

Encouraging and Supporting Women's Participation in Cambodian Local Politics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been compiled by FCM International for use by the National League of Communes/Sangkats (NLC/S) in Cambodia and its members. It is intended to provide a concise overview of the current trends in women’s participation in Cambodian local politics, to highlight challenges that women face in accessing this decision making sphere, and to offer conclusions from topical literature that can ultimately inform strategies for encouraging and supporting female commune candidates.

The report is organized into four parts: Part I introduces the general topics addressed throughout and gives examples of the distinctive impact women make on local development through politics; Part II describes the trends in women’s political participation in Cambodia and across Southeast Asia, and emphasizes the main barriers that they face; Part III summarizes best-case practices from major organizations for facilitating participation; and Part IV offers a list of potential partners and resources that NLC/S can look to for support—including local and international organizations working in the areas of governance and women’s empowerment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I.....	3
Introduction.....	3
The impact of women in local politics: what difference does it make?	3
PART II.....	4
Trends in national-level politics.....	4
An overview of women’s participation in local government.....	6
Barriers to political participation	8
Other socioeconomic trends	9
PART III.....	10
Best case practices from the literature.....	10
PART IV.....	15
Potential partners for collaboration.....	15
APPENDICES.....	17
Appendix A. Full summary of results of UNESCAP questionnaires on women’s impact on local government.....	17
Appendix B. Four key strategies for improving women’s participation in local government in Asia and the Pacific, as suggested by UNESCAP’s research.....	25
Appendix C. Terms of reference to produce articles showcasing women in politics.....	27
REFERENCES.....	29
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES.....	30

PART I

Introduction

Although the right of women to actively participate in government has been formally recognized in Cambodia's democratic framework and significant progress has been made in including women in formal political processes since the 1990s, traditional gender roles prevail in many commune governance structures—preventing women from taking on fully participatory decision making roles. From a lack of training to unfavourable work environments, a number of additional obstacles remain. However, many organizations in the country are studying this phenomenon, as well as encouraging and implementing gender mainstreaming and equality programs. They offer a solid base of information and recommendations for best practices, while socioeconomic trends suggest that women are steadily catching up to men in literacy and workforce participation.

The impact of women in local politics: what difference does it make?

The goal of including women in decision making at a local level reflects the increasing value international organizations and many governments are placing on gender equality—but it has significant practical implications as well. Women in politics make a markedly different and overwhelmingly positive impact on local development than does a system dominated by men (UNESCAP 2001). UNESCAP's comparative report on women in local government in Asia and the Pacific attempted to address this topic empirically by summarizing questionnaires sent to local female politicians in the thirteen studied countries. The results indicated that women:

- Have a greater sense of the social issues and the well-being and welfare of their communities and factor these into the decision-making process
- Promote policies and activities which strengthen communities
- Encourage participation
- Emphasize the importance and the practice of good communication with the community
- Have a different approach to the way their local authority is governed
- Develop a team approach
- Set different priorities
- Bring mediation skills, clear goal setting, multitasking and practicality to their work
- Are dedicated, responsible, and practice what they preach and show a great deal of spirit
- Stimulate and encourage other women to be part of development (UNESCAP 2001, 46)

For a more comprehensive summary of the questionnaire's results, please see [Appendix A](#).

PART II

Trends in national-level politics

Although the national political sphere differs in many ways from local commune politics, trends in women taking positions at the national level reflects a changing attitude towards women in decision making roles. These female politicians can provide strong examples for women at the local level, as well as support policies and programs that benefit them.

Cambodia

The proportion of seats held by women in parliament increased more than twofold between 2004 and 2011. Although some data is missing, it is clear that the proportion of women in ministerial-level positions also increased during this time.

Table IIa: Trends in female participation in national government (%) in Cambodia, 2004-2011 (World Bank)

Indicator	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Proportion of seats held by women in parliament	9.8	9.8	9.8	19.5	16.3	21.1	21.1	20.3
Proportion of women in ministerial-level positions	-	7.1	-	-	6.9	-	9.7	-

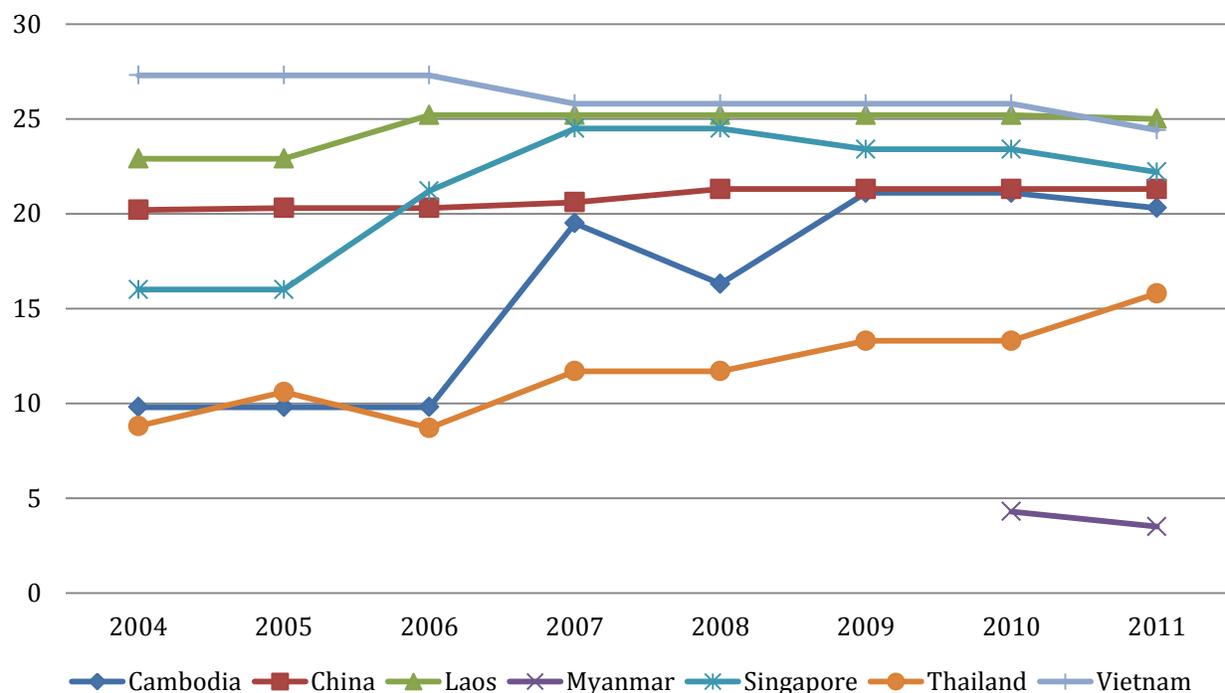
Southeast Asia and China

As of 2011, Cambodia had a slightly lower proportion of parliamentary seats belonging to women than did China, Laos, Singapore and Vietnam. However, the increase in female representatives since 2004 has been much higher than in any of the latter countries, and remains ahead of Thailand and far ahead of Myanmar.

Table IIb: Trends in the proportion of seats held by women in parliament (%) in China and selected countries of Southeast Asia, 2004-2011 (World Bank)

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Cambodia	9.8	9.8	9.8	19.5	16.3	21.1	21.1	20.3
China	20.2	20.3	20.3	20.6	21.3	21.3	21.3	21.3
Laos	22.9	22.9	25.2	25.2	25.2	25.2	25.2	25.0
Myanmar	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.3	3.5
Singapore	16.0	16.0	21.2	24.5	24.5	23.4	23.4	22.2
Thailand	8.8	10.6	8.7	11.7	11.7	13.3	13.3	15.8
Vietnam	27.3	27.3	27.3	25.8	25.8	25.8	25.8	24.4

Chart Iia: Trends in the proportion of seats held by women in parliament (%) in China and selected countries of Southeast Asia, 2004-2011 (World Bank)

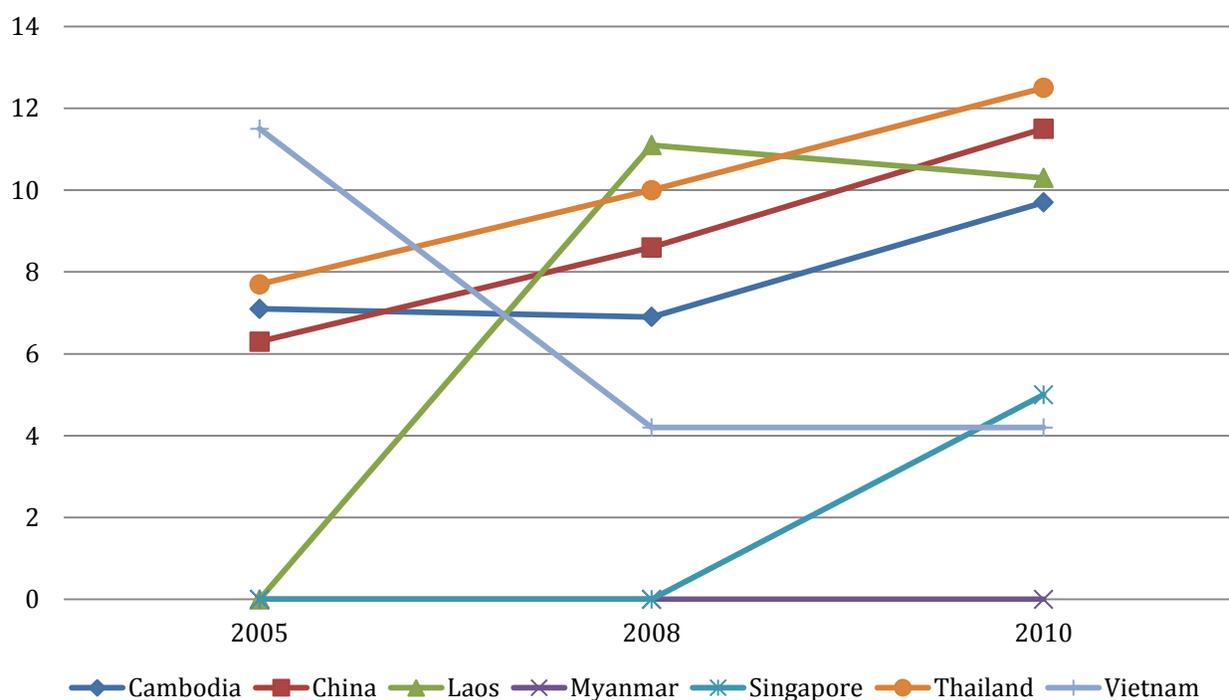


As of 2010, the proportion of women in ministerial-level positions in Cambodia followed slightly behind the same in China, Laos and Thailand; it had also not grown as significantly as any of the other three since 2005. It was, however, ahead of Singapore and Vietnam, the latter of which actually experienced a significant decline since 2005.

Table Iic: Trends in the proportion of women in ministerial-level positions (%) in Cambodia, China and selected countries of Southeast Asia, 2005-2010 (World Bank)

Country	2005	2008	2010
Cambodia	7.1	6.9	9.7
China	6.3	8.6	11.5
Laos	0.0	11.1	10.3
Myanmar	-	0.0	-
Singapore	0.0	0.0	5.0
Thailand	7.7	10.0	12.5
Vietnam	11.5	4.2	4.2

Chart IIb: Trends in the proportion of women in ministerial-level positions (%) in Cambodia, China and selected countries of Southeast Asia, 2005-2010 (World Bank)



An overview of women’s participation in local government

UNESCAP’s comparative report on women in local government in Asia and the Pacific finds that local politics have generally been more accessible to women than positions at the level of central government, for the following reasons:

- local government being easier for women to fit into their lives along with family responsibilities and employment;
- local government being more accessible as there are more positions available and less competition for places than in central legislatures;
- reserved seats for women on local authorities (in some countries);
- more acceptance of women in city and community government as it is seen as an extension of women’s involvement in their communities (UNESCAP 2001, 3).

In Cambodia specifically, the fact that “commune elections constitute a relatively new level in the democratic system of governance ... in which men are not already entrenched” (Yip 2007), and that the qualifications for local positions are relatively low, has made it easier for Cambodian women to participate in politics.

Cambodian local elections

In 2012, 25.6% of the candidates put forward by political parties were women, although only 17.8% of commune seats ultimately went to these. Both indicators are higher than they were during the previous two elections in 2002 and 2007, and the proportion of women candidates who won seats is slightly larger than in 2007 and markedly larger than in 2002. Nevertheless, the disparity between the number of candidates and number of elected representatives who are women reflects the fact that women are typically placed lower on party lists.

Table IId: Trends in female commune candidates nominated by their political parties and elected (%) in Cambodia, 2002-2012 (COMFREL 2012, 8 and COMFREL 2007, 5)

Indicator	2002	2007	2012
Women candidates (% of total)	16.0	21.4	25.6
Elected women representatives (% of total)	8.0	14.6	17.8

Cambodian local politics

Many civil society organizations, such as Women for Prosperity (WFP), have encouraged and supported women running for local office in Cambodia, and there is growing support in communities for female candidates (Yip 2007).

Indeed, formal community participation processes typically include a large number of women. However, it is informal systems such as consultation and “invited participation” that are most effective at influencing decision-making; from these, women—as well as poorer households—are frequently excluded, while village elders and wealthier men take leadership roles. (The Asia Foundation 2012, 7-8). In the informal sphere, women are still largely subjected to a traditional hierarchical structure (The Asia Foundation 2012, 37).

According to interviews with local women representatives, low participation on their behalf is due to a lack of previous exposure to politics and to the types of roles the village assigns to them (The Asia Foundation 2012, 33). Although government policies have stipulated that there should be at least one woman in each village authority and one in every Planning and Budget Committee (PBC), these female representatives are generally treated as junior to their male colleagues and take on assisting, rather than leadership roles (The Asia Foundation 2012, 34-5).

Barriers to political participation

There are several reasons for why this phenomenon can be observed, and why women are either discouraged from entering politics or find it difficult to operate in that type of work environment.

***Chbab Srey* and traditional perspectives on women**

In Khmer society, the influence of the traditional code of conduct for women, the *Chbab Srey*, has waned slightly in recent years but nevertheless remains strong. The *Chbab Srey*, along with the *Chbab Proh* for men, is taught as part of primary school curricula and provides guidelines that enforce different roles for the two genders. Women are generally considered subordinate to men and are required to stay home, as well as to speak quietly and be well-mannered in order not to reflect poorly on their husbands and families (Walsh 2007, 9-10). These customary laws are in many ways at odds with the requirements of political position, which is why even the female representatives in local government are often treated—and feel—more like assistants than leaders.

Lack of support for women in politics

Women councillors often do not receive support from their families, and thus must balance household and childcare responsibilities with their workload, putting considerable strain on their ability to participate effectively. Local female representatives also describe feeling isolated and marginalized on commune councils (ADB 2008). According to a report by the Asian Development Bank, women councillors requested more “moral support,” “a network of solidarity,” and “a network of mutual consultations and problem solving” (ADB 2008) among female colleagues.

According to the Asia Foundation, “[t]he number of women elected to office also depends on the parties’ commitment to increasing the number of women candidates and positioning them higher up the party lists” (Yip 2007).

Literacy

Literacy has important implications for women’s participation in decision making because it is typically required of local political candidates to be literate. The gap between the proportion of young females and young males who are literate has tightened since 2004, and is significantly smaller than that between adult females and adult males. Although the expected years of schooling for females increased by 1.5 years between 2004 and 2011, it is still almost a year lower than the expected years of schooling for males.

Table II: Gender trends in education and literacy indicators (%) in Cambodia, 2004-2011
(World Bank)

Indicator	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Literacy rate, adult female	64.1	-	-	-	70.9	65.9	-	-
Literacy rate, adult male	84.7	-	-	-	85.1	82.8	-	-
Literacy rate, youth female	78.9	-	-	-	85.5	85.9	-	-
Literacy rate, youth male	87.9	-	-	-	89.4	88.4	-	-
Expected years of schooling, female	9.1	9.4	9.6	9.8	9.9	-	10.5	10.6
Expected years of schooling, male	10.6	10.7	10.9	11.1	11.2	-	11.5	11.5

Lack of suitable training

The Asian Development Bank reports female councillors in Cambodia feeling that commune training sessions were difficult to understand, requesting “support to develop their skills, boost their confidence, develop and strengthen their knowledge and capacity to perform their public duties” (ADB 2008). They also asked that skill building be tailored appropriately to their level of education.

Adverse work environments

UNESCAP’s comparative report finds that women are often hindered by environments in which the style of work is geared more towards men. This is especially true if the nature of local politics is adversarial and if male politicians personally attack their female colleagues (UNESCAP 2001, 5).

Other socioeconomic trends

In order to better understand the role that women play in Cambodian political society, it is also useful to examine trends in their participation in the economic sphere.

Workforce participation

Females represented roughly half of the labour force through the years 2004 to 2010. Approximately 80% of women of working age were participating in the labour force throughout this time, growing slightly between 2004 and 2010 but not quite at the level of men (around 87%). The female unemployment rate was only slightly higher than the male unemployment rate in 2008, although it is not possible to analyze trends in this statistic due to missing data.

A higher proportion of employed females worked in agriculture in 2008 than did employed males, and a lower proportion of employed females worked in services than did employed males. A slightly higher proportion of women worked in industry than did men.

Table II: Gender trends in labour (%) in Cambodia, 2004-2010 (World Bank)

Indicator	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Employees in agriculture, female	-	-	-	-	75.0	-	-
Employees in agriculture, male	-	-	-	-	69.3	-	-
Employees in industry, female	-	-	-	-	9.0	-	-
Employees in industry, male	-	-	-	-	8.1	-	-
Employees in services, female	-	-	-	-	15.9	-	-
Employees in services, male	-	-	-	-	22.6	-	-
Labour force participation rate, female	78.0	79.0	80.0	81.0	81.9	81.8	81.8
Labour force participation rate, male	87.7	87.8	87.7	87.5	87.3	87.4	87.5
Labour force (%), female	49.1	49.3	49.5	48.7	50.1	49.9	49.9
Unemployment, female labour force	-	-	-	-	1.8	-	-
Unemployment, male labour force	-	-	-	-	1.5	-	-

PART III

Best case practices from the literature

The following is a summary of recommendations given by three major organizations supporting women’s local political participation, based on their research or programming experiences—VNG International’s LOGO South program, UNESCAP’s comparative analysis of 13 Asia-Pacific countries, and the Asian Development Bank’s Strengthening and Capacity Building project in Cambodia.

VNG International’s LOGO South programme experiences

According to the knowledge developed by VNG International through its LOGO South programme, “there are two ways of reaching gender sensitive leadership:

- 1) Create opportunities for women to become leaders and behave in a more gender sensitive way; and
- 2) Stimulate male leaders to become more gender sensitive” (VNG International 2010, 11).

This can be achieved, more specifically, by addressing the following factors:

- **Individual factors**—including women’s attitudes towards and interest in politics, their confidence in their own leadership abilities, and their level of education, income, professional experience and available time;
- **Institutional factors related to the organization of society, its norms and values**—including the level of support women get from their families, their ability to access skills

and leadership training, the existence of female role models and women's organizations, religious and cultural norms or expectations, and any violence that is perpetrated against women; and

- **Institutional factors related to the political system**—including voter registration procedures, the amount of information available to women concerning voting and running for political office, the extent of political party support for female candidates, the level of support for women participating in politics in general, and the favourability of working conditions (VNG International 2010, 11-2).

Factors adverse to women participating in local leadership can be reduced through practices such as:

- **Communication skills trainings**—such as sessions on public speaking, media relations and interpersonal communication;
- **Leadership skills trainings**—such as workshops on debating, negotiations, managing conflict, managing change, and team-building;
- **Relationship-building and networking trainings**—making sure female politicians are accountable to their constituencies and can work closely with civil society organizations;
- **Cultivating women role models**—ensuring that all of the strengths and skills associated with women, such as integrity and transparency, are highlighted;
- **Exchanging information internationally**—allowing female colleagues around the world to share knowledge and experiences, and to gain a sense of solidarity; and
- **Involving men**—engaging male political leaders as champions of female participation in decision making, by having them endorse female candidates, and by ensuring female politicians discuss issues in a manner that does not exclude men (VNG International 2010, 12-3).

As a result, VNG recommends the following actions for integrating a gender perspective in local government:

- **Municipal functions**—such as land-use planning, transport planning, economic development, and provisions for physical security—must take into account the unique needs of women and men
- **Organizational culture, working conditions, and attitudes towards clients** should be favourable to both women and men

- Policy should take into account the expertise and skills of women in the organization, as well as of men
- Programme deliverables should reflect attempts at gender mainstreaming
- Budget planning should take into account the different ways in which women and men spend money (so that resources are allocated in a way that is most amenable to the broader goal of development) and earn money (so that taxation systems do not unfairly disadvantage poor women, who generally earn less than men for the same work) (VNG International 2010, 19-20)

In order to achieve these goals,

- Analyses for strategic planning purposes must:
 - Refer to sex-disaggregated data;
 - Create and make use of links between planners, researchers and women’s advocacy organizations; and
 - Create and make use of training courses and operational manuals outlining women’s needs and interests.
- Consultative processes must:
 - Take an open and inclusive approach that appropriately target both women and men when disseminating information;
 - Employ appropriate means of facilitating discussions so that women’s views, as well as men’s, can be expressed; and
 - Empower citizens by allowing different groups, including women’s advocacy organizations, to interact and work with municipal officials.
- Projects must:
 - Use clear language, rather than jargon, to describe their goals and methods;
 - Identify local advocates, such as women’s organizations, to highlight pertinent issues for women and provide information on them to municipal officials;
 - Draw on relevant, practical experience; and
 - Not treat the objective of gender equality as separate from other project objectives, but rather integrate it as a standard consideration (VNG International 2010, 22).

UNESCAP comparative analysis of 13 countries in Asia and the Pacific

UNESCAP finds that three major factors affected women’s participation in local government in Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP 2001, 4-5):

1) Laws, practices and initiatives that ensure participation

- Statutory provisions guaranteeing the right of women to participate
- National policies and programs, such as specific departments for women's issues
- Requirements for women's participation at the local government level
- Role of NGOs in encouraging women's participation
- Training by NGOs, governments, political parties, and institutes
- Regional and international conferences providing support, training, and momentum
- Initiatives by women in local government to encourage other women to participate
- Data collection on women's participation

2) Barriers to participation

- Fundamental inequality, including a lack of access to basic rights such as education
- Political and economic instability, which affects the formation of democratic norms
- Discrimination against women in politics
- Political institution environments geared towards styles of work acceptable to men
- Campaign expenses, which can be prohibitive to women, especially if they earn less
- Lack of childcare provision and the timing of meetings

3) Impact of the political system on participation

- Local government systems, which are generally more open to women the more devolved they are from central government
- The type of electoral system; proportional representation party list systems¹ are most conducive to women being elected
- Ward representation is similarly more effective than at-large systems of election
- Quotas of reserved seats for women
- Access to and effectiveness of reserved seats
- Kinship ties, which can help women access positions but do not necessarily give them more power to influence politics in an otherwise adverse environment
- The extent to which political parties support women
- The adversarial nature of politics and environments in which male politicians personally attack female colleagues
- Corruption, which acts as a disincentive for women to participate in politics

¹ A *proportional representation system* is one in which the percentage of seats a party wins is equivalent to the percentage of total votes it has received.

For a comprehensive summary of suggested strategies based on UNESCAP's comparative report, please see [Appendix B](#).

Based on the research, the UNESCAP report concludes that regional support mechanisms are a "pivotal" tool in supporting women's participation in local government (UNESCAP 2001, 59). Actions at the regional level should be geared towards:

- 1) Establishing regional targets for increasing the number of women in local government within timeframes; monitoring progress achieved in meeting these targets and undertaking advocacy of gender mainstreaming and gender equality in local government as well as the transformative role that women play in local government.
- 2) Promoting exchange of experience and information as well as comparative research through networking among women in local government, governmental and non-governmental organisations, political parties and research and training institutes working on the issues of women and local government.
- 3) Promoting regional, sub-regional and country-based training programmes on gender mainstreaming, training of women already in local government as well as training women aspiring for positions in local government through organising regional and sub-regional conferences and workshops for women in local government to share strategies, network, provide training and support.
- 4) Catalysing resource mobilisation at the country level to support training and campaigns of women candidates in local governments (UNESCAP 2001, 59)

ADB's Strengthening and Capacity Building of Female Commune Councilors' Network project

In partnership with Women for Prosperity (WFP), The Asian Development Bank's project created twenty forums between 2005 and 2006 for female commune councillors in Cambodia to discuss "common experiences and concerns" (ADB 2008). The result among the 174 participating councillors was a visible boost in confidence and skills by the third forum. Participants also reported learning to using advocacy to gain support from their husbands and families in household work, and from male colleagues. They were invited to more council meetings and were able to introduce topics into the discussion, as well as to get men on the council to assist them in implementing strategies developed at the forums.

PART IV

Potential partners for collaboration

Local Cambodian women's rights and government groups

Name	Website
ADHOC Cambodian Human Rights & Development Association	adhoc-cambodia.org
CAD-C Gender and Development for Cambodia	
CCHR Cambodian Center for Human Rights	www.cchrcambodia.org
CPWP Cambodian Committee to Promote Women in Politics	cpwp.silaka.org
CWC Cambodian Women's Caucus	cambodianwomenscaucus.blogspot.ca
CWDA Cambodian Women's Development Agency	www.pub22.net/cwda
KYA Khmer Youth Association	www.kya-cambodia.org
Strey Khmer	streykhmer.org
WFP Women for Prosperity	wfp cambodia.org
WRC Women's Resource Centre	www.wrccambodia.org

International institutions supporting democracy and local government development

Name	Website
ADB Asian Development Bank	www.adb.org
APWLD Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development	www.apwld.org
Asia Foundation	asiafoundation.org
Diakonia	
NDI National Democratic Institute	www.ndi.org
Heinrich Böll Stiftung	www.kh.boell.org
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	www.kas.de/wf/en
Oxfam	www.oxfam.org

Government agencies and committees

Name	Website
CNCW Cambodian National Council for Women	cncw.gov.kh
MWA Ministry of Women's Affairs	www.mwa.gov.kh

International women's groups

Name	Website
CAPWIP Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics	www.capwip.org
ICRW International Center for Research on Women	www.icrw.org

Other organizations

Name	Website
SILAKA	www.silaka.org

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Full summary of results of UNESCAP questionnaires on women's impact on local government

(UNESCAP 2001, 46-52)

The difference made by women

Research has found that women in local government believe they make a difference as women leaders; they bring a different style to local government; and they consciously approach the job in a different way. Many also believe that increasing the number of women in local government will “accelerate the pace of change, promote collaborative styles of leadership and decision-making, broaden perspectives and move communities forward.”²

Evidence of this difference in countries in the Asia-Pacific region shows that women:

- Have a greater sense of the social issues and the well-being and welfare of their communities and factor these into the decision-making process
- Promote policies and activities which strengthen communities
- Encourage participation
- Emphasise the importance and the practice of good communication with the community
- Have a different approach to the way their local authority is governed
- Develop a team approach
- Set different priorities
- Bring the mediation skills that they have developed as mothers, the ability to have clear goals, to juggle many tasks at once, and to be practical.
- Are dedicated, responsible, and practice what they preach and show a great deal of spirit
- Stimulate and encourage other women to be part of development

A different agenda

Women's concerns and priorities are more likely than are those of men to centre around people's needs for safety and clean water supplies and for community facilities rather than just the traditional roads, rates and rubbish. Women also have a strong focus on women's issues and a human rights flavour in their goals for local government, suggesting that changes in local politics

² Jean Drage, 1997, Weaving a New Pattern: Women Political Leaders in Local Government, Local Government New Zealand Research Monograph Series Paper No. 6, p. 88.47

will lead to changes in society, less discrimination against women and greater flexibility in work and childcare. By bringing a grassroots perspective to local government, women make it more people orientated and closer to the community it serves. Some survey respondents suggested that:

- There are differences in the interests of female and male councillors in that women's interests focused on environmental issues, childcare, education and caring while men are more interested in construction, maintenance and planning for water supplies, sewerage, roads and urban development.
- Women are more concerned about the social implications of policies and give priority to issues which impact on people's lives such as employment, care of elderly, poverty elimination, the rights of women and children, education, health care and sanitation, family planning, quality of life and social support.
- Women are more concerned with social issues such as health services, poverty alleviation and community development. They also tended to work out the details and aim to achieve consensus on specific policies and programmes rather than to politicise issues.
- When dealing with the needs and priorities of women in planning city development, local government women not only take into account the physical considerations but they also consider harmony in art and culture, the quality of life, a healthy city, and environmental development. And in their involvement with their communities, it is suggested that women actually contribute more at all levels of politics than men.
- Women ensure a more democratic and transparent form of governance by standing on a unified platform with other women to pressure municipal government to present information such as the budget in detail
- Women give importance to issues that men find trivial, such as family and marriage disputes and dowry problems. They also feel they work from their heart as their own experiences help them understand the causes and nature of gender discrimination.
- There is also a belief that women's work in the home and with their children has made them more concerned than men are about aspects of health, cleanliness, water, sanitation, housing conditions and the environment.

A different style

The women suggest that they take a democratic approach to governance and management within their councils and with their communities, encouraging participation in decision-making. Their styles were described as being:

- More inclusive, collaborative and consultative: The style of some woman mayors was described as involving everyone, consulting and sharing power. Women also broaden the governance outlook and outcomes and they expect discipline from councillors. Women use more democratic forms of decision-making, preferring to consider, debate and discuss with their colleagues rather than resort to orders.
- More tolerant of different points of view: Women work around the problem and look at it more fully rather than taking a confrontational approach to it. They don't always have fixed views and prefer win-win solutions.
- More caring, people orientated and respectful: They facilitate opportunities for community representatives to make submissions to the council.
- Change focused, in particular wanting to clean up the dirty image of politics: This approach is based on honesty and an effort to create a corruption free society.
- More open, informative and professional: Some women issue regular newsletters to report on their activities and the major issues being dealt with in their local authority.
- More innovative and conscientious: Some women have made bold and pioneering strides. They are practical and will stick with issues and projects throughout and they can put themselves in the place of others. They also take effective decisions and demonstrate self-confidence.
- More persistent, persuasive, committed and unafraid of challenging the structures.

The impact of increasing the number of women

Successful and competent women act as role models and earn respect not only for themselves but also for women in general. Many women believe that being a role model helps demonstrate that women can participate effectively in local government. This in itself opens doors for more women. The range of issues considered by councils has also extended, council processes have changed because of different styles of women and community perceptions of the council have changed as a result of increased openness, accountability, breaking down the 'red tape' and a preparedness to listen. Some examples from the survey material suggest that:

- Women are particularly well-suited to coping with change itself and the diversity of issues that local government is now required to consider as their approach is distinctly different to that of many of their male colleagues. They have a strong sense of wanting to demonstrate a different way of 'doing' politics and not simply operating in the same way as many male politicians. These qualities, if possessed by significant numbers of people, have the capacity

to transform the local government environment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that male councillors and appointed staff have observed and learnt from the examples that have been set by women colleagues.

- Women have a greater understanding of equity issues and the need for more women decision-makers results in an increased number of women participating, gender equity policies being mainstreamed and a greater diversity of role models for women being seen.
- The increasing numbers of women in local government has had a positive impact on the improvement of women's position in society as it creates an increased understanding of conditions for women and children and leads to policies, projects and funding for development and to promotion of other women to decision-making positions.
- Once women reach decision-making positions in urban local governments, more concern is shown for the improvement of living and working conditions of women. Women's activities become favourable and are included in the allocation of budgetary funds to women's work.
- Women's status has improved with increasing participation of women and more women in elected positions. In particular, the concept of 'respect for men and disdain for women' is gradually changing.
- In a political climate in which opportunities have been opened up for women and minorities to participate, women have been able to take advantage of these to provide women's services.
- Women in large numbers have come out against atrocities on women, in defence of their traditional control over crucial resources such as water, forests and land, mass literacy drives and other issues. They are also coming out against ecological degradation, price rises and protests against repression.
- In supporting women's groups and being part of their programmes on health, cleanliness, environment, security and family issues, more women have become conscious of their own worth and ability.
- Women members participate more actively in women's issues – health, welfare, atrocities against women and violations of human rights.
- The environment in which local government operates has changed. It is more people friendly, more transparent and less corrupt. It has also changed in relation to the poor and women. Issues like familial disputes, dowry issues, domestic violence, mother-child healthcare, education opportunities, women's cooperatives, income earning and credit

programmes and emergency funds and relief in times of disaster have received special attention.

- For some women their most important achievement has been to make women more politically aware and active and to help them understand their political rights and capacity.
- Women's groups are working together collaboratively to promote women's participation in public life and the economic welfare of women.

The impact women have on their cities/communities

When asked what they had done to improve their local authorities women in the Asia and Pacific region had long lists. Some examples of programmes initiated, continued or supported include:

- Women's centres, youth centres, arts centres, community owned child care centres, playground projects, petitions to oppose development that would impact negatively on the district, safety councils, trusts to deal with unemployment, urban and community projects, campaigns to improve local hospital and health services, environment projects, pensioner housing, landscape projects, swimming pools, independent economic development projects, EEO projects, urban and community renewal programmes, a recreation review. Different processes were also initiated by some women in order to improve consultation, participation, planning, decision making, working as a team with council and develop a culture of cooperation and collaboration, changing the language and using more user friendly approaches
- Changes to council policies, land-use planning instruments and new and improved infrastructure, facilities and service. Specific projects relate to community services and facilities such as art galleries, parks, aquatic and sports centres, childcare and community centres. And apart from projects that involve their councils directly, women have had a significant influence on more broadly based initiatives through their work with community and business organisations or through their contacts and influence on state and federal committees and with state and federal politicians. Some of these projects are main street programmes, revitalisation of central business districts, obtaining a sexual assault counsellor for the town, community festivals, business enterprise centres, projects to build relationships with indigenous and non-indigenous communities, crime prevention, community safety and health programmes for older people.

- Gender equity policies have been implemented which provide for training and promotion of women employees and improve their working conditions, increase the number of women on advisory committees, consciousness raising and gender mainstreaming policies.
- Local programmes and projects for the improvement of the urban environment, farm economy, garden, field and fruit tree development and programmes to mobilise people in the construction of infrastructure, roads, electricity and safe water supply.
- The pace of civic construction has accelerated in order to provide basic and much needed facilities, water supplies, housing and controlling pollution. Cultural, educational and public health management projects have included a nine year compulsory education plan, welfare facilities, rest homes, libraries and centres for women's activities. Urban economic programmes have targeted outside investment for local projects which build community infrastructure and activities.
- Increased development to districts has occurred through completion of projects on time and these improvements have not gone unnoticed. This has helped to secure more federal and state funding for the district, created the capacity to do more and developed community pride as the district has won awards for this transformation.
- Developed proposals for programmes on energy and environmental concerns for women with the result that a recycled paper project has been set up to solve waste problems and increase the income in the community.
- The provision of clean water, waste management, city cleanliness has improved, street lighting provided, slum development, food packages for workers, programmes that address the needs of poor children, such as noon meal centres.
- Projects which improve the municipality and assist its residents, such as programmes for education and basic needs for internally displaced and a housing and resettlement programme. This has also included successfully fighting for a significant percentage of the city budget.
- Initiating and actively supporting public utility services such as provision of sanitary facilities, housing and drainage, and community services such as 51libraries and playgrounds. Setting up programmes such as labour camps, health initiatives for women and children and environmental conservation.

Support for other women

Women believe they have a responsibility to promote women's participation and improve the status of women generally. Many work actively to increase the numbers of women in this tier of government and to ensure that women's issues are kept high on the agenda. Descriptions of what they had done included:

- Running workshops for women interested in running for office and encouraging them to participate: As a resource for these workshops, suggestions were made for an information kit which outlines what local government is about, the importance of women in local government, how to campaign and what a councillor does. This kit could be distributed to women's groups and to individual women.
- Encouraging women to apply for positions in local government: In line with research evidence, women in this part of the world stand for local government because they are encouraged to do so. Most of them were already heavily involved in their communities, knew a great deal about local issues, had already earned a public profile for the work they have done and now wanted to move on to more formal public participation where they could influence decision-making. They are involved in recruiting more women and increasing the number of women in consultative roles on various committee and programmes.
- Promoting women as political leaders and supporting them once elected or appointed: This involves demystifying these positions, helping women feel more comfortable and helping them learn the ropes. Being prepared to be part of mentoring programmes also assists other women. Supporting the promotion of women in decision-making positions in political, economic, cultural and social aspects at various levels. Offering solutions to increase female cadres in direction and management work and raise the percentage of female executive and the proportion of women participating in people's councils. There is some evidence that women stay in local government longer as a result of the satisfaction they get from the job.
- Setting up and supporting services for women: Setting up women's centres, negotiating contracts for women's services. The recognition that women are disadvantaged in many areas of their lives and poorly represented in all spheres of political activity has given many local government women a sense of responsibility to other women generally. Participating in formulating and carrying out specific policies to improve women's situation in society. Promoting and supporting women's organisations, initiating economic empowerment programmes and ensuring better access of women to services. A focus on improving the

status of women has included encouraging women to provide information on issues of local governance and seeking justice for women who have been harassed.

- Public speaking, participating in women's activities and running conferences for women in local government: Being a guest speaker at meetings, seminars and conferences. Taking part in activities organised by federations of women, trade unions and other mass organisations to improve the quality of women's lives and providing financial support for women's activities. Mobilising demonstrations in support of a quota of women in local government and organising workshops for women on local governance. Taking part in radio and television programmes promoting women's participation and lobbying for an increase in women's seats within the political parties. Organising forums to discuss women's issues, safeguard women's rights and help women with income earning activities.

Appendix B. Four key strategies for improving women's participation in local government in Asia and the Pacific, as suggested by UNESCAP's research

(UNESCAP 2001, 53-55)

1) Changes to the systems within which local government operates

- A quota of reserved seats for women to be implemented in countries where few women have been elected. These reserved seats to be permanent, filled through direct and open elections and to have the same status as general seats
- Proportional representation systems of voting be implemented
- The number of elected positions at community level be maintained
- Wards systems for electing representatives be retained
- EEO programmes to ensure more women are employed in local government and to enable more women to move into senior management positions
- Elected representatives to be paid at a level that will enable more women to participate
- Local government implement the policies outlined in Agenda 21 on good governance
- Consultation processes be established to ensure women participate
- Funding allocated for gender and development that emphasises capacity building, networking and advocacy
- Women's standing committees be established
- Recruitment by political parties of women candidates

2) Ways of changing attitudes towards women in local government

- The culture of local government needs to change to ensure that women are treated fairly and equally and to make sure that discrimination against women is not acceptable
- Gender awareness programmes for men and women need to be developed
- Local government needs to be more women friendly. Consensus style politics and meetings at times that fit into the other responsibilities that women have, will enhance the political environment
- Opportunities need to be made available for women as soon as they are elected to learn about local government and their governance role and to provide them with support.

3) Strategies to increase the number of women

- Strategies need to be adopted to change policies and structures that perpetuate women's subordinate status
- Policies on economic and social empowerment are needed to enable women to participate on an equal footing with men
- Local government needs to work closely with NGOs, civil societies and women's groups to develop communities and services that take account of the needs of women
- Women in local government need financial support, childcare, support systems and training opportunities
- Women's associations to be established for women councillors and managers in local government to provide a voice for women's views and a base for networking
- Women in local government need to encourage more women to participate
- Funds to be established to assist women to run for election
- Gender-disaggregated statistics need to be collected to increase the visibility of women.

4) Training

- Training programmes to be established by NGOs, political parties, educational and political institutions to help women in local government develop skills and self-confidence and to enable them to learn the functions and processes within this tier of government
- Training to be provided for women candidates on the political system, local government functions and processes
- Workshops be provided on gender awareness and development for both women and men in order to educate people on women's rights and the importance of women's equality
- Girls and young women's education should include training on self-reliance, self-confidence and their potential for decision-making positions

Appendix C. Terms of reference to produce short articles showcasing women in politics

For the purpose of identifying effective strategies to encourage and support women in local politics in the Cambodian context, it would be useful to conduct interviews or surveys with women who are currently in these positions. A semi-structured format would be preferable, because it allows for reflection on participant opinions, especially concerning strategies that the literature reviewed in this report has recommended.

A specific methodology and sampling strategy needs to be developed, but the following are potential questions for consideration:

- How many individuals do you represent as a local politician?
- What made you interested in participating in politics?
- How easy or difficult was it to get involved?
- How would you describe the current environment in which you work?
- How easy or difficult do you find it to work in your current environment?
- Is there anything you would change about your current work environment?
- How would you describe your relationships with your female and male colleagues?
- What issues are most pertinent to you as a local representative?
- How similar or different do you think your issues of interest are to those of your colleagues?

- From your experience, how useful do you think the following initiatives are/would be to encouraging women to participate in local politics? Please rate on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being least useful and 5 being most useful.
 - Quotas of reserved seats
 - Proportional representation electoral system
 - Wards systems
 - Equal employment opportunity programs
 - Local government consultation processes with women in the community
 - Government funding for gender and development capacity building
 - Establishment of women's standing committees
 - Targeted recruitment of women by political parties
 - Gender awareness programs for men
 - Gender awareness programs for women
 - Provision of childcare services

- Funds established specifically for election campaigns for female candidates
- Collection of gender-disaggregated statistics
- Training in leadership
- Marketing campaigns targeting young women
- Consensus-style politics
- Different meeting times

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