99522

PN-ACD-886

# GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ASIA·

## A STUDY OF WOMEN IN NEPAL, BANGLADESH AND THAILAND

Asia Democracy Program
Democratic Affairs and Private Voluntary Cooperation Unit
Technical Resources Division
Office of Development Resources
Asia Region
Bureau for Asia and Near East
U S Agency for International Development
Washington D.C.

Jenna Luche, Consultant
November 1993

Copy

## ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ADP- | Asia Democracy Program |
| BASE- | Backward Peoples Association for Social and Economic Growth |
| BNP- | Bangladesh National Party |
| BRAC- | Bangladesh Rural Action Committee |
| CHW- | Community Health Worker |
| DDC- | District Development Committee |
| DO- | District Officer |
| FAO- | International Fund for Agricultural Development |
| FED- | Forum for Environment and Development |
| GAPP- | Gender and Political Participation |
| GDRI- | Gender and Development Research Institute |
| GOB- | Government of Bangladesh |
| GON- | Government of Nepal |
| JI- | Jamati Islami |
| MCHW- | Mother Child Health Worker |
| MLAA- | Mardaripur Legal Aid Association |
| MP- | Member of Parliament |
| NGO- | Non-Governmental Organization |
| PVO- | Private Voluntary Organization |
| SCOPE- | Society for Constitutional and Parliamentary Exercise |
| UK- | United Kingdom |
| UN- | United Nations |
| UNDP- | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNICEF- | United Nations Children's Fund |
| USAID- | United States Agency for International Development |
| VDC- | Village Development Committee |
| WO- | Women's Organization |

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


Executive Summary

I. Introduction . . . . . 1

II. Research Methodology . . . . . 4

III. The Role of Women In Promoting Democracies . . 6

IV. Responsiveness of Democracies to Women's Participation. . . . . 8

4.1 Women's Expectations and Concerns Regarding Democracy . . . . . 8

4 2 Women as Politicians . . . . . 11

4.3 National Politics . . . . . 12

4.4 Local Politics . . . . . 13

V. Significant Contextual Preconditions Affecting Women's Political Participation . . 16

5 1 The Three Most Significant Constraints . . . . 16

5 2 Domestic Violence . . . . . 16

5 3 Lack of Personal Income. . . . . 19

5.4 Poor Access to Information . . . . . 21

5.5 Asian Women's Issues . . . . . 23

VI Empowerment From Development Increasing Women's Political Participation. . . . . 27

6 1 The Local Non-Partisan NGO Paradigm. . 27

6 2 How NGOs Increase Women's Political Participation. . . . . 28

6.3 NGO/PVO/WO Non-Partisanship. . . . . 30

VII. Conclusions and Lessons Learned. . . . . 33

VIII. Recommendations . . . . . 36

Appendix A: Nepal Findings

Appendix B: Bangladesh Findings

Appendix C Bibliography

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Asia Bureau instituted the Asia Democracy Program (ADP) in 1990. The purpose of the ADP is to develop and strengthen sustainable democratic societies. The ADP 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.

In 1992, the Asia Bureau conducted an evaluation of the ADP. The evaluation found that Thailand, Nepal, Sri lanka, and the Philippines were implementing sound multi-tiered democratization activities. However, it did not disaggregate the analysis by gender nor was sufficient research conducted on the end users of USAID's assistance. Of particular importance was whether women and men were equally involved and affected by democratic movements. As a result, the Asia Bureau decided to do a separate study on women's political participation

Furthermore, the Asia Bureau recognized 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. These expectations and prohibitions inherently undermine women's individual rights and their opportunities for participation in democratic societies.

The purpose of the Gender and Political Participation Study or GAPP Study was to provide the ADP information on the following three 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?**

**Research Methodology:** The research methodology used for collecting information for this study recognized that women's political and public participation is realized on a broad continuum of interaction, from being a member of a water users' group to voting, to being a student activist, to holding a political party seat. Therefore, selection criteria for the women participants interviewed ensured that those from different ethnic, caste, religious, economic, political and development participation, age and education levels are represented Focal group and individual interviews took place

Over 100 women were interviewed in Nepal, more than 100 women were interviewed in Bangladesh, and in Thailand, approximately 50 women were interviewed. Male NGO/PVO, government, community representatives and politicians were also interviewed, 19 in Nepal, 23 in Bangladesh and nine in Thailand. Men were interviewed separately or at the end of the interviews with the women. In some cases they acted as the translators for the interview process. The findings presented below represent the **responses** of **60 percent to 80 percent** of those interviewed

The information gathered does not reflect a nationwide sampling Time limits restricted the field research to certain districts between three to 12 hours from the capital cities. The populations in these districts frequently did reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the country. The field research allowed two and one half weeks both in Nepal and Bangladesh, five working days were spent in Thailand.

Communities identified had exposure to or had worked with local non-governmental organizations, private voluntary organizations and women's organizations (NGOs/PVOs/WOs) Individuals and focal groups interviewed tended to be identified by these organizations. The field research focussed primarily on the grassroots level, i e. indigenous WOs and their "participants." The field research was not limited to USAID-funded activities and organizations.

**FINDINGS**

**Role of Women in Promoting Democracies:** In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, women contributed significantly to the fostering of democratic political systems and principles. Women risked or sustained injury and death in unlawful demonstrations. Women were jailed for their political activism and women safe-housed political activists at great risk to their personal security.

In all three countries individual women and women's organizations and mobilized their networks and resources to march and demonstrate for a change to democracy In Nepal, an English teacher risked her life to be the spokesperson at the mass demonstrations for democracy. In Bangladesh, the United Women's Front had the first unlawful pro-democracy demonstration under the former military regime. In Thailand, it is estimated that 30 percent of the participants in the violent May 1992 pro-democracy rallies were women.

**Responsiveness of Democracies to Women's Participation:** In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, women continue to be under-represented in formal political positions Nepal and Bangladesh have both set quotas (Nepal five percent, Bangladesh 10 percent, Thailand has no established quota) for women politicians at the

national level. However, in all three countries the majority of women politicians have been appointed rather than elected, their "constituency" is their political party.

All the political parties have stated "women's agendas," yet the allocation of financial and human resources to this agenda remain minimal in proportion to other agendas. Nepal Congress Party has yet to make good its promise that its Members of Parliament (MPs) will vote to revise gender-biased law. The Bangladesh National Party (BNP) has yet to implement its comprehensive "free school" system; this system is meant to encourage girl-child education. Thai political parties have yet to push for the promised decentralization of government intended to increase women's and tribals' political participation at village and district levels.

In Nepal and Bangladesh, emerging local governance policy often requires representation by men and not women at all levels of governance. In Nepal, natural resource user groups must have men to be allowed to function independent of government oversight. This law does not take into account that it is often women and not men that manage and collect resources such as fuel and fodder wood.

**Significant Contextual Preconditions Affecting Women's Political Participation:** In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand the three most frequently cited constraints to women's political participation were: **domestic violence, lack of personal income and poor access to information.** They are of particular significance to women in urban and rural poor or subsistence communities. Educated professional women are the least impacted by these three constraints. However, educated professional women constitute the smallest proportion of the female population in all three countries. Additionally, women of female-headed households suffered less from the constraint of domestic violence and managed their own income.

In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand **domestic violence**, or the threat of domestic violence, significantly controls and inhibits women's political participation. 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.

* In all three countries women interviewed reported that: some women have been beaten, even to death, by their husbands for voting for a candidate other than their husbands' choice, other women have been beaten merely for voting as their husbands do not think their wives should vote. Women often lie to their husbands when they are voting for a different candidate to avoid being beaten

* In Nepal, interviewees knew of four women who were badly beaten by their husbands for voting differently than their husbands. In Bangladesh, two women living near Mardaripur were beaten to death by their husbands after they told their husbands they had voted for candidates other than their husbands' choice. In Thailand, women leaders from Northern Thailand cited six examples of women who had been publicly beaten by their husbands for holding political views different than their husbands. Additional cases of domestic violence inhibiting women's political participation are cited in the GAPP Study.

In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand women's **lack of personal income** reduces their political voice, their use of the legal and political system and their individual rights and freedoms Despite women's significant contribution in time and labor to household and national economies, women rarely have access to the full income their work has generated Overall, women in Thailand have greater opportunities and more cultural approval for gaining and controlling their own personal income

* 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 and to meet with other men and women on common concerns.

* In Nepal, a woman politician who actively recruits women to participate in local elections said women are unable to become involved in politics as their husbands do not support the idea She also said women tend not to have the independent income needed for political participation, i.e., travelling to mass meetings. In Bangladesh, between 70 and 80 percent of the women participants with an indigenous NGO said that until the NGO assisted them with income-generating activities and community rights-awareness training they were unable to participate in politics. In Thailand, interviewees knew of at least 11 women whose husbands did not give them the permission or money to travel to voting centers.

In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand poor women have a significantly lower literacy rate and **poorer access to information** than poor men in Asia

* For the greater part, in all three countries poor women filter their political information from overheard conversations of men, visiting political canvassers and occasional mass meetings that are conducted in their communities. Lacking non-biased information, women are less able to make informed decisions regarding political

candidates and remain less able to use the political, legal and judicial systems to their benefit. Approximately 70% of the interviewees said women remain marginalized or disadvantaged within the political and socio-cultural infrastructure of their countries when they do not know their basic human rights under national constitutions or legal codes.

* In Nepal, 80 percent of the women interviewed near Pokhara said they did not really understand what democracy means and that they were unsure how to create positive change or gain increased access to resources under the democratic system. In Bangladesh, women participants with three indigenous development organizations had received legal and constitutional rights training. Before this training the women said "they were living in blindness and despair." In Bangkok, WO representatives taught slum dwellers (a majority were women) their legal rights, the slum dwellers then petitioned the Thai government for housing.

**Empowerment from Development Increasing Women's Political Participation:** Based on the groups and individuals interviewed in this study, women were most empowered by NGOs/PVOs/WOs that mobilize around development issues but also provided legal aid or human and/or constitutional rights awareness programs. The combination of the concrete - meeting basic needs, increasing income - and the abstract - rights awareness - provided the foundation and incentive for political activism. The most dynamic examples of women gaining political voice and clout derive from women in communities and women leaders in NGOs/PVOs/WOs building linkages to policy-makers.

* In Nepal, Tharu (a minority ethnic group) women have increased their income, become literate and received legal rights training through a program run by an indigenous NGO. These women are now politically mobilizing against the common practice of indenturing Tharu women. In Bangladesh, women participants who have met their basic needs, increased their income and had legal rights training from working with two indigenous NGOs are subsequently organizing voting blocks for local elections In Thailand, after receiving training in democratic processes from NGOs, women members of Women and Youth Development Groups are organizing themselves to present their community concerns to appropriate Ministries.

* The NGO sector (comprised of NGOs/PVOs/WOs) in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand can be characterized as more socially progressive and issues-activated than the national governments. The NGO sectors are less burdened by an unwieldy bureaucracy than the governments resulting in more

cost-effective responsiveness to the communities in which they operate.

* In all three countries, the NGO sector also contains a significant percentage of educated professional women. These women are drawn to the NGO sector as it offers 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

**Expectations:** Women anticipate that under a democracy "their daughters will have the same freedoms and opportunities as men." Women perceive democracy to be a vehicle for positive social change. Their optimism is tempered by the observation that they can not remain passive for transformation to occur.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Democracy is both a means and an end to development in that it embraces participation as a process and representation as an end. The process of participatory development enables democratization regardless of sector focus. For USAID, an emphasis on local-capacity building and popular participation directly links to a gender-integrationist approach by which democracy and development are wedded within the indigenous NGO/PVO/WO paradigm.**

**USAID Support to Pro-Democracy Women:** If pro-democracy women do not become full participants in USAID democracy projects, USAID will have lost the chance to involve one half of the population in the advancement of democratic values for personal, familial and societal development.

USAID can facilitate the process in which half of the population in Asia might strengthen their opportunities to **voice, choice** and **redress** and assist in **governance and accountability.** The USAID Missions in Nepal and Bangladesh have significant programs with the local NGO/PVO/WO community regarding local capacity building, civic and voter education and advocacy, legal aid and government reform. The Thailand Mission also includes some of these activities under its PVO Co-Financing Project.

The framework of the 10/5/93 draft USAID Democracy Strategy identifies key democracy objectives including combatting the "disenfranchisement of women" This objective strategically dovetails with draft's following objectives promoting respect for human rights; bolstering intermediary organizations and NGOs, increasing free flow of information; encouraging respect for the rule of law (and associated legislative reform and access to due process), fostering civic education and awareness; and assisting democratic institutions.

The following recommendations can assist USAID to empower women and foster democracy in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand:

**Building Democratic Institutions:**

1 **Pressure host-national government reforms to include: inclusive or participatory government processes; increased government-institution responsiveness to women's issues; and commitment and follow through on decentralization.**

Examples. 1. Encourage political parties and labor unions to follow-through on promises related to women's issues. 2 Monitor and pressure evolving local governments (versus central government) to increase women's political participation.

2. **Research political processes to determine the constraints and opportunities affecting women's levels of participation; particularly the flow of information regarding political issues and candidates.**

Example· Electoral support should include a concerted effort to reach potential women voters -that might not even speak the national language - by placing simple posters on water taps or providing mother/child health centers with radios and news programs in minority languages.

3. **Pressure host national governments for gender equity in their democratic institutions.**

Examples. 1. Women MPs should be assigned to a constituency before USAID assistance is provided to the Parliament and its MPs 2. National-level and local-governance quotas for women politicians should be set, constituencies should be assigned, and authority and resources, determined by population size of constituency, should be given to the women politicians These types of reforms will help women politicians to be full partners in the democratic governments.

4. **Monitor the stance on women's issues within party platforms and labor unions; fundamentalist groups are of a particular concern.**

**Supporting Pluralism and Participatory Development:**

1. **In bi-lateral policy discussions, continue to provide loud support for the NGO sector as a viable development tool and as a means of strengthening a functional pluralistic society.**

2. **Provide institutional capacity building and leadership or advocacy training for indigenous WOs and indigenous NGOs/PVOs that focus activities to benefit women.**

3. **Request USAID-supported local NGOs/PVOs/WOs, regardless of their sectoral focus, to piggy-back civic education, human, legal or constitutional rights awareness training onto their other development activities.** These rights awareness trainings should not be the main focus of their programs, rather a fleshing out of established systems of mobilization surrounding the WO/NGO activities

4. **Support NGOs/PVOs/WOs that operate in a holistic sense regarding women meeting their basic needs, improving their status in society (social change) and mobilizing for political action (often legal redress or social change).** Such NGOs/PVOs/WOs facilitate the initiatives of economic and political development.

5. **Support legal aid programs that provide loans - based on expected legal-related financial gains - to the women they assist.**

6. **Take action on opportunities that strengthen the NGO/PVO/WO network and facilitate communication between communities, NGOs/PVOs/WOs and governments.**

7. **Research the socio-cultural factors contributing to domestic violence. Develop interventions to counter domestic violence.** Domestic violence is a human rights abuse; domestic violence against women inhibits women's popular and political participation.

8 **Complement democracy programs with programs benefitting women in the areas of education and income-generation.** These complementary programs will assist women to overcome the constraints of poor access to information and lack of personal income.

9 **Support country-specific studies, such as the GAPP Study, in order to increase USAID's effectiveness in encouraging women's political participation in emerging democracies and democracies in crisis or transition.**

# I. INTRODUCTION

"As water does not know the power of water,
women do not know the power of women."

Nepali Woman Politician

The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Asia Bureau instituted the Asia Democracy Program (ADP) in 1990. The purpose of the ADP is to develop and strengthen sustainable democratic societies The 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

In 1992, the Asia Bureau conducted an evaluation of the ADP. The evaluation found that Thailand, Nepal, Sri lanka, and the Philippines were implementing sound multi-tiered democratization activities. Of particular importance was whether women and men were equally involved and affected by democratic movements. However, the evaluation did not disaggregate the analysis by gender nor was sufficient research conducted on the end users of USAID's assistance. In addition, there is a dearth of literature on women's recent political participation in transforming Asian democracies. As a result, the Asia Bureau decided to do a separate study on women's political participation.

Asian females constitute 50 percent of the population in Asia. Asian women significantly contribute to national economies and yet remain poorly politically represented in both local and national governments. 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 These expectations and prohibitions inherently undermine women's individual rights and their opportunities for participation in democratic societies.

The purpose of the Gender and Political Participation Study or GAPP Study was to provide the ADP information on the following three 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?**

USAID support to democratization also includes the areas of "institution building" and "popular participation." There was particular focus on these areas during the GAPP Study field research as women's public and political participation can be directly and indirectly affected by supporting civic organizations that benefit women and promote a women's agenda Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs) and women's organizations (WOs) often have a much stronger focus on the concerns of women than do national governments

Some of the GAPP Study's overarching themes are as follows:

1. Has donor support with civic 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?

2. What aspects of democracy have greater or lesser value and significance for different groups of women on a personal and socio-cultural level?

3. How do other economic, social and political phenomena, i.e., domestic violence, fundamentalism, access to personal income and devolution of government, impinge on or promote women's political participation?

The ADP framework coupled with gender-specific findings should provide clearer guidance for the formulation of gender-sensitive democracy programs, projects and activities and additional issues for consideration in developing performance indicators for program and project assessment.

GAPP Study findings uncover gender-unique socio-cultural constraints and opportunities for Asian women's political participation in **Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand.** The Study identifies lessons learned and insights gained under indigenous NGO/PVO/WO programs in order to provide practical recommendations to Asia region USAIDs for a) increasing Asian women's access to and participation in development activities, civic organizations and political processes, and b) promoting greater responsiveness by key organizations to women's concerns.

The GAPP Study should also increase the awareness of Asia region USAID staff on factors that are affecting women's political, public and development participation including: rising fundamentalism; domestic violence, devolution of central governments; and political parties' stance on women's issues

The GAPP Study is 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 " Hirschmann's work provides an overview on how to integrate women into any USAID democratization activity.

The GAPP Study document is divided into four broad themes: **1) The Role of Women In Promoting Democracies; 2) Responsiveness of Democracies to Women's Participation; 3) Significant Contextual Preconditions Affecting Women's Political Participation; and 4) Empowerment from Development Increasing Women's Political Participation.**

The GAPP Study findings are intended to provide a broader information base by which Asia-region Missions might strengthen their democracy programs' support to women's political participation The findings are analyzed within the context of the five ADP elements **voice, choice, governance, redress** and **accountability**



11

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Every country has different kinds of women (i.e , elite, educated, urban and rural poor) with different types of socio-economic constraints, opportunities, needs, desires and priorities. Women's political and public participation is realized on a broad continuum of interaction, from being a member of a water users' group to voting, to being a student activist, to holding a political party seat Therefore, selection criteria for the women participants interviewed ensured that those from different ethnic, caste, religious, economic, political and development participation, age and education levels are represented. Focal group and individual interviews took place

Interview time was weighted in bias of "recipients/participants/ beneficiaries" as opposed to, i.e., NGO/PVO/WOs and political leaders. Regarding available literature, participants' perspectives and information is the most lacking to date despite the participant profile being the largest amongst different types of women. Appropriate literature research, particularly that written by non-Western intellectuals, continued throughout the consultancy

**Over 100 women were interviewed in Nepal; more than 100 women were interviewed in Bangladesh; and in Thailand, approximately 50 women were interviewed.** Male NGO/PVO, government, community representatives and politicans were also interviewed: 19 in Nepal, 23 in Bangladesh and nine in Thailand 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. The findings presented represent the **uniform responses** of **60 percent to 80 percent** of those interviewed The information gathered does not reflect a nationwide sampling; time limits restricted the field research to certain districts between three to 12 hours from the capital cities The districts' populations did reflect the nations' ethnic and socio-economic diversity.

The field research allowed two and one half weeks each in Nepal and Bangladesh; five working days were spent in Thailand. Communities identified had exposure to or had worked with local NGOs/PVOs/WOs; individuals and focal groups interviewed tended to be identified by these organizations. The research focussed primarily on the grassroots level, i.e., indigenous women's organizations and their beneficiaries The research was not limited to USAID-funded activities or organizations. Selection criteria for the NGOs/PVOs/WOs included: organizational-beneficiary responsiveness, organizational employee/ board/beneficiary diversity; grassroots-policy linkages, organizational sustainability; and development sectoral diversity.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH/INTERVIEWS

Questions addressed women's feelings, perceptions, expectations and felt impacts of democracy Interview questions ensured that democratization is not confused with economic liberalization The five ADP elements of **voice, choice, redress, governance** and **accountability** are not clearly delineated in the following questions The five elements represented overlap much as they interact and overlap within the political frameworks of democracies

1 How have Asian women politically and publicly participated?

2. What are the restrictions and opportunities for women's public and political participation?

3 What are the women's agendas promoted in civic and political organizations?

4 What kinds of civic 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?

5 What other factors impinge or promote women's public and political participation?

6. What are common agendas, linkages and activities shared by women-supportive organizations and multi-sectoral development organizations?

7. How have women's lives been affected by democracy? In what ways have women been empowered individually and collectively?

8. What aspects of democracy are considered more or less important to different socio-economic groups of women?

9. To what extent does each Mission promote women's participation in its democracy program?

There was particular focus on "institution building" and "popular participation" during the GAPP Study field research as women's public and political participation can be directly and indirectly affected by supporting civic organizations that benefit women and promote a women's agenda

## III. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PROMOTING DEMOCRACIES

In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, women greatly contributed to the fostering of democratic political systems and principles. Individual women risked and/or sustained injury and death in unlawful demonstrations. Women were jailed for their political activism and women safe-housed political activists at great risk to their personal security

In all three countries women's organizations and groups mobilized their networks and resources to march and demonstrate for a change to democracy. Women's organizations and groups also organized public protests against government brutality of political prisoners. Women's organizations and groups often maintained public pressure and visibility during those periods when men's political activism was curtailed due to injuries or jailing.

**Nepal Examples:**

1. Suprabha Ghimire, English Literature professor at Tribhuvan University, former President of the Congress University Teachers' Association and Vice President of Congress Nepal Women's Association In 1987, while studying in France, Ghimire decided to become politically active She said that she "was ashamed" of the Europeans' views regarding the Nepalis. She heard people say that Nepalis were "passive, docile, meek and deferring and unable to demand democracy." Ghimire was so fired by this view that she decided she was willing to risk prison and death in order to re-establish democracy in Nepal It was Ghimire who acted as the spokesperson for the Congress Party during the mass rallies of the 1990 multi-party revolution At this time, Ghimire does not have clear formal political ambitions and she has yet to be approached by the Congress Party for a high-level political position

2. Village women of the Chainpur District (Democratic and Communist parties are represented in these interview groups): Many village women safe-housed political activists during Nepal's multi-party revolution The police came to the village looking for activists and often beat villagers (male and female) they suspected. The women are proud of the role they played in fostering democracy. Free elections were an exciting event for this village, "a new taste of curry."

3. There were six women martyrs from the multi-party revolution. Three were peasant women from Janakpur, two were peasant women from Lalitpur One women 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. Women participating in the demonstrations, including the martyrs, did not necessarily understand what democracy is but they believed it would improve their lives as women.

4. Parvati Rana, local Chair of the Congress National Women's Association out of Damauli, District town of Tonahue District. The Congress Party did not ask the women to participate in the Demauli demonstrations as "women need to take care of the children" and "women cannot protect themselves in jail " The Congress Party also felt that if women were formally involved in the multi-party revolution they might "leak secrets under duress." However, when the women saw the police brutality inflicted upon the demonstrating men they organized their own protest demonstration. Parvati Rana took the lead in organizing the women's demonstration and acted as the main spokesperson. Rana spent 15 days in the Pokhara jail after demonstrating (March 1990) during the multi-party revolution During the ride to jail she was terrified and cried as there had been rumors of jailed women being raped by the police

5. Demonstrations were illegal under the Panchayat system Before the multi-party demonstrations of 1990 and 1991, women in Kathmandu valley organized a march "for the women's cause" on March 8, 1989.

**Bangladesh Examples:**

1 In 1983, the United Women's Front, a group of NGOs/PVOs/WOs, members of political parties and women's professional associations, demonstrated in support of democracy. The United Women's Front claims to have had the first demonstration for democracy under the former military regime. Demonstrations were banned under martial law

2. Women students were the first to break the curfews imposed by the military regime.

3. When the Eighth Amendment was passed, stating that Islam was the state religion and the basis for law, WOs demonstrated (1989) against the decision.

**Thailand Example:**

1. In Thailand, it is estimated that 30 percent of the participants in the violent May 1992 pro-democracy rallies were women.



15

## IV. RESPONSIVENESS OF DEMOCRACIES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

### 4.1 WOMEN'S EXPECTATIONS AND CONCERNS REGARDING DEMOCRACY

"Compared to other political systems,
democracy should help women a lot "

Bangladeshi Woman PVO Representative

The women interviewed were largely unschooled in the processes and principles of democracy, however, their concepts align with the fundamentals of democracy The interviewees consulted had very clear ideas regarding their expectations, observations and concerns regarding democracy. The five ADP elements of **voice, choice, governance, redress,** and **accountability** are all represented in their expectations, observations and concerns

Underlying the awareness of the five elements is the disclosure of gender inequities manifested in these national democracies. According to the interviewees, their national democracies have yet to adequately address institutional, socio-cultural and religious biases against women However, it is interesting to note that the **interviewees perceive democracy as a vehicle for positive social change.**

Many of the ideas and concerns regarding democracy interact with women's fledgling political agendas, they also frame the political system in which "women in democracies" are trying to gain equity with men. **Given the significant role women had in fostering democracies in their countries, given their success in creating positive political and social change, these ideas and opinions might well be addressed by women in their continuing efforts to strengthen their national democracies.**

Where possible, the women's expectations, observations and concerns regarding democracy are broadly classified as those that have immediate **personal relevance** and those expectations that fall under **broader democratic reforms.**

**EXPECTATIONS - Personal Relevance:**

1. Women hope that democracy will help their culture become less male dominated and restrictive for women and more equitable toward women.

2. Women will have more opportunities to organize and be trained in income-generating activities

3. Daughters will grow up with the same freedoms as men

4. Families' basic needs will be met.

5 Women want the gender-inequitable laws to be reformed

6. Women hope that violence (domestic and public) against women will decrease.

**EXPECTATIONS - Broader Democratic Reforms:**

1. Government officials will now come to their communities to see how they live and what they need

2. Women expect the legal system to be more impartial, not biased against women

3. Women want to increase their representation in national and local government.

4. Everyone will be rich under democracy

5. A democratic government will provide basic services

6 The public will be better informed of government actions and policies.

7. The public will have a more active role in the development of government policies and allocation of resources.

8. The government will become more participatory in its decision-making process.

9. The government will become more responsive to citizens' groups.

10. Candidates now try to appeal to all sections of the community whereas before they might focus on the more powerful, i.e., landlords

11. Candidates now choose an issue that affects all groups within a community.

12. People are free to organize and to voice their opinions.

13 NGOs/PVOs/WOs have proliferated, they are gaining a voice in politics.

**CONCERNS:**

1. The media are still government controlled - is this freedom of speech?

2. Can democracy exist without the basic understanding by the population of democratic principles?

3 Can democracy exist without literacy?

4. Many members of government do not fully understand democracy.

5. Democracy is still a remote concept and abstract for many rural communities.

6 Government is still corrupt

7. There is still a lack of understanding regarding the civic responsibility to democracy

8. There is a need for conflict resolution skills to settle differences and develop common agendas among political parties.

9 The poorest of the poor are benefitting the least from the political change to democracy.

10. Lawlessness has increased.

11. Divisiveness in communities has increased because of political partisanship

## 4.2 WOMEN AS POLITICIANS

"By not articulating women's issues
women politicians hope they will not be discriminated against "

Former Thai Woman MP

In general, women in formal politics have overcome the three constraints most common to urban and rural poor women These three constraints are domestic violence, lack of personal income and poor access to information. However, with few exceptions, the democratic processes in which women politicians are meant to operate continue to undermine their potential for **voice, redress** representation of women's issues and other issues, **accountability** to the public, and skills-building for **governance and choice.**

Women politicians must function in democracies and societies that prove to be inequitable toward women Women politicians' personal lives remain free from much discrimination. However, their own political parties generally grant them less authority and resources than the men politicians. **In addition, the political parties of Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand have characteristics that do not encourage political leadership by their women representatives:**

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 instead of industrial or mechanical skills training.

3. Political parties categorize women's issues under development rather than formal politics.

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.

All the political parties have stated "women's agendas," yet the allocation of financial and human resources to this agenda remains minimal in proportion to other agendas. The Nepal Congress Party has yet to make good its promise that its Members of Parliament (MPs) will vote to revise gender-biased laws. The Bangladesh National Party (BNP) has yet to implement its comprehensive "free school" system; this system is meant to encourage girl-child education Thai political parties have yet to push for the promised decentralization of government intended to increase women's and tribals' political participation at village and district levels.

## 4.2 NATIONAL POLITICS

Women continue to be under-represented in formal political positions. Nepal and Bangladesh have both set quotas (Nepal five percent, Bangladesh 10 percent, Thailand has no established quota) 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 their primary constituency remains to be their political party. Given parliamentarian (MPs) women's reliance upon political party support for future appointed positions, it is not in their best interest to take up issues that do not follow the party's priorities.

In **Nepal**, those women who have succeeded in the political mainstream have not been members of or affiliated with women's organizations (recent exception is membership in the Pressure Group) Unlike other political associations, women's political associations receive no party monies and they are "not allowed" to solicit funds from party donors. Furthermore, women's political association leaders are appointed by the party rather than elected to office

In **Bangladesh**, women hold 35 of the 330 Parliamentary seats. Most of the women politicians (and MPs) have not been educated to know their nation's laws, legal system or constitution. This further undermines their participation and potential contribution to articulating (women's) issues. Thirty out of the 35 women MPs are appointed by their parties; five are elected The 30 appointed women MPs are not assigned to a public constituency Under these circumstances, the women MPs are greatly restricted in their opportunity to develop political skills. **The women MPs do not have the opportunity to enact a fundamental democratic principle - representation of the people.** The lack of formal political-process integration of women MPs encourages tokenism and discourages women to act as viable politicians.

During Bangladesh's interim government of 1990, the Ministry of Planning set up a series of task forces to bring out broad policy guidelines on different sectors and concerns. Most of the task forces had one woman out of ten members. Women known as "feminists" were asked to join the task forces, i.e. the Poverty Alleviation Task Force. After the elections when the interim government was dissolved, the task forces were dissolved. The Parliamentary Committees do not have as high a female representation as did the task forces.

**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.

Another source of political tokenism (in Bangladesh and Nepal) are women whose husbands and/or fathers achieved high-level political visibility/support and were then murdered The wives and daughters of these political martyrs are astutely recruited or utilized 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 Many of these women have gained valuable political skills during their tenure. However, a common perception voiced by the interviewees was that these women are symbolic rather than skilled politicians.

### 4.4 LOCAL POLITICS

Quotas for female representation do not extend beyond the national level of political positions The few women local representatives in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand are elected on their own merit Local women politicians constitute less than one percent of local political positions However, in all three countries there are certain regional or district area concentrations of local women politicians The majority of these women politicians achieved political recognition for their activism in fostering the democratization of their political systems.

**The possibility for local women politicians to access significant financial and human resources will increase dramatically when governments implement their "local governance plan."** Furthermore, the opportunity for women to be involved in local politics is much greater than at the national level. The "three greatest constraints" previously detailed interact effectively to restrict women's opportunities for formal political participation except on the local level.

In **Nepal**, the local governance reform is lacking in language and awareness of women s contributions in all the sectors important to Village Development Committees (VDCs) Women are successfully blocked from official VDC positions as literacy is often required; VDCs must provide financial statements to the District. Women have difficulty benefitting from the local body (district level) of judicial authority as these processes are carried out in Nepali and many rural women do not speak Nepali. VDCs do not have the official capacity to act as the judicial authority and lack legal knowledge to advise women

In Nepal and Bangladesh, emerging local governance policy often requires representation by men and not women at all levels of governance. In Nepal, natural resource user groups must have men to be allowed to function independent of government oversight. This interpretation of the law does not recognize that women, not men, manage and collect resources such as fuel wood and fodder.

In **Thailand** also, the local governance reform is lacking in language and awareness of women's contributions in all the sectors important to local governance and local (and national) economies. 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. Tribal women have difficulty benefitting from the local body of judicial authority as these processes are carried out in Thai and many tribal women do not speak Thai

**Nepal Examples:**

1. The Tanahue District has a high level of political development as the Congress Party has been active there since the 1950s There are three Chetras (subdistrict committees), 45 VDCs and Youth Committees Additionally, the Ward-level VDCs represent, by election, nine wards. Each of the elected Ward VDC members appoint four members. The four appointed members in turn appoint 11 members representing families in a village to voice the concerns of the village. The Chair of the Ward VDC also appoints an Advisory Committee of 11 members The sum is 47 appointed officials representing all the castes, ethnic and economic groups; none of the appointed officials is a women According to male interviewees, the reason women have not been appointed is because "women are not interested in political appointments." However, one source who attended a meeting in which a woman Community Health Volunteer (CHV) asked to be appointed said the men responded by looking "dumbfounded." The CHV said that she would be able to contribute a great deal given her level of education (completed high school) and her understanding of community health problems.

2. Salbas village interviewees· VDCs tend to make decisions that benefit men as women are barely represented in the VDCs. Example provided by the interviewees A VDC must decide between electrifying a village or building a road. Men appreciate a good road as they commonly travel to and from their home communities for social and political activities. Women rarely travel outside their home and neighboring communities. Women spend 35-40 hours a week collecting fuel wood and cooking for their families; this labor would be minimized by the introduction of electricity and electric stoves. However, the VDC will choose to build the road.

**Bangladesh Example:**

In 1990, NGOs/PVOs/WOs mobilized demonstrations against the 1990 Health Policy. The Health Policy would have allowed the District (Tana) 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) It would have also given elected/appointed officials the right to decide who was eligible for health care

**Thailand Example:**

A woman in a northern province campaigned to become the village chief and sit on the Tambon Council. She won her positions by clearly articulating the concerns of all the groups in her village (women, men, elders, youth) She decided to lobby for a political position as she "was unhappy with how the men ran the show, they did not take into consideration all members of their community when making decisions." This village chief is well-known and respected for her conflict resolution ability.

## V. SIGNIFICANT CONTEXTUAL PRECONDITIONS AFFECTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### 5.1 THE THREE MOST SIGNIFICANT CONSTRAINTS

**The three greatest constraints to women's political participation are domestic violence, lack of personal income and access to information.** These three constraints form the most significant contextual preconditions affecting women's political participation. They are of particular significance to women in urban and rural poor/subsistence communities. This socio-economic group constitutes the largest portion of the female population in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand. Every focal group interview revealed anecdotal information and personal histories illustrating the three constraints. The anecdotal information referred to national or local instances familiar to women; personal histories provided primary information.

Other socio-economic categories of women also face these three constraints but to a lesser degree The group that is least impacted by these constraints are educated professional women Educated professional women constitute the smallest proportion of the female population in all three countries Additionally, women of female-headed households showed greater overall political participation than women in traditional family units.

The three constraints are not ordered in a prioritized fashion as they interact with different significance within varying localities, communities and households.

### 5.2 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**Voice, redress and human rights are linked to the issue of domestic violence.** Voice places emphasis on an open society that is free from reprisals; people should not fear imprisonment, torture, or execution as a result of expressing their opinion. Domestic violence toward women is not uncommon when women express independent political opinions (voice).

The family household is the most intimate environment a woman inhabits. 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. Domestic violence and the threat of domestic violence significantly control and inhibit women's political participation in urban and rural poor/subsistence communities

(lack of opportunities for redress). Fortunately, legal aid programs provide opportunities for redress and voice; women then have the option to leave husbands who beat them.

**Voting:** Women appear to vote in equal numbers as men in Nepal and Bangladesh. Women vote in greater numbers than men in Thailand. Women have been beaten and beaten to death by their husbands for voting for a candidate other than their husbands' choice. Women have been beaten merely for voting as their husbands do not think their wives should vote Women often lie to their husbands when they are voting for a different candidate to avoid being beaten Women are divorced by their husbands for holding different political views and voting differently than their husbands. Divorce has great negative economic and social impact on women.

**Demonstrations and Mass Meetings:** Women are not encouraged by their husbands to 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?" Women who defy their husbands to participate in demonstrations and mass meetings run the risk of injury during the event; their risk of injury is much higher upon return to their homes.

Overall, men 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 " Many men also said that it was "a shame that women are beaten and beaten to death by their husbands, women should be protected by the men in their family." Men in Bangladesh said that "under Koranic law husbands have the right to hit their wives."

Certainly, not all women interviewed were subjected to domestic violence. However, the women interviewed viewed the constraint of domestic violence as directly linked to women's inhibited political participation.

**Examples of Domestic Violence Interfering with Political Participation:**

**Nepal:**

1. Many women of the Salbas village of the Chainpur District have presented their demands orally to the VDC and District Development Committee (DDC) The women's political activity required the permission of their husbands. A number of women were unable to participate in these activities because their

husbands would not allow them to do so If women do not take permission from their husbands they are seen as "defiant " Salbas women say that "if women defy their husbands, the husbands will beat them and then maybe take a new wife " In Salbas, men often beat their wives after drinking roxy (local liquor).

2. A local school in Pokhara received a new management team that was government appointed. The students, families of the students and the teachers did not appreciate an appointment without their input and prior notification; they were very content with the former management team. The teachers and students demonstrated by holding their classes outside the school building in the school yard. The local police then arrived and told the students and teachers that classes must be held in the school building. The news that police had arrived spread very quickly and alarmed the mothers of the students.

Many of the students' mothers arrived at the school to "protect" their children. Fighting between the police and community did break out. It is not clear who began the violence. 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. The husbands said that it was "unseemly" for the women to leave their homes and demonstrate in public Other husbands appreciated their wives' strong protective instincts toward their children.

3 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

**Bangladesh:**

1. Indigenous PVO participants: In Kalkani, near Mardaripur, a PVO representative said two women told their husbands that they had voted differently than their husbands. Their husbands then beat them to death. "We (the participants) do not know any women who tell their husbands if they have voted differently; this action remains a dangerous secret. We are expected to follow our husbands dictate, including who we vote for! After all, husbands are usually physically stronger than their wives. We know that voting is our personal right but. ."

2. Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) primary education teachers near Jessore 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 lack of personal income 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.

**Thailand:**

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

## 5.3 LACK OF PERSONAL INCOME

Lack of access to personal income is another reason why women's political participation is curtailed. **Lack of personal income reduces (voice) women's political voice, (redress) their use of the legal and political system and their control of individual rights and freedoms.** Despite women's superlative contributions in time and labor to household economies, women rarely have access to the full income their work has generated. In a number of households women do control a small portion of the household income for small day-to-day expenses. Generally, men control the greater portion of income generated by the family unit. Under these circumstances, women must have permission and financial support from their husbands and fathers to fully participate in political processes. The issue of women's personal income was not as significant in Thailand. Examples of Thai women achieving in the private sector are numerous.

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 said that "women shouldn't waste money and time on politics."

The striking exception to this attitude was voiced by men whose wives had gained high visibility (local or national fame) for their activism during the political changeover. Their wives had been single (often students) during the change to democracy. 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.

**Examples of Lack of Personal Income Interfering with Political Participation:**

**Nepal:**

1. Parvati Rana and Amar Raj Kaimi, politicians from the Damauli, District town of Tonahue District. Rana tries 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" (few women do). However, Rana believes that she provides a good role model for women's political participation as she is well known for her activism and both men and women know that her political work is supported by her husband.

Amar Kaimi agreed that women face particular social-cultural constraints regarding travelling alone - they face potential character defamation - and leaving their home responsibilities for outside (political) activities. Kaimi said "that Rana was one of the only women he knew whose political activism was financially supported by her husband." Rana said that she "could not be politically active without her husband's (financial) support "

2. 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 DDC because their husbands would not give them the funds for travel

**Bangladesh:**

Before joining one of the programs sponsored by two indigenous PVOs, 70 to 80 percent of the women had not been able to take political action with the exception of voting. They said "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.

**Thailand:**

The 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.

## 5.4 POOR ACCESS TO INFORMATION

For the reasons detailed below, women have poor access to information (political and otherwise) **Lacking information, women are less able to make informed decisions regarding political candidates (voice) and remain less able to use the political, legal and judicial systems to their benefit (redress). When women do not know their basic human rights under national constitutions or legal codes they remain marginalized or disadvantaged within the political and socio-cultural infrastructure of their countries.**

**Political Information Regarding Candidates and Issues:** Poor women have a significantly lower literacy rate than poor men in Asia Even the literate rural women rarely read newspapers Unlike men, 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, as opposed to tuning in regularly to the news or a favorite show. 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.

For the greater part, women filter their political information from overheard conversations of men, visiting political canvassers and occasional mass meetings that are conducted in their communities. These three common information sources are at best incomplete and biased. These sources provide inadequate information for women to make informed decisions when voting

**Knowledge of Political System:** Apart from voting many women, literate and illiterate, do not understand or make use of the varying political/democratic processes available for creating change and accessing resources. However, women who had received legal, constitutional and/or human rights awareness training were motivated to make use of the political system. These women did make use of their training if supported by their husbands and/or fathers or if they were not economically reliant upon men (i.e., divorcees, widows, abandoned women, female-headed households).

**Examples of Poor Access to Information Interfering with Political Participation:**

**Nepal:**

1. The Rasuwa District, in the northern area bordering Tibet, is predominately Tamang (a minority ethnic group). Of this population, 95 percent of the women do not speak Nepali and are illiterate The women have little access to or use of the Nepali-language radio, newspaper and television. Most of the men

are illiterate but do speak Nepali and listen to the radio. Women's information, including political, is filtered from the opinions overheard by the men in their families and communities

2. Eighty percent of the women of 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 "

3. Ninety percent of the women in Salbas said that if "they were literate, more information (political and otherwise) would be available to them." 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."

**Bangladesh:**

Most of the literate women benefitting from an indigenous PVO spoke of the need to be better informed regarding candidates, local and national politics and political processes. They said that the illiterate women in their communities were even less informed than they; the literate women were from wealthier families and had some leisure time to listen to the radio (in some instances watch television). The women participating in two indigenous PVO or Grameen Bank programs had significantly increased their awareness and knowledge of basic rights and political process. Before working with these organizations, the women said "they were living in blindness and despair."

**Thailand:**

1. 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 " In fact, many of these women were so burdened with labor that they rarely slept more than four hours a night. By their observation, women in wealthier families did watch television news

2. In Bangkok, slum-dweller communities are being destroyed and replaced with high-price structures. A number of women from these communities, who had benefitted from NGOs/WOs activities, have organized demonstrations and petitioned the government for alternative housing.

## 5.5 ASIAN WOMEN'S ISSUES

"Social traditions repress women more than the laws "

Women Lawyer Apprentice (Nepal)

Asian women have been contributing to democratization against great odds. This portion of the document is meant to reveal how astounding the democratization efforts of Asian women have been given the depth of the restrictions and inequities they face.

Apart from the three major constraints (of domestic violence, lack of personal income and poor access to information) to women's political participation, there are a number of other contextual preconditions that continue to adversely affect women's popular and political participation Many of these preconditions/expectations are manifested within the household environment and spill into women's interaction with public life.

Women's expectations for equity under democracy begin with their status within their households and immediate communities. Once developed, a superstructure of political parity must interact with traditional socio-cultural and religious expectations and political history.

The issues detailed below overlap with the concerns of the five ADP elements **of voice, choice, redress, accountability and governance. Many of the issues are inadequately addressed under current political party platforms, law and law enforcement. Many of the issues are of cultural, religious and economic origin.** Although many women are not directly involved in or affected by all the issues outlined, women are aware of how these problems continue to undermine their status in society and the political framework

The issues detailed effectively interact to form an overriding sense of women being less equal to men despite constitutional equity. The issues underscore this contextual precondition of (societal and legal) inequality with men. **Many of the issues are indirectly or directly a result of females (adults and children) having less access than males (adults and children) to opportunities for income-generation (and associated skills), education, information, legal redress and personal freedoms.**

The interviewees believe that under a democratic system, increased public awareness and proper attention can be brought to these concerns. They anticipate: political candidates will begin to take or support action regarding the issues, NGOs/PVOs/ WOs, popular movements and communities will be given greater voice and latitude in representing and addressing these concerns.

1 Sexual Harassment: Women are sexually harassed in the work place and in public Women have little opportunity to change sexual harassment practices in the work place When women are harassed in public they are afraid to respond strongly to the harassers for two reasons· 1) negative attention will be brought to them and their families should they "fight" back, family or personal honor would be jeopardized; and 2) the men will take revenge.

2 Rape It is very difficult for a known rape victim to become married as· virginity is prized; communities will question the circumstances surrounding the rape; and a woman who is outspoken (about a rape) will be outspoken in general, an undesirable trait.

Hindu belief: Premenstrual virgins are believed to have magical (healing) powers This particular belief was imported from India to Nepal: Men suffering from sexually transmitted diseases believe they will be cured if they have sex with a premenstrual virgin This belief may be a contributing factor to the increase of girl-child rape instances in Nepal, Bangladesh and other countries bordering India

3 Advertisements that exploit women as sex objects to sell the product

4 Increase in pornography.

5 Trafficking of girl children to brothels Girls at increasingly younger ages are participating in prostitution as the clients hope very young girls will not yet be AIDS carriers.

6. AIDS Awareness (particularly given women's lack of control of their sexual practices).

7. Child marriage.

8 Polygamy.

9 Law reform Examples: **[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) Inheritance laws favor men; 3) Divorce laws favor men (estranged wives receive alimony for only five years), 4) It is legal for a man to commit adultery, it is illegal for a woman to commit adultery; 5) The father is responsible for feeding his son and his wife (not a daughter). **[Bangladesh]** 1) Uniform Family Code; 2) Divorce laws favor men; also, for a woman to have the right to divorce her husband it must be stated in the marriage contract; 3) A Bangladeshi man's wife

automatically gains Bangladeshi citizenship; a Bangladeshi woman's husband will not gain Bangladeshi citizenship for many years; 4) Children must take the father's family name, 5) Women require their father's or husband's names on their passports. **[Thailand]** 1) Divorce law; A man can divorce his wife on the suspicion of adultery, a women must prove that her husband was violent, adulterous or did not provide financial support for her to divorce him; 2) Prostitution is illegal. It is the prostitutes who are arrested, not the pimps, not the clients; 3) A women must have her husband's signature to lease land; a man does not require his wife's signature to lease land; 4)"Protective" legislation (so that women are not forced into prostitution) that limits women's travel to and work in the Middle East, Germany, Scandinavia, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

10. Mothers' contributions to the household practice of discrimination against girl children; women need to foster a change in this behavior.

11 The urban migration of men for economic reasons leaving women relatives in vulnerable positions since the remaining women are easily (and legally) exploited in their home communities.

12. The practice of dowry Dowry contributes to: the commonly held belief that women are "parasites" upon family wealth; and violence against women, i.e., news reports on "suicides" when women die from acid-throwing and the ingestion of insecticide.

13 The belief that widows should not remarry as they will be unlucky for future husbands.

14. Men do not contribute to household chores and child care (often even when both the husband and wife have professional jobs).

15. The accepted practice of husbands beating defiant wives, the practice of men taking new wives if current wives are defiant.

16. Girl children and women suffer from low registration of their births, marriages and deaths Many women do not know or insist to have their marriages registered. Many men take other wives in unregistered marriages.

17. Many wealthy families allow less personal freedom for women relatives than poorer families do Poor families are quicker to support a woman working for purely economic reason whereas wealthy families remain more concerned with social status Wealthy families tend to "spoil" their sons

and expect their daughters to behave with traditional decorum.

18 Women must modify their behavior regarding individual goals versus their duty to the home. When women are perceived as "too independent" they anger their husbands and communities. Quarreling often leads to the women being beaten by the men as it is "inappropriate" for them to hold independent opinions. In this sense women are repressed by both behavior modification and physical violence.

19. After women receive permission from their husbands to meet, discuss issues and develop a plan of action their husbands often do not allow them to carry out their agenda.

20 Men make the decisions regarding major purchases. The woman's opportunity and labor costs are rarely considered in these decisions This lack of consideration minimizes the "free time" women can devote to other interests (i e., community development, personal income generation, politics.

21. The history of monarchy and feudalism meant that women-commoners were usually hidden from the gaze of royal men to reduce the chance they would be taken as concubines or for momentary sexual pleasure This attitude toward women's personal freedoms to travel alone, live alone, etc. remain influenced by this history.

## VI. EMPOWERMENT FROM DEVELOPMENT INCREASING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### 6.1 THE LOCAL NON-PARTISAN NGO PARADIGM

A functional pluralistic society includes a web of associational structures, i.e., public advocacy NGOs and constituent advocacy groups (professional, religious and ethnic associations, business clubs, women's organizations) that 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 local non-partisan NGOs/PVOs/WOs

Support to indigenous NGOs/PVOs/WOs contributes to democratic functional pluralism and political participation Local non-partisan NGOs/PVOs/WOs provide a dynamic catalyst for women's political and popular participation The NGO sector (comprised of NGOs/PVOs/WOs) in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand can be characterized as more socially progressive and issues-activated than the national governments. The NGO sectors are less burdened by an unwieldy bureaucracy than the governments resulting in more cost-effective responsiveness to the communities in which they operate.

Although influenced by the top-down donor and government development models, NGOs/PVOs/WOs tend to be more participatory (than governments) in their development process and 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.

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

## 6.2 HOW NGOS INCREASE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Three major classifications of non-partisan NGOs/PVOs/WOs are significant regarding the increase of women's 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.

**Women are most empowered by (3.) NGOs that mobilize around development issues and also provide legal, human and/or constitutional rights awareness.** The development activities often provide women access to a personal income and the "rights awareness training" provides a framework in which women feel justified to take political action despite traditional cultural and religious prohibitions to women's popular and political participation. Income plus rights empowerment have a galvanizing effect on women regardless of their socio-economic status

Women interacting with NGOs/PVOs/WOs that mobilize around development issues often improve their status within their households and communities as their income increases. 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). However, **the combination of the concrete - meeting of basic needs, increase in income - and the abstract - rights awareness - provides the foundation and incentive for full mobilization or political activism.**

In Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand, wisely supported indigenous NGOs/PVOs/WOS can sway the balance of women's popular and political participation NGOs/PVOs/WOs are relatively non-restricted by local and national government. **Nepali NGOs** also have a 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. Before democracy was established in Bangladesh, poverty pushed many communities to organize to meet their basic needs; local NGOs/PVOs/WOs have significantly contributed to this process. In **Thailand**, the NGOs/PVOs/WOs based in Bangkok tend to be "advocacy" organizations while the rural NGOs/PVOs/WOs tend to be more development oriented.

**Examples:** The following examples underscore how NGOs/PVOs/WOs have increased women's political participation by assisting women to overcome the three constraints of domestic violence, lack of personal income and access to information. These successful examples derive from NGOs/PVOs/WOs that facilitate the meeting of

basic needs and provide legal, human or constitutional rights awareness and advocacy WOs The successful examples deal directly with the contextual preconditions (outlined in "Asian Women's Issues") that are unique to increasing women's political participation

**Nepal Examples:**

1. The Pressure 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 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 Pressure Group then organized a "Silent March" against rape December 2nd, 1992 (2,000 women - students, professionals, political leaders, NGO/PVO/WO representatives, housewives - in attendance). The Silent March received much media coverage The son was charged and thrown in jail. The Pressure 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.

2. 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 issue of indentured bondage.

**Bangladesh Examples:**

1. As 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.

2. Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) participants near Jessore said that women needed to know their basic rights - human, legal and constitutional - and better understand the political system so that they could transmit this knowledge to others in their community After facilitating the meeting of basic needs and income-generating activities, BRAC will be providing them a training in legal rights

3. Participants of the Mardaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) 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

**Thailand Examples:**

1. 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.

2. The Friends of Women Foundation, with other WOs, helped working women to 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.

## 6.3 NGO/PVO/WO NON-PARTISANSHIP

Many NGO/PVO/WO leaders do not want to have known political affiliations as it reduces the potential to work on an "as needed basis" with communities. NGO/PVO/WO 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 This perception is often heightened by donor support; donors reflect their national politics and it is considered (by political parties and communities) to carry over to the supported NGO.

**Nepal Example:**

1. USAID-supported health and population activities in the Makawanpur District are perceived by the local communities to be promoting the Congress Party. This perception is fostered because these activities are implemented through local NGOs that have unstated but strong political ties with the Congress Party. USAID supports local NGOs that claim to be non-partisan. However, many NGOs are forced into informal political alliances in order to receive community and local government participation and support to carry out their programs. In fact, this perception of NGO-party alliance undermines full participation.

Established in 1989, the USAID/GON Community Health Volunteers (CHV) project successfully trained women 35,000 CHVs. After assuming the project, GON was unable to provide the small stipend the USAID project offered However, the CHVs continued to operate on a purely voluntary basis because their training had increased their status in their communities. The CHVs opinions are being sought by their communities on many community-related issues. The CHVs said that they felt an increase in "self worth" and many are now active participants in high level village/community meetings However, the CHVs have not yet entered the formal male power structure of their communities.

In addition to being prized by their communities, CHVs are seen as human resources by development groups. Many CHVs are being recruited by local and international NGOs as salaried employees. Also, the GON is training CHVs to be salaried Mother Child Health Care Workers (MCHWs). Political parties are also trying to lay claim to the successes of individual CHVs.

**Bangladesh Example:**

1. A group of women from the 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.

**Thailand Example:**

1. Gender and Development Research Institute (GDRI) is monitoring men and women MPs regarding many issues and elections promises including women's issues At the year's end, GDRI will publish a MP "report card.



90

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Women have contributed significantly to the process of democratization in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand However, since the establishment of democracy, women have not been mainstreamed into formal politics Under the democracies of Nepal, Thailand and Bangladesh, women remain outside of the political power structure and continue to suffer gender-related inequities within legal, socio-cultural and economic frameworks.

Most women are unable to interact with or affect the ADP elements of **voice, choice, redress, governance and accountability.** The majority of the women in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand face three overwhelming constraints to their public and political participation: **domestic violence; lack of personal income; and poor access to information.** Men inhibit women's popular and political participation by domestic violence and denying or controlling women's access to information and income. For example, women need the permission of their husbands to meet for any reason, including political, and women are told by their husbands for whom to vote. Women who openly defy their husbands risk injury and death.

Apart from the three overwhelming constraints, other contextual preconditions of a socio-cultural, religious and economic nature inhibit women from exercising their individual freedoms and rights within their households, larger communities and political systems. These restrictions also create the conditions shaping democracy within the home (domestic democracy).

The lack of domestic democracy can so influence women that even when women do understand their constitutional, legal or human rights, many continue to behave according to social and family expectations. These expectations do not include women's full and active political participation. Given that domestic democracy is so poorly upheld, women's low level of participation in the formal political arena is understandable.

The governments and political parties of Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand tend to underestimate the contributions women have made to their national economies and the process of democratization. They do recognize that support by men is innately more powerful than that of women given women's lower socio-cultural status Politics is perceived as a man's domain. Therefore, governments and political parties of Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand have not given high priority or human and financial allocations to women's issues. Although women are making more demands for government services they have little faith that petitioning the government to address women's concerns will effect change in government practices and allocation of financial and human resources.



41

Women politicians are often appointed rather than elected. Even when elected they are expected to follow party lines which do not tend to highlight women's concerns. Women politicians are blighted by public perceptions of tokenism, lack of party authority and monies and poorer education than their male counterparts (regarding laws and constitution) As appointed politicians they do not have a public constituency.

Women's political development can be categorized as "survival oriented." Women are quicker than men to look for economic improvement under democracy; men initially focus on personal freedoms. As women understand political processes better they (tend to) first mobilize to meet their basic needs, i.e., a good water tap, access to education, and formation of natural-resource user groups. When women have met their basic needs they become more concerned with issues of a more ethical nature including. legal reform or redress; sponsoring political candidates; and demonstrating for better working conditions

Many indigenous NGOs/PVOs/WOs have concretely assisted women to overcome the three constraints of domestic violence, lack of personal income and poor access to information. These NGOs/PVOs/WOs facilitate women's popular participation through a variety of activities that help women mobilize to meet their basic needs NGOs/PVOs/WOs that help women to meet their basic needs and then provide them with a human, constitutional or legal rights framework have the most catalytic affect on women's political participation. In this sequence, women are better able to realize how their basic needs and societal status are affected by local and national politics and how they are able to improve these conditions by using political processes. There is a direct linkage between this NGO/PVO/WO facilitation and women becoming more politically active. Unfortunately, the majority of rural and urban women remain largely unaware of women activists and women's organizations.

Although useful, pure rights awareness training can often frustrate women, i.e., women who are scrabbling to have food or women who cannot afford lawyers to enforce their former husbands' maintenance pledges. Development-focussed NGOs/PVOs/WOs are helpful to women trying to meet their basic needs, but women do not automatically move from greater public participation to greater political participation as a result of working with a development activity.

Women who have received some rights awareness training value the concept of democracy as a vehicle for positive social change; they recognize that democracy is a political system that might improve their standard of living and status in their societies. They understand that they have the right and civic responsibility to argue against societal limitations, particularly those that impinge on their opportunities for income-generation, education

and personal freedoms. Women anticipate that under a democracy "their daughters will have the same freedoms and opportunities as men." As politically active members of society, women often focus on issues that affect their communities and families, women bring individual concerns with altruistic impact to the political process.

The most dynamic examples of women gaining political voice and clout derive from the linkages between women politicians, women in communities and women in NGOs/PVOs/WOs. The Nepal Pressure Group illustrates this phenomenon. The fledgling Pressure Group includes individual women members, women politicians from different non-aligned political parties, and women affiliated with NGOs/PVOs/WOs. Together, they have brought the following to bear: their combined strength; visibility, knowledge of law, constitutional rights and political process; knowledge of issues affecting women from all castes, ethnic origin and socio-economic status; and organizational skills. These combined traits and skills are creating positive political, legal and social change. Their non-partisanship remains very political in nature as they pressure their agenda through the political system. Thailand and Bangladesh have yet to develop such cohesive organizations. In Bangladesh, women leaders from the NGO/PVO/WO sector are laying the groundwork for a similar organization.

There is a growing awareness by women that democracy will better their status in society. Their optimism is tempered by the observation that they cannot remain passive for transformation to occur. Women, aware of their rights under a democratic system, are willing to risk communal upheaval and scorn by taking on the responsibility for positive change. Women recognize that democracy must begin in their own homes and communities in order to flourish nationwide.



43

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Women Bringing Democracy to Women** The constraints women must overcome to be politically viable are institutional and societal. The majority of women in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand must overcome the three constraints of **domestic violence, lack of personal income and access to information** before women's political activism will flourish.

Women politicians, who remain largely untouched by the three constraints, must insist that restrictions imposed on them by their political institutions and parties are lifted. This action will provide women politicians with the same institutional framework as their male counterparts. Women politicians' opportunities to become viable politicians and strong spokespersons for women issues and other concerns will be increased. Women politicians must find opportunities to bring attention and solutions to the three constraints facing women

NGO/PVO/WO leaders should maintain or develop non-partisan yet political women's agendas. They should cultivate government support for eradicating the three constraints, other contextual preconditions adversely affecting women's popular and political participation and the limitations imposed on women politicians Women, women politicians and NGO/PVO/WO women leaders should be well versed in their constitutional and legal rights as well as judicial, legal and political processes. NGOs/PVOs/WOs should piggy-back rights awareness training onto their existing programs.

**USAID Support to Pro-Democracy Women:** If women do not become full participants in USAID democracy projects, USAID will have lost the chance to involve one half of the population in the advancement of democratic values for personal, familial and societal development.

USAID can facilitate the process in which half of the population in Asia might strengthen their opportunities to **voice, choice and redress,** and assist in **governance and accountability.** The USAID Missions in Nepal and Bangladesh have significant programs with the local NGO/PVO/WO community regarding local capacity building, civic and voter education and advocacy, legal aid and government reform. The Thailand Mission also includes some of these activities under its PVO Co-Financing Project

Women politicians face institutional constraints, government institutional reforms are needed to democratize government processes. Governments have yet to be responsive to women. These government institutional reforms will be long-term processes. For USAID, support for indigenous NGO sectors might be the most



44

timely and effective means to increase women's political participation. Clearly, any USAID programs and projects benefitting women in the areas of education and income-generation will help assist overcoming the constraints of poor access to information and lack of personal income

**Democracy is both a means and an end to development in that it embraces participation as a process and representation as an end. The process of participatory development enables democratization regardless of sector focus. For USAID, an emphasis on local-capacity building and popular participation directly links to an gender-integrationist approach by which democracy and development are wedded within the indigenous NGO/PVO/WO paradigm.**

The framework of the 10/5/93 draft USAID Democracy Strategy identifies key democracy objectives including combatting the "disenfranchisement of women". This objective strategically dovetails with the draft's following objectives: promoting respect for human rights; bolstering intermediary organizations and NGOs; increasing the free flow of information; encouraging respect for the rule of law (and associated legislative reform and access to due process); fostering civic education and awareness; and assisting democratic institutions.

The following recommendations can assist USAID to empower women and foster democracy in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand:

**Democratic Institution Building:**

1. **Pressure host-national government reforms to include: inclusive or participatory government processes; increased government-institution responsiveness to women's issues; and commitment and follow through on decentralization.**

   Examples. 1. Encourage political parties and labor unions to follow-through on promises related to women's issues. 2. Monitor and pressure evolving local governments (versus central government) to increase women's political participation.

2. **Research political processes to determine the constraints and opportunities affecting women's levels of participation; particularly the flow of information regarding political issues and candidates.**

   Example Electoral support should include a concerted effort to reach potential women voters - that might not even speak the national language - by placing simple posters on water taps or providing mother/child health centers with radios and news programs in minority languages.



45

3. **Pressure host-national governments for gender-equity in their democratic institutions.**
   Examples: 1. Women MPs should be assigned to a constituency before USAID assistance is provided to the Parliament and its MPs. 2 National-level and local-governance quotas for women politicians should be set, constituencies should be assigned, and authority and resources, determined by population size of constituency, should be given to the women politicians These types of reforms will help women politicians to be full partners in the democratic governments.

4 **Monitor the stance on women's issues within party platforms and labor unions; fundamentalist groups are of a particular concern.**

Supporting Pluralism and Participatory Development:

1. **In bi-lateral policy discussions, continue to provide loud support for the NGO sector as a viable development tool and as a means of strengthening a functional pluralistic society.**

2 **Provide institutional capacity building and leadership or advocacy training for indigenous WOs and indigenous NGOs/PVOs that focus activities to benefit women.**

3. **Request USAID-supported local NGOs/PVOs/WOs, regardless of their sectoral focus, to piggy-back civic education, human, legal or constitutional rights awareness training onto their other development activities.** These rights awareness trainings should not be the main focus of their programs, rather a fleshing out of established systems of mobilization surrounding the WO/NGO activities.

4 **Support NGOs/PVOs/WOs that operate in a holistic sense regarding women meeting their basic needs, improving their status in society (social change) and mobilizing for political action (often legal redress or social change).** Such NGOs/PVOs/WOs facilitate the initiatives of economic and political development.

5. **Support legal aid programs that provide loans - based on expected legal-related financial gains - to the women they assist.**

6. **Take action on opportunities that strengthen the NGO/PVO/WO network and facilitates communication between communities, NGOs/PVOs/WOs and governments.**



46

7 **Research the socio-cultural factors contributing to domestic violence. Develop interventions to counter domestic violence.** Domestic violence is a human rights abuse; domestic violence against women inhibits women's popular and political participation

8 **Complement democracy programs with programs benefitting women in the areas of education and income-generation.** These complementary programs will assist women to overcome the constraints of poor access to information and lack of personal income.

9. **Undertake country-specific studies, such as the GAPP Study, in order to increase USAID's effectiveness in encouraging women's political participation in emerging democracies and democracies in crisis or transition.**



47

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Women Bringing Democracy to Women:** The constraints women must overcome to be politically viable are institutional and societal The majority of women in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand must overcome the three constraints of **domestic violence, lack of personal income and access to information** before women's political activism will flourish

Women politicians, who remain largely untouched by the three constraints, must insist that restrictions imposed on them by their political institutions and parties are lifted. This action will provide women politicians with the same institutional framework as their male counterparts Women politicians' opportunities to become viable politicians and strong spokespersons for women issues and other concerns will be increased. Women politicians must find opportunities to bring attention and solutions to the three constraints facing women

NGO/PVO/WO leaders should maintain or develop non-partisan yet political women's agendas They should cultivate government support for eradicating the three constraints and other contextual preconditions adversely affecting women's popular and political participation. The leaders should also pressure political parties to lift the gender-unique limitations imposed on women politicians. Women, women politicians and NGO/PVO/WO women leaders should be well versed in their constitutional and legal rights as well as judicial, legal and political processes. NGOs/PVOs/WOs should piggy-back rights awareness training onto their existing programs.

**USAID Support to Pro-Democracy Women:** If women do not become full participants in USAID democracy projects, USAID will have lost the chance to involve one half of the population in the advancement of democratic values for personal, familial and societal development.

USAID can facilitate the process in which half of the population in Asia might strengthen their opportunities to **voice, choice and redress,** and assist in **governance and accountability.** The USAID Missions in Nepal and Bangladesh have significant programs with the local NGO/PVO/WO community regarding local capacity building, civic and voter education and advocacy, legal aid and government reform. The Thailand Mission also includes some of these activities under its PVO Co-Financing Project

Government institutional reforms are needed to democratize government processes, i e., support gender equity and women's access to political process Governments have yet to be responsive to women. These government institutional reforms will

be long-term processes. For USAID, support for indigenous NGO sectors might be the most timely and effective means to increase women's political participation Clearly, any USAID programs and projects benefitting women in the areas of education and income-generation will help assist overcoming the constraints of poor access to information and lack of personal income

**Democracy is both a means and an end to development in that it embraces participation as a process and representation as an end. The process of participatory development enables democratization regardless of sector focus. For USAID, an emphasis on local-capacity building and popular participation directly links to a gender-integrationist approach by which democracy and development are wedded within the indigenous NGO/PVO/WO paradigm.**

The framework of the 10/5/93 draft USAID Democracy Strategy identifies key democracy objectives including combatting the "disenfranchisement of women". This objective strategically dovetails with the draft's following objectives· promoting respect for human rights, bolstering intermediary organizations and NGOs, increasing the free flow of information, encouraging respect for the rule of law (and associated legislative reform and access to due process), fostering civic education and awareness; and assisting democratic institutions

The following recommendations can assist USAID to empower women and foster democracy in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand.

**Democratic Institution Building:**

1. **Pressure host-national government reforms to include: inclusive or participatory government processes; increased government-institution responsiveness to women's issues; and commitment and follow through on decentralization.**
   Examples. 1. Encourage political parties and labor unions to follow-through on promises related to women's issues 2 Monitor and pressure evolving local governments (versus central government) to increase women's political participation

2. **Research political processes to determine the constraints and opportunities affecting women's levels of participation; particularly the flow of information regarding political issues and candidates.**
   Example Electoral support should include a concerted effort to reach potential women voters - that might not even speak the national language - by placing simple posters on water taps or providing mother/child health centers with radios and news programs in minority languages.



49

3. **Pressure host-national governments for gender-equity in their democratic institutions.**

   Examples 1 Women MPs should be assigned to a constituency before USAID assistance is provided to the Parliament and its MPs. 2. National-level and local-governance quotas for women politicians should be set, constituencies should be assigned, and authority and resources, determined by population size of constituency, should be given to the women politicians. These types of reforms will help women politicians to be full partners in the democratic governments

4 **Monitor the stance on women's issues within party platforms and labor unions; fundamentalist groups are of a particular concern.**

**Supporting Pluralism and Participatory Development:**

1. **In bi-lateral policy discussions, continue to provide loud support for the NGO sector as a viable development tool and as a means of strengthening a functional pluralistic society.**

2. **Provide institutional capacity building and leadership or advocacy training for indigenous WOs and indigenous NGOs/PVOs that focus activities to benefit women.**

3 **Request USAID-supported local NGOs/PVOs/WOs, regardless of their sectoral focus, to piggy-back civic education, human, legal or constitutional rights awareness training onto their other development activities.** These rights awareness trainings should not be the main focus of their programs, rather a fleshing out of established systems of mobilization surrounding the WO/NGO activities

4 **Support NGOs/PVOs/WOs that operate in a holistic sense regarding women meeting their basic needs, improving their status in society (social change) and mobilizing for political action (often legal redress or social change).** Such NGOs/PVOs/WOs facilitate the initiatives of economic and political development.

5. **Support legal aid programs that provide loans - based on expected legal-related financial gains - to the women they assist.**

6 **Take action on opportunities that strengthen the NGO/PVO/WO network and facilitates communication between communities, NGOs/PVOs/WOs and governments.**

7 **Research the socio-cultural factors contributing to domestic violence. Develop interventions to counter domestic violence.** Domestic violence is a human rights abuse, domestic violence against women inhibits women's popular and political participation.

8 **Complement democracy programs with programs benefitting women in the areas of education and income-generation.** These complementary programs will assist women to overcome the constraints of poor access to information and lack of personal income.

9 **Undertake country-specific studies, such as the GAPP Study, in order to increase USAID's effectiveness in encouraging women's political participation in emerging democracies and democracies in crisis or transition.**

## APPENDIX A

## NEPAL FINDINGS

"As water does not know the power of water,
women do not know the power of women."

Nepali Women Politician

### I. What is Democracy?

"Democracy is freedom, freedom to do anything, say anything "

Woman PVO Participant

### II. Additional Women's Expectations and Concern's Regarding Democracy

1 Women want to increase the national-level 5% quota of women's representation

2 Women want a quota for women's representation set for local government.

3. In villages, many former Panchayat (pre-democracy) members became ruling party members

4. Local governments still reflect the former power structure and its corruption.

5 Although the government is moving towards decentralization, the process of accountability has only been formulated at the central level

6 Both the Congress Party and the Nepal Communist Party claim to be "social democrats," and are both led by Brahman men

7. Before the election, many candidates promised to change laws that discriminate against women but they have only moved on this promise in response to isolated incidences of public pressure (i e , the Pressure Group and rape laws)

8. Political parties do not think that it is a "good" political strategy to force a quota for women politicians at the local level

## III. Local Governance: User Group Example

Women are responsible for collecting the fodder, firewood, fuel wood, grass and water in rural communities yet they remain under-represented in user groups.

Advisor for Social Forestry Project, Rapti Zone, Dang District
The Advisor was requested by a women's social forestry users' group to assist them in putting together their management and financial plan. This plan is required by the (Dang) District Forest Office before the Office will entirely turn over the forest management to a users' group The Advisor observed that the user's group had done a fine job of forest management and that the community men and the District Officer (DO) had shown no interest in the users' group's activities until the financial plan was revealed The financial plan clearly showed the areas of potential profit in forest management. The DO then said that it was "against the law" to have a women's-only users' group unless the men in the community agreed to it After discussing the financial plan with the DO, the men decided to join the group in formal membership Women now comprise 60% of the group and men hold all the group's offices with the exception of the chair.

## IV. Additional Notes on Domestic Democracy

It is widely believed that sharing a family problem with those outside the family causes the family to lose honor As women usually live lives restricted to the family domain this practice inhibits their opportunity to share their common problems with other women. This practice contributes to the isolation of women's lives and curtails their ability to organize around common issues.

## V. Ethnic Differences Regarding Women's Status

Nepal includes a number of ethnic groups that vary regarding expectations of appropriate gender-specific behavior Communities of largely mixed caste, religion and ethnic origin tend to be more gender equitable and politically progressive

The following three groups constitute the majority of the population. The gender relationships to decision-making, access to income and interaction in the public and private domain underscore the "accepted" political participation of women.

Of the three groups the Brahmans are the most socially and economically dominant. The Brahman caste supplies the priests of the Hindu religion. According to Hindu belief, once female children have menstruated, they are inherently "unclean "



53

Physically becoming a woman lowers the religious (and therefore cultural) status of the female. Nepal remains a "Hindu Kingdom" under democracy.

Brahman and Chettri Traditionally, Brahman and Chettri women do not work outside the home They control a small portion of the family income to make small household-related purchases The public domain (political and otherwise) is seen as the male domain; the private domain (household and family) is the sphere of women's lives and ambitions

Tibeto-Burman (T-B): T-B women earn money and handle money However, this ethnic group perceives that politics is a man's domain. T-B women speak publicly on community issues and in political settings but do not run for political office Some sources said that domestic violence is higher amongst the (T-B) ethnic groups than others as a result of alcohol abuse.

Tharu: The Tharu people of the Dang District are severely exploited both politically and economically by other ethnic groups. The great bulk of Dang's domestic and agricultural work is performed by Tharu women Tharu women are visible to the eye everywhere, yet socially and politically invisible.

Tharus often enter into the "kamaiya" or bonded labor agreement with landlords as a result of indebtedness. There are two patterns of kamaiya· 1) Annually, a father puts his "mark" on a paper agreeing to give his daughter(s) for "servant" labor (24 hours a day, seven days a week); 2) families become indentured through indebtedness (sometimes generationally) Ironically, many well-educated middle-class Nepali men and women do not find Kamaiya unconstitutional.

Because of their history of exploitation many Tharu of the occupational castes (blacksmiths, tailors, potters, leatherworkers) have shown a strong devotion to education for both their male and female children.

## VI. Some Notes on the Media

Before the re-establishment of democracy, the media was not "allowed" to give critical insights or facts The majority of the news revolved around the events orchestrated by the royal family. Although "royal-watching" has continued there is more freedom to express negative observations on a variety of topics including donor-driven development It is now acceptable to have news reflect a significant event affecting the public.

It is also easier for professional media women to receive recognition than before the multi-party revolution Professional media women are now being considered and placed for high-level



54

positions Furthermore, before the multi-party revolution, development beneficiaries opinions were usually not sought, especially by the media

**Example:** Bandana Rana, a woman reporter, producer, news editor, news caster for Nepal Television and a co-founder of a local WO A UNDP/FAO water-shed and wildlife conservation project in Shivapuri, Kathmandu District, was adversely affecting the beneficiaries The community used to earn money selling fuel wood. The project did not allow them to sell fuel wood but had not introduced alternative income-generating activities for compensation. The community was not allowed to protect their crop from the wild boars that had been introduced by the project into their environment A portion of the population was displaced by the project and did not receive adequate financial compensation for their land. When the families were displaced compensation was given to the men of the families, the women were not given any compensation.

Before democracy was established these communities did not publicly voice their concerns. After democracy was established B. Rana interviewed the affected communities and filmed their concerns Their issues were then presented to the UNDP Resident Representative who promptly responded with appropriate project modifications The second phase of the project is commencing (1993) with these modifications: fuel efficient cook stoves and off-season vegetable raising (training and seeds for this activity).

## VII. Women's Labor Issues

Representatives of The Fredrich Naumann Foundation have been studying women's trade union and labor issues. In 1993, The Foundation will fund a comprehensive statistical study on women's labor issues The industries being studied include. biscuit factories, flour mills, textiles; Coca Cola, watch manufacturing, mechanical work; printing presses; battery manufacturing and bamboo furniture. The findings will be developed into policies and an Action Plan that will be shared and in part implemented by the Chamber of Commerce, labor and trade unions, women's organizations and other concerned ministries.

**Private Sector Attitudes Toward Free Market** In general, companies and industries are very resistant to "open competition" and "free market " Many industries (i.e. transportation and biscuit industries) have formed temporary "cartels" to control pricing of their goods and services in direct reaction to government withdrawing subsidies or opening markets. Companies and industries equate economic "liberalization" with. less government intervention, no taxes, waiver of excise duties,



55

independent standards of quality control, and freedom to form cartels and then charge whatever the market can bear

**Questions on Women's Labor Issues:** (Q) What is the demographic status of women workers? How do women's, as compared to men's, job status, promotion rate and job performance differ? Why are women working? What are the attitudes of women's families, peers and supervisors towards women's work and job performance? What kinds of job satisfaction do women have? How do women's lives change after they begin working? What training opportunities are provided to working women? What involvement do women have in labor unions? What working women's issues do labor unions support?

**Observations on Women's Labor Issues:** Families support women working in factories as it increases family income. However, women who work carry a burden of "double-day" labor between their jobs and household responsibilities Women are not treated equal to men - by both men and women - in the work environment Unions perceive women workers as a union "voters" as opposed to potential union officers Unions under-represent women's labor issues. GEFONT, the leftist labor union, supports gender-biased wage discrimination against women in tea production The Nepali Trade Union of the Congress Party has no language for its women laborers. Women workers feel disadvantaged by low literacy rates and opportunities for training Women of female-headed households control their own incomes, women from extended families hand their income over to the head of the household; women from nuclear families vary in their control of income To date, only one factory has a child day care center even though the law states that any business employing over 50 women (and many do) must provide this service

**Garment and Carpet Industries:** The garment industry recruits many married and unmarried women from rural areas It is not uncommon for these women to meet and start relationships with the imported Indian men workers. If the women are married this action results in divorce from their Nepali husbands and an eventual separation from their Indian boyfriends The women then provide full financial support for children from their unions (including marriage). It is also not uncommon for the "rural" husbands to begin new families once their wives have gone to work in the carpet and garment factories. Often, the women working in the industries send money home and unknowingly support these new families.

## VIII. Additional Content of Interviews

1. Apprenticing Women Lawyers with the Nepal Law Society and Nepal Law Firm: All six women wish to complete their university law degrees. The mothers of these women are not educated beyond

the age of eleven Although their parents support their daughters' interest in higher education, they hope their daughters will marry before completion of their studies The students say that if they marry before beginning their professional lives they will be expected to begin families and the commencement of their careers will be subordinated to this expectation

Therefore, all of the women want to have careers established before marrying and hope to marry men who support their careers. The women want to "complete their studies, work, marry, continue to work." They feel that they may have to form their own support group to accomplish this goal. The women also said that there are yet few role models of women practicing law in the private sector and few opportunities. If private sector jobs are unavailable, they hope to work in the NGO sector It is very difficult to get government jobs

None of these women are yet affiliated with civic or political organizations. However, they do feel a responsibility to help less privileged women Furthermore, when they reach professional stature they, in turn, would like to mentor young women They would like to join organizations that promote "women's liberty and expression" and "protect women from violence." They are familiar with the work of the Pressure Group, Didi Bahini (a USAID/Nepal-sponsored WO), SUSS (Women's Legal Services Project) and Cheli Betiko Beta (Problems of Women )

One source of inspiration is their Criminal and constitutional law professor Surya Dhungel of SCOPE and LEADERS, Inc. (local NGOs). In his lectures, S Dhungel makes reference to women's inequality under Nepali law They would like to know more about how other countries' laws and enforcement of laws affect women

2. Suprabha Ghimire, former President of the Congress University Teachers' Association and Vice President of Congress Nepal Women's Association Ghimire comes from a family of seven sisters and four brothers Her father was the governor of the state bank and her mother was a housewife Her eldest sister was given away in marriage at the age of 13 and suffered greatly by the union. Her father then decided that the remaining daughters should be well educated so that they could financially support themselves (and not depend on marriage to provide this support). After receiving her Bachelor of Arts in Economics, Ghimire passed the "public service exam" and worked for the GON.

At the age of 29, Ghimire had an arranged marriage to Shankes Ghimire and left two months later for an educational opportunity in the United Kingdom (UK). After returning from the UK, Ghimire became pregnant Worries about income encouraged both husband and wife to become lawyers. Her husband was politically active as a student and as a professional lawyer for the Congress party

Until his accidental death in 1982, she fostered his professional and political career and succeeded in her academic career (English literature)

It was five years after her husband's death, while studying in France, that Ghimire decided to become politically active. She said that she "was ashamed" of the Europeans' views regarding the Nepalis She heard people say that Nepalis were "passive, docile, meek and deferring and unable to demand democracy " Ghimire was so fired by this view that she decided she was willing to risk prison and death in order to re-establish democracy in Nepal It was Ghimire who acted as the spokesperson for the Congress Party during the mass rallies of the 1990 multi-party revolution. At this time, Ghimire does not have clear formal political ambitions and she has yet to be approached by the Congress Party for a high-level political position.

3. Parvati Rana, local Chair of the Congress National Women's Association out of Damauli, District town of Tonahue District. Amar Raj Kaimi, District President of Nepal Congress; Mandhari Ale, President of Women's Cooperative The majority of people in this District are Magyar and less educated than in other Districts between Kathmandu and Pokhara.

Rana spent 15 days in the Pokhara jail after demonstrating (March 1990) during the multi-party revolution During the ride to jail she was terrified and cried because there had been rumors of jailed women being raped by the police Initially, the Congress Party did not ask the women to participate in the demonstrations because "women need to take care of the children" and "women cannot protect themselves in jail." The Congress Party also felt that if women were formally involved in the multi-party revolution they might "leak secrets under duress." However, when the women saw the police brutality inflicted upon the demonstrating men they organized their own protest demonstration While in jail, Rana met women from other political parties. Rana said that the women supported each others' activism despite their party differences.

Amar Raj Kaimi was the head master and his wife a teacher at the school Rana attended. The Kaimis, who were secretly recruiting students into the democratic revolution, found Rana to be a particularly bright and well-liked student. Rana, whose father was a secret Congress member, quickly became a leading student activist.

Rana tries 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 as they must have the income and permission from their families to travel" (few women do). However, Rana believes that she provides a good role model for women's political participation as she is well known for her

activism and both men and women know that her political work is supported by her husband. However, Rana did ask a Minister-level politician why he did not support his wife's interest in formal politics He responded by saying "then everyone in the family would be involved in politics "

Amar Kaimi agreed that women face particular social-cultural constraints regarding travelling alone, i e potential character defamation and criticism for leaving their home responsibilities for outside (political) activities.

4. Salbas Village Interviewees: Salbas Village, Ward Five of Chainpur District. Salbas village has approximately 110 households comprised of Brahmans, Mugyars, Sarki (shoemakers), Cammie (blacksmiths), Domai (tailors) and agriculturists The average family has six months of food self-sufficiency. Many men leave for Pokhara (Nepal) or India to earn additional income

The village is located next to a protected forest for which the VDC is responsible FED works with this village on activities including: family planning; tree nurseries; hybrid goat raising; primary health motivation; literacy/numeracy and potable water

Many women of the Salbas village of the Chainpur District safe-housed political activists during the multi-party revolution. The police used to come to the village looking for activists and often beat villagers (male and female) they suspected. The women are proud of the role they played in fostering democracy. Free elections were an exciting event for this village, "a new taste of curry "

All the women in this village voted Salbas village women have also presented their demands orally to the VDC and DDC. Many of the women working with FED share political information as they visit women for development activities However, they have not heard of any specific government policies regarding women.

Some former leaders from the Panchayat system say that "if women go to literacy classes they will become prostitutes." Before democracy, women did not feel free to respond to this comment. Now women say "its their right to be educated."

Initially men and women in this village thought that democracy would bring immediate "utopia." Now the community realizes that they will have to work to improve their lives but that democracy will allow them more opportunities (than the Panchayat system) to mobilize to make changes Villagers hope that democracy will reduce the social prejudices based on gender and the caste system. Election promises included: "Everyone will learn to read and the village will have potable water " The government never delivered its promise, but FED arrived with its literacy and potable program One reason the elected officials did not



59

deliver on their promises is because development activities are prioritized (in part) by population concentration

5. Indira Rana, Secretary for the Judicial Committee, former District judge When Indira Rana's father died, her brothers took all the family assets and income Therefore, Rana has spent her adult life financially caring for her mother When her mother passed away (1993) Indira decided she would be the one to light her mother's funeral pyre By lighting the funeral pyre Indira gained, through religious ritual, the right to inherit her parents' property Her action received much publicity and other women have since imitated her lighting of funeral pyres Indira has devoted her adult life to lobbying for a change toward gender-equity in the inheritance law.

## APPENDIX B

## BANGLADESH FINDINGS

"If I am single, I am a loose or sinful woman. If I am unmarried with no children, I am unlucky and looking at my face will make you unlucky If I am married with two daughters, I am a poor quality woman. If I am married with one daughter and one son, I am of dubious quality. If I am married with two sons, I am a good woman."

Women WO Participant

### I. What is Democracy? The right to legally "gharoo."

"Gharoo" is a Bangladeshi custom in which persons surround the house or office of an individual or group they are protesting, during this protest one word is often repeated to unnerve those they are protesting

### II. Additional Women's Expectations of Democracy

1 Women hope that the government will allow professional women to gain "lateral entry" into government ministries as many well-educated women will not consider government service at the entry-level position. Lateral entry would provide the government a strong women's voice in all sectors

2 University students are at risk of violence whether or not they join a political party because there has been a significant increase in arms on campuses. Families are very concerned about their children as university students

3. Increased regional militarism might undermine Bangladesh's efforts to strengthen its democracy

4 Increased victimization of ethnic and tribal minorities and persons of religious beliefs other than Islam might weaken democracy.

5. Speaking against Islamic Law is perceived as seditious.

### III. Rise of Fundamentalism

Jamati Islami (JI) is self-identified as a Islamic fundamentalist political party JI has increased its influence in the military since the 1971 liberation of Bangladesh JI systematically killed many intellectuals during the 1971 liberation This action inspired the formation of the "Committee Against Butcher Collaborators "

By 1975, JI had effectively established itself within mosques and the education system, particularly at Chittagong and Rajshahi University. JI changed an education policy in 1978 so that students from religious fundamentalist schools could matriculate into the university system

Other political parties depend on volunteers for much of their canvassing and campaigning. JI pays its party members to form cadres that spread their political/religious messages. They are said to be funded by wealthy Middle Eastern countries Many Bangladeshi women find this connection terrifying given the status of women in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and other Middle Eastern countries JI is said to be a supplier of arms to university campuses At Rajshahi University, women teachers and students who have spoken against the JI have been raped and assaulted by members of the JI cadres

JI believes that personal freedoms for women are a "Western" concept. JI wants to enforce complete purdah (body and face covered, women remaining in the confines of their home) JI is considered a threat to the women's movement as JI believes women are not equal to men Men often support the gender attitudes spouted by JI as JI maintains the men's upper hand. Part of JI's dogma includes Bangladesh will only overcome its problems if it returns to the path of Allah, only JI knows the path of Allah, JI will rid the country of corruption

The government official (Shohidu Allum) formerly in charge of the NGO sector was of JI. He is said to have targeted many of the progressive NGOs/WOs for registration cancellation

Political parties tolerate the JI, supporters as potential "swing" voters and because of JI's presence in the military The government has allowed JI to grow in strength by ignoring them. In part, the government is silent regarding JI as they helped to establish the current government.

UNICEF is funding religious schools (many are JI establishments) after the teachers go through a "secular teaching program " The secularism has not been well integrated as manifested by the May 1993 UNICEF conference for their sponsored religious schools women were "not allowed" to attend the conference.

## IV. Additional Observations Regarding Political Parties

1. Jamati Islami does not support the indigenous NGO/WO sector as this party sees this sector as too "socially progressive" or against the fundamentals of Islam JI is said to have developed a "hit list" of NGO/WO representatives.



62

2 JI supported the leading party in the last elections so that JI could then leverage a political presence in the government.

3. JI believes that a "true democracy" was developed under the Islamic founder Mohammed by following Koranic guidance and Sunna law.

4 JI believes that, because men and women are physically different, they should work in different domains; this will also prevent immorality and sexual harassment

5. If JI were in power, women MPs would be physically segregated from men MPs; males and females would be taught in segregated schools; males and females would not work together, very poor laborers (men and women) might work together as long as the women were completely covered and only spoke to men regarding work issues; and prostitutes would be rehabilitated.

6 JI does not support contraceptive use, unless the woman is too sickly to bear children

7 The BNP removed secularism from the Constitution.

8. The BNP identifies the nation as being made up of Bangladeshis, a country of Islamic people.

9 Women BNP MPs said that women need training in their legal rights and need legal aid. There is a government program for this that will be cut.

10 The opposition party (Awami League) believes that the Bengalis are a socio-cultural group make up the nation regardless of religious beliefs

**V. Additional Notes on Domestic Democracy:**

"Women are beaten when they cook one less vegetable dish than their husbands expected."

"My husband beats me but he gives me shelter, will you give me shelter if I leave my husband?"

"When I was 12 years old my father told me that if anyone (outside the family) ever saw my face the world would burn. [So, I wore a complete burkha (body cloth and went into purdah ]"

1 A commonly-held Islamic belief is that the women of the family represent the family's honor. This belief is manifested by restricting women's interaction with those outside of her



63

family, particularly men Traditions of "purdah" range from having a woman keep her head covered to covering her entire body and face when in public, from working only within the household to attending sex-segregated schools. In this fashion the opportunities for compromised honor are diminished but women are severely restricted in their chances for public and political participation However, economics often forces a family to allow the women to work outside the home and with men.

## VI. Somes Notes on the Media

In Bangladesh, the media remains state controlled under democracy. Television remains to be the most controlled medium, radio is less controlled. There are some independently owned newspapers.

JI has vested strength in the media of Bangladesh. Since 1991, during the annual Islamic practice of the Ramadan ritual, the JI forced all women (and no men) television news casters to cover their heads when appearing on television. It is believed that JI was behind the recent firing of a woman newscaster. She was fired because "she was divorced " Yet there are a number of divorced men in the television medium

## VII. Additional Content of Interviews

1. The government (GOB) has set a national quota of 15 percent for women in the civil service. However, women are represented at five percent in the government for social-cultural reasons such as the reality that civil servant jobs are transferable and families do not appreciate women taking the precedence in job relocation. Women civil servants remain concentrated in traditional sectors, i.e., Ministries of Health, Education and Family Planning. In the private sector there is a concentration of women working in the banks and garment industry. However, few women work in the Ministry of Finance. The private sector tends to employ women when they are related to the families controlling the businesses.

2. An NGO Woman Leader's story. She came from a highly political family of journalists and film-makers. She chose to take her first Master's Degree in sociology so that she could better understand the roles of men and women in her society After being a University professor she married a man who unfortunately beat her After divorcing this man (an unusual action for a Bangladeshi woman to take) she decided to devote her life to helping less privileged women. Given her greater opportunities she felt it was her duty to become a spokesperson for those women who were less fortunate than her. In part, she realized that her more privileged background did not protect her

from the numerous abuses women in her society experienced Teaching seemed to be "too remote' an occupation and so she became involved with development She worked with two international donor agencies before taking a leadership position in a local NGO.

3 Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) "Democracy must begin in the family," is the BRAC philosophy BRAC was established in 1972. Initially donor reliant, BRAC now raises 34 percent of its annual budget from its own income-generating activities (printing press, garment factory and cold press). BRAC hopes to become completely self-reliant Among many activities, BRAC sponsors a "social awareness education" program in which gender issues, community analysis, motivation techniques, conflict resolution and role plays are utilized to bring about positive social change. BRAC is an NGO that has full government support for its activities, they are jointly working with the GOB in fisheries, sericulture, agriculture and livestock programs

Two groups of approximately 20 women being trained by BRAC to provide nonformal primary education to landless people were interviewed These women were chosen in part because of their level of literacy all had completed high school. It was difficult for BRAC to fill its training program as there was resistance on the part of many husbands to allow their wives to break purdah and travel to the training center. Those women attending the training had their husbands' support as their husbands felt it would increase the prestige of the family in the community " However, a number of them voiced their concerns about village acceptance (and particularly that of the Imams) of breaking purdah when they began to teach

All the women in these groups voted. The women related stories of an acquaintance who was divorced by her husband and five who were beaten for voting for a different party than their husbands' parties. Most of the women did not share their voting choice if it differed from their husbands even though they were aware of their individual right to vote

Out of this group one woman was aware of women's equal status under the constitution. Others did not know that women had the right (equal to men under law) to education. They said that they needed to know their basic rights, human, legal and constitutional, and better understand the political system so that they could transmit this knowledge to others in their community. BRAC will be providing them a training in legal rights.

The greatest problems facing women were domestic violence, dowry, early marriage and restricted mobility. The women said that potential violence, the threat of divorce and restricted mobility

(due to lack of personal income and husbands' permission) reduces the opportunities for women to be politically active Apart from voting these educated women had not been involved in other political processes. They said that women needed to organize themselves as it was very difficult for individual women to act (politically and in other public activities)

4. Mardaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA). Fundamentalist groups have made "allegations" that MLAA is supportive of women's rights. MLAA empowers its beneficiaries in very concrete ways The women learn their legal rights and receive adequate compensation in divorce cases. MLAA provides loans to the women during that vulnerable time when they are unable to live in their husbands homes and are awaiting the court's decision. Many of the women have used this loan to buy land for agricultural purposes and start small businesses. One woman, married at the age of 13 to a husband who beat her, has started a "small snacks" (channa chu) business and completed her education. She now feels no need to rush into a marriage for financial support and will be able to choose her husband She also feels that she will have better choices regarding a potential husband when she earns her own income and is well-educated. The women beneficiaries as so motivated by the changes MLAA has brought to their lives that they act as unpaid advertisers for the program The women said "that by nature and life experience women are susceptible to others' sorrows and misery and are inclined to help."

The women interviewed also said that families and husbands initially disliked having women work outside their homes in non-traditional jobs. However, once the women's income came to the household they supported their wives Many families experienced disapproval from the village Imams (religious leaders) and fundamentalist groups. In many villages, Imams would not allow the husbands to pray in the mosques as their wives had broken purdah. These conflicts were at times violent, but the enlightened men continue to support their earning wives activities. Imams who refused to support the changes were replaced by supportive Imams.

5. A Banchte Shekha Story: The Director of Banchte Shekha was sent to a Christian school when she was 12 years old. She taught at the school after she graduated and then decided to work with poor village women. She studied the Koran so that she could cite women's rights as described in the Koran to the people in the community. When she described the abuses women suffered, the nuns said "it was God's will."

She then decided that women needed more human assistance and so she founded Banchte Shekha. When Banchte Shekha was first established, a group of people and religious leaders came and stoned the women saying that it was a "house of prostitution." Many of the women and men working at Banchte Shekha have

organized demonstrations surrounding a local incidence of violence against women and law reform All of the staff must work for one hour every day on the communal gardens, fisheries or livestock activities. A few professional men are employed; they said that they "love working with such strong intelligent women." The professional staff also take turns cooking the communal meals.

The Director uses music and theatre to bring her messages to the villages The consultant visited one Banchte Shekha village and met with approximately 50 women. Apart from answering questions on women in democracy, the women attended to their revolving loan-funds decisions, some issues regarding skills training and a series of songs and plays. The music and theater were very powerful tools; they taught lessons, gave encouragement, mocked gender roles and lit the faces of the women

The lives of the women in this village had dramatically improved, they said their "lives had not changed because of democracy, their lives had changed because of Banchte Shekha " The status in their households and communities had improved, they had learned a variety of income-generating skills and they felt "better about themselves and their daughters' futures." Banchte Shekha has also provided human rights seminars for entire communities once the women are mobilized. This seems to coalesce the village support for social change.

When political parties canvass the women, the women now ask about the parties platform on women's issues They are very concerned with access to contraceptives The women said that many of them used to be beaten when their husbands discovered that they were using contraceptives They were also beaten for not preparing enough food (there was not enough food) so why would they want more children?

Some additional stories The village women organized to sell a large tree to a businessman. The businessman then gave them less money than he had promised, bribed the local police and came with the police to take the tree Carrying sticks, the women surrounded the businessman and the police and would not let them go until the businessman gave full payment.

"One day, while walking by the mosque, my head scarf was blown off by the wind The Imam, who was teaching my daughter the Koran, saw this and promptly beat my daughter for my "sinfulness" (breaking purdah). The Imam, who was in his 50s, later married an 11 year old girl My daughter had been ten when she studied with him."

6 Grameen Bank: A Grameen Bank village group (approximately 25 women) in Norshingly (outside of Dhaka) was visited Grameen Bank participation is designed along democratic principles and

the village women the consultant spoke to said that they "understood democracy before democracy came to Bangladesh [as a result of being Grameen Bank members] " The members of this Grammen Bank group, along with their families and neighboring Grameen Bank groups, formed a voting block for the local and national elections They decided to use their Grameen Bank network to mobilize their support for certain candidates.

Members have been able to fight the practice of dowry as there is a pool of eligible men and women from the Grameen Bank groups. Daughters of Grammen Bank members have high expectations. One girl said she wanted to be a magistrate (her parents approved), others wanted to be teachers or to work for Grameen Bank. These girl's mothers were illiterate and before joining Grameen Bank they had absolute poverty.



68

## APPENDIX C

## BIBLIOGRAPHY


1. Chazan, N. (1992) **Africa's Democratic Challenge. World Policy Journal** (pp. 279-307)

2. The World Bank (1992). Booklet· **Governance and Development**, published in the U S.A.

3. Diamond, L., Lipset, S.M., and Ling, J. (1992). **Building and Sustaining Democratic Government in Developing Countries: Some Tentative Findings,** grant from National Endowment for Democracy

4. Nepal Law Society (1993). **Child and Law in Nepal: An Analytical Study**, published in Kathmandu, Nepal.

5 Department of State (1993) **Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992**, published by U S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D C.

6 Hirschmann, D. (1993). **Democracy and Gender: a Practical Guide to USAID Programs**, USAID/GENESYS

7 Mahat, Prakash S , Rigal, Minendra P. (1992) **Democratic Nepal: Problems and Prospects** Paper presented at the Annual Convention of Nepalese Association in Southeast America.

8. A Report by Women's Rights Project and Asia Watch (1992) **Double Jeopardy: Police Abuse of Women in Pakistan**

9. Diamond, L. (1992). **Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered. Democracy Reconsidered.** (pp 451-499)

10. Nepal Law Society (1990, 1992). In A.N Sharma (Ed.), **Essays on Constitutional Law, Vol. 3 (1990) 12, 13 (1992)**, published in Kathmandu, Nepal.

11. Development Associates, Inc. (1992). **Evaluation Report: Asia Democracy Program,** USAID.

12. Finsterbusch, K. Mausolff, C. and Van Wicklin, W. (1992) **Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness and Sustainability of Development Projects** (draft report for USAID) University of Maryland (IDMC).

13 **FY 91-92 Africa Democracy and Human Rights Activities Report** USAID 1992.




69

14. **FY 1991 and FY 1992 Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights Program Summary**, USAID 1992

15. Jacobson, J.L. (1992) In E. Ayres (Ed.), **Gender Bias: Roadblock to Sustainable Development**, World Watch Institute publication.

16. Brinkerhoff, D.W., Goldsmith, A.A., Ingle, M.D. and Walker, S.T (1992) **Institutional Sustainabilty: A Conceptual Framework.** University of Maryland (IDMC).

17. **International Alliance of the Indigenous Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest Charter (1992).**

18 Draft of **Islamic Political Movements**, USAID/Near East Bureau.

19. Soban, S. (1978). **Legal Status of Women in Bangladesh,** The Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs.

20 Nepal Law Society (1992). **Local Self Government and Decentralization in Nepal**, published in Kathmandu, Nepal.

21. USAID (1992). **Nepal Democracy Project 367-0163.**

22. Bratton, M. (1990). **Non-governmental Organizations in Africa: Can They Influence Public Policy? Development and Change, Vol. 21,** (pp 87-118), published by Sage, London, Newbury Park and New Dehli.

23. **Policy Paper: Democracy and Governance**, USAID 1992.

24. USAID/Institute for Development Anthropology, (1992). **Rapport Sommaire: Projet des Institutions d'Eau Potable en Milieu Rural**

25. Schaffer, T.C. (1986). **Survey of Development Projects and Activities for Women in Bangladesh**, published by USAID/Dhaka.

26. Adoum, C.M. and Ingle, M.D. (1992). **The Logical Framework and Benefit Sustainability.** University of Maryland (IDMC).

27. Le Marchand, R (1992). **Uncivil States and Civil Societies: How Illusion Became Reality.** The Journal of Modern African Studies 30,2 (pp. 171-191).

28. **United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 1992**, published by the Oxford University Press in New York

29 Atherton, J.S , Devine, D. Grimm, C. Harmsworth, J. and Nelson, P. (1992) **USAID/Development Fund for Africa Local Participation in the Design and Implementation of DFA Programs: Some Lessons from the Field,** (with the Institute for Development Anthropology and Development Alternatives).



10

30 **USAID LAC/DI Action Plan, FY 92-93.**

31 **USAID LAC/DI Assessments Handbook for Use in Preparing Country Democratic Development, Sectoral and Sub-sectoral Assessments and Strategies (1993).** (draft)

32. Abdullah, Tahrunnessa (1976). **Village Women As I Saw Them,** Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development.

33. **1991** and **1992 WID Action Plans** and **Mission Democratic Initiative Strategies** for USAID in Asia.

34. Nelson, B. (1993). **Women and Politics Worldwide,** Hubert H. Humphrey, University of Minnesota (draft).

35 USAID/GENESYS (1992). **Women and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Critical Overview.**

36 Amnesty International Publications (1991) **Women in the Front Line: Human Rights Violations Against Women New York.**

37. International Center for Research on Women (1993). **Women's Issues in Development Cooperation: A Call for Action.**

38. Pokharel, Usha (1993). **Women's Status in Nepal,** paper presented at the Nepal Update Seminar/Workshop on Women's Status in Nepal, American University, Washington, D.C

39. World Bank (1991). **World Development Report 1991: The Challenge of Development.** (pp. 50, 128-147, 171), published by Oxford University Press in Oxford, England