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**THE GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
(GAPP) STUDY:
The 1993 GAPP Study of Women in
Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand**

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The findings of the GAPP Study do not
necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Gender and Political Participation (GAPP) Study in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand was to provide Asia Democracy Program rapid appraisal information that indicates areas requiring further understanding or program support in order to foster women's political empowerment. The Study illustrates the solutions indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have devised to overcome constraints to women's political participation and foster their political empowerment. The GAPP Study inquiries fall under the following three broad questions: 1) What roles have women played in promoting or fostering democracies in the countries?; 2) To what extent have women participated in these newly emerging democracies? Have the democracies addressed issues of concern to women?; and 3) Does the empowerment of women through development related activities have any affect on their involvement in the political movement or in promoting a women's agenda in the new government?

Women and men representing NGO leaders, government, and political parties and NGO participants were interviewed. Focal group and individual interviews took place. Questions were open-ended in order not to lead responses. Men were interviewed separately and/or at the end of the interviews with the women. In some cases they acted as the translators for the interview process. Interview notes were organized in order to identify patterns among responses to the three GAPP questions. Patterns represent 60 to 80 percent of the responses in individual and focal group sessions.

A majority of women and men interviewed in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, responded that women greatly contributed to the fostering of democratic political systems and principles. In all three countries women's organizations (WOs) mobilized their networks and resources to march and demonstrate for a change to democracy. WO's often maintained public pressure and visibility during those periods when men's political activism was curtailed due to injuries or jailing. Individual women risked and/or sustained injury, imprisonment and death for unlawfully demonstrating and safe-housing political activists.

Both focal group and individual interviews reported that the political parties of Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand have characteristics that do not encourage political leadership by their women representatives. Women continue to be under-represented in formal political positions in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand. Nepal and Bangladesh have both set quotas, five and 10 percent respectively, for women politicians at the national level. However, in all three countries the majority of these women politicians have been appointed rather than elected and according to interviewees their primary constituency is their political party. Reportedly the local governance reform in Nepal and Thailand is lacking in language and awareness of women's contributions in the development sectors important local governance. In Bangladesh, WO's have had to demonstrate against emerging local

governance policy that did not consider how doctors' promotions would be affected by reporting on domestic violence.

According to group and individual interviews, the three greatest constraints to women's political participation are: access to and control of personal income; access to information; and domestic violence. Respondents felt that these three constraints most affect women's political participation in poor urban and rural communities. This socio-economic group constitutes the largest portion of the female population in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand. Respondents reported that educated professional women, who constitute the smallest proportion, are least impacted by these constraints. Respondents noted that poor men's political participation is also affected by access to income and information. However, the issue of access to limited resources is significantly greater for women than for men because of unique gender-based socio-cultural attitudes and behaviors.

Respondents reported that husbands control their wives' and daughters' political participation by denying them the money required to travel to political events or meetings with elected and appointed officials, to campaign for candidates or sponsor their own campaigns, to produce political fliers on issues that concern them and to meet with other men and women on common concerns. Respondents reported that women generally lack the access to information to make informed decisions regarding political candidates and the political, legal and judicial systems. In general, women did not know their basic human, legal or constitutional rights.

According to the interviewees, domestic violence and the threat of domestic violence significantly control and inhibit women's political participation, particularly women in urban and rural poor/subsistence communities. Reportedly women have been beaten, some beaten to death, by their husbands for voting for a candidate other than their husbands' choice or merely voting when their husbands disapprove of women voting. Respondents reported that women often lie to their husbands when they are voting for a different candidate to avoid being beaten. It is not uncommon for women to be divorced by their husbands for holding different political views.

The individual and group interviews reported that women participating in NGO income-generating activities improve their status within their households and communities. Respondents reported that there was a direct and positive link between the improvement of their status and increase in their income. Interviewees said that women exposed to rights awareness are inspired and more willing to take on legal issues that affect their lives, i.e., divorce without maintenance, loss of inheritance and domestic violence. However, the integrated approach, combining the meeting of basic needs and the rights awareness training, provided women the foundation and incentives for mobilizing toward political empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION "As water does not know the power of water,
women do not know the power of women."
Nepali Woman Politician

In 1992, United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Asia Bureau conducted an evaluation of the Asia Democracy Program (ADP).¹ The evaluation found that Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines were implementing sound multi-tiered democratization activities. However, the evaluation did not disaggregate the analysis by gender. The ADP recognizes that Asian men's and women's interaction with the public domain and associated political participation is affected by differing cultural, religious and societal expectations. ADP recognizes that women's political and public participation is realized on a broad continuum of interaction, from being a member of a development activity such as a water users' group to voting, to being a student or women's organization activist, to holding a political party seat. As a result, the Asia Bureau decided to do a separate study on women's political participation in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand.

The Gender and Political Participation (GAPP) Study was designed to provide ADP rapid appraisal information that indicates areas requiring further understanding or program support in order to foster women's political empowerment. The Study was also intended to uncover some of the development strategies and nexus between development and democracy activities that foster women's political empowerment. These development and democracy strategies, activities and nexus were provided by the focus on civil society organizations, i.e. indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs) and women's organizations (WOs). The Study illustrates the solutions indigenous NGOs/PVOs/WOs have devised to overcome constraints to women's political participation and foster their political empowerment.

The GAPP Study inquiries fall under the following three broad questions: 1) What roles have women played in promoting or fostering democracies in the countries?; 2) To what extent have women participated in these newly emerging democracies? Have the democracies addressed issues of concern to women?; and 3) Does the empowerment of women through development related activities

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The Asia Bureau instituted the ADP in 1990. ADP's strategy contains five broad elements: voice - a) channels for popular influence on government and b) channels for the free dissemination of information and opinion; choice - free, fair and meaningful elections; governance - effective, democratic and open administration; redress - full protection for individual and group rights; and accountability - financially responsible government.

have any affect on their involvement in the political movement or in promoting a women's agenda in the new government? ²

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Women participants were selected to include a broad range of political participation and different ethnic, caste, religious, economic, political and development participation, age and education levels. The research was not limited to USAID-funded activities or organizations. The information does not reflect a nationwide sampling due to the time limits of the field research. The field research allowed two and one half weeks each in Nepal and Bangladesh; five working days were spent in Thailand.

Women and men representing NGOs/PVOs/WOs leaders, government, and political parties* and NGO/PVO/WO participants were interviewed** (see table below). Focal groups interviews lasted approximately 3 and one half hours; individual interviews lasted approximately 2 hours. Questions were open-ended in order not to lead responses (see Appendix A). Questions were often repeatedly asked in different fashions throughout the interviews in order to verify initial responses. Men were interviewed separately and/or at the end of the interviews with the women. In some cases they acted as the translators for the interview process.

	Men	Women	Focal Groups	Individual Interviews	Leaders *	Participants **
Nepal	19	117	11	12	30%	70%
Bangladesh	23	124	13	13	30%	70%
Thailand	9	53	6	8	40%	60%

Interview notes were organized in order to identify patterns among responses to the three GAPP questions. Patterns represent 60 to 80 percent of the responses in individual and focal group sessions. The responses include specific examples or quotes that illustrate issues, constraints and solutions identified by participants in the Study. Individuals are quoted but not identified given the political and socio-cultural sensitivities of the findings. The responses detail women's feelings, perceptions, expectations of and involvement in democracy. The responses also reveal the nexus between women's participation in development activities and the fostering of their political empowerment.

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The GAPP Study is also meant to complement and build upon the work and documents of David Hirschmann's "Democracy and Gender: A Practical Guide to USAID Programs" and the "Asia Democracy Program Strategy, January 1993."

III. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PROMOTING DEMOCRACIES

A majority of women and men interviewed in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, responded that women greatly contributed to the fostering of democratic political systems and principles. In all three countries WOs and women's associations mobilized their networks and resources to march and demonstrate for a change to democracy. WOs and women's associations often maintained public pressure and visibility during those periods when men's political activism was curtailed due to injuries or jailing. Individual women risked and/or sustained injury, imprisonment and death for unlawfully demonstrating and safe-housing political activists.

In Nepal, an English Literature professor at Tribhuvan University and former President of the Congress Party's University Teachers' Association risked prison and death by acting as the party's spokesperson during mass rallies of the 1990 multi-party revolution. Men acting as spokespersons have been approached by the Congress Party for high-level political positions; as of July 1994 she has not. Nepali village women respondents of the Chainpur District, representing democratic and communist parties, safe-housed political activists during Nepal's multi-party revolution. The police came to the villages looking for activists and often beat the men and women they suspected.

There are six women martyrs who were killed during the multi-party demonstrations. Three were peasant women from Janakpur; two were peasant women from Lalitpur. One woman was killed in Kathmandu. In Janakpur and Lalitpur women took kitchen utensils to make noise during the demonstration against the Panchayat system and to make men aware of the women's participation in the demonstrations.

In Bangladesh, demonstrations were banned under martial law. The United Women's Front claims to have had the first demonstration for democracy under the former military regime (1983). According to interviewees, women university students were the first to break the curfews imposed by the military regime. WOs demonstrated (1989) against the passing of the Eighth Amendment which stated that Islam was the state religion and the basis for law. In Thailand, it is estimated that 30 percent of the participants in the violent May 1992 pro-democracy rallies were women.

IV. RESPONSIVENESS OF DEMOCRACIES TO PRO-DEMOCRACY WOMEN

IV.1 Political Parties

"By not articulating women's issues women politicians hope they will not be discriminated against." Former Thai Woman MP

In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, interviewees noted that women politicians must function in democracies and societies that are inequitable toward women. Both focal group and individual

interviews reported that the political parties of Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand have characteristics that do not encourage political leadership by their women representatives. For example:

1. Political parties expect their women politicians to vote the party line no matter how women might be affected.
2. Political parties maintain a traditional approach to women's issues, i.e., for women's economic improvement they will support sewing and handicraft projects.
3. Political parties categorize women's issues under development agendas rather than the politics of access to resources.
4. Previous to elections, political parties speak on women's issues; after winning elections parties do not give women's issues high priority or significant human and financial resource allocation.

IV.2 National Politics Women continue to be under-represented in formal political positions in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand. Nepal and Bangladesh have both set quotas, five and 10 percent respectively, for women politicians at the national level. However, in all three countries the majority of these women politicians have been appointed rather than elected and according to interviewees their primary constituency is their political party.

In Nepal, unlike other political associations, women's political associations receive no party monies and they are "not allowed" by their parties to solicit funds from party donors. Furthermore, women's political association leaders are appointed by the party rather than elected to office. Respondents reported that women who succeeded in the political mainstream have not been members of or affiliated with women's organizations.³

In Bangladesh, women hold 35 of the 330 Parliamentary seats. Thirty are appointed by their parties; five are elected. Respondents reported that most of the women politicians and members of

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At the time of the Study political parties had made the following promises. The Nepal Congress Party promised that its MPs will vote to revise gender-biased laws. The Bangladesh National Party pledged to implement its comprehensive "free school" system; this system is meant to encourage girl-child education. Thai political parties have promised to increase women's and tribals' political participation at village and district levels by pushing for decentralization of government. To date, these pledges have not been fulfilled.

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Recently, some women politicians have joined a WO, The Pressure Group for Security.

parliament (MPs) have not been educated regarding knowledge of their nation's laws, legal system or constitution. The 30 appointed women MPs are not assigned to a public constituency. Respondents, including 10 women MPs, said that the appointed women MPs are greatly restricted in their opportunity to develop political skills because they do not regularly interact with any constituency. Therefore, interviewees thought that women MPs are considered "token" politicians. According to group and individual interviews in Bangladesh and Nepal, women whose husbands and/or fathers achieved high-level political visibility and support, and were then murdered were astutely recruited to maintain the political momentum the family name garnered. In Bangladesh both the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition Party fit this profile.

Thai women MPs have only recently set a "women's issues agenda" including: elimination of sex discrimination; improvement of women's labor force issues; and the dismantling of the sex industry.

IV.3 Local Politics In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, quotas for female representation do not extend beyond the national level of political positions. The few women local representatives in these countries are elected on their own merit. Local women politicians constitute less than one percent of local political positions. Respondents reported that the majority of women politicians were elected because of their activism in fostering the democracy.

Respondents in Nepal reported that the local governance reform is lacking in language and awareness of women's contributions in the development sectors important to Village Development Committees (VDCs). Five group and four individual interviews reported that women are blocked from being elected to official VDC positions because of their illiteracy. Literacy is often interpreted to be a requirement for participation in the VDCs as VDCs must provide reports and financial statements to the District.

According to one individual and three group interviews in Nepal, laws relating to natural resource user groups have been interpreted to require men's representation in order to function with minimal government oversight. They said that this interpretation of the law does not recognize that women, not men, manage and collect resources such as fuel wood and fodder.

In Nepal, the Tanahun District has a high level of political development as the Congress Party has been active since the 1950s. There are three Chetras (subdistrict committees), 45 VDCs and Youth Committees. In a representative VDC (Kashabtar), in addition to elected officials, there are 47 appointed officials in the Ward and VDC ranks representing all the castes, ethnic and economic groups. However, none of the appointed officials is a

women. The Salbas village interviewees also felt that VDCs tend to make decisions that benefit men because women are barely represented in the VDCs.

Group and individual interviews in Bangladesh reported that emerging local governance policy and law often does not include gender considerations. In Bangladesh NGOs/PVOs/WOs mobilized demonstrations against the 1990 Health Policy. If adopted, the policy would have allowed the District level authority to decide doctors' promotions. This would have affected those doctors willing to provide courts with proof of police brutality and violence against women by their husbands among other things.

In Thailand also, the local governance reform is lacking in language and awareness of women's contributions in the development sectors important to local governance. Respondents reported that women are often appointed to village committees by the village chief to provide labor, not decision-making acumen. However, women are gaining a presence in local government with the exception of tribal women. For example, in northern Thailand, a woman campaigned to become the village chief and sit on the Tambon Council. Respondents replied that she won her positions by articulating the concerns of all the groups in her village (women, men, elders, youth) and committing to representing their views when making decisions. This village chief is well-known and respected for her conflict resolution ability.

V. CONSTRAINTS AFFECTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

According to group and individual interviews, the three greatest constraints to women's political participation are: access to and control of personal income; access to information; and domestic violence. Respondents felt that these three constraints most affect women's political participation in poor urban and rural communities. This socio-economic group constitutes the largest portion of the female population in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand. Respondents reported that educated professional women, who constitute the smallest proportion, are least impacted by these constraints. Interviewees felt that women of female-headed households showed greater overall political participation than women in traditional family units. Respondents noted that poor men's political participation is also affected by access to income and information. However, the issue of women's access to limited resources is significantly greater than that of men's because of unique gender-based socio-cultural attitudes and behaviors.

Every focal group revealed anecdotal information and personal histories illustrating the three constraints. All but two of the individual interviews with NGO/PVO/WO leaders reported these three constraints are significant to women's political participation. The anecdotal information referred to national or local

instances familiar to women; personal histories provided primary information. The three constraints are not ordered in a prioritized fashion as they interact with different significance within varying localities, communities and households.

V.1 Access to and Control of Income Respondents said that women rarely have access to or control of the full income their work has generated despite their significant contributions in time and labor to household economies. However, women do control a small portion of the household income for small day-to-day expenses. The issue of women's personal income was not as significant in Thailand; examples of Thai women achieving in the private sector are numerous.

Respondents reported that husbands control their wives' and daughters' political participation by denying them the money required to travel to political events or meetings with elected and appointed officials, to campaign for candidates or sponsor their own campaigns, to produce political fliers on issues that concern them and to meet with other men and women on common concerns. Most men interviewed said that "women shouldn't waste money and time on politics."

The striking exception to this attitude was voiced by the men interviewed whose wives, previous to marriage, had gained high visibility and fame for their activism during the political changeover. Their husbands enjoyed the status, prestige and business connections their highly visible wives brought to their union. These husbands continued to financially and emotionally support their wives' political participation.

A Nepali woman politician in the Tanahun District is trying to recruit other women into political activism and the Congress Party. She says that "it is difficult for women to be active members of a party because they must have the income and permission from their families to travel." A male politician from the Congress Party in Tanahun agreed that women face particular social-cultural constraints regarding travelling alone; they also face potential character defamation by leaving their home responsibilities for outside activities.

Three of the women interviewed in Pokhara said that they had wanted to take a more active role in the multi-party revolution but it required funds their husbands would not give them. Some women in Salbas were unable to make their demands to the District level because their husbands would not give them the funds for travel.

In Bangladesh, NGO participants said "[before] their husbands would not allow them to participate and would not give them the money needed to travel to political meetings or to make demands at the District level." Now that they are earning their own income, and in many cases divorced, they are very politically

active. Four women leaders of Northern Thailand knew of 11 women who wished to become local politicians/representatives whose husbands would not allow them the freedom or money to travel.

V.2 Access to Information Respondents reported that women generally lack the access to information to make informed decisions regarding political candidates and the political, legal and judicial systems. In general, women did not know their basic human, legal or constitutional rights.

Respondents reported that women do not have the time or societal acceptance for convening in tea and coffee shops and other public meeting areas to listen to the radio and/or discuss politics. If there is a radio in the home, women tend to listen to the radio on an ad hoc basis, as time permits given their domestic duties, as opposed to tuning in regularly to the news or a favorite show. Literate rural women rarely read newspapers because they are considered costly and reading is time consuming. Except in Thailand, few women have access to television. Those who do watch television tend to watch it on an irregular basis for the same reasons as with radio listening.

Individual and group interviews reported that women usually filter their political information from overheard conversations of men, visiting political canvassers and occasional mass meetings that are conducted in their communities.

In the Rasuwa District of Nepal, the population is predominately the Tamang minority ethnic group. Of this population, 95 percent of the women do not speak Nepali and are illiterate. A USAID official, who conducted democracy-related research in Rasuwa reported that the women cannot be informed by Nepali-language radio, newspaper or television. Although most of the men are also illiterate, many speak Nepali and listen to the radio.

Women interviewed in the Salbas village and Pokhara said that they "did not really understand what democracy means and that they were unsure what the best opportunities for change and access to resources were." Ninety percent of the women in Salbas said that if "we were literate, more information, political and otherwise, would be available to us." They also said that "they had to depend on their husbands for much of their political information and that their husbands did not answer many of their questions."

In Bangladesh, most of the literate women interviewed were from wealthier families and had some leisure time to listen to the radio and in some cases watch television. They felt the need to be better informed regarding candidates, local and national politics and political processes. They reported that the illiterate women in their communities were even less informed than they. Interviewees participating in indigenous NGOs/PVOs/WOs

and/or Grameen Bank programs reported that they had significantly increased their awareness and knowledge of basic rights and political process. Before, "we were living in blindness and despair."

The women leaders in Northern Thailand said that "village women often did not have time to listen to the radio or watch television as they worked hard all day in the fields and then had to come home to care for their families." They said that many of these women were so burdened with labor that they rarely slept more than four hours a night. The leaders observed that women in wealthier families did watch television news.

V.3 Domestic Violence The USAID 1991 Democracy and Governance Policy states that cruel treatment, torture and arbitrary interference in personal life are human rights abuses. Domestic violence is a form of torture and/or execution within the framework of a family and household. According to the interviewees, domestic violence and the threat of domestic violence significantly control and inhibit women's political participation, particularly women in urban and rural poor/subsistence communities.

Women appear to vote in equal numbers as men in Nepal and Bangladesh and in greater numbers than men in Thailand. However, women have been beaten, some beaten to death, by their husbands for voting for a candidate other than their husbands' choice or merely voting when their husbands disapprove of women voting. Respondents reported that women often lie to their husbands when they are voting for a different candidate to avoid being beaten. It is not uncommon for women to be divorced by their husbands for holding different political views. Divorce has great negative economic and social impact on women.

Interviewees reported that women are encouraged by their husbands to not attend or participate in demonstrations and mass meetings since the (re)establishment of democracy. The same husbands who demonstrated with their wives during the political changeover are now telling their wives that "you have to stay home because who would take care of the children if there is violence?" Respondents maintained that women who defy their husbands to participate in demonstrations and mass meetings run the risk of injury, during the event or upon return to their homes.

Overall, men interviewed responded to the women's information regarding domestic violence with the justification that "women are to do as their husbands/fathers tell them because the men know what is best for women and men have a greater understanding of politics." Some men interviewed in Bangladesh believed that "under Koranic law husbands have the right to hit their wives." Several men also said that it was "a shame that

women are beaten, some to death by their husbands. They should be protected by the men in their family."

In Nepal, Salbas village women said their political activity required the permission of their husbands. If women do not take permission from their husbands they are seen as "defiant." They reported that "if women defy their husbands, the husbands will beat them and then maybe take a new wife." The interviewees in Pokhara said they knew of four women who were badly beaten by their husbands for voting differently. They knew of two women who were beaten and then divorced because they supported political parties other than those of their husbands.

Teachers and students demonstrated at a local school in Pokhara by holding their classes outside the school building in the school yard. According to the interviewees, news that police had arrived at the school spread very quickly and many mothers arrived at the school to "protect" their children. After returning to their homes many of the mothers present at the demonstration were publicly chastised and/or hit by their husbands for taking part in the demonstration.

In Kalkani, Bangladesh, village women reported to a PVO representative that two women told their husbands that they had voted differently than their husbands. Their husbands then beat the two women to death. Respondents participating with that PVO said that they do not know any women who tell their husbands if they have voted differently because this action remains a dangerous secret.

Women primary education teachers near Jessore, Bangladesh said that the greatest problems facing women are domestic violence, dowry, early marriage and restricted mobility. They said that potential violence, the threat of divorce and restricted mobility due to personal income access and husbands' permission reduced the opportunities for women to be politically active. This group knew of five women in their communities who had been beaten and one who had been divorced for voting differently than their husbands.

Women leaders from Northern Thailand cited six cases in which women were publicly beaten by their husbands for holding different political views. They said that there is "probably a great deal more violence used to control women but it takes place in the home."

V.4 Additional Constraints

"Social traditions repress women more than the laws."

Nepali Woman Lawyer Apprentice

Apart from the three major constraints previously detailed, the interviewees identified a number of other contextual preconditions that also adversely affect women's popular and political

participation. Many of the women interviewed were not directly affected by all the issues outlined below. However, a majority of the women felt these issues contribute to undermining women's status in society and the political framework.

Many of the women NGO/PVO/WO leaders interviewed were advocating for change because they felt that these issues are inadequately addressed under current political party platforms, legal reform and law enforcement. The women leaders felt that these issues effectively interact to form an overriding sense of women being less equal to men despite constitutional equity. A review of the interview data identified 26 additional issues that merited citing because of their frequent reporting. The following is a sampling of laws and cultural practices cited by the interviewees.

Legal Issues Include: In Nepal: 1) A man is legally permitted to take another wife if the first wife does not bear a male child within 10 years of marriage; 2) Divorced wives receive alimony for only five years; 3) It is legal for a man to commit adultery; it is illegal for a woman to commit adultery; 5) The father is legally responsible for feeding his son and his wife (not a daughter). In Bangladesh: 1) A woman's right to divorce must be stated in the marriage contract; the man's right does not; 2) Women's passports require their father's or husband's signatures. In Thailand: 1) A man can divorce his wife on the suspicion of adultery; a woman must prove that her husband was violent, adulterous or did not provide financial support for her to divorce him; 2) A woman must have her husband's signature to lease land; a man does not require his wife's signature to lease land; 5) "Protective" legislation, created so that women are not forced into prostitution, limits women's travel to and work in the Middle East, Germany, Scandinavia, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan. In all three countries, many women are in unregistered marriages because they do not know (or insist) that marriages should be registered. Unregistered marriages do not provide women the legal framework to request child support or alimony should a divorce occur. In addition, respondents in all three countries reported that men will practice polygamy by taking a number of other wives in unregistered marriages.

Cultural Issues Include: Respondents reported that the practice of dowry contributes to the commonly held belief that "we are parasites" upon family wealth and justifies violence against women⁵; girl child marriage; and the belief that widows, no matter what age, should not remarry as they will be unlucky for future husbands.

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News reports on dowry deaths, or "suicides." Women are killed for their dowry by being burned in kitchen fires and poisoned by insecticide.

VI. HOW INDIGENOUS NON-PARTISAN NGOS FOSTER WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Respondents in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand reported that local non-partisan NGOs/PVOs/WOs provide a dynamic catalyst for women's political and popular participation. The respondents felt these NGO sectors in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand were more socially progressive and issues-activated than the national governments. The interviewees reported that the NGO sector also contains a significant percentage of educated professional women. These women are drawn to the NGO sector as it is one of the few opportunities for professional women to gain non-partisan leadership positions in their countries and to act as representatives and activists for women and their issues. Respondents reported that one result of women being in decision-making positions in the NGO sector is that these NGO sectors often recognize the significant role of women's contributions to national development. A great portion of NGOs/PVOs/WOs specifically target women to participate in and benefit from their development activities.

Group and individual interviews indicated three general types of indigenous non-partisan NGOs/PVOs/WOs were significant to increasing their political participation: 1) NGOs that mobilize around development issues; 2) NGOs that provide legal, human and/or constitutional rights awareness; and 3) NGOs that mobilize around development issues and also provide legal, human and/or constitutional rights awareness. The latter is reported to be the most empowering type. These NGOs implement development activities that provide women access to personal income and the "rights awareness training" required for justifying women's rights to take political action. All focal group interviews reported that an integrated approach fosters women's political empowerment despite traditional cultural and religious prohibitions to women's popular and political participation. Respondents reported that income, plus the knowledge of rights, have a galvanizing effect on women regardless of their socio-economic status.

Twenty-two of the individual and all group interviews reported that women participating in NGOs/PVOs/WOs income-

6 A functional pluralistic society includes a web of associational structures, i.e., advocacy NGOs, professional, religious and ethnic associations, business clubs, and NGOs/PVOs/WOs that focus development-related activities to the marginalized, disenfranchised and other groups. These associational structures act in concert and individually to balance and distribute political and economic power. As collective voices, these associations develop political clout and visibility, facilitate redress and disseminate information. The ADP intentions of its five elements - voice, choice, redress, governance and accountability - often overlap within the institutional philosophies and activities of the indigenous non-partisan NGOs/PVOs/WOs found in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand.

generating activities improve their status within their households and communities. Respondents reported that there was a direct and positive link between the improvement of their status and increase in their income. Interviewees said that women exposed to rights awareness are inspired and more willing to take on legal issues that affect their lives, i.e., divorce without maintenance, loss of inheritance and domestic violence. However, the integrated approach, combining the meeting of basic needs and the rights awareness training, provided women the foundation and incentives for mobilizing toward political empowerment.

Interviewees reported that the NGO sectors are relatively non-restricted by local and national government. This enabling environment has fostered Nepali NGOs' strong history of facilitating the formation of functional users' groups. In Bangladesh, donors support approximately 650 registered local NGOs/PVOs/WOs working in various sectors. It is estimated that the NGO sector reaches 40 percent of the population in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi respondents reported that before democracy was established, the local NGO sector assisted impoverished communities in organizing to meet their basic needs. In Thailand, the NGO sector based in Bangkok tends to be "advocacy" organizations while the rural NGO sector tends to be more development oriented.

Many NGO/PVO/WO leaders interviewed did not want to have known partisan affiliations. NGO sector representatives say that training in human, constitutional and legal rights is very important for strengthening democracy, but that it is very difficult to provide this training for political activism in a way that is perceived as non-partisan.

The following examples, derived from the indigenous NGO sector, reveal approaches for fostering women's political empowerment by assisting women to overcome the three constraints of access to and control of personal income, access to information and domestic violence.

In Nepal The Pressure for Security Group was established in September 1992 to provide a nationally active, non-partisan, women's agenda organization; to protect women and girl children against violence; and to ensure proper punishment of those that commit crimes against women and girl children. The organization is non-partisan and politically active in supporting a women's agenda from the grass-roots through parliamentary levels. Its membership includes: 54 NGOs/WOs; individual members; political parties; and professional women's associations.

A young girl, working as a house domestic, was raped by the 25-year-old son of the family. The Pressure for Security Group felt that the son was not appropriately punished. They tried to take this issue to the Parliament, the Home Minister and the Prime Minister but did not gain appointments. The group then organized a "Silent March" against rape December 2nd, 1992 (2,000

women students, professionals, political leaders, NGO/PVO/WO representatives, and housewives marched). The Silent March received much media coverage. The son was charged and thrown in jail. The Pressure for Security Group was then invited to meet with the Parliament and the Prime Minister. The group is now rewriting the law and penalties for statutory rape and rape.

BASE, established in 1985, operates out of the Dang District. BASE is a Tharu NGO that focusses on Tharu (an ethnic minority) empowerment; particularly of Tharu women. Participants are initially trained in literacy, then in microenterprise, management of revolving loan funds, leadership training, legal training and other skills. BASE trainers volunteer their services for six months. The BASE groups have also politically mobilized for elections, development agendas and the issue of indentured bondage.

In Bangladesh, abused and abandoned women and widows, participants with Banchte Shekha receive safe-housing and food, legal aid, training in income-generating activities, human rights training and health care services. Many of the women and men working at Banchte Shekha have organized demonstrations surrounding a local incidence of violence against women and law reform. They also might sponsor women candidates in the local elections.

A group of women interviewed from Bangladesh's NGO sector and professional groups have written a series of analytical position papers detailing the impacts on women from former government policies in the varying sectors, Five Year Plans, laws and constitutions, and development and economic plans. The position papers have been distributed to the various political parties. This group is now writing a gender-focussed position paper on the "universality of human rights versus cultural relativism of human rights." The paper will be distributed to the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women and the UN Commission on Human Rights as well as the government and political parties.

Participants in the Mardaripur Legal Aid Association have gone to the District government (1992) to demand bridge construction, schools, a feeding program and shelter for the homeless. The women believe that if they went in larger numbers elected officials might follow through on their promises. The large group of women would tell the elected officials that they would not vote for them if action were not forthcoming.

Many of the Women and Youth Development Groups in Northern Thailand became politicized after receiving legal rights training from NGOs/PVOs/WOs. Legal rights training increased their awareness of rights and responsibilities in a democratic system. Originally, these organizations mobilized for development reasons; now they are organized to represent and draw attention to their communities' issues to various concerned ministries. The

women leaders said that "people need to know how politics interact with their lives whether they are politically active or not." These groups are now "courted" by politicians for their votes.

The Friends of Women Foundation in Thailand, with other WOs, helped working women organize and demonstrate for an improved government policy on maternity leave. After many demonstrations in 1993, the women achieved their goal of a paid 90-day maternity leave. The Gender and Development Research Institute is monitoring men and women MPs regarding election promises on women's issues. At the year's end, GDRI will publish and discuss the MP "report card" through national and local news mediums.

VII. SUMMARY

The purpose of the GAPP Study in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand was to provide ADP rapid appraisal information that indicates areas requiring further understanding or program support in order to foster women's political empowerment. The GAPP Study findings have been summarized below.

Women greatly contributed to the fostering of democratic political systems and principles. For example, WOs demonstrated for a change to democracy and individual women risked and/or sustained injury, imprisonment and death for unlawfully demonstrating and safe-housing political activists.

Women continue to be under-represented in formal political positions in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand. Political parties of Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand have characteristics that do not encourage political leadership by their women representatives. The local governance reform in Nepal and Thailand is lacking in language and awareness of women's contributions in the development sectors important local governance. In Bangladesh, the emerging local governance policy often does not reflect gender considerations.

Indigenous NGO sectors assist women in overcoming constraints to women's political participation. Women participating in income-generating activities improve their status within their households and communities. Women exposed to rights awareness are inspired and more willing to take on legal issues that affect their lives. The integrated approach of meeting basic needs and rights awareness training, provided women the foundation and incentives for mobilizing toward political empowerment.

APPENDIX A. GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH/INTERVIEWS

Questions addressed women's feelings, perceptions, expectations and involvement in democracy. The questions also address the nexus between women's participation in development activities and the fostering of their political empowerment. Questions were often repeatedly asked in different fashions throughout the interviews in order to verify initial responses.

1. How have Asian women politically and publicly participated?
2. How have women's lives been affected by democracy? In what ways have women been empowered individually and collectively?
3. What aspects of democracy are considered more or less important to different socio-economic groups of women?
4. What aspects of democracy have greater or lesser value and significance for different groups of women on a personal and socio-cultural level?
5. What are the legal and political party restrictions and opportunities for women's public and political participation?
6. What are the women's agendas promoted in civic and political organizations?
7. What kinds of civil society and political organizations are benefitting which socio-economic groups of women and in what fashion? What grassroots through policy linkages do those civic organizations have that promote women's agendas and benefit women?
8. What are common agendas, linkages and activities shared by women-supportive organizations and multi-sectoral development organizations?
9. Has donor support to civil society organizations that benefit women also promoted a women's agenda and led to increased public and political participation by women? What was the process by which this occurred? How can we facilitate this process?
10. How do other economic, social and political phenomena, i.e., access to personal income and devolution of government, domestic violence, impinge on or promote women's political participation?

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