



SUCCESS STORY

Growing into Government

USAID empowers women to help govern, ensuring diversity of issues on the national agenda



[Photo: NDI/Cambodia]

Women training women is one method used to teach women the skills to assume roles in government. Here a trainer discusses how participants should talk to potential party members to engage interest in political life.

USAID support encourages and enables the men and women of Cambodia to rebuild their country, strengthen their democratic institutions, and address the needs of all citizens, as they work to create a more equitable and prosperous nation.

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What inspires a woman accustomed to an agrarian way of life to seek political office?

For Ung Vathana, a vegetable farmer and now Chief of her province in Kompong Cham, Cambodia, it was taking part in a USAID-funded training program targeting women's participation in local government.

As one of over 12,000 women to place her name on the ballot in Cambodia's 2002 communal elections, Ung and others like her set the stage for the 2003 National Assembly elections. More than 900 women representatives were elected—an astonishing 8,900 percent increase over the previous total of 10. Two thirds of the women elected had participated in training sessions offered by Women for Prosperity, a USAID-supported nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Phnom Penh.

The violence of the Khmer Rouge regime decimated Cambodia's male population. Twenty-eight percent of women are widows and 56 percent of the population is female, forcing women to assume new roles in business and in the family. Yet prior to the 2003 elections, women were excluded from participating in any aspect of the governing process. With USAID support, Women for Prosperity is working to correct that inequity and promote awareness of the importance of gender in the country's decision-making and development.

USAID has been a strong supporter of Women for Prosperity's decade-long effort to promote voter education and the participation of women in government. Working with politicians, voters, and the media, Women for Prosperity advocates for greater inclusion of women in all levels of government and encourages women's leadership, democratic reforms, and non-violence. The organization also publishes a magazine encouraging women's political participation and has trained over 5,500 women to run for and hold political office.

The organization encourages men to participate alongside women. By training together, men grow to understand their peers' gender concerns and recognize that women must be involved in the country's decision-making and development. Women for Prosperity hopes this cooperative rapport will carry over into the men's work in government.

The organization has successfully lobbied the government to ensure that at least 15 percent of political party lists for the National Assembly



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include women. Moreover, through the organization's successful legislative initiatives, a new law mandating the creation of women and children's committees in local governing councils is changing the way these councils work and influencing the issues, priorities, and agendas they address in the long-term. Women for Prosperity now focuses on women formerly associated with the Khmer Rouge—integrating their concerns into local civil society initiatives.