup>.

Gender Mainstreaming can be defined as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is also a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality<sup>19</sup>.

At the sub-national level, the Provincial Departments of Women's Affairs (PDoWA) represents the Provincial Rural Development Committee and the Executive Committee (ExCom) with the mandate to support gender mainstreaming within their province. Gender focal points have been designated in provincial line departments<sup>20</sup>. Women and children's consultative committees (WCCCs) were established as a sub-national mechanism to promote gender equality and empowering women and children under the Provincial and District Councils. WCCCs carry out all important roles to provide suggestions and recommendations to the council, Board of Governors, Governors, and other committees of the council on issues related

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<sup>18</sup> Interview's Result with NCDD advisor Ms. Henny Anderson and Mary Sok, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012

<sup>19</sup> United Nation Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 1997. Available at:  
<http://www1.aucegypt.edu/src/engendering/definitions.html#Gender%20Mainstreaming>

<sup>20</sup> National Program for NSDD 2010-2019, Annex 2, Gender Mainstreaming for Sub-national Administrations

to gender equality and women's and children's issues within the authority, function and duties of the Council<sup>21</sup>.

Gender mainstreaming in decentralisation and de-concentration reform occurred through the following efforts, implemented originally through the Seila<sup>22</sup> programme at the provincial, district and commune level:

- Cooperation with line ministries to mainstream gender into guidelines and local development policies;
- Cooperation and advocacy with municipal/provincial, district and commune levels to mainstream gender in policies and guidelines;
- Strengthening the capacity of all provincial departments to implement, monitor and evaluate mainstreaming of gender;
- Establishment of gender networks with implementing institutions at the local advocacy level with political parties and the Ministry of Interior to increase the number of women governors, deputy governors, district, and village chiefs;
- Preparation of prospective women candidates for 2007 commune election; and
- Cooperation with coordinating agencies of the programme in training programs of new women members.

## **VI- Successes of decentralisation reform in promoting the role of women in political life**

Despite traditional views of women's roles and their involvement in political life, evidence is that this is changing and that culture does not just remain static. International assistance flowing into the country, democratic principles and continued post-conflict changes have transformed some old norms<sup>23</sup>. In the words of Stivens "modernisation in Asia is a gendered process"<sup>24</sup>. Political representation and decision-making roles for women and gender equality

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<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, July 2012, Women's Political Participation in Cambodia : Policy/mechanism, Progress and lesson learnt

<sup>22</sup> The Seila Program was an aid mobilization and coordination framework for decentralization and de-concentration reforms, originated in 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Kim and Ojendal (2012)

<sup>24</sup> Stivens (2010), cited in Ojendal and Kim (2012)

have been promoted by international aid organisations and NGOs throughout the post-conflict era, particularly in rural areas. This has produced a more flexible political climate, but developmental aims require women to play a key role and this in turn has led to “more demand as well as space for female leaders”<sup>25</sup>.

Women’s participation at all levels has increased, and in addition to elected commune chiefs and councillors, women are now active at all levels of government and serve as commune focal persons, village chiefs and village assistants<sup>26</sup>. Women are seen as better aware and more confident to express their needs and concerns.

Women in political life and positions of power at the local level are generally seen to be more committed to the household economy and community social affairs than their male counterparts, and are less prone to discriminate between people from different political parties, and are transparent. Furthermore, decentralisation has allowed women to better know their rights and access capacity building programmes and exercises. This works towards producing demand for equality and far greater pro-activity in social and political affairs. NGOs and the media are seen as key avenues for the enhancement of gender awareness. This has helped make commune councils and people at the local level more aware of gender rights, including equality of women in all aspects of life and in different sectors. This has made older norms more obsolete and assisted women who have a strong individual personality, are educated and committed and able to effectively make contact with other organisations and layers of government<sup>27</sup>.

## **VII- Key obstacles preventing women from fully participation in politics**

Though the statistics show there has been an increasing degree of female representation at various levels in legislative and executive bodies through direct and indirect elections<sup>28</sup>, the

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<sup>25</sup>Kim and Ojendal (2012)

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

continued limited participation of women in political and decision-making processes poses a serious challenge to democracy, and means that women may not be adequately represented in decision-making processes. There are many factors undermining women's participation and influence in politics.

### **1- Political party priorities**

Although women are increasingly utilised and respected inside different political parties, the electoral system at the local level in Cambodia is done through the party list. This requires women to be placed high enough to attract the popular vote and links their advancement and status very closely to political party processes.

Commitment to the party is the most critical pre-condition to an active role in politics. This can be achieved through long service to the party, important in the context of the party list system, which allows women to be placed as priority candidates, which is key for political advancement<sup>29</sup>, and decision-making power in the party may depend on commitment and popularity amongst the people. Therefore, a woman candidate who has worked to earn the trust and effectively networks and represents the needs of her constituents is likely to also rise more quickly through the party system. It is vital the political parties are more pro-active in implementing gender policy in future to allow women a stronger role. However, political parties may feel that they find it difficult to find qualified women candidates to put at the top of the list. Young, qualified and high-educated women may not wish to work at the local level.

### **2- Social issues and lack of support**

The influence of tradition and stereotypes of women and cultural norms in Cambodia has also greatly influenced women's participation in political life. In Cambodia, power and politics has been strongly associated with male characteristics, and this has tended to marginalised women. Women are seen as primarily involving themselves in household tasks. Most provincial women are very attached to the traditional cultural code *Chbab Srey* or 'the law for women', which describes the orientation of women's duties towards their husband and home. This means that

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<sup>29</sup>Kim and Ojendal (2012)

for women who may participate in politics, this means a double workload as they must handle not only their political office but also most of the household tasks. There may be continuing misconceptions that women cannot work as well as men, are weak, cannot deal with issues of security in communes, and cannot undertake other tasks seen as men's work<sup>30</sup>, and these misconceptions must be changed if women are to play a fuller role in local level political life.

Often there is a lack of support for women to become involved in politics. This also feeds into a dynamic where women lack the self-confidence and capacity to serve as high ranking local leaders, reinforcing the problem of initial lack of support. It is important that husbands and male relatives are actively involved in the process of promoting gender relations to ensure that female leaders are more fully appreciated by their male counterparts or commune councils or within their political party. Female leaders not only lack sufficient support from men, but also occasionally from other women too<sup>31</sup>. According to an interview with the National Committee for sub-national Democratic Development, "The topic of gender is not really welcome in discussions with men; male officials also usually feel uncomfortable to put the promotion of women on the table<sup>32</sup>". However, in some ways this dynamic is changing. Many young women in Cambodia travel far to study or work, and this makes them more independent and better able to fend for themselves confidently outside the confines of their families.

### **3- Education**

To effectively perform their duties, women also need a certain level of education and experience. Literacy and a sound understanding of administrative practices are both of key importance to allow for more equal gender relations and to enable women commune council members to fully understand issues such as financial management, planning and budgeting, which are key to delivery of effective local services. Where literacy and capacity is lacking, this represents one of the most important factors that explains the imbalance of gender relations in Cambodia. It not only affects the daily work of women, but also the confidence they need to perform their work.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Prak and Schuette (2007), Gender and Women Politics in Cambodia, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Cambodia.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Ms. Henny Anderson and Ms. Mary Sok, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012

Though there have been signs of improvement for sending girls to school, the high drop-out rate in secondary education is still considered as a big challenge, particularly in rural and indigenous areas. According to NIS<sup>33</sup>, the drop out for rural girls at grades 7-11 is higher than for boys.

#### **4- Economic independence**

The lack of economic independence of women is also a fundamental hindrance in developing equality and fair relations between men and women. Women in provincial areas are often denied access to the type of resources that they require in order to play a full role in political life. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where the concept of women participating in politics is not highly welcome or recognised. Economic independence must start from the household level, but must also be within political parties if women are to play a fuller role. Lack of financial resources means that when women voice their priorities, this may be rendered futile unless there is material support from NGOs, the commune/*sangkat* fund or from the central government<sup>34</sup>.

#### **5- Implementation of policy**

Despite many laws and policies that promote gender equality, in reality although Cambodia has an extensive and well-documented framework of national legislation and international conventions upholding women's rights and status, implementation and enforcement has been slow. In general, gender policy and legislation is not yet fully understood and promotion of gender issues on-the-ground is not in accordance with the legislation and policy in place. A clearly defined role and better lines of communication between the commune, the political party and the individual could better assist the implementation of the policy<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Education Statistics Database, 2009-2010, MoEYS, Cambodia

<sup>34</sup> Kim and Ojendal (2012)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Instead of following national guidelines, implementation may rather follow policies of political parties. Full implementation may also be a problem of lack of resources at the local level to fully address problems in the community, such as domestic violence and poverty. Overall, policies are in place but are held up by problems of implementation due to ongoing effects of social norms, lack of financial support and the need for more political will to fully push through these policies<sup>36</sup>.

## **6- Articulating voice in local decision-making**

Having women in positions of power alone is not sufficient, their voice must be heard and they must be able to behave autonomously and have their interests understood and acted upon in political debate. In this regard, a strong commitment to work on issues of importance for the community can build the popularity of women commune councillors and allow them to be more strongly favoured by their own party. Effectively dealing with local issues gives women legitimacy amongst the community, but there is the risk that this may just result in women's roles being relegated to the areas where they are seen to have traditional influence, such as domestic violence, children's issues, social welfare and household issues. Breaking this pattern will be key to the overall legitimacy of women's voices at local levels. In sum, being popular amongst local people, working in a transparent manner and being committed to the community are the key factors that promote women's political voices at the local level. Therefore, "women's *de facto* ability to effectively articulate their responsibilities is through the possible trust and cooperation they are awarded from other male dominated fora ... that collectively and possibly unknowingly control/dominate the discourse"<sup>37</sup>. Women's presence in positions of leadership is also rare. Often, when women are selected to become involved in local politics, their position is very low. When they work in commune councils, they often play a support rather than a full decision-making role<sup>38</sup>.

Overall, the key factors that allow women to fully articulate their opinions at the local level are:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Interview Result with NCDD advisor Ms. Henny Anderson and Ms. Mary Sok, 14<sup>th</sup> December



- Access to the financial resources and decision-making powers stipulated in the law;
- Support and trust from their parties, helped when they have a long association with the party;
- A sufficient level of education and experience, and improvements in capacities in leadership, financial management, etc;
- Self-confidence; and
- Popularity, good standing and trust from the community<sup>39</sup>.

### **VIII- Role of parliamentarians in enhancing women role in SNDD**

Parliaments can play a strong role in promoting women's role in political life by using their legislation, representation and oversight roles. Approximately 93% of senators are elected by the commune councillors and the representation role of parliamentarians gives Senators a key role in building up the capacity of commune councillors. However, it is important that parliament listens to and works more closely with all the people in the community not only women in order to fully understand the dynamics which prevent women from playing a full role in political life<sup>40</sup>. Women need more support from both family and the community to fully participate in their work, and parliament can play a role in listening to all the people in their community and attending public consultations specifically designed to uncover gender issues. Parliamentarians can play their role by reaching out to women in their constituencies and through public consultation exercises, encouraging them to join meetings, supporting them to speak out, providing training and information and encouraging them to take over leadership. All these steps take time but are essential in order to achieve real participation.

Full implementation of laws and policy is a continuing problem, and parliamentarians should examine and revise existing laws to ensure that women are given attention and priority. For example, the Commune/Sangkat election law could include a component for gender, and there

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<sup>39</sup>Kim and Ojendal (2012)

<sup>40</sup> Interview's Result with NCDD advisor Ms. Henny Anderson and Ms. Mary Sok, 14<sup>th</sup> December

should be an understanding of how to work with Technical Working Groups inside ministries to implement the laws that already include gender components<sup>41</sup>.

In addition, parliament should closely study budget allocations for women's programmes and whether this budget is adequate for their remits and to answer the needs of women at the sub-national level. Parliamentarians have to use their powers in order to persuade provincial governors to conduct gender awareness exercises, capacity building and advocacy to ensure that officials at the provincial level fully understand gender concepts and the importance of including women in all activities or programmes that relate to gender<sup>42</sup>. The specialized commission of the parliaments should build up a stronger relationship with the line government ministries and some NGOs that put in place similar programmes to receive updates on information and problems concerning gender mainstreaming at both national and sub-national levels.

## **IX- Conclusion**

In Cambodia, the situation of women has improved; however, there are still obstacles to be overcome in allowing women a fuller role in political life. In one sense, promoting women's status in a society is like a jigsaw puzzle – we need all the pieces to fit together in order to have a complete picture. The first piece lies in educating women to obtain reasonable knowledge of their roles and potential. The second piece of the puzzle is establishing the political will to empower women and follow up on the implementation of gender legislation. Another crucial part is support from men; they need to change their judgment toward female partners, both at home and in the workplace, in order to work towards promoting a more substantial political role for women. Last but not least, women must also have confidence in themselves to improve their level and their voice in society. Overall, it appears women's success in political life is predicated on a number of factors: political party priorities, individual personality, history within the community and their individual attitudes<sup>43</sup>. Overall, women are seen to be successful

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<sup>41</sup> Information obtained through interview with Mr. The Chunkhank , Deputy General Director of Ministry of Women's Affairs, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

<sup>42</sup> Information obtained through interview with Ms. Henny Anderson and Ms. Mary Sok, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012

<sup>43</sup> Kim and Ojendal (2012)

in political life where they generate public support in the community, which then promotes their role in the party. This must be backed up by well-implemented public policy and legislation<sup>44</sup>.

## **X- Issues for Further Consideration**

- Young people are the primary targets for embedding gender equality considerations, and mainstreaming gender issues should be conducted from the grassroots upwards. The first step to empowering women to play a full role in all aspects of society is to improve their access to education and to promote schooling for girls to secondary level and beyond. This is a vital pre-condition for substantial change. MoWA have advocated for more attention to be paid to the curricula for girls, and integrating the promotion of women's rights and voice in the national curricula.
- Education is also a key for men to fully understand the needs of women and gender issues. At present, men in society and in positions of power frequently do not fully understand gender concepts and ways in which they can promote women's positive role in political life. Advocacy efforts could target this.
- The next step is for women to have increased access to training on issues that will allow them to play a stronger political role. These include the administration process, local governance and knowledge of key rights and policies. At present, some female councillors expressed that they do not have a full understanding of the political system, which prevents them from expressing their ideas or comments toward the issues they are working with.
- Education and capacity are important, but for women to be successful in playing a political role at the local level they must also be well-respected, patient and generous, treat people without discrimination and rise above pure party politics<sup>45</sup>. In terms of advocating on issues such as health, education and conflict resolution, women are seen as more successful and effective than men. It is vital that women are intelligent, educated and well-known in the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Kim and Ojendal (2012)

community, can deal with local situations well, and where candidates such as this exist they should be prioritised by political parties on the list.

- Women's representation in local politics is strongly dependent on political party priorities. Quotas in political and administrative institutions could be suitable steps to improve women's representation, but this must go alongside other efforts to strengthen their capacities and voice.
- Economic independence of women is an important contributing factor to increase women's participation in politics. Financial stability enables women to choose what they want to do. More specifically, female commune councillors need to get funding for projects and services that they propose in consultation with the local community in order to improve their political influence.
- Support from men and families are key. This involves trying to encourage women to participate in commune council meetings and to put forward their views and ideas.
- Information practices should be strengthened, and parliament can play a key role in this. This is especially important for women who live in rural areas, who need to be made more aware of the kind of rights, laws and policy that exists to support their life and their participation in social and political arenas.
- Donors should continue to provide technical assistance to help the government in developing more effective mechanisms to mainstream gender at the sub-national level.
- Complaint mechanisms should continue to improve their transparency and accountability, so that women's problems can be addressed, heard more widely and effectively solved.

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## **Interviews**

Interview result with Ms. Men Vannavy, CPWP Program Coordinator, dated 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2012, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Interview with Henny Anderson and Mary Sok, NCDD consultants, dated 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2012, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Interview's with Mr. The Chunkhank , Deputy General Director of Ministry of Women's Affairs, dated 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2012. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

## Annex

### Representation of women in political life: Cambodian and international experience

**Figure 1: Comparison of National vs. sub-national Women's Political Representation as of October 2010**

Country	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Sub-national Women's Representation (%)
Afghanistan	27.3	30
Australia	27.3	28.10
India	10.8	37
New Zealand	33.6	29.40
Vietnam	25.8	22.14

*Source: Women in local government in Asia Pacific Status Report 2010, UNDP*

**Figure 2: Data for Women Elected Representatives in Rural Councils as of October 2010**

Country	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
	Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representative (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which women chairs/Heads of council (#)	Women Chairs/-Heads of Councils (%)
Afghanistan: Provincial	420	125	30	34	5	15
New Zealand: Regional, City and district councils	999	294	29.4	85	14	16
Philippines	NA	NA	NA	81	16	19.8

*Source: Women in local government in Asia Pacific Status Report 2010, UNDP*

**Figure 3: Commune/Sangkat Election in Cambodia**

Mandate and Year	Member of CCs		Commune Chief		First Deputy Chief		Second Deputy Chief	
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
2002	11,216	1,056(9.4%)	1621	42(2.6%)	1621	72(4.4%)	1621	86(5.3%)
2007	11,353	1,717(15.1%)	1621	67(4.1%)	1621	151(9.3%)	1621	131(8%)
2012	11459	2038(17.7%)	1633	96(5.8%)	1633	189(11.6%)	1633	151(9.2%)

*Source: NEC Updated, 2012*



**Figure 4: Percentage of Women in Provincial, District and Commune People's Councils during Terms 1999-2004, 2004-2011 and 2011-2016**

	<b>1994-2004</b>	<b>2004-2011</b>	<b>2011-2016</b>
<b>Provincial level</b>	22.33%	23.80%	25.70%
<b>District level</b>	20.12%	22.94%	24.62%
<b>Commune level</b>	16.10%	19.53%	27.71%

*Source: Jean Munro, (2012). Women's representation in leadership in Vietnam. UNDP*