

USAID Evaluation Special Study No. 83

After the Carnage

Women in Postconflict Cambodia

by

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AS A PART of its multicountry evaluation of gender issues in postconflict societies, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation undertook a case study of Cambodia. That country was embroiled in turmoil from 1970, when warfare broke out between government forces and communist Khmer Rouge guerrillas, and 1979, when Vietnamese troops overthrew the Khmer autarky. This case study was designed to answer three sets of questions:

1. What has been the impact of the prolonged conflict on women? How did the conflict affect their economic, social, and political roles and responsibilities? What are the major problems and challenges facing women in postconflict Cambodia?
2. What types of women's organizations have emerged in the postconflict era to address the problems faced by women and to promote gender equality? What unique contribution do women's organizations make? What has contributed to their establishment and growth? What types of activities do they undertake? What have been their overall impacts? What factors affect their performance?
3. What has been the nature and goal of assistance provided by USAID and other donor agencies to women's organizations? How has the assistance affected their priorities and sustainability?

CDIE followed a multistage research methodology. First, it undertook a systematic review of project and program documents, reports of the international agencies, and relevant academic

publications on Cambodia. Once the review was completed, CDIE commissioned a background paper on women's organizations by a Canadian scholar working in Cambodia. The paper provided detailed information about the nature and functioning of women's organizations. It also helped sharpen the scope of inquiry.

Finally, in January 1999, CDIE sent a three-person team to Cambodia for fieldwork. The team visited 28 organizations, interviewed more than 40 key informants, and conducted four focus group discussions with program beneficiaries. In addition, the team met with senior officials of the Cambodian government, the U.S. ambassador, the USAID mission director, and senior USAID staff. It also collected documents, records, and other publications not available in Washington.

This case study is based on the data, information, and ideas gathered from the above sources. Regarding women's issues, it draws 10 major lessons from the Cambodian experience:

1. Internal conflict on the scale that took place in Cambodia leaves deep scars on the national psyche. There is a need for comprehensive, targeted gender policies and programs.
2. The war created a manpower shortage, opening new economic and political opportunities for women (except during the Khmer Rouge era, when economic activity was prohibited). During a transition, donors should build on such gains.

In the impoverished condition of typical postconflict countries, women's organizations will have to depend on foreign donors for years to come; they cannot become economically sustainable within the usual target of five to seven years.

3. Education and training of women and their participation in refugee camp activities can prepare them to assume leadership roles in postconflict societies. The international community should support education and training programs for women in refugee camps, enabling women to acquire new skills, experience, and vision to help reconstruct gender relations—and their country—upon their return to society.

4. Newly founded women's organizations in postconflict societies can implement a wide range of programs funded by the international community. When donors do not want to administer assistance either through the government or international nongovernmental organizations, indigenous women's organizations can provide a viable option.

5. The international community can help establish women's organizations in postconflict societies. Such organizations can develop local roots and gain political legitimacy despite their dependence on international resources.

6. In the impoverished condition of typical postconflict countries, women's organizations will have to depend on foreign donors for years to come; they cannot become economically sustainable within the usual target of five to seven years. The yearly funding cycle causes these organizations to spend most of their time writing proposals and reporting on results. Donors should shift to multiyear funding, allowing the groups to concentrate on their core empowerment work.

7. Women's organizations provide an important setting for women to gain self-respect and participate in decision-

making. Thus the international community should support the growth of women in postconflict societies not only to channel assistance to needy populations but also to socially empower women.

8. International nongovernmental organizations observed that women's organizations did not understand the importance of monitoring program activities, nor did they know how to conduct effective evaluations. Yet these activities are fundamental to developing local capacity to respond effectively to the needs of beneficiaries. Therefore, the international community should undertake to build monitoring and evaluation capacity within women's organizations.

9. Donors have paid little attention to continuity or developing expertise in a given area, settling instead on a flavor-of-the-month approach. As donors develop new priorities, they must not overlook the continuing needs in previous sectors, except when problems have been solved.

10. Many Cambodian women's organizations spend considerable resources on spacious offices, four-wheel-drive vehicles, and unnecessary support staff. Often their expectations and operations are not congruent with the realities of the situation in-country. The international donor community needs to foster a realistic and affordable vision for women's organizations. It should emphasize utilization of local resources, modeled at an appropriate level, such as local government agencies.

The Country Conflict

A COUNTRY OF 11 million people, Cambodia has been a victim of the Vietnam War and the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge under dictator Pol Pot. Few other countries in recent history have experienced such agony, wholesale destruction of their social fabric, and utter devastation of their economic and political systems. Between 1969 and 1993, the country suffered clandestine military operations by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, massive carpet bombing by the United States, genocide under the Maoist Khmer Rouge, large-scale internal migration, invasion by Vietnam, and recurring guerrilla attacks by the defeated Khmer Rouge and their allies. Only after 1993 did Cambodians begin to live in relative peace. That the country has survived and has begun reconstruction is a tribute to both the resilience of its people and the generosity of the international community.

NATURE AND HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

Until 1954, Cambodia was a French protectorate. As in much of Indochina, the French did little to promote the country's economic or social development. Cambodia had few schools, fewer hospitals, and a minimal economic infrastructure at the time of independence. Most of the population were subsistence farmers. As there was no shortage of land,

which people could easily obtain for rice cultivation, little social and economic differentiation existed in the countryside.

After independence, the situation began to change. The new government, led by King Norodom Sihanouk, launched modest social and political reforms, significantly expanded educational opportunities, and initiated economic development programs. It promoted mass literacy and sent its brightest students for higher education in France. There, many came under the influence of communism and later led the revolutionary movement against the government itself.

The government followed a policy of neutrality in international affairs, refusing to be drawn into the Indochinese war that engulfed the region. This was a pragmatic policy dictated by national interest. As compared with its powerful neighbors, the country had few political and military resources, much less a strong economic base. Moreover, the government was concerned that alignment would mean involvement in the developing conflict. But North Vietnamese regulars and Viet Cong guerrillas clandestinely used the country's eastern borders as sanctuaries from which to launch attacks on South Vietnam. In retaliation, and with the tacit approval of Sihanouk, the United States

*A word of explanation is in order about the odyssey of this once and future king's royal titles. In 1941, the Saigon- and Paris-educated aristocrat was elected king by a royal council. He held that title until 1955, when he abdicated the throne in favor of his father, Norodom Suramarit. After Suramarit's death in 1960, Sihanouk again became head of state, although now with the title of prince. Overthrown by a rightist coup d'état in 1970, he went into exile in China. (He returned to Cambodia briefly to become chief of state under the Khmer Rouge, only, in short order, to be placed under house arrest, after which he decamped to China.) Sihanouk returned to Cambodia in 1991 as chief of state after the signing of a UN-sponsored peace treaty. In 1993, under a new constitution, he became, once again, king.

Estimates of the dead during the Khmer Rouge's sanguinary 42-month reign range from 1 million to 3 million, out of a 1975 population of 7.3 million.

began secret bombing of communist bases in 1969. The bombing continued until 1973.

In 1970, right-leaning elements within Cambodia's military and political elite led by the prime minister, Gen. Lon Nol, staged a coup against the government of Prince Sihanouk. The new government pursued a strong anticommunist policy, aligning itself with South Vietnam and the United States. As bombing increased, the communist forces moved deeper into the countryside, which in turn led to more bombing in the interior. The escalation uprooted millions of people, who flooded the cities in search of protection and peace.

Torn by infighting and rampant corruption, the Lon Nol government remained both indifferent and ineffective in providing assistance to Cambodia's suffering people. Consequently, a Maoist insurgency movement, the Khmer Rouge, gained ground in the countryside. The insurgents were armed and trained by the North Vietnamese. Gradually, large parts of the countryside fell into the hands of the Khmer Rouge, and many provincial capitals were cut off from Phnom Penh. On 17 April 1975, two weeks before the fall of Saigon, the Khmer Rouge took complete control of the country. They implemented the most radical and brutal restructuring of Cambodian society in the country's history.

In its first major act, the Khmer Rouge ordered the evacuation of the capital and all provincial towns. They forced all residents—even hospital patients—to move to the countryside. The Khmer summarily executed those who resisted or were unable to move. Thousands died in this forced migration.

The Khmer Rouge obsessively distrusted anyone who exhibited autonomy or introspection. The regime demanded nothing less than complete control of its citizens' thoughts, achieved through fear, repression, and indoctrination. They severed links with the

outside world by denying people access to mail, radio, telephone, and other forms of mass communication. They abolished money. They closed schools and universities. Those suspected of working with the previous regime suddenly disappeared. Perceived as enemies of the state, the educated—teachers, doctors, and other professionals—met the same fate. The Khmer Rouge carried out systematic ethnic cleansing (against ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese) and what has been termed autogenocide. Estimates of the dead during the Khmer Rouge's sanguinary 42-month reign range from 1 million to 3 million, out of a 1975 population of 7.3 million.

The Khmer Rouge attempted to wipe out religion. They also sought to undermine the institution of the family. Children were often separated from their families. When not separated, they were encouraged to spy on their parents. The Khmer Rouge also promoted mass weddings in which young men and women were randomly selected for marriages. Cumulatively, these policies led to a disintegration of the institution of the family.

While Cambodian society endured horrific suffering on the domestic front, the Khmer Rouge's irredentist designs on Vietnam would soon lead to turmoil on an international level. Combined with the persecution of indigenous Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge's claims on various parts of southern Vietnam led to heated border clashes in which hundreds of Vietnamese civilians were killed. Vietnam retaliated by invading Cambodia. It toppled the Pol Pot regime on 7 January 1979. Vietnam installed a new, essentially totalitarian government friendly to its interests.

Establishment of a new regime failed to bring peace, however. Guerrilla warfare soon erupted, as the Khmer Rouge, supported by China, launched operations in the north. Thus fueled, the warfare continued for another nine years, draining the country's capital and human resources.

With the end of the Cold War, the major powers finally initiated diplomatic efforts to bring peace to Cambodia. These efforts culminated in the formulation of a peace plan in 1989. The plan called on the different factions to disarm and form an interim coalition government under Prince Sihanouk. It also stipulated that the United Nations would establish a body, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia, to supervise the government and to organize free and fair elections. Despite many problems, the plan was implemented in 1993, with UNTAC succeeding in holding national elections. At 90 percent, voter turnout was remarkably high. A constitutional monarchy was formed, with Norodom Sihanouk named as king.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Cambodia is now a constitutional monarchy. Although its written constitution guarantees civil and political rights to all citizens irrespective of race, color, religion, creed, or sex, in practice much remains to be accomplished. The executive is responsible to a unicameral National Assembly elected every five years. The country has three major political parties. The public bureaucracy is fragile, and its effectiveness and efficiency are severely compromised by a shortage of trained personnel, extremely low salaries, widespread corruption, and political interference.

Civil society has also emerged in this postconflict period. More than a hundred indigenous voluntary organizations engage in activities ranging from human rights monitoring to rural development. Although largely dependent on external assistance, these organizations symbolize the emergence of a civil society that could serve as a buffer between the state and its citizens. A relatively free press has also emerged. Although it lacks professionalism and journalists sometimes suffer government intimidation, the press enjoys more freedom than its counterparts in neighboring countries.

Since 1992 the country has witnessed a modest growth in its gross national product, which has slightly outpaced population growth. The rate of economic growth ranged from 4.1 in 1993 to 7.6 in 1995. But the growth rate declined to 2

Table 2.1. Cambodia at a Glance

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General	
Size	181,040 square kilometers
Population	10.5 million
Population growth rate	2.7%
Female population	53%
Ethnic composition	
Khmer	90%
Vietnamese	5%
Chinese	1%
Others	4%
Religion	Buddhism
Social	
Total fertility rate	5.81
Life expectancy	54 years
Adult literacy rates	
Female literacy	53%
Male literacy	80%
Infant mortality	106 out of 1,000 live births
Political	
Form of government	constitutional monarchy
Civil Society Organizations	100+
Press and electronic media	relatively free
Economic	
Gross national product (US\$billions)	3.2
Per capita income (US\$)	300
Per capita GDP (US\$)	715
Average annual growth rate (1990–96)	6.5%
Growth rate in agriculture (1990–96)	2.1%
Growth rate in manufacturing (1990–96)	7.8%
Growth rate in service (1990–96)	8.6%
<i>Sources: World Development Indicators (1998), UNDP Gender-Related Development Index (1998).</i>	

percent in 1997 because of an internal political crisis and the economic meltdown in Asia. As both crises have passed, the economic picture for the future looks brighter. With a per capita annual income of \$300, though, the country clearly remains one of the poorest in Asia.

Cambodia has much to do to build a stable political order and before sustainable economic growth can be laid. Three decades of war and bloodshed have devastated its society. The road to recovery and reconstruction is bound to be long.

Agriculture provides employment to 78 percent of the people; industry and service sectors account for the remaining 5 and 18 percent, respectively. Indeed, agriculture has served as an employment buffer, absorbing a disproportionate share of the increase in the labor force. In the absence of improved farm technologies, both production and productivity remain low, far inferior to that of neighboring countries.

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USAID'S ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Since the beginning of the peace process, USAID has been involved in rebuilding the war-shattered nation. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, USAID has designed its programming to promote democratic governance and sustainable growth. The Agency provided critical procedural assistance during the first national elections in 1993. It also assisted in strengthening political parties before and after the elections. In addition, the Agency initiated an extensive program to reform and rebuild the legal system. The program included a nationwide court reform program, introduction of public defenders, legal education for lawyers and students, and assistance to the new National Assembly.

USAID has also worked with the Asia Foundation to strengthen the institutional capacity of indigenous civil society organizations. Four major women's organizations have received economic assistance from USAID through the Asia Foundation. To promote economic growth, the Agency first turned to the pressing

need of demining and reconstructing roads throughout Cambodia. By 1998 it had supported the rehabilitation of 300 kilometers (186 miles) of major roads throughout the country. Other programs involved microfinance projects and training in entrepreneurial skills, benefiting over 50,000 people.

The Agency has also funded programs in health, education, and the environment. The Cambodia Environmental Management project, sponsored through Care International, helped design and implement a major multidonor conservation strategy. The project also helped establish a community reforestation program and launched an environmental awareness and community education project.

In 1994, USAID initiated a broad, countrywide effort to retrain primary teachers. The initiative built on a successful program begun earlier to train faculty and develop curriculum at the Faculty of Business. The Agency also worked closely with the Ministry of Education to develop and refine the government's investment plans for the education sector. Moreover, USAID funded studies on impediments to and strategies for increasing girls' participation in primary schools.

The Agency has been at the forefront of donor assistance in maternal and child health. It has worked with the Ministry of Health and local nongovernmental organizations to design and implement birth spacing and HIV/AIDS testing and prevention policies. It helped develop a dengue hemorrhagic fever program and Cambodia's first private reproductive center. Furthermore, it has provided prosthetic limbs, physical therapy, and vocational training to thousands of landmine victims.

Conflict and Cambodian Women

BEFORE WE DISCUSS the effects of three decades of war and genocide on women, we make three general observations:

First, the tragedy has profoundly affected both men and women. Both sexes have suffered from the poverty, the pain, and the brutal violence inflicted on them. However, because of traditional hierarchical structures, sexual division of labor, and differential access to economic and political power, the war has in some ways affected men and women differently.

Second, the effects of the conflict on men and women have been mediated by a number of interacting factors and conditions. For example, the abject poverty exacerbated by the war has compounded many adverse effects of the conflict, but poverty itself was a contributing factor to the war.

Finally, the conflict has had both positive and negative effects for women. While the conflict has caused vast suffering among women, it has also led to new opportunities for some. In particular, it has undermined the traditional hierarchical structure of the society, opening the way for more balanced gender relationships.

EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT

Trauma and Disability

Hundreds of thousands of women have personally experienced and been traumatized by the brutalities of war, such as cruelty, extreme violence, forced migration, sexual abuse, and separation

from loved ones. Psychologists debate whether Cambodians show the symptoms of what is commonly called posttraumatic stress disorder. Such symptoms typically include depression, listlessness, chronic fatigue, mental anguish, psychological disabilities, and recurrent recollection of traumatic incidents. Some experts have observed an absence of these symptoms among Cambodians, and they have concluded that posttraumatic stress disorder has not affected the postconflict population. Others, however, have suggested that trauma is widespread but that its behavioral manifestations differ dramatically from society to society. In Cambodia, religious beliefs, the notion of karma, societal relationships, and other cultural norms have tempered the most extreme expressions of posttraumatic stress disorder (Boyden and Gibbs 1997).

In interviews and focus groups, women mentioned their high levels of stress and the profound sorrow they experienced. They were deeply moved by the recollection of traumatic war experiences and often were unable to contain their emotions. Despite these problems, women have been valiantly trying to take charge of their lives. They have found solace in religion, in public rituals, and in family. Some women who experienced sexual assaults have regained self-esteem by performing a culturally approved cleansing ceremony in Buddhist temples. For others, the challenge of survival has helped overcome their trauma.

Where rape was used as a weapon of terror and intimidation in countries such as Angola, Bosnia, Mozambique, and Rwanda, it has been a source of personal

The high casualties of young men in combat resulted in a demographic imbalance. There was a surplus of “women of marriageable age” during the 1980s and early 1990s.

anguish to thousands of victims. Rape was not the policy in Cambodia, and the magnitude of this problem has not been as severe. But two psychologists who studied the subject have concluded that rape and sexual violence were commonly practiced by Khmer Rouge officials and frequently occurred during the migration of refugees to the Thai border. Moreover, single women were highly vulnerable in the refugee camps (Marcus 1995). We know little about the plight of women who were raped and sexually abused during the conflict, but most of the victims of such crimes have rarely sought outside help. They prefer to remain anonymous out of fear of social stigma.

The situation for women disabled by land mines likewise has remained tenuous. During and immediately after the war, thousands of people were killed or lost their limbs to land mines. Most were men; only 5 to 7 percent were women. Anecdotal evidence indicates that women usually face more difficulties in obtaining treatment and prostheses. Often they are too poor to travel, or family members are reluctant to take them to the city for physical therapy and rehabilitation. As they are unable to perform their personal and family chores, disabled women are not treated well by others. Often the married victims have been left by their husbands and have little or no means of support.

Status and Role in Family

The conflict affected the institution of family in at least three profound ways. First, the Khmer Rouge sought to undermine family cohesion and redefine the roles of family members. They assigned men and women the same tasks in agriculture, irrigation, and other activities. The regime encouraged family members to spy on one another, and in many parts of the country during 1977–79, it even collectivized cooking and childcare. It organized marriages between randomly selected people without the

consent of their families. The cumulative effects of Khmer Rouge policies on the family have been devastating.

Second, the large-scale movements of populations resulting from carpet bombing, forced evacuation of cities by the Khmer Rouge, and the guerrilla war on the Thai border contributed to the disintegration of many families. Thousands of families were separated during the forced migration. Often, husbands drifted away under physical and psychological stress, abandoning their wives and children.

Finally, the high casualties of young men in combat resulted in a demographic imbalance. There was a surplus of “women of marriageable age” during the 1980s and early 1990s.

As suggested by two analysts (Ledgerwood 1996, Frieson 1998), these developments led to a decline of women’s status in the family. Before the war, women had enjoyed an honored position in the family. Kinship was traced through both husband and wife. Moreover, after the marriage, men usually lived with the parents of their wives. Thus, women enjoyed the emotional and material support of their families and friends, strengthening their position in the marriage. The traditional status of women was damaged by the surplus of “women of marriageable age” during and after the war. Because of the postconflict demographic imbalance, men have found themselves in a better bargaining position. They have been able to offer lower bride prices and easily divorce their spouses and find new wives.

Faced with this situation, many women have preferred to become second and third wives rather than remain unmarried (Ledgerwood 1996). The decline of women’s status was repeatedly raised in focus groups and interviews. Women participants often told the team of evaluators from USAID’s Center for Development Information and Evaluation

that women are no longer treated the way they used to be. Many women, especially those of the war generation, are concerned about their social status and how it has changed.

High rates of domestic violence against women have been reported throughout the country. A recent survey conducted in Phnom Penh and six provinces found that 16 percent of women respondents were physically abused by their husbands, and half of them sustained injuries as a result of the abuse (MWA 1996). In another study, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center noted that more than 27 percent of women were battered by a member of their household, usually the spouse (CWCC 1999). Participants in focus groups also indicated that wife and child beatings have become widespread. Many respondents attributed the domestic violence to the prolonged bloodshed and a subsequent decline in women's status. Such a subculture condones violent behavior—so much that people begin to view it as a normal occurrence.

The conflict also resulted in the growth of women-headed households, a phenomenon uncommon in the past. Recent statistics indicate that women presently head between 25 and 30 percent of Cambodia's households (UNDP 1998). In such households, the traditional division of labor between men and women has become blurred, as women have assumed roles normally undertaken by men. They discipline sons, build or repair houses, deal with community leaders and government officials, and fulfill religious and social obligations expected from the male members. More important, they have become the sole support for the family and make critical decisions about family members.

Female-headed households usually face severe economic and social difficulties. Female farmers, for example, persistently face labor shortages for heavy agricultural operations. They are rarely in

a position to hire outside laborers, depending instead on the generosity of distant relatives and friends. Although traditional laws provide for the ownership of land, women tend to encounter difficulties in legitimizing their claims and in obtaining access to necessary agricultural inputs. They also find it difficult to get a fair price for the marketable surplus. Social impediments arise because the female heads of households are not readily accepted in the community. Men may be embarrassed to interact publicly with single women. Still others try to take unfair advantage of their situation. Married women in the community often look at them with suspicion, if not hostility. In focus groups, single women told the team that with the rise of polygamy, married women in the community were suspicious of their intentions and concerned they might attract their spouses.

Despite these difficulties, female-headed households may be better off in their living standards than male-headed households. A recent survey found that the incidence of poverty is 37 percent in male-headed households and only 33 percent in female-headed households (UNDP 1998). This finding contradicts conventional wisdom.

Several explanations have been given for this unexpected finding. Female-headed households include many that have an elderly woman as the head but also have grown sons with their wives and children, or grown daughters with their husbands and children. Hence, many "female-headed households" may include relatively prosperous extended households. In research that accounted for this, female-headed households *without* male labor had the smallest landholdings, the lowest income, and the smallest holdings of farm animals (Ledgerwood 1994.) Moreover, lower poverty rates might reflect a lower dependency burden. Absent of husbands, families are likely to have fewer children. Another explanation

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points to the fact that the average age of the female head is higher than that of a male head, and in Cambodia the incidence of poverty declines with the age of the head of the household beyond age 35. Finally, women may simply be more adept at developing a wide range of economic activities in the informal sector.

Social Contract and Interpersonal Trust

Social scientists often suggest that conflict and totalitarian political systems undermine interpersonal trust and community participation. They believe that these experiences socialize people into thinking that others—neighbors, friends, coworkers—will take undue advantage of them. In focus groups and individual meetings during CDIE’s fieldwork in Cambodia, many women participants directly or indirectly confirmed this phenomenon. They complained about a lack of trust and unwillingness to help in times of need. Some recalled with nostalgia preconflict days, when people shared with and assisted friends and neighbors. Poverty seems to be a driving force behind this issue: where there is no surplus, sharing may mean hunger.

This problem has had a profound effect on microcredit programs in Cambodia. It is noteworthy that the average size of self-help groups for credit ranges from three to five—low, compared with other developing countries. A number of women indicated they would join only immediate family members for group credit programs. Because of the difficulty of persuading unrelated individuals to work together, credit groups have established new requirements. Relatives may be members of the same economic group, but they must physically live in separate households.

Economic Burdens and Opportunities

Although the conflict imposed economic hardships on women, it also opened new

opportunities to participate in the economic sphere. Because of the mass mobilization of men into the military, mass killing, and increased labor demand for war and rehabilitation work, women were forced to undertake activities and perform economic roles that had been restricted to men. This led to the undermining of the traditional sexual division of labor that had characterized Cambodian society.

Historically, men and women worked together in agriculture, particularly in cultivating rice. Men were generally responsible for heavy tasks such as plowing and harrowing, whereas women transplanted seedlings from seedbeds to the fields. The remaining tasks—harvesting, transporting, and threshing—were jointly done depending on convenience.

Women were also responsible for grinding rice and transporting it to the mill. The temporary or permanent absence of the male members of the household during the war put a heavy strain on this division of labor. Often women had to perform all agricultural tasks by themselves. The situation has somewhat eased in recent years as the army has demobilized and young adults born in the early 1980s have entered the labor force. Still, many female heads of households with insufficient funds to hire laborers have difficulty obtaining assistance. They must plow and harrow the fields themselves.

During the conflict, women made significant employment gains in the industrial sector. Before the democratic transition, most workers in state industrial enterprises were women. According to Ledgerwood (1996), 7,137 of 10,693 employees were women. Women constituted a majority of workers in textile and salt production and nearly half the employees in the rubber industry. With the transition to a market economy, the ownership of many of these enterprises

passed into private hands. It is not clear how the change in ownership has affected male and female workers. Increased numbers of men did enter into the labor market. Nonetheless, in the garment industry, which has emerged as the largest industrial employer, women still constitute 90 percent of the work force (UNDP 1998).

Women have traditionally dominated petty trading in Cambodia. They sell fish, vegetables, fruits and flowers, and cakes and other food cooked at home. Many women initiated such ventures, which require little capital investment. Women continued to engage in petty trading throughout the war years. (The only exception was the Khmer Rouge era, when the leadership prohibited all economic transactions.) However, Cambodians' limited purchasing power prevented any rapid expansion of petty trading during the conflict. The situation changed with the arrival of thousands of officials and staff from the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, and other international agencies. They dramatically increased the flow of cash into the economy. These highly paid expatriates stimulated a demand for goods and services, increasing the demand for petty trading by women. Consequently, a thriving informal sector emerged in Phnom Penh and other cities, a sector that continues today.

The presence of a large number of expatriates, especially UN peacekeepers, also led to a rapid growth in another industry—prostitution. While prostitution had existed in the past, it had been hidden. To meet the demands of the expatriates, many entrepreneurs openly set up brothels, which were soon frequented by local customers as well, institutionalizing the phenomenon. Initially these brothels imported commercial sex workers from Vietnam and Thailand, but soon they were also recruiting from the countryside. According to a recent study, more than 14,000 women work as prostitutes. Girls under 18 make up more than 15 percent of these sex workers (UNDP 1998). Poverty

compels many destitute women to seek their livelihood in commercial sex work. Many impoverished families sell their daughters into prostitution, sacrificing one for the survival of the family. Young women are often tricked into prostitution with the promise of good jobs and high salaries. The large number of internally displaced persons—generally people without land access, lacking community ties, and having a high proportion of female-headed families—constitutes a major vulnerable group. Such women and girls may feel that the relatively high economic returns outweigh the risks. Whatever the reason, there is no shortage of workers for the large commercial sex industry, an unfortunate legacy of international intervention in the country.

Political Participation

As in many war-torn societies, women's involvement in the political arena increased during the conflict. Although a few women did occupy important positions in the Sihanouk government, the Khmer Rouge were the first to organize women at the grass-roots level. Khmer Rouge leaders established a women's wing of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in the late 1960s. In turn, this wing organized women's groups in rural and urban areas. We know little about the inner workings of the women's wing and its units at the local levels. Frieson (1998), however, does state that it was responsible for "organizing women's support, taking on important rear-guard roles in the military conflict against the Phnom Penh regime." Once the Khmer Rouge came to power, the women's wing assumed more power and prestige and became another instrument of political repression and intimidation.

The communist regime that succeeded the Khmer Rouge took major steps to enhance women's participation in the political process. It promoted women to leadership positions in commune solidarity groups. Some scholars have

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suggested that the regime did so mainly because men were reluctant to serve in these groups, as officeholders received no salary (Frieson 1998).

Though perhaps true on certain fronts, this was not the only reason for granting women positions of leadership. Like many communist regimes, the government was committed to promoting gender equality. In any case, the leadership of solidarity groups conferred political and social power upon female incumbents and expanded their political horizons. In addition, women were represented at the highest levels in the Communist Party and the government. One woman served as a member of the politburo while five others participated on the 31-member Party Central Committee. In addition, in 1988 there were 21 female members in the 117-member National Assembly (Ledgerwood 1996). While women, like men, did not enjoy political freedom, they did have a role in the decision-making process at the local and national levels.

The situation began to change during the transition to democracy. In a major irony linked to the peace process, women's political participation has declined rather than increased during the transition. Only five women, for example, were elected to the new National Assembly in 1993. Although women constituted 56 percent of the registered voters, only 5 percent of all competing candidates were women. The first democratically elected government had not a single woman at the ministerial level. There were only five female undersecretaries of state. None of the provincial governments was woman headed (Ledgerwood 1996). It is likely that war fatigue, political disenchantment, the unstable economic situation, and the assertion of the Khmer identity with its emphasis on women's traditional roles have contributed to this phenomenon.

There are signs that after the initial disenfranchisement, women have begun

to take a slightly greater interest in politics. They are becoming more active at the national, provincial, and local levels. During the 1998 elections, major political parties fielded more women candidates than in the previous one, and 5 of the 39 political parties vying for a seat were headed by a woman. The number of women elected to the National Assembly has doubled, from 5 to 10. There are now two women ministers in the national government and four state secretaries. At the local level, women now head nearly 10 percent of the Village Development Councils.

The above discussion shows that the effects of the conflict have been all-pervasive. The war has touched all major aspects of women's lives, affecting their psychological well-being, family roles, interpersonal relationships, economic activities, and participation in the political arena. Women have taken on increased economic responsibility for their families at the same time their social position has eroded.

While the conflict imposed untold suffering on women, one must also recognize that it opened space for their increased participation in various aspects of their collective life. It remains too early to tell, though, whether the opportunities created by the conflict will continue or whether there will be increasing pressures for women to return to traditional subservient roles. Further, there are some weak indications that with the easing of tensions, increased social and economic stability, and the rise of a younger generation unmarked by the excesses of war, many of the economic advances made by women may be reversed. As more men enter the work force, women might face greater competition in agriculture and industry.

GENDER ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In light of the foregoing discussion, we mention here a few problem areas that

require concerted attention by the government, by international donor agencies, and, above all, by women's organizations. The list is illustrative and not comprehensive.

Poverty remains the foremost problem. Estimates indicate as few as 28 percent or as many as 40 percent of Cambodians live below the poverty line. Without sustained economic growth, the adverse social and economic effects of the conflict cannot be mitigated, and new opportunities for women's advancement cannot be created. Vulnerable women urgently need to be provided with skills, training, and credit so they can become self-sufficient, productive members of the society.

Literacy and education rates for women and girls continue to be a problem. Only 53 percent of women are literate, compared with 80 percent of men (UNDP 1998). The enrollment rate for girls in primary and secondary education is extremely low. Less than half of all girls begin primary school, and the average length of schooling is four years for the entire population. There is a rapid drop in the percentage of girls entering secondary school, and two thirds of all girls abandon their studies before completing high school. Women make up only 10 percent of the university student body.

Several factors shed light on the high dropout rates. Girls are needed at home to assist families in household chores and to look after younger siblings. Some parents see limited value in higher education for daughters whom they expect to marry and be supported by their husbands. Others, anxious to marry their daughters early, are concerned that schooling may delay it. In rural areas where few villages have secondary schools and students must travel long distances or stay away from home, parents are reluctant to educate their daughters at the secondary level. Whatever the explanation, the dual problems of women's illiteracy and differential access to education need to be

addressed. Without rapid expansion of literacy and education rates, gender equality is bound to remain a distant dream.

Access to health services, particularly for reproductive health, is yet another problem. Men and women both suffer

Effects of the Conflict (As told by Women)

On family relationships: "Relationships have changed very much; families used to be intact and supportive. Husbands and wives were loyal to each other. . . . We can no longer trust each other."

On work: "After work we are tired as a dead snake."

On being a widow: "We are people without hands. A widow is like a blind man who looks at the sun."

On domestic violence: "I feel that I want to hit him with a stick, but I am scared that he will hit me."

Source: van der Wijk 1997.

from poor, or often nonexistent, health services, particularly in rural areas. Because of their reproductive needs, the lack of adequate health care is particularly problematic for women. The maternal mortality rate approaches 500 deaths per 100,000 births. Taking into account obstetrical complications, the number of women adversely affected by pregnancy is estimated to be more than 200,000 each year. Nearly 90 percent of all deliveries occur at home, since few clinics offer reproductive health services. Induced abortions to end unwanted pregnancies also contribute to maternal mortality. Adequate reproductive health care could prevent the majority of these cases.

Although the incidence of HIV infection is higher among men, the rate of infection among women is increasing rapidly. Nationally, 2.4 percent of married women harbor the virus. More disturbing, 13- to 20-year-old girls have the highest rate of infection among married women. In recent years, the number of cases of sexually transmitted diseases (which facilitate the transmission of HIV) has

Cambodia lacks the political will and institutional infrastructure needed to protect rights guaranteed in the constitution.’

increased dramatically. As discussed earlier, domestic violence has emerged as a major problem in postconflict Cambodia. It indicates that men place a low value on women. The problems of commercial sex and trafficking of women and children are closely related. These problems have attracted attention in recent years because of the efforts of local women’s nongovernmental organizations and the international community.

Another problem concerns discrimination against women and the challenge of promoting gender equality. In pursuance of agreements signed in October 1991 in Paris, the elected Cambodian government drafted a national constitution that guarantees equal rights for men and women. Seven articles in chapter 3 of the constitution specifically address women’s rights. Moreover, in recent years the National Assembly has passed additional laws

protecting women’s rights. For example, the assembly has passed legislation on abortion, domestic violence, and the trafficking of women. The government is also working on legislation to guarantee women land and inheritance rights.

But while a legal framework for gender equality exists, implementation and enforcement remain a problem. Cambodia lacks the political will and institutional infrastructure needed to protect rights guaranteed in the constitution. Characterizing the law-enforcement system are impunity combined with an absence of transparency. The government lacks trained personnel and material resources to enforce the laws. Above all, disadvantages such as illiteracy, lack of resources, and ignorance of the law limit women’s access to fair treatment by the judiciary system and law-enforcement agencies.

Women's Organizations In Postconflict Cambodia

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER examined the effects of the conflict on women, their status, roles, and social and economic activities. It identified some of the gender issues and problems facing contemporary Cambodian society. This chapter looks at women's organizations that have emerged to deal with these issues and problems. It describes the factors that contributed to their emergence and discusses their structures and the activities they undertake.

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

The emergence of independent women's organizations has been a postconflict phenomenon. True, a body called the Women's Association of Cambodia existed during the Vietnamese occupation of 1979–89. It had the mandate and authority to promote the advancement of women—which it did. But the association was sponsored and controlled by the state. It was not autonomous and independent, the defining characteristics of civil society organizations.

Several factors have contributed to the growth of independent women's organizations in postconflict Cambodia. The first was the political opening created by the democratic transition. After an interruption of more than two decades of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, the country enjoyed a semblance of democracy in the early 1990s. Its constitution guaranteed essential civil and political rights and provided a legal framework for forming voluntary organizations. This political opening, limited though it was, has been an essential, though not a sufficient, condition for the growth of all kinds of voluntary organizations,

including women's organizations.

Another factor was the presence of a large number of international nongovernmental organizations involved in both humanitarian assistance and sustainable development. As the international donor community was generally reluctant to channel funds to the government, it has depended on NGOs to administer the programs. The international NGOs were philosophically committed to the growth of indigenous voluntary organizations, which would gradually replace them and carry on their activities. The international organizations were also under pressure from the government as well as donor agencies to reduce visibility. Consequently, many NGOs working on gender issues helped women leaders form indigenous organizations. In interviews with the CDIE team, many women leaders acknowledged that the impetus for establishing their organizations often came from international NGOs. Without the latter's assistance, said the leaders, the local organizations might not have been established.

A third factor has been the generous availability of resources for women's organizations. The international community viewed the growth of civil society organizations as an essential component of its efforts to promote democracy. These organizations stand as a buffer between the state and the citizen, curtailing the totalitarian impulses of the government. Consequently, the international community provided generous financial and technical resources to found indigenous organizations, including women's organizations. Practically speaking, all existing women's organizations received support from multilateral and bilateral

The CDIE team was impressed by the vision, commitment, and capabilities of the top leaders. But a vast gulf lies between top leadership and midlevel managers and fieldworkers.

donors for both programs and organizational development. Several key informants told the team that funds were no problem in the early 1990s; the real hurdles were organizational capacity and the vision of women's organizations. (In recent years, though, international funds, have been scarce, creating problems for many organizations.)

A fourth contributing factor has been what we might call the growth of "gender sensitivity" among national policymakers in the early 1990s. This sensitivity resulted from the growing recognition that the sustained development of Cambodian society is not possible without the involvement and participation of women. The presence of women expatriates working with multilateral and bilateral agencies, with the NGO community, and even with the government contributed to this awareness. Moreover, influential women leaders realized that women's organizations, led and managed by women and working for their welfare, are essential for promoting gender equality in Cambodia. This gender sensitivity provided philosophical and practical justification for establishing women's organizations, particularly those engaged in advocacy functions.

Finally, the return of Cambodian women who had gained experience in leadership or education outside the country was another contributing factor. Many were visionaries possessing leadership qualities, and a few took the lead in establishing women's organizations in the early 1990s. Examples of such women include Mu Sochua Leiper, a founder of Khemera (see table 4.1) and now minister of women's and veterans' affairs; Thida C. Khus, founder of Silaka; and Nanda Pok, who started Women for Prosperity. All are expatriates or refugees who returned to Cambodia during or after the peace process. Having lived in Western democracies, they were aware of the contributions that civil society

organizations can make to the articulation of interests of different cross-sections of the population.

Table 4.1 lists most registered organizations presently active. It also lists a few as-yet unregistered organizations engaged in interesting work. General characteristics of these organizations are mentioned in the next section.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Table 4.1 shows that 13 of 18 women's organizations are located in the capital city and only 5 in the provinces. Given that all international NGOs and donor agencies are based in Phnom Penh, this is hardly unexpected. However, while located in the capital, many work in the countryside or support programs benefiting people throughout the country.

The table also shows that 6 of the 18 organizations were established in 1993, and another 3 in 1994. Thus during 1993-94, half were founded. One plausible explanation is that during these years there was a surge of optimism and hope as the democratic transition occurred. Moreover, generous international assistance was available to establish voluntary organizations.

Broadly speaking, we can classify these organizations into three categories. One consists of the *social service organizations* that provide a set of services to women and children, particularly those affected by the conflict. Khemera, Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, and Cambodian Women's Development Agency and Homelands illustrate this category. Over time, such organizations have also started taking up advocacy activities. Another category consists of those whose primary work is *economic*. Help the Widows is a good example. It is engaged in microcredit and has established informal women's groups to channel credit to women. Finally, the *advocacy and democracy-promoting organizations* are

Table 4.1. Women's Organizations in Cambodia

Name	Location	Activities	Est.
Arun Reah	P	Vocational training, microcredit	1994
Association Lumière des Femmes Rural	P	Vocational training	1997
Battambang Women's AIDS Project	P	HIV/AIDS education, research	1993
Cambodia Community Building	C	Microcredit, health	1995
Cambodia Migration and Development Committee	C	Vocational training, women trafficking, prostitution, human rights	1997
Cambodian Women Crisis Center	C	Domestic violence, women trafficking, and prostitution	
Cambodian Women's Development Agency	C	Literacy, human rights, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, prostitution	1993
Help the Widows	C	Microcredit	
Indradevi Association	C	Human rights, HIV/AIDS, women advocacy	1994
International Friendship Organization for Development	C	Vocational training	1996
Khemara	C	Community development, vocational training, microcredit, domestic violence	1991
Khmer Women's Voice Centre	C	Democracy, women's advocacy, human rights	1993
Kompong Thom Cambodian Association Support of Women	P	Microcredit, domestic violence, economic	1993
Project Against Domestic Violence	C	Domestic violence	1995
Silaka	P	Management training	
Women for Prosperity	C	Political participation, women's advocacy	1994
Women's Organization for Modern Economy and Nursing (WOMEN)	C	HIV/AIDS	1993
Women's Media Center of Cambodia	C	Women's advocacy, mass media	1993

Sources: Directory of Cambodian NGOs, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia.
Notes: A few organizations that were listed but not active were eliminated; a few that were not listed but operational were added.
P=province, C=capital city (Phnom Penh).

Influential women leaders realized that women's organizations, led and managed by women and working for their welfare, are essential for promoting gender equality in Cambodia.

involved in lobbying and public education efforts to improve women's status in society and increase their participation in the political arena. This category includes organizations such as Women for Prosperity, Women's Media Center of Cambodia, and Khmer Women's Voice Center.

The top leadership of women's organizations initially came from four groups of women. First were Western-educated Cambodian expatriates. The

second consisted of women who had lived in refugee camps on the Thai border, many of whom received education or assumed leadership roles in the camps. The third included female employees of international NGOs in Cambodia who had acquired practical experience in running voluntary organizations. The last group was those women who lived in the country during the conflict but worked for the Revolutionary Cambodian Women's Association, a mass organization under the Vietnamese occupation.

Women's Organizations: Serving a Medley of Causes

Khemera is not just the first Cambodian women's NGO—it is the first *Cambodian* NGO. Founded in 1991 by a group of Cambodian women, it grew under the direction of Mu Sochua Leiper, now a cabinet minister. The organization targets poor women through community-based development programs. Khemera's activities fall into five main program areas: literacy, child-care, health care, family support, and women in business.

The **Cambodian Women's Development Agency** was founded at the end of the communist Vietnamese occupation as an independent NGO. Director Kien Serey Phal is one of the few women who remained in Cambodia throughout the conflict and now directs a woman's organization. CWDA is recognized as one of the best-managed organizations in Cambodia. Its activities include health programs, community development, basic literacy promotion, and HIV/AIDS education. The organization seeks to empower grass-roots organizations and village communities. CWDA also supports initiatives against trafficking in and violence against women.

Help the Widows is one of the few economic associations run by a woman. Sareth Soun founded the group and directs it. Help the Widows provides microloans to women to help them expand their economic activities in agriculture and petty trading.

Indradevi Association was founded in 1993 by Dy Ratha. Operating in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Phnom Penh, the group carries out education, information, awareness, counseling, and treatment programs on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. It also advocates women's rights and needs.

Established in 1997, the **Cambodian Women's Crisis Center** addresses violence against women. It seeks to stop forced prostitution, domestic violence, and the trafficking of women and children. CWCC was founded and is directed by Chanthol Oung, a human rights lawyer. The organization opened a shelter for abused women after several women escaped from a brothel and had no place to stay.

Why the preponderance of expatriate and refugee women in leadership positions? The obvious explanation is that overseas exposure gave them new skills and expertise. It widened their social and political horizons. They often learned English. The foreign sojourn also weakened the shackles of traditional society, giving them a new vision and new perspectives.

The CDIE team was impressed by the vision, commitment, and capabilities of the top leaders. But a vast gulf lies between top leadership and midlevel managers and fieldworkers. This is partly due to a lack of qualified and educated women who can successfully assume those positions. But it also reflects leaders' reluctance to delegate authority and invest in human resource development.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Vocational Training

Six of 18 organizations provide some vocational training to women. Such training usually is in food, catering, sewing, and hospitality. A few organizations have also organized agricultural extension training programs for women farmers. And a few have established handicraft outlets to sell products made by the trainees. Some observers have questioned the sustainability of such outlets, which depend on artificially created markets.

Some have questioned the utility of many vocational training activities, since they are generally carried out with little regard to women's needs. For example, many focus group participants trained by Khemera complained that certain skills classes were not helpful, because they did not lead to jobs. As international funding for vocational training has diminished, women's organizations are phasing out such activities.

Microcredit Lending

One third of the women's organizations listed in table 4.1 administer credit programs for women to initiate and operate microbusinesses. Loans are provided to a group of three to seven members, who are responsible for repayment. In the absence of formal institutions, such programs have been popular with women. For example, Help the Widows (which now serves all

women) started with 50 to 60 women; it had more than 2,700 members in 1998. Several women the CDIE team interviewed were enthusiastic about microcredit activities. They described how their own lives were transformed by small-loan availability. Most were using loans for selling cooked food or starting poultry operations.

Several major international donors led by USAID have supported microcredit activities administered by international and local NGOs, which have established local partners to channel funds for group loans. Although most of the local partners cannot be designated as women's organizations, women are well represented in them and have begun assuming leadership positions. Almost 95 percent of the participants in group-lending programs are women.

Domestic Violence

Three women's organizations seek to create public awareness about and help victims of domestic violence. Reacting to a 1994 USAID-funded survey that demonstrated the gravity of the problem and a need for remedial action, the Agency helped 15 local NGOs launch Project Against Domestic Violence. One of the most successful activities of the newly founded organization was initiating a street theater. It held 39 performances in five provinces and reached an audience of approximately 250,000.

Women's organizations also provide a range of services to victims of domestic violence. Khemera provides housing, vocational training and small loans. Its shelter accommodates 300 women from throughout the country. The Cambodian Women's Crisis Center also runs a counseling program for abused women and arranges for legal assistance. If deemed appropriate, it contacts the family of the victim and explores the possibility of reconciliation.

Prostitution and Trafficking

Women's organizations are also dealing with forced prostitution and the trafficking of women and children. The organizations provide shelter, counseling, vocational training, and legal assistance to women who want to leave the profession. For example, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center manages a shelter, arranges for counseling, and conducts classes on literacy, sewing, hairdressing, and women's rights. It also works with selected garment factory managers to arrange job opportunities.

CWCC also supports educational media initiatives. It has produced videos on the exploitation of commercial sex workers, which have attracted the government officials' attention. That has led to more effective enforcement of laws against trafficking and forced prostitution.

HIV/AIDS Awareness and Research

Women's organizations are mostly engaged in two types of HIV/AIDS activities: research and public education. The Battambang Women's AIDS Program, in collaboration with Population Services International, regularly carries out knowledge, attitude, and practices surveys and holds focus group discussions with the population at risk. Its findings are used for scientific research and policy formulation. The Cambodian Women's Development Agency conducts annual surveys among commercial sex workers to assess the effects of AIDS awareness initiatives.

Women's organizations also expend considerable effort on educating vulnerable populations. The Battambang Women's AIDS Program produces AIDS prevention videos and a television program that is both popular and instructive. It also produces educational material and posters for use by other organizations. Indradevi Association carries out education, information, awareness, and counseling programs on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases among vulnerable groups. In 1997,

'The Cambodian Women's Crisis Center has produced videos on the exploitation of commercial sex workers. That has led to more effective enforcement of laws against trafficking and forced prostitution.'

its educational outreach program provided information to 4,398 sex workers and 712 brothel owners.

Democracy and Human Rights

Several women's organizations have promoting democracy and human rights as major objectives, but they are not actively engaged in these activities. They concentrate on voter education and strategies to increase women's political participation. The Khmer Women's Voice Center was among the first women's organizations to undertake voter education programs for the 1993 elections. It organized meetings and workshops and printed literature to encourage both men and women to vote.

Women for Prosperity seeks to enhance the political participation of women. With a grant from USAID, it organized leadership workshops in the capital and in 11 provincial towns for women candidates for the 1998 elections. Attended by 698 female leaders, the workshop covered such topics as public speaking, interviewing skills, and writing press releases. The organization also published a report profiling women candidates from all political parties presenting each party's platform on women's issues. Moreover, the organization holds leadership training courses for midlevel decision-makers such

as commune chiefs and district chiefs in the provinces.

Public Advocacy

Finally, many women's organizations are doing pioneering work in public awareness of gender issues in Cambodian society. They have successfully used radio and television, print media, and meetings and workshops to articulate various issues and promote gender equality.

The Women's Media Center creates programming on social and gender issues. It produces radio, television, and video programs in cooperation with other voluntary organizations, reaching a large audience. It has a successful weekly television program that highlights gender issues in culturally appropriate ways. The center also conducts audience surveys on its productions.

Another group, the Women's Voice Center, uses print media. It has published several illustrated booklets and posters highlighting women's problems. The publications are helpful for women and children with limited reading skills. The organization also publishes a magazine much in demand in the school system. It features articles by and about women active in economic, social, and political arenas.

Impact of Women's Organizations

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, we described the emergence of women's organizations as well as the characteristics and activities of these groups. This chapter assesses the impact of these organizations on women's empowerment in Cambodia. It also discusses various factors that affect their performance and impacts.

OVERALL IMPACT OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Despite their small number and limited economic and technical resources, women's organizations have been contributing to the empowerment of women in various ways. For one thing, they are helping vulnerable women through vocational training and microcredit programs. The interviews and focus groups conducted by the CDIE team indicate that credit programs are particularly effective and help women initiate small income-generating activities such as farming, poultry raising, and petty trade. Access to credit has improved their economic position, enabling them to meet the minimum necessities of life. More important, it has given them new confidence and identity. Some income-producing women experience better treatment by their husbands and other members of the family. In other words, economic empowerment seems to contribute to social and cultural empowerment in Cambodia as elsewhere.

Women's organizations are assisting victims of HIV/AIDS, of domestic violence, and of trafficking and forced prostitution. Although only a small fraction of the needy women receive assistance, the

assistance does make a difference in the lives of those women. The real contribution of these organizations lies in generating public awareness of these problems. The organizations have put the problem of domestic violence on the public agenda. Traveling from province to province, the Project Against Domestic Violence confronted men and women with the issue. Pioneering efforts of many organizations have helped center public attention on the plight of commercial sex workers and the victims of forced prostitution. Their activities have led to the arrest of many brothel owners and the rescue of young girls enslaved as prostitutes. Radio and television programs sponsored by women's organizations have pressured law enforcement to intervene. Women's organizations have also been pioneers in educating people about the growing problem of AIDS.

Women's organizations have also started influencing the political landscape, though in a limited way. During the 1998 elections, a few women's organizations participated in voter education programs for women. Women for Prosperity trained women candidates. It raised public awareness of gender issues by publishing information on each party's platform for women. The organization has now begun to address leadership training for increasing women's participation in politics. By promoting participation, the group is also highlighting the issue of gender equality. As a midlevel trainee told the CDIE team members: "After our training we are aware of what government does [and] also knowledgeable about equality. Men cannot abuse women if women know their rights. Now we

understand how to work together for justice.”

More important, women’s organizations have been raising awareness of gender issues through mass media. The Cambodian Women’s Media Center, for example, produces a TV series, in the style of opera and drama, that explores gender-related subjects in inventive, entertaining, appropriate ways.

Impacts of Women’s Organizations

“It is too early to tell about the effects of women’s organizations. I would call their contributions modest, . . . but they are doing some good work.”

—*Academic scholar*

“During the past five years, women’s organizations have come a long way. They are helping raise a consciousness about gender issues. I am very much impressed by the use of radio and television by women’s organizations.”

—*International private voluntary organization official*

“There is no doubt that their [women’s organizations] activities have helped a segment of Cambodian women.”

—*Prominent Cambodian human-rights leader*

These comedic shows are “particularly effective because they challenge traditional gender roles in the family and in society in ways that permit men and women to see the reality of discrimination and ways to ameliorate it without much loss of face or indignity to the family’s reputation” (Frieson 1998). The series is popular. The center receives over 150 letters each month from viewers who provide feedback on programs. Several independent observers told the team that such programs are influencing in particular middle- and upper-middle-class women, who have more access to radio and television than do poorer women. The programs have started making women aware of their rights and responsibilities. They also are causing women to rethink their traditional role and status in the family and society.

Thus women’s organizations are redefining and expanding the limited social, cultural, and economic roles available to women in Cambodian society. Empowerment remains a critical issue for women, whose social status and respect in society has been altered by loss of family, demographic shifts, changing kinship and marriage patterns, and a woman’s increasingly burdensome role as sole supporter of her children. Leaders of women’s organizations provide important role models. Those models contrast sharply with the sexualized and objectified image of women common in the imported movies and television series that dominate the media in Cambodia.

Women’s organizations bring unique benefits to the women who administer them as well as to their beneficiaries. First, the leaders experience opportunities and a climate of respect that contrasts sharply with the status they tend to be accorded in mixed groups. Second, the nature of power relationships experienced by women in women’s organizations is qualitatively different. Here women manage the organizations, providing women opportunities and access to power they do not experience in society at large. Third, women are emboldened to speak openly in female-run meetings, whereas in mixed meetings social norms often prevent women from taking a proactive role. Finally, women’s organizations provide a training ground for broader leadership roles. The experience women gain in managing can serve as a springboard for future national leadership. Witness the rise to power of Soucha Mu Leiper, founder of Cambodia’s first NGO and currently minister of women’s and veterans affairs. Others are sure to follow.

FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT

Social and Cultural Factors

Women’s organizations face many social and cultural obstacles. No tradition exists

in Cambodia for voluntary organizations. Although there once was a community network surrounding the Buddhist temple, it bore little semblance to present-day civil society organizations. Consequently, all voluntary organizations, including women's organizations, face difficulties in gaining public legitimacy and in obtaining broader participation of the people.

Compounding the problems of women's organization is the low social status of women. Women employees of these organizations often do not receive the respectful treatment accorded their male counterparts, and they encounter difficulties in working with government officials and local community leaders. Even within an organization, male officials dominate their fellow female workers, lowering the women's morale and self-confidence. Finally, women's organizations suffer from the depletion of social capital. There is a widespread shortage of trained and educated women who possess technical and managerial skills. The shortage is likely to persist because of the low enrollment of girls in higher education.

Political Factors

Cambodia's political environment is not conducive to the effective functioning of voluntary organizations. But the government lacks the capacity to deliver services to its citizens, thus it tolerates and occasionally supports service-oriented organizations. Such organizations provide assistance to needy segments of the population, relieving the pressure on government to provide it. There has been tension and apparent competition for resources between government and women's organizations, particularly at the province and district levels. The Battambang Women's AIDS Program is a case in point. The organization encountered initial resistance from local health officials, who saw its activities as an intrusion into their work. But it was able to overcome the resistance with tact and persistence, and now works effectively with the officials.

The government is more seriously threatened by the activities of advocacy groups and organizations that promote democracy. An experience of Women for Prosperity provides a not-uncommon example. That group ran into a government stone wall on a USAID-funded project for the 1998 legislative elections. The group had planned to produce debates on women's issues for airing on national television. But the Ministry of Information feared the debates (by representatives of the various political parties) might demonstrate government foot-dragging on gender issues. It withheld cooperation. The organization got the message and dropped the project. It did, however, find an amenable radio station, which agreed to air some of the debates (Frieson 1998).

Dependence on International Funding

Women's organizations in Cambodia depend totally on international funding. As most of these funds are short-term grants, the organizations are unable to engage in long-term planning and capacity development. The yearly funding cycle emphasizes the capture of next year's funds, not development of a long-term vision or assessing lessons learned and comparing results with other organizations in order to improve programming. The existence of some women's organizations with a clear vision, targeted programming, and a degree of expertise in a specific sector may seem to contradict this observation. However, closer examination reveals that these are organizations whose activities mirror current donor interest. It is conceivable that these same organizations will diversify their programs—or falter—when donor priorities shift.

Because of this dependence, women's organizations are under constant pressure to change their agenda to reflect the apparent funding priorities of the international community. Several women's organizations have responded to recent

The Ministry of Information feared the debates (by representatives of the various political parties) might demonstrate government foot-dragging on gender issues. It withheld cooperation.

There has been little effort by women's organizations to coordinate their activities. Instead of coordination and cooperation, we find competition for funds and repetition of popular programs.

reductions in donor funding by developing “flavor of the month” programming, with little apparent attention to the development of expertise in a given area. Many observers told the CDIE team that the agendas of several organizations have changed with shifts in donor interest: programming has evolved from community development to economic empowerment to women’s rights and political participation. Currently, a number of organizations the team met were planning to initiate antitrafficking or domestic violence programs in the next funding cycle, reflecting current donor interests.

LACK OF COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

There has been little effort by women’s organizations to coordinate their activities. Instead of coordination and cooperation, we find competition for funds and repetition of popular programs. The tendency to copy successful activities without sharing information and coordinating efforts reduces the overall effectiveness of women’s organizations. What is needed is for organizations to specialize in a specific area, developing expertise and sharing their lessons learned in order to increase the effectiveness of their work. The NGO Forum, an umbrella organization, has an offshoot woman’s working group that holds monthly meetings to discuss major issues, but it has not been effective in promoting cooperation and coordination. The minister of women’s and veterans’ affairs is holding monthly meetings to address this problem.

Internal Organizational Structure And Management

Finally, women’s organizations suffer from serious organizational and managerial limitations. The organizations reflect the Cambodian model of social organization: a hierarchical structure with a charismatic leader and a tendency for patron–client relationships. Charismatic leaders head most organizations. They monopolize power and authority. Such leaders are

reluctant to delegate decision-making to midlevel management. Consequently, there is little division of labor. The result is that the participatory approach—with teams and mentoring—is generally absent. This limits the organizations’ ability to respond to new challenges and opportunities. It also minimizes the diversity of ideas necessary for innovation and development. Moreover, it means that leaders are overwhelmed and operate under a great deal of stress.

Few organizations nurture a second-generation staff that could gradually assume the role of leaders. The training programs for mid- and junior-level staff, sponsored by the international community, are generally inadequate, as they do not zero in on the specific needs of the trainees. Moreover, because of the poor knowledge of the language—English—in which these courses are conducted, many participants fail to get the full benefit of the training. Often organizations are reluctant to send their staff for long-term training out of fear they might not return after completing it. Women leaders themselves participate in most training, rather than sending lower level staff. That serves only to widen the gap between leadership and the rest of the staff. The general reluctance to nurture midlevel staff for leadership positions is a serious impediment to the future growth of these organizations.

Many organizations also lack capacity for strategic planning and thinking. They are unable to articulate their organizational goals and develop long-term strategies. This problem is accentuated by the short funding cycles of donors, but other factors—the charismatic nature of the leadership, shortage of trained manpower, and preoccupation with ongoing activities—also contribute to it. The absence of strategic thinking also accounts for the neglect of monitoring and evaluation. Most of the organizations interviewed by the CDIE team did not systematically monitor their ongoing programs, evaluate their effectiveness, and draw lessons for the future.

Women's Organizations and The International Community

THIS CHAPTER explores the relationship between the international community (broadly defined to include intergovernmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and international voluntary organizations) and Cambodian women's organizations. It discusses the nature of assistance provided by the international community and the areas of tension between them. It also examines the question of sustainability of the women's organizations in the absence of significant international assistance.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: A CRITICAL ROLE

Women's organizations are largely, though not exclusively, the product of the policies and programs of the international community. Although the initiative for their establishment came from enterprising Cambodian women visionaries, these organizations could neither have been established nor survived without the economic and technical assistance of international agencies. Many women's organizations are spinoff groups. In other cases, international NGOs encouraged their employees to found them to continue the programs they were managing. In still other cases, international NGOs themselves were behind the founding. The Project Against Domestic Violence provides a good example of how USAID, through the Asia Foundation, could help found an organization. Practically all the organizations the CDIE team interviewed had received their entire funding from the international community.

Because of the highly visible involvement of the international community in women's organizations, a few Cambodian and international observers do not regard them as genuine civil society organizations. According to those observers, these are the shadows of the international community and not autonomous indigenous organizations with local roots. Such a sweeping criticism is probably not justified. The mere fact that women's organizations were established with the major involvement of the international community does not mean that they have not developed local roots and acquired legitimacy in the public eye. In fact, as mentioned in previous chapters, these organizations are having an impact on the national scene.

NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

The international community has provided three kinds of assistance to women's organizations: financial, technical, and political. First comes *financial assistance*. All women's organizations depend on international funds for their program as well as core budgets. Only organizations that provide microcredit have some alternative sources of funding, getting a share of interest paid by clients.

Second, the international community has provided *technical assistance* to women's organizations in various ways. Several international NGOs have established fostering relationships or partnerships with them to develop and strengthen their capacities and capabilities. PACT, for example, initiated a "local NGO incubator" approach to provide training, technical support, and

A female leader of a prominent organization told the CDIE team that “more important than economic and technical assistance was the feeling that you [USAID] were with us.”

direct grants to the first generation of voluntary organizations in Cambodia. Silaka, the woman’s management training organization, was an early recipient of its assistance. PACT currently provides funds to local voluntary organizations so that they can send their staff for training. The Asia Foundation, through its partnership with a number of political and human rights-oriented women’s organizations, supports and fosters their development.

International NGOs are also fostering a woman’s NGO to promote the integration of gender issues in development programs. The Gender and Development Program for Cambodia is a semiautonomous organization. It will become a full-fledged local organization within two years. With its emphasis on training and internship, advocacy and network building, and research and resources development, the program serves an important need of women’s organizations.

We note here two limitations of organizational fostering. First, many international NGOs lack requisite skills and patience to mentor indigenous organizations. Often they are in a hurry and seek to transfer skills with little understanding of the hurdles facing the partnering organization. Second, while they mentor, they also serve as models for indigenous organizations. In Cambodia, however, their model is not always appropriate. International NGOs operate with a large support staff, air conditioners, and four-wheel-drive vehicles. The problem is that many women’s organizations follow their examples despite the high costs.

The international community often provides short- and medium-term advisers to women’s organizations. Such expatriate experts work in an organization for up to a year. Organizations as diverse as Project Against Domestic Violence, Khmer Women’s Voice Center, and Cambodian Women’s Development Agency all

continue to make use of foreign advisers. Many organizations have benefited from the services of such consultants. But even the presence of a long-term expatriate consultant, who might work in-country for as long as three years, has been insufficient to guide the organizations with limited institutional capacity through the myriad problems they face.

In addition, the international community supports training programs for the staff of women’s organizations. Increasingly, many organizations are questioning the utility and relevance of training programs funded and managed by international NGOs. The training does not necessarily build on the knowledge or needs of trainees or their sponsoring organizations. Sponsors make little attempt to conduct a regular, systematic assessment of organizational capacity for training and for developing training plans for individual staffers and the organization as a whole. Training is also conducted haphazardly and often in English, making it difficult for many trainees to comprehend the content. Therefore, many training programs have not been useful to women’s organizations.

Finally, the *political support* of the international community has been critical to organizations promoting democracy and human rights. A female leader of a prominent organization told the CDIE team that “more important than economic and technical assistance was the feeling that you [USAID] were with us.” The moral support of the international community may also serve to protect women’s organizations.

AREAS OF TENSION BETWEEN WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Cambodia has an excellent record of cooperation between women’s organizations and the international community. Both work closely together and share mutual trust and understanding. However, as expected in any complex

institutional relationship, there are tensions, which arise largely out of differences in their mutual expectations.

One major source of tension lies in *funding*. In the past, the international community has provided generous financial support for both programs and organizational development. That situation is changing. Women's organizations complain that the donor community is increasingly cutting core funding. Moreover, funding for programming is usually provided annually, creating uncertainty among staff and beneficiaries. While such criticisms are justified, the funding agencies have their own constraints. Since a political crisis in 1997, the volume of development assistance to Cambodia has declined significantly; the funding agencies have no alternative but to reduce their financial support to women's organizations. It is logical that they expect that recipient organizations tighten their budgets and explore alternative sources of funds. Donor agencies feel uncomfortable with the present dependence of women's organizations on their funding.

Another area of tension is the issue of *accountability*. Many funding agencies, on the one hand, increasingly demand detailed financial records and program accountability. Some also require performance and impact data for their own reporting purposes. While most organizations can provide financial records, they have difficulty in monitoring and evaluation. Often they have no institutional capacity to collect the necessary data, and they see no justification for expending time and effort on gathering such information. Funding agencies can solve this problem by doing two things: 1) providing technical assistance to organizations to help them develop appropriate forms and procedures, and 2) lowering information requirements to the barest minimum.

Women's organizations, on the other hand, resent what they regard as the short-

term vision of donors and international NGOs. They see the latter as constantly changing direction. One woman leader told the team, "The donor has objectives; we must fit their program." The pattern becomes apparent as one examines the evolving donor missions over time. These changed from relief to community development to health care and literacy and then to advocacy, political rights, and participation. For women's organizations that see the continuing need for social welfare activities that are apparently falling out of vogue, the result can be devastating.

Still another source of tension is the *management style and organizational culture* of women's organizations. These organizations usually suffer from a lack of division of labor, absence of written rules and procedures, and the dominant personality of the founder. Moreover, they lack capacity for strategic planning. Many international donors are uncomfortable with the situation and press them to initiate reform. Such pressure is resisted by the organizations' leaders, who view it as an unwarranted intrusion into their affairs.

Finally, tensions also arise because of *barriers of language and culture*, heightened by Cambodia's long isolation from the world. The vast disparities between the salaries of the staff of the international community and of women's organizations and the apparent superiority of the educational background of the former create resentment and mistrust. That serves to reinforce traditional models of hierarchy and the roles of leaders and followers. International organizations have done little to build bridges outside office hours, and the two communities remain worlds apart.

Women's organizations note that even with medium-term technical consultants who work for up to a year, it takes months before they are able to communicate in meaningful ways. The director of an organization underscored the profound cultural gap in the following words: "These

“These consultants come from a different culture. They see different solutions. We can't follow their recommendations. They are too pushy.”

On Sustainability, A Clash of Views

"For local organizations to be sustainable, there is a need to go to the grass roots. Advocacy organizations are by and for elites. When an organization operates effectively at the grass roots, it gets the support of the community. Donor support to elite groups doesn't encourage a self-reliant system."

—*Local NGO leader*

"All this talk about sustainability is not relevant in the present conditions. We are not in a position to raise resources locally. Who has the money to give these organizations? You [USAID] should support them."

—*Cambodian researcher*

"They have to face the fact that our resources are limited. We cannot fund them indefinitely. Our budget has been drastically cut this year."

—*USAID official*

consultants come from a different culture. They see different solutions. We can't follow their recommendations. They are too pushy."

SUSTAINABILITY OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

As Cambodian women's organizations are totally dependent on external funding, a question is generally asked about their sustainability without international assistance. Perhaps, at this time, the answer is in the negative. Cambodia is impoverished, and its government faces enormous fiscal problems. It is therefore not in a position to help these organizations in a substantial manner. Nor is the nascent private sector affluent enough to fund voluntary organizations. Thus, the dependence on external funding is likely to continue. As a leader of an organization stated during the interview, "Donors are always talking about sustainability, but there will be sustainable only if the country is better off."

The international community recognizes this reality. It is concerned, though, that women's organizations harbor unrealistic expectations and are not making sufficient efforts to become economically more self-reliant. But women's organizations model their programs and choice of expenditures on international NGOs, which is their only example of what such an organization should be. A well-educated Cambodian expatriate manager of an organization can earn as much as \$24,000 a year. Top local employees have a lower salary that can nonetheless reach \$600 a month—still vastly different from the local teacher who may officially earn \$10 a month, \$15 at most. Often women's organizations own several vehicles, and these are viewed with great envy even by top government officials. The consensus is broad in the donor community that women's organizations should learn to live frugally and raise some resources, however small they might be.

To many in the international community, sustainability is intertwined with human resource development and efficient management. They suggest that with the improvement in technical and managerial staff, problems of cost effectiveness, efficiency, and sources of alternate funding will become clearer and the concerned organizations will be in a better position to face them. Some derive hope from the fact that management of the organizations has improved over time and there is a greater awareness of these problems. Many organizations have been gradually acquiring "critical consciousness," which is enabling them to project their vision for the future and assert their independence from the donor community.

Some experts have suggested that women's organizations transform themselves into membership-based institutions to become more vibrant and sustainable. Such a change would help them develop deeper roots in the community and mobilize available local resources. More important, it would improve their bargaining position with the government and the international community. So far, leaders of women's organizations have shown a marked resistance to the idea. A few international donors suggest this is because officials of membership organization are elected and the leaders are concerned about a challenge to their authority. But it is the reality of Cambodia's poverty that probably underlies this problem. To function, membership organizations require dues. In addition, many U.S. organizations use volunteer labor for much of their work. But Cambodians have neither the funds to contribute to membership organizations nor the luxury of volunteering. Women leaders are struggling to support their families. They depend on their salaries to ensure an education and future for themselves and their children.

Lessons for the International Community

DESIGN COMPREHENSIVE GENDER POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

IN CAMBODIA, the prolonged conflict has profoundly affected women, their status, roles, and responsibilities. It has left deep psychological and emotional scars on their psyche. It has adversely affected their status in the family. The death of men in the war led to the rapid growth of female-headed households. Moreover, war has also contributed to domestic violence, prostitution, and trafficking of women. It has also affected women's economic and political participation. The government, indigenous voluntary organizations, and the international community had to formulate and implement targeted programs and comprehensive women-in-development policies to deal with the effects of the conflict.

An obvious lesson of the Cambodian experience is that comprehensive, targeted interventions based on a coherent policy framework are needed in postconflict societies. Gender-blind policies and programs are not sufficient to solve the problems faced by women and to promote gender equality.

BUILD ON ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL GAINS DURING THE TRANSITION

Not all effects of the conflict in Cambodia have been harmful to women. The conflict undermined the traditional sexual division of labor, creating for women new economic and political opportunities. During the war, women were able to enter occupations that had been closed to them in the past. Because of widespread labor

shortages, women were recruited for manufacturing and service sectors. Women became construction workers, bus drivers, and machine operators. Women's political participation also increased during the conflict. They held important political offices at both national and local levels. But some of the gains were undermined during the transition. Women encountered economic and political disenfranchisement after the war ceased. However, conditions gradually improved with the implementation of generously funded women-in-development policies and programs.

Thus the Cambodian experience indicates the need for policy and programmatic interventions to mitigate the phenomenon of women's disenfranchisement during the transition. Such interventions should, for example, protect women employees against abrupt changes in labor markets as a result of demobilization of soldiers, decline of war industries, and the closure of state-managed enterprises.

PROMOTE WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN REFUGEE CAMPS

Among the leaders of Cambodian women's organizations, female expatriates and refugees have predominated. Returning women who had lived in refugee camps in Thailand or lived in Western democracies founded many of these organizations. The explanation is that overseas exposure gave them new skills and expertise and widened their social and political horizons. Some learned English and acquired enhanced skills in refugee

The lesson is that the education and training of women and their participation in refugee camp activities can prepare them to assume leadership roles in postconflict societies.

camp. Many also held managerial positions. As a result, many women acquired new vision and perspectives.

The lesson is that the education and training of women and their participation in refugee camp activities can prepare them to assume leadership roles in postconflict societies. Therefore, the international community should support education and training programs for women in refugee camps. Such programs will enable women to acquire new skills, experience, and vision that will help them, upon their return, reconstruct both gender relations and their country.

CHANNEL INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE THROUGH WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

A major objective of the international community in fostering women's organizations in Cambodia was to channel assistance for a wide range of programs targeting women. It appears that this objective has been accomplished. Women's organizations provide group credit and vocational training to women. They assist victims of domestic violence, trafficking, forced prostitution, and AIDS, and they raise awareness about these problems. They also promote women's political participation and help redefine women's roles through radio, television, and print media. Thus, women's organizations have been able to channel international assistance to the targeted female populations.

The Cambodian experience shows that newly founded women's organizations in postconflict societies can implement a wide range of programs funded by the international community. Therefore, when international donors do not want to administer assistance either through the government or international NGOs, indigenous women's organizations can provide a viable option.

FOSTER WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Women's organizations are largely, though not exclusively, the product of the efforts of the international community. Although the initiative for their establishment came from enterprising and enlightened Cambodian women, these organizations could neither have been established nor survived without the economic and technical assistance of the international community. Many organizations are spinoff groups of international NGOs. In other cases, the international organizations encouraged their employees to found them. In still other cases, international NGOs themselves founded an organization.

The lesson is that the international community can help establish women's organizations in postconflict societies. Such organizations can develop local roots and gain political legitimacy despite their dependence on international resources.

PLAN FOR MULTIYEAR FUNDING AND LONGER TIME FRAME

There is little doubt that most women's organizations in Cambodia will not survive without external assistance. The country is impoverished and the government is not in a position to support the organizations. Nor is the nascent private sector affluent enough to fund them. Opportunities for cost-sharing of services are also limited. Therefore, women's organizations will continue to depend on foreign donors for years to come. The Cambodian experience thus suggests that if the international community seeks to foster women's organizations to deliver services and to promote gender equality, it should be prepared to take a long-term perspective.

Given the harsh economic and political realities of postconflict societies, such organizations cannot be economically sustainable within the usual time span of five to seven years.

Moreover, the yearly funding cycle hampers the development of improved programming through the constant pressure to obtain funds for the following year. Discussions with women's groups revealed that much time is spent on writing proposals and reporting on results, with program development and follow-on activities relegated to second-tier priorities. Multiyear funding would be more conducive to long-term goals. It would reduce pressure on organizations to continuously produce new proposals that cater to evolving donor interests. It would permit organizations to concentrate on program delivery, building on lessons learned, assessing the impact of activities, and identifying improvements and follow-on activities.

ENHANCE WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL POWER THROUGH WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

In Cambodia, women's organizations are addressing critical and interrelated goals through a myriad of activities promoting economic self-sufficiency, social dignity, and political and legal rights and protections. They are helping redefine and expand the limited social, cultural, and economic roles available to women in Cambodian society. Female leaders in politics and civil society provide important models for Cambodia. Women's organizations provide the necessary setting for women to gain self-respect and participate in decision-making. Working with other women provides them with the self-confidence and the experience to eventually become proactive in community decision-making

in local, regional, and national political spheres.

Thus, the Cambodian experience suggests that the international community should support the growth of women's organizations in postconflict societies not only to channel assistance to needy populations or to promote civil society, but also to socially empower women. Working in such organizations helps women garner self-confidence and acquire important skills.

BUILD MONITORING AND EVALUATION CAPACITY

Monitoring and evaluation are fundamental to developing local capacity to respond effectively to the needs of beneficiaries. International NGOs frequently commented that women's organizations did not understand the importance of monitoring program activities and lacked knowledge of how to conduct effective evaluations. Donors and international NGOs have not emphasized training in monitoring and evaluation. Yet monitoring and evaluation remain central to creating programs to meet evolving circumstances and to identify and develop effective approaches to development issues.

The Cambodian experience suggests that the international community should provide incipient women's organizations support for annual monitoring, evaluation, and program implementation of lessons learned. The emphasis must be on participatory identification of client needs and development of activities to meet those needs. Then the organizations need to undertake evaluations to determine whether those needs have been met, how the program might be altered for greater impact, and how best to design follow-on activities.

'The yearly funding cycle hampers the development of improved programming through the constant pressure to obtain funds for the following year.'

This “flavor of the month” programming prevents sectoral specialization and encourages organizations to develop programs in multiple sectors.

SUPPORT SECTORAL SPECIALIZATION

In Cambodia, donor emphasis on programming has evolved through time and has a profound effect on the activities proposed by women’s organizations. However, donors have paid little attention to continuity or the development of expertise in a given area. Local agendas have shifted with changes in donor interest. While it is important to address new issues and respond to evolving needs in the community, eliminating funding for activities that are still needed creates confusion and leads to possible dissolution of organizations that try to expand their repertoire of activities to meet donor interests. This “flavor of the month” programming prevents sectoral specialization and encourages organizations to develop programs in multiple sectors.

The Cambodian experience indicates that in some postconflict societies donors must find approaches for supporting sectoral specialization. As donors develop new priorities, they must not overlook continuing needs in existing

sectors, unless the problems have been solved.

FOSTER A VISION FOR WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS CONGRUENT WITH THE ECONOMIC REALITY

Women’s organizations in Cambodia follow the example of international NGOs in their working and living conditions. Many spend considerable resources on four-wheel-drive vehicles, spacious offices, and unnecessary support staff. Often their expectations and operations are not congruent with the realities of the Cambodian situation.

The international donor community should take steps to foster a realistic vision for women’s organizations. The model needs to be based on grass-roots organizations in the region. Donors can create appropriate models through international visitors programs that concentrate on the region, rather than on U.S. or European visits. Donor agencies should emphasize utilization of local resources, modeled at an appropriate level, such as local government agencies.

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