

The Role of Women's Organizations in Post-Conflict Cambodia

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Introduction

This report examines the evolution and impact of women's organizations in Cambodia. It serves as a preliminary survey for the Cambodia portion of a multi country study initiated by the USAID'S Center for Information and Evaluation to assess women's contributions to democratization and development in societies long conflicted by war. The policy component of the report serves to examine USAID's assistance to organizations and its potential to support and strengthen gender equity in development and democratization processes.

The report explains how women's organizations have individually and collectively confronted socio-economic and political problems that have emerged in the aftermath of two decades of war and social upheaval. The auto-genocide of the Khmer Rouge revolution of the 1970s and the civil war and foreign occupation of the 1980s have generated complex impacts on gender relations in Cambodian society, many of which are not sufficiently recognized, understood, or addressed by government and NGO policy makers. Women's organizations, therefore, have the potential to play pivotal roles in confronting and publicizing the issues of gender relations in the areas of social and political equity, domestic violence, trafficking of women and children, and more generally, in the political transition of democratization.

The fieldwork for the project was conducted in Phnom Penh over a 30 day period in October 1998. The methodology consisted of two main components: in-depth Khmer-language interviews conducted with over 25 key women and men representing women's organizations, media, government ministries, religious movements, and international donor agencies ; and a survey of archival, government, NGO and academic materials in Khmer, English and French which are relevant to the subject of women and gender in

Cambodia.¹

This study was carried out during a time of unprecedented political expression by university and high school students, Buddhist monks and nuns, women market sellers, cyclo and taxi drivers, peasants and urban dwellers, who spontaneously and consistently joined daily demonstrations in front of the National Assembly, the United States Embassy, the Ministries of Information and Interior and the Olympic Stadium, as well as city-wide marchers in August and September. Initially the demonstrations were organized by the political opposition parties, and attended by their political members. But when opposition leaders, faced with the threat of arrest or worse, went into hiding, ordinary Cambodians took to the streets themselves in numbers unprecedented in modern Cambodian history. The demonstrations were held to protest political intimidation and violence which marred the 1998 internationally observed and sanctioned elections, the results of which were contested by the protesters and their supporters country-wide. The demonstrations were eventually crushed by government police and army units, and at least 38 demonstrators, including monks, were victims of extra-judicial killing.²

While violently suppressed, this historic illustration of a democratization process served to reinforce one of the key lessons of this study: that NGOs, and particularly women's NGOs are the key builders of civil society in Cambodia--in spite of and in response to long years of one-party rule based on a communist political system, on the one hand, and in contrast to the political opinions of the international community, in this instance. In other words, the men and women active in women's and human rights NGOs are providing the voices and the political visions of empowerment of the rural and urban underclasses, the politically dispossessed, and the ethnically and sexually marginalized groups in Cambodian

It was not possible to interview political leaders since the survey was undertaken during a time of political turmoil following the July 1998 elections when the formation of the government was postponed and many opposition politicians had left the country for security reasons. However, the authors previous research and interviews from 1997 will be drawn upon to fill this gap.

Report by the Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Phnom Penh, October 1998. The research consultant documented several of these cases during her tenure as analyst with the UN Centre for Human Rights, June-September 1998.

society. While it could be argued that these voices are often congruent with or inspired by movements outside the nation's borders, and to some extent dependent upon them for domestic survival, they also reflect the particular conditions of Cambodian society.

It was an inspiring and riveting time to be in Cambodia. We wish to thank all of those people who shared their ideas, concepts and points of view during the conduct of this study, many of whom, are risking much in the struggle for social and gender equity.

Chapter 1: The Emergence of Women's Organizations

War has crippled Cambodian historical memories of women's participation in national development. When asked about pre-war women's organizations, Cambodians today will say they simply did not exist before the 1980s, or at the earliest, in the 1970s when the Khmer Rouge communist movement swept to power and decreed equality between men and women.

However, in the rarely used national archives, sitting in dusty folders, are Khmer-language documents dating from as early as the 1940s which tell a different story. These documents provide clues of an active and progressive women's movement that molded and was molded by changing notions of sex roles and gender relations during various periods of modern Cambodian history.³ At times, this women's movement lacked coherency, consistency and leadership. At other times it was smothered or consumed by the conflicting politics of kingship, ethno-nationalism and communism that engulfed Cambodia in long years of war from the 1960s to the 1990s. Yet the historical record leaves no doubt that women were active players in Cambodia's political, economic and social development during the pre and post-war years of this century. It is the case, unfortunately, that through no fault of their own, the historical amnesia so characteristic of women's organizations of today has prevented them from forming a consciousness and indigenous identity linked to women's movements and organizations that were active in past decades, and even centuries.⁴ One result of this is that in some

The author is currently writing a book about Cambodian women, gender and nationalist movements which includes a history of women's organizations from the early French period to the 1990s. For preliminary results of research carried out for the book in 1996, see "Women, Power and the State," paper presented at the international conference, "Cambodia: Power, Myth and Memory", Monash University, Australia, December 1996.

Historical amnesia is not restricted to women's organizations, however, since scholarly research by local Cambodian scholars on political periods, particularly those covering the war years is taboo. By way of illustration, there is only one Khmer-language history book on the post-war period in the library of the University of Phnom Penh, a polemical treatment of the Khmer Rouge, written by Prime Minister Hun Sen. Works by foreign scholars on Cambodian history are available in Phnom Penh markets as unauthorized translations.

cases, women's organizations view themselves as being dependent upon or subservient to their ideological goals and funding objectives of international agencies and their foreign advisors.⁵

Women's organizations first emerged in the late colonial period in Cambodia, when French-educated Cambodian intellectuals influenced by European notions of "civilization" in vogue in the 1940s, assembled a writer's group for one of the first Khmer-language newspapers, *Kampuchea*. Becoming literate enabled women to negotiate their claims to the public domains of power, a privilege that had been up to then exclusively male apart from a select group of palace women. This group of women writers scorned the "uncivilized" Khmer customs that prohibited secular and religious schooling for girls. They argued that in order to advance on par with nations in Europe, and for women to become modern, it was crucial for the Cambodian government to establish secular education for girls that would reach deep into the vast impoverished countryside.

By the time of Cambodia's independence from France in 1954, arguments in favor of expansion in rights for women's were voiced by a small group of politically conservative, elite urban women, many with family connections to King Sihanouk's political circle of ministers and advisors.⁶ In 1958, the first national women's organization was established in Phnom Penh, the Women's Friendship Association, under royal sponsorship, with the goals of promoting a nationalist consciousness and supporting the newly independent Cambodian state. The Association's political ambitions were modest, advocating that wives of political leaders should play supportive and secondary roles in politics rather than become leaders themselves in national affairs. These modest ambitions were tucked in the folds of the modernist project that was sweeping the globe in the late 1950s, as illustrated by the Association's first appeal to its members:

These controversial issues are examined in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Kate Frieson, "Guardian Angels: Women in Khmer Nationalist Discourses", unpublished paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies, Washington, D.C., March 1998.

All Women in Cambodia!

The Khmer Women's Friendship Association has the following educational intentions for women:

- 1) Respect the Nation, Religion, King
- 2) Follow the leadership of the Preah, Father of Independence
- 3) Protect women's rights from destruction, and seek ways to carry out complete rights for women
- 4) Help educate citizens of both sexes before or after marriage on the five moral principles which are useful for a newlywed couple
- 5) Future brides and grooms who live in towns or near the capital should see a doctor for a medical check up before the wedding ceremony
- 6) Khmer women need instruction in how to dress appropriately in various situations
- 7) Seek ways to eliminate prostitution
- 8) Women volunteers are needed to help train women in the countryside about their obligations as women in an independent country. They should know how to love their country. This activity will be borne by the Women's Association budget.
- 9) Women's Association undertakes to prepare food for the reception of foreign guests of the government. But the Association request financial assistance for this from the Royal Government in addition to that provided by the Association which helps the nation. The Women's Association also makes fruit beverages made from orange, mango, pineapple, sugar-palm, sugar-cane and so forth in order to help save the national budget.
- 10) Develop the country through just and peaceful means
- 11) Develop well-being but not at the expense of others⁷

Chea Um, the Association's president provided the closing editorial, emphasizing the need to stay loyal to the patriarchal system of royalism, placing the nation's needs before those of female emancipation:

I would like to inform you all that our country needs peace, well-being and prosperity that will come from communication, hygiene, studies of civilization and development like other civilized countries. We don't want to see dishonesty or bad behavior. For this reason we would like to invite all of you to be our members because our association does not belong to any political party inside or outside the country. We are independent neutral women, following the King, the father of independence with just and peaceful means based on the teachings of Buddha. ⁸

Khmer Women's Friendship Association--Appeal of the Association", April 1958. Housed in the National Archives of Cambodia. Translation by author.

Chea Um, President of the Women's Association, quoted from document entitled, "Khmer Women's Friendship Association--Appeal of the Association", April 1958. Housed in the National Archives of

It was not until the spread of the Vietnam war to Cambodia in the late 1960s, that a politically radical movement of women took shape in the form of the women's wing of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). Little is known about the women's wing of the CPK or of its shadowy president, Khieu Ponnary, recognized more as being the wife of Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot than for her own leadership role in the party and its women's wing. In the 1950s, Ponnary was a literature teacher at the Lycée Sisowath, loved and respected by her students, several of whom still remember her with adoration in spite of her relationship to one of the twentieth centuries most reviled political leaders.⁹ She studied in Paris in the late 1950s and joined a Marxist circle there along with other Khmer intellectuals. In 1963, she fled from Phnom Penh along with Pol Pot, her sister, Ieng Thirith, and Thirith's husband, top ranking Khmer Rouge leader Ieng Sary, and lived in the *maquis*, slowly building up a revolutionary movement which took power in 1975.¹⁰

Khieu Ponnary headed the women's wing of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) during and after the war years which was modeled on the Vietnamese Women's Association. This mass-based organization was primarily responsible for organizing women's support for the revolutionary movement as it took shape in the early 1970s, and gradually taking on important rear-guard roles in the military conflict against the Phnom Penh regime.

The Khmer Rouge promised to eradicate sources of oppression in Khmer society, including those related to traditional concepts of gender relations based on ancient *chbap*, or laws of behaviour. In the classical *chbap* literature detailing the roles of couples, men are

Cambodia. Translation by author.

Author's interviews with her former student Suan Champu, Phnom Penh, 1997.

Pol Pot died on April 15 1998; Ieng Sary is still living, and has been granted political amnesty by King Sihanouk. The Khieu sisters are still living, although it is said that Ponnary had a nervous breakdown in 1975 and has never recovered.

expected to earn the wages to look after the family, while women are expected to run the household, take care of the children and provide amorally correct environment for the family's well-being.¹¹ While there has always been contestation and pushing of such boundaries, gender relations within the family were nevertheless socially constructed around a dichotomy of private and public spheres of responsibility for men and women.

The exigencies of the bloody civil war made division of roles strategically important. Young women fought in the trenches, dispatched messages to the front lines, and portered weapons and supplies to battle destinations. Moreover, young village women were strategically organized as a support system for soldiers on the front lines and the rear areas. A former Red Khmer male combatant explained:

By 1974, in each battlefield location in Siem Reap there were cells composed of one male soldier and two female combatants. The role of the women was to provide moral support to the men, encouraging them to keep fighting. The role of the women was strategically important because when the Lon Nol soldiers wounded us, one of the women in the battlefield location would tend to our wounds, and the second woman was needed to take care of food and so forth. If there were only men on the battlefield, they would lose their morale, especially when they saw the wounded and the dead all around them. But with women there to look after them, they continued the struggle.¹²

A former government soldier also recalls this policy, remarking that it helped the Red Khmers win many battles. "What I observed from 1973 on was that for every male soldier there was a female soldier. The Red Khmer treated the men and women equally. As for us, we just got weaker and weaker, we had no support."¹³ During periods of heavy fighting, young women were positioned behind the front lines and stood in rows 100meters apart on the rice dikes and roads in order to care for the wounded. Male medics transported the wounded in hammocks to field hospitals, and women accompanied

See for example, Khmer Customs and Traditions, Phnom Penh, 1962, which provides detailed conduct codes, including what women should and should not wear according to age, social rank and occasion.

Author's interview with 44 year old male, Siem Reap, April 1997.

Author's inter view with 59 year old district chief, Pradak village, Siem Reap, April 1997.

the wounded, fanning them, whispering encouraging words, and keeping them as comfortable as possible. "The policy at the time was that only single women took these posts because they were young and could keep the soldier's spirits up. There were many love stories as a result. And *Angkar Loeu* (literally "the high organization", the term the CPK used to identify itself to the masses) permitted marriages among combatants and gave us unhusked rice, palm sugar, ducks and chickens for the wedding feasts"¹⁴

The ideological forces underpinning the DK mixed communism with ethno-nationalism, with tragic results for women and men. After 1975, the social organization of independent family units was obliterated, stripping women of the little autonomy they had in the pre-revolutionary society. Set to work "building and defending the Kampuchea motherland", women and men were given the same difficult labor duties without regard for physical differences between them. Work tasks varied according to age. Women over 50 years old were instructed to stay in their hamlets to look after infants. Married women over 30 years of age worked along side men in rice agriculture, digging canals, building dikes, planting and harvesting rice. Young adolescent girls were formed into mobile production teams (*krom chalat*) and sent to work as agricultural laborers. Children were separated from their parents, inducted into *Angkar*, the revolutionary organization, and taught to report on adults who criticized the revolution.

With their lives harnessed in the service of the state, women were cut loose from traditional family structures, many against their will. From one day to the next, women were deprived of the duties which gave them value and respect in pre-revolutionary society. They were denied the bonds of family kinship, torn away from their homes, and separated from those they loved. Women's physiological abilities to outlive men had a psychological toll that associated guilt with survival. "We saw that once starvation set in, men died quickly. But as for women, we managed to survive under the same conditions.

Ibid.

But after my children and husband died, I had little will to live." ¹⁵

Some couples managed to live together but there was little energy for sexual intimacy. "We were like friends, not husband and wife" several survivors recalled. Many women stopped menstruating due to malnutrition and overwork, and few babies were born during the Khmer Rouge years. Perhaps out of plan to replenish the ranks of revolutionary cadre, young people were forced to participate in mass marriage ceremonies. These generally loveless unions were presided over by communist cadres who instructed solemn partners to "join hands and respect Angkar". Women were to bear children for the revolution. The racial purity of the revolution was to be thus guarded, although so much of what Cambodians considered to be Khmer culture was abolished along with Chinese, Vietnamese, Cham and other minority cultural practices.¹⁶ Making a "pure Khmer" revolution, unmindful of previous revolutionary models or influences was one of the hallmarks of the DK regime.

While women were tasked with defending the state's interior racial frontiers, Khmer Rouge soldiers were dispatched to the Vietnamese border in 1977 and ordered to retake territory that had once belonged to the Khmer state. The forays were ill-advised since Vietnam's army was much larger and better equipped. Moreover, popular support for the revolution had evaporated among ordinary Cambodians during the first year of the regime, nulling domestic support for foreign policies.

By 1978, the country's population had been depleted by at least one million due to starvation, disease and political killings. DK leaders vented their madness on "enemies of

Author's interview with 50 year old Phnom Penh professor, May 1997.

Although DK announced that the country was 99 percent pure Khmer, there is no conclusive evidence that the regime carried out executions solely on the basis of race. See Serge Thion, "Genocide as a Political Commodity," *Watching Cambodia*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993: pp. 170-172. A contrary view is put forth by Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*, Yale University Press, 1996.

the revolution" most of whom were innocent civilians whose discontent was equated with treason. But foreign "enemies" were also suspected of contaminating the purity of the revolution. Among the far-fetched plots the DK leaders hatched to justify their killings, was one blaming Vietnam for using female sexual sorcery to undermine the revolution and to destroy the Khmer nation. Citing the example of the Khmer King Chey Chetta (1618-1628) who accepted the gift of a Vietnamese wife from the emperor in exchange for trading rights in Prey Nokor (Saigon), a DK publication concluded: "The Vietnamese have often used young girls in sordid ways to achieve their annexionist ambitions. Today, they do not hesitate to apply the same repugnant methods to swallow the territory of other countries." ¹⁷ There was no other elaboration; the point supposedly self-evident.

When Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia in late 1978, the population was grateful. Under the tutelage of the Vietnamese, Khmer communists who had split from the DK in 1977, formed a new regime, the People's Republic of Kampuchea. The PRK legitimized itself on the basis of "national salvation" and vowed to prevent the "Pol Pot-Ieng Sary genocidal clique" from returning to power. Fears of Vietnamization compelled other Cambodians to flee to the Thai border where Khmer resistance movements formed in coalition with Khmer Rouge remnant forces. From 1979-1991, nationalist movements were embroiled in a civil war over the issue of the survival of the Khmer nation. The PRK argued that the Pol Potists were culpable for genocide while the anti-PRK forces on the Thai border accused the Phnom Penh regime of succumbing to Vietnamization. On either side, women were trapped as captives in political movements. Women in refugee camps were beholden to the political leadership of the resistance movements; and women in Cambodia lived under the grip of a communist state. Women's organizations were formed on both sides of the border to carry out political objectives of the warring parties.

The State Women's Association

See chapter 2, "Les Manoeuvres et les Méthodes Utilisées Par les Vietnamiens pour Annexer et Avaler le Territoire Du Kampuchea Dans le Passé", Livre Noir, Département de la Presse et de l'Information du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères du Kampuchea Démocratique, Septembre 1978, p.10.

After the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was established on 7 January 1979, with the assistance and military backing of Vietnam. The PRK leadership was composed primarily of dissident Khmer Rouge members who had escaped to Vietnam in the late 1970s to set up a resistance movement to topple Pol Pot. The PRK functioned as a communist state with the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (PRPK) as the sole ruling party, heavily dependent upon the Vietnamese Communist Party for its ideological blueprints and its state budget.

The PRK encouraged normalization of Khmer social patterns within the political framework of a communist state. From the party's viewpoint, the institutionalization of Cambodian society was strategically necessary to galvanize support for the war against the Khmer Rouge and other anti-Vietnamese resistance movements based on the Thai-Cambodian border in the 1980s. This meant that while individuals could regroup themselves into family units, they were nevertheless inducted into various mass organizations directed by the regime's People's Kampuchean Revolutionary Party.

In 1979, the National Association of Women for the Salvation of Kampuchea was established with a national network of members that extended to the district level. Branch offices of the Women's Association were established in all the provinces under the control of the state, although there was no funding for specific programs in the first few years of its existence. Mean Sam An was the director from 1979 until 1990 when the Association became detached from the government.¹⁸

The Association acted as the women's wing of the PRPK, promoting and explaining party policy to its members and galvanizing women's support for the war against the Khmer Rouge and its coalition partners on the Thai border. These objectives required intense

Author's interview, Chhouk Chhim, President of the Women's Association of Cambodia, 6 October 1998, Phnom Penh.

propaganda efforts since the population was depleted of male numbers, and women were loathe to send their husbands and sons off to war.¹⁹

Women were the cornerstone of the rebuilding process in manual and blue collar labor fields as they comprised between 60 and 65 per cent of the adult population.²⁰ Women were prominent in administration, state media and education sectors filling positions that had in previous regimes been male dominated. Women took up hard physical labor, working on infrastructure projects building roads, bridges and ditches that had been destroyed during the long war years. "Women were very enthusiastically entering the workforce in the early PRK years," Chhouk Chhim recalled. "They were not forced to do this but wanted to participate in rebuilding the country."

There was some resistance from male colleagues to the massive participation of women in government sectors, according to Chhouk Chhim, "but we took the position that those who looked down on us and thought our capacity was lower than that of men could be educated to see the value of women."²¹

By the mid-1980s, the Women's Association was active as a media organ of the government in its drive to find recruits for an army fighting an increasingly unpopular war. Its monthly magazine, published in Vietnam, profiled lives of model revolutionary women who "offered" their sons to the war effort while engaging the remaining family members in rice production for the state's agricultural collectives.

The magazine went through several incarnations, mirroring the political evolution of the

Women accounted for 65 per cent of the adult population as of 1995. See Cambodia's Country Report, op.cit. p. ii.

Chanthou Boua, "Women in Today's Cambodia," New Left Review; see also, Cambodia's Country Report, op.cit. p.ii.

Author's interview with Chhouk Chhim, President of the Women's Association, Phnom Penh, 6 October 1998.

PRK. First published in 1984, Revolutionary Kampuchean Women was issued three to eight times per year, with copy runs up to ten thousand.²² After the Paris Peace Accords of 1991, the magazine's funding was cut drastically and only a few issues of the publication were issued, renamed Kampuchean Women. The magazine dealt with "women's issues" as these were defined by the Association's membership, but these seem to have been conflated with the state's military objectives. The magazine routinely carried morality stories depicting model mothers as those who "with a spirit of pure nationalism" sent their "few remaining sons to serve in the Armed Forces". Model female citizens were featured as those who "worked tirelessly in agricultural work" so that food could be produced for the army. An article covering a workshop convened by the Cambodian Women's Association to evaluate women's work reported that: "in 1990, 1,400,000 hectares of land were cultivated by women throughout the country, which represents 75 per cent of the state quota. Women of Battambang sent 18,500 sacks of rice to the Front; women of Siem Reap sent 140,000 sacks of rice; and 31 women of Banteay Srei district (Siem Reap) transported food to the Front on four occasions." The piece concluded by summarizing a speech by CPP Secretary General Chea Sim, who emphasized the importance of women in the cause of "Defending and Building the Motherland", urging women to "work hard and carry out the work assigned by the higher authorities."²³ Another short piece, titled "Model Sacrifices of Neary Deu Yieng for the cause of the Motherland" reported that the 56 year old woman from Pursat province acted patriotically "out of her belief in the new regime and her hatred for the Pol Pot genocidal clique" by sending "a total of five of her sons and son-in-laws to serve in the armed forces." Moreover, this model woman worked "in the rear base by doing agricultural work and raising chickens".²⁴ The dry ideological tone of the magazine may be well conveyed in the following piece, entitled: "Ms. Krak Yein Performs Very Well in the Movement of Defending and Building the Country":

The Phnom Penh Unicef office kindly allowed me access to the originals.

"Workshop to Evaluate Women's Work for 1990," Neary Kampuchea, #1, 1991.

Ibid.

Ms. Krak Yein, 46, is the chief of Information in Boseth district, Kompong Speu. With political training she has received from the state and the Party, she sent three sons to serve in the armed forces. Her daughter is in the village militia. In the rear base she ceaselessly participates in social work and she also raises animals. She always provides moral support to those on the front lines. She is loved by everyone in the base [village].²⁵

As the war dragged on, slogans entreating women to "build and defend the motherland" increasingly fell on deaf ears.²⁶ Further, the Women's Association was severely constrained by its lack of power within the decision-making structures. In short it had no authority to advance women's issues outside of those considered strategically imperative. The Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs acknowledged this weakness in its 1994 report:

The Women's Association of Cambodia, in theory, had the mandate and the authority to promote the advancement of women. Its representatives, however, had little success in influencing policies and programs to enhance women's positions in the workplace. They were not given the practical means i.e., training and resources, and did not receive much support from the authorities to fulfill their mandate. There was not much room for maneuvering or lobbying within the structure of a one-party system, whose period in power was characterized by a protracted war.²⁷

From 1988, the Women's Association had relied almost exclusively on income it received from the UNDP which had rented one of its offices. But with insufficient government funding, the Association declined in activities and popularity by the early 1990s at a time when Cambodia's protracted civil war was coming to a negotiated settlement. The government decided to end funding for the Association, partly as Chhouk Chhim explains, because by 1992, "the need to protect the motherland had stopped."²⁸ After the 1993 United Nations organized elections, co-Minister of the Interior Sar Kheng and

Neary Kampuchea, No. 2, 1990.

By the late 1980s, the population was war weary, a factor which figured into the regime's decision to find political solutions to end the war.

Cambodia's Country Report, op. cit., p.25

Chhouk Chhim, op cit.

Secretary of State Sok An, both high ranking CPP officials, asked the Women's Association to decide whether its members wished to become a non-governmental organization or remain with the government. Most of the staff opted out of the government and either created or sought employment in the NGO sector.

In 1993, the newly constituted Royal Government created the Ministry of Women's Affairs to replace the Women's Association. Many former Association members,

including those in the provincial offices were streamlined into new ministry. UNICEF, which had been a main funder of the Women's Association projects in 17 provinces also moved its funding to the new ministry. "This meant we were left with nothing, not a thing," Chhouk Chhim recounted. The Women's Association remains located in an unrestored French era colonial villa although there are no signs of activity. Few staff remain and struggle to survive on a total budget which in 1996 amounted to approximately \$30,000. As for the Association's future, its president had little to say. With tears in her eyes, she explained, "I only want women to be happy. We try to do whatever does not upset the government, so this means we try to get funds to build wells, schools and to continue to help build the country. There is no future planning right now without funds but I still want to develop women's resources for the country. But we cannot compete with NGOs anymore."

According to estimates of conducted for this report in late 1998, there are twelve active women's organizations based in Phnom Penh which can be classified as NGOs and 7 others which are mostly single-program oriented and based in the provinces.²⁹ There is considerable variation in the type and scope of programming, outreach to the countryside, and access to funding sources among these organizations.

See Appendix A, List of Women's Organizations in Cambodia. Addresses and telephone numbers are current as of the report date.

In spite of the relatively short history of these women's organizations, most of which started five years ago or less, and which have been operating in an unstable political environment since 1993, formal and informal linkages have been made with each other, and with international NGOs, government, political parties and civil society organizations. A formal linkage has been established among the women's organizations through monthly meetings of the NGO Forum for Women convened at the offices of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) in central Phnom Penh. The CCC was established in 1991 to facilitate communication among NGOs in Cambodia. Its offices include meeting rooms and a comprehensive library of Cambodian NGO and INGO-produced reports, NGO listings and meeting schedules, a growing number of titles addressing issues of development in a variety of sectors and regions of the world, and a fairly comprehensive library on Cambodian history, politics, economics and culture. The NGO Forum of Women is organized and chaired by the Gender and Development

Program for Cambodia which is playing a key role in network building and resource development among women's organizations and NGOs in Cambodia.

Linkages and relationships with international agencies have been established mainly through workshops and meetings hosted and organized by funders. With respect to USAID funded organizations, USAID program officers work in close liaison with the directors and staff of the women's organizations in matters of programming and budget planning.³⁰

Linkages with civil society organizations such as the large human rights sector in Cambodia and with the Buddhist community of monks and lay priests have grown in the past two years, in part due to advancements in communications technology in the country as a whole. In the past, communications had to be done by courier as there were very few telephone land lines and an inadequate and frequently cut electrical supply. However, in the past two years, there have been enhanced technical abilities of NGOs to network and communicate with each other and the outside world via email, land lines and mobile phones.

A second factor in the linkages among women's NGOs and the wider community of INGOs, government and civil society organizations is the rapid pace of political development in Cambodia since the end of the civil war in the early 1990s, and the roles that NGOs have defined for themselves in this process. Political initiatives for democratization, human rights, labor rights and peace, among others, have brought various sectors of the Khmer NGO community in contact with each other, including women's organizations, since it is this sector which is taking the lead in forming non-partisan avenues for the expression of social justice issues in Cambodia, and finding appropriate avenues to bring these issues to the attention of lawmakers, government commissions, the national assembly and to the international community at large.

The nature of USAID support and the impact of these linkages are addressed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2

Current Programs and Activities of Women's Associations

This chapter explores how women's organizations have interpreted and understood the gender impacts of the long war years, including problems and opportunities that emerged for women, and how these are being addressed programatically and ideologically.

Coinciding with the historic United Nations brokered Paris Peace Agreements in 1991, the State of Cambodia was undergoing political liberalization that permitted the emergence for Cambodian-managed NGOs for the first time. Before then, there was a plethora of international NGOs and international agencies based in Phnom Penh which had made significant contributions to Cambodia's development needs in agriculture, infrastructure and to a lesser extent, education. But it was only in the early 1990s that Cambodian NGOs emerged, specifically those with mandates in human rights, and women's issues, providing women more independence from the state, although ironically with less formal representation in it.³¹

The first women's NGOs emerged as either breakaways from the SOC affiliated Women's Association, such as the Cambodian Women's Development Association in 1993, or as reconstituted women's associations formerly attached to the Cambodian political resistance parties based on the Thai-Cambodian border, such as Khemara for example. Khemara, which means Khmer in the Cambodian language, was the first local NGO established in 1991. It was directed for several years by Mu Sochua, a Cambodian-American woman who had worked in Cambodian refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border in the 1980s, and who moved back to Cambodia to participate in a women's forum organized to discuss women's political roles peace building and elections that resulted from the 1991 Paris

The percentage of National Assembly members dropped from 25% in the 1980s to 6% of the total in 1993. The current percentage of women elected in the 1998 elections remains about the same but final figures will have to await the negotiations over seat allocations that were underway during the writing of this report.

Peace Agreement . Mu Sochua resigned from Khemara to join the cabinet of the FUNCINPEC party, acting as the party's special advisor on women's affairs and in the July 1998 elections, she was elected as a representative of FUNCINPEC in Battambang province and currently serves as a Member of the National Assembly in Phnom Penh. ³²

The burgeoning number of Khmer NGOs addressing gender issues have provided women with unprecedented opportunities to exert pressure on the state to address issues of social and political empowerment. For the first time in Cambodia's postwar history, conferences, seminars and workshops are being organized to study a wide range of social issues such as illiteracy, trafficking of women and children, domestic violence, prostitution and the spread of HIV aids.

The particular problems faced by women are reflected in the following statistics and figures³³:

- * women make up between 60 and 64% of the adult population and 52% of the total population
- * women constitute 60 per cent of the agricultural workforce and head between 25 to 30% of all households
- * women constitute 56 per cent of registered voters but only 7 out of 122 National Assembly representatives were female (as of Sept 1998)
- * 55 % of women are illiterate compared to 79 % for men
- * less than 20 % of girls complete schooling; girls comprise only 32 % of enrollments in high school girls and 15% tertiary levels

Information on Khemara was obtained through the author's previous interviews with Mu Sochua, and the organizations' briefs and annual reports from 1997. Mu Sochua has recently been chosen to head the Ministry of Women's Affairs and details of this appointment are found in chapter 4.

The figures below come from the UNDP's 1995 *Human Development Index and Women*; the *Draft National Action Plan on Girl's Education 1998-2003*, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, August 1998; and *Cambodia Human Development Report 1998, Women's Contribution to Economic Development*, Ministry of Planning, 1998.

- * 18 per cent of girls between 10 and 14 years old are economically active
- * less than 1 per cent of women use contraception and the average woman has 5 children
- * 500 out of every 100,000 live births will result in a woman's death

The gendered dimensions of Cambodia's demographic imbalance stem from several war-related factors. First, more men than women died during the civil war period (1970-75) due to heavy war casualties suffered by largely male armies. During the Khmer Rouge years, although women were arrested and executed for political reasons, many more men were targeted during the internal purges carried out by the communist leadership in the late 1970s and the widespread executions of political rivals targeted in the months immediately after the regime came to power in 1975.³⁴ Due to factors of greater physical and psychological resilience, women were able to survive conditions of starvation and severe trauma in the mid-1970s in greater numbers than men.³⁵ As a result of the demographic imbalances, women in the post-war years bore a disproportionate burden to men in family responsibilities and in agricultural work, the sector where 90 per cent of the population was based. Finding food and shelter during the early to late 1980s was a daily struggle for widows and female-headed households who were forced to take up heavy agricultural work such as ploughing and pedal-push irrigation that was usually performed by men in addition to traditional female work in rice agriculture such as planting, transplanting, harvesting, milling and marketing. Moreover, Cambodia was not food-self-sufficient throughout the 1980s: 600,000 hectares of cultivable land was left unproductive due to the lack of agricultural inputs and more generally, due to the fact that the country's economic and social systems were in a state of near-collapse.³⁶ This meant that women were faced with

See William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger and the Destruction of Cambodia*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979; David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, Yale University Press, 1991; and Kate Frieson, *The Impact of Revolution on Cambodian Peasants*, Ph.D. thesis, Monash University 1992.

See Eva Mysliwicz, *Punishing the Poor, the International Isolation of Kampuchea*, London: Oxfam 1988: 58. and Judy Ledgerwood, *Analysis of the Situation of Women in Cambodia*, Unicef Consultancy, 1992: 7.

Mysliwicz, *op. cit.*: 52.

tremendous physical demands to meet subsistence needs.

There were also psychological impacts of these gender role changes stemming from additional social and economic responsibilities in the postwar environment which continue to linger in the 1990s. For one thing, women feared that undertaking tasks that were traditionally assigned to men in rural work would defeminize them, and as Mysliwiec states, "reduce their chances of remarrying in a society with few men."³⁷

Many women are quick to voice concern about the changed nature of relationships between men and women since the war years. "It is as though the war brutalized men, making them violent, and disrespectful of women now," one respondent explained. "Before the war, before Pol Pot, women had status in the family and her parents could protect her if her husband was abusive. But now families are torn apart, women are sometimes forced to marry bad men because there are so few to choose among, and who can protect these women when things go wrong?"³⁸ Another respondent explained: "Men now take two or three 'wives', spend money on prostitutes, and gamble away the money that their wives earn, and women are powerless to do anything because they are afraid of not having a husband. For a woman to be single in Cambodian society is not socially acceptable so we think, wrongly, that it is better to be married to a bad man, than not be married at all."³⁹ Chantou Boua noted that loneliness, lack of marriage prospects and the guilt bearing down on survivors combined to produce widespread psychological depression among women. Boua noted "widows talking obsessively about their husbands, who were killed by Pol Pot forces. They talk about memories of earlier, happier days, about the dreadful Pol Pot period, about the abduction and killing of their husbands. It seems that tragically, many women will never forget the moment when their husbands were taken away or were shot or clubbed to death. These traumatic

Mysliwiec, op. cit.: 58

Author's interview with Chan Dara, Khmer Women's Voice Centre, Phnom Penh, November 1997.

Author's interview with Em Phally, Phnom Penh, 1997.

experiences haunt them and some women will never recover..."⁴⁰

Due to the widespread nature of these traumas, and the grave impact on Cambodian family and social relations, many women organizations in the 1990s have embarked on community projects and media campaigns to educate women and to think in new ways about subjects which are now part of the 1990s social discourse: domestic violence, prostitution and Aids, women's rights as human rights, gendered social constructions of marriage, family relations, and their negative impacts on women. However, the reality is that women continue to be marginalized and powerless in Cambodian society and it will be several years before the impacts of program targeting gender issues will truly have an impact in changing society-wide conceptions and understandings of women as an underclass.

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment is one of the most pressing needs for women in Cambodia as the war years have militarized society, valorized males in battle, and as a result of skewed demographic patterns, largely eclipsed cultural practices that had in-built protection for women in their relations with men such as bilateral kinship systems and wealth brought to the bride in marriage and uxori-locality in residence patterns.⁴¹ Today, many women in their 30s and 40s complain about their husbands having two wives, sometimes more, and also with their partners regularly visiting houses of prostitution which are in most neighborhoods, even very poor areas. The impact of these changes has been a devastating loss of social value and respect. As Sam Monnyka, a lawyer for the Cambodia Defenders

Chantou Boua, *Women in Kampuchea*, Report for World Church Service, 1981:3,4.

Uxori-locality means that the groom comes to live with the bride's family. In rural Cambodia before the war, it was common for prospective grooms to live with the bride's family for several months or longer working in the fields and contributing in labour and emotional support to the family. If the bride or family members were not satisfied after a certain amount of time, the wedding could be called off. Many women have lamented the breakdown in this custom during the course of conversations with me over the years. Also see Ledgerwood, op. cit. Pre-war male and female rites of passage and gender roles are thoroughly examined in May Ebihara, *Svay, A Village in Cambodia*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1968. The gendered impact of the war and relocation on Khmer communities in the United States is the subject of Judy Ledgerwood's Ph.D. dissertation, *Changing Khmer Conceptions of Gender*, Cornell University, 1990.

Project explained, women have become sexualized and objectified in today's society: "There is a stereotyped idea of women as a flower, [pretty to look at but] not something meaningful. Society does not believe that women have equal rights or that they are useful for the nation."⁴²

In order to tackle these problems, women's organizations have established myriad programs to accomplish three inter-related goals: 1) economic self-sufficiency so that women can remove themselves from unhappy marriage unions; 2) social dignity and self-worth needed to handle psychological traumas of war; and 3) legal means to challenge discriminatory practices and enforce constitutional guarantees of gender equality .

For many women's NGOs, the most urgent goal is meeting the immediate needs of hundreds of thousands of women in dire economic circumstances who suffer from gendered dimensions of poverty. Khemara, for example, is one of the most active local NGOs in Cambodia with activities in literacy training, community-based health services, and family support programs for very poor women and children who have limited kinship support systems, and women ostracized by society because of physical or mental health problems.

Several other women's organizations provide temporary shelters for physically abused women, those seeking escape from forced prostitution, and HIV positive women who have been spurned by their families. The Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV) engages in research, advocacy, and public education about physical abuse of women in their homes as well as providing emergency accommodation for abused women. The Women's Crisis Centre provides counseling and temporary accommodation for women who have been abandoned by their husbands or physically and emotionally abused by them or other family members. The Cambodian Women's Development Agency provides accommodation and training for HIV women and also offers temporary accommodation for women seeking

Quoted in Anugraha Palan, *Women in the Media in Cambodia*, Phnom Penh 1995, 28.

escape from domestic violence. In the area of women's human rights, LICADHO and the Human Rights and Community Outreach Projects (OUTREACH) have worked with lawyers to protect the legal rights women as enshrined in the Cambodian constitution.

The Women's Media Center of Cambodia (WMC), established in 1995, and Khmer Women's Voice Centre (KWVC) established in 1993, are the only two organizations actively raising awareness of gender and social issues from women's perspectives in the domains of public radio and television, the most effective and far-reaching mediums for a population which is still heavily rural-based and largely illiterate.

WMC's mission is to "raise awareness of social issues from Cambodian women's perspectives by producing and promoting effective TV, video and radio programs in cooperation with NGOs. WMC also strives to improve the participation and portrayal of women in the mainstream media through workshops, research and lobbying."⁴³ The WMC is staffed solely by Cambodian women, who work on all aspects of production, including the script writing, filming, editing, post-production, and marketing. WMC is widely recognized by funders as being one of the most dynamic, creative and productive NGOs in Cambodia.⁴⁴ The WMC's philosophy of organization and management is based on the principles of consensus and democracy, a management style that is unique in the Cambodian cultural context where quite rigid social hierarchies are often replicated in NGO structures. Rather than have one director dominate the organization, a management system that allows minimal input from the staff, each sub-department in the WMC such as radio, television, and audio visual has a director who develops programming ideas with her staff. The strategic planning and day to day management of the WMC is conducted on the basis of consensus among the department heads.⁴⁵

Womens Media Centre of Cambodia leaflet, 1998.

Author's interview with Kim McQuay, Asia Foundation Assistant Representative, 22 October 1998, Phnom Penh.

The WMC is the only women's organization to have come up with a comprehensive and forward looking three year strategic plan, drafted with assistance from a foreign advisor, and submitted to funders in 1998.

One of the impressive accomplishments of the WMC is its weekly television series, produced in the style of a soap opera or social drama which explores relevant and sometimes controversial subjects in inventive, entertaining and culturally appropriate ways.

The 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 too much "loss of face" or indignity to

the family's reputation. One of these, entitled, "You Win" is about a husband who comes to appreciate the value of his wife's contribution to the family when she takes ill and he is forced to stay home for one day and tend to the small store she has established that fronts their home, take care of the children, and do the domestic chores. The story begins with the wife asking her husband if he would consider picking up their eldest boy from school after work as she feels burdened with too many other domestic duties. He scoffs at this suggestion, replying that her situation is easy as she stays home all day, and that he is the one with the heavy responsibilities at the office. When the wife becomes ill with a flu, the husband must take a day off from work to look after the two young children. He starts out thinking that the day will be fun, like a vacation, proving to his wife how easy her life is. During the course of the day, the husband learns he is unable to complete two or three tasks at once as his wife does daily--looking after the children while cooking, washing up, tending to the store, and all the other tasks needed to keep the household running. With side-splitting slapstick routines, the husband bumbles the lunch by burning it when he is unable to comfort the crying baby and stir the pot at the same time. Then he loses money from the family store because he does not know the prices of the products and undercharges customers. Totally overwhelmed and exhausted at the end of the day, he decides to go out to buy take out food for dinner, unaware that his older boy is waiting for him at school long after other parents have come to pick up their children. When the boy returns home alone, and the wife sees her husband come back sheepishly with the take out food for dinner she explodes, and castigates him for not thinking about the boy's safety in a city where dangers lurk from thieves, traffickers of children, and busy streets with few crosswalks or traffic lights. The husband realizes that his wife has a point, and that she is skilled in management, finance and organization. He offers her an apology with sincerity, and says "You win: I'll pick up our boy every day from now on". They both laugh and the story ends with a positive resolution.

One measure of the popularity of the shows is the from the response of viewers who send up to 150 letters a month to WMC in response to invitations by the broadcasters to send feedback on programs. WMC directors say progress has been achieved from their

programs because "women know their rights more than before, more than they did in 1993 because they are expressing themselves with greater confidence and knowledge". Men, too, are listening and responding to the programs, according to the WMC directors, who report getting mail from monks, and members of parliament as well as ordinary viewers. One example of this is when after listening to one program dedicated to the problem of trafficking of women, a motorcycle taxi driver brought a young woman to the WMC office to help her find a safe haven after learning she was forced into prostitution and feared being trafficked out of the country.⁴⁶ The mayor of Phnom Penh, Chea Sophara, contacted WMC to commend it for the same program on trafficking, saying that he was not aware of how and why women were kidnapped and that his office would look into the matter.

While the WMC is almost certainly most dynamic and forward thinking in its programming, there is still the tendency to resolve gender conflict harmoniously in the story-lines, when in reality, there are deep conflicts dividing men and women which cannot be resolved without overwhelming social change. For example, in the story "you Win" the ideal resolution is presented with the husband changing his perceptions after only a day, an unrealistic likelihood. Men who already help their wives to some extent with household tasks may be swayed by the film and strive to do more next time their wives ask them for help, but men and women who are firm believers in the traditional gender divisions which have been drilled into them since birth, expressed by the codes of conduct for females and males (*chbab srei ; chbab pros*) may dismiss the story as not culturally appropriate.

The issue of culturally appropriate behavior for Cambodian feminists is an issue which has not had a venue for extensive debate, nor is it one that is even recognized by most activists. When asked, for example, about the kinds of intellectual divisions exist among the various organizations involved in women's issues, the WMC staff said there were none, and that there was consensus and agreement about women's issues among colleagues from

Author's interview with Chea Sundaneth, Director of Radio Programming, WMC, Phnom Penh, October 1998.

other organizations. In part, this answer reflects the desire to keep internal conflicts hidden from outsiders. However, the uniformity of such answers across the spectrum of women's organizations suggests that debate on sensitive and potentially divisive issues that so marks feminist movements elsewhere has not yet come to the fore in Cambodia.⁴⁷

The Khmer Women's Voice Centre is a local NGO which also focuses its work in the area of the media, primarily print media. The KWVC publishes a Khmer-English monthly magazine called "Khmer Women's Voice" which features articles by and about women active in economic, social and political arenas. The goal of the magazine is to "educate the whole society by eliminating harmful and incorrect preconceptions about women, promoting developing traditions and disseminating points of view which are good for women".⁴⁸ A recent issue featured an article on women and the law, the personal story of a blind woman, a critique of gender stereotypes in classical Khmer literature, and an editorial on why husbands and wives should help each other.⁴⁹

The articles are usually a few hundred words in length, and presented in simple language suitable for an audience with little education. The quality of the articles reflects the limited training and education of the staff who for the most part were school teachers in the 1960s, who have no formal journalistic training, and whose intellectual growth has taken place within a culturally and ideologically confined cocoon for the past decade. To the outsider, the magazine appears naive and sub-standard by most criteria.

Regarding the editorial objectives of KWV, clearly there is room for debate about the contradictions among the magazine's stated goals. What are the "developing traditions" and how do they conflict or support "perceptions which are harmful to women"? It is not clear that the editors have decided on these issues since they are promoting gender equity

This issue will be explored more fully in the next chapters.

Quoted from Preface, Khmer Women's Voice, No. 6/98.

Ibid.

on the one hand, but not to the extent of critiquing those traditions that have culturally and historically kept women in an inferior position to men in Khmer society. What is lacking in the intellectual development of the KWV are signs of debate and discourse about how the writers and editors interpret their notion of "developing traditions" for women that balances the psychological needs of Cambodian society to rescue cultural practices that were nearly obliterated by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s on the one hand, and advocating the changes required for women's advancement, on the other.

One explanation for this lack of debate is that the magazine's self-presentation is not entirely an indigenous effort, but which has seen the imprint of non-Cambodians, usually Western volunteers or hired advisors, who have had a limited involvement with the magazine and have piece-meal tried to steer it along an intellectual path which its director and editors have adopted but not fully understood.⁵⁰ Another reason stems from the very limited facilities the writers have to properly research and study the stories they present before writing them. The magazine office has few resource materials, and the public library is extremely limited. Often writers ask foreign colleagues to get books and articles for them because they lack basic background information to begin with. Finally, the pressure to get pieces out with a limited budget means that writers keep to basic storylines based on limited sources of information. The end-product reflects all of these limitations.

The magazine has a limited distribution due to the print run of one to two thousand issues per month, and is rarely found at news stands in the capital.⁵¹ The distribution to provinces is made through the Ministry of Education, where provincial schools are provided with copies. Readership in the provinces, appears to be limited to teachers and their families,

This is a personal observation after spending many hours with staff at all levels of the magazine in 1997.

Personal observation. The magazine is found at the newsstand adjacent to the WMC office and at four or five others in the center of the capital and near the major high schools and the university. There are hundreds of newsstands in Phnom Penh and the WMC does not have the capacity at the present time to have issues distributed to all media outlets. Author's interview, Sim Chanya, Editor, Khmer Women's Voice Magazine, June 1997, Phnom Penh.

and it is not known how many people outside government channels are exposed to the magazine through current distribution methods.

That said, the Khmer Women's Voice Magazine is the only print media currently available that promotes a positive role models for women and provides them with information on issues ranging from HIV and Aids, to the plight of homeless women, to women active and accomplished in science, law, politics, and medicine. For the magazine to mature intellectually and journalistically, more training is required, higher standards of writing and accountability need to be put in place, and there needs to be more room made for genuine intellectual reflection and debate about how women's traditional roles are being transformed in positive and negative ways by the aftermath of long years of war and influences from the outside.

Through television, radio and print media, the Cambodian public is slowly being exposed for the first time to programming with alternative gender roles for men and women. This is a much needed service for a media that is overwhelmingly dominated by men in all aspects of production and programming. Much more needs to be done in this area to have an impact on attitudes and behavior, however. Studies of the Khmer television and print media have found that women are either largely neglected or when they are featured, appear in negative gendered stereotypes as sexual vampires, prostitutes or corrupt wives of wealthy businessmen and politicians.⁵²

Political Empowerment

Political rights for women are a relatively recent development. For example, it was not until independence that women's rights extended to political enfranchisement. On 25 September 1955, under the proposition of Prince Sihanouk, the National Congress decided unanimously to allow women to vote. The proposition became law three months later. In

See Anugraha Palan, Women in the Media in Cambodia, Phnom Penh 1995.

the 1958 elections, two women were elected to the National Assembly --Mme. Pung Peng Cheng and Diep Dinar, representing 3% of the total of 73 elected representatives.

However, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, high profile political roles for women in Cambodia are rare, occurring only when they dovetail with the careers of male spouses or fathers. In the political realm, women are publicly submissive to the male hierarchy rather than active and participatory. But in popular culture and gender stereotyping, women are often cast as intruders who interfere in their husband's political affairs for their own interests. In this regard, Marie Martin summarizes a stereotypical view of the politicized femme fatale:

Skillful in the art of pleasing and charming, she often gives him no rest until he accedes to her desires. Firm and smiling, she bends his will. If her husband is an influential man, even at a modest level, she builds a clientele for herself. a practice described by a Cambodian proverb, "If you are a colonel, your wife is a general."⁵³

In short, women's political roles have been largely confined to the shadows, taking political action as mothers or wives to enhance the status and access to power of the male members of their families. Women have rarely become political leaders in their own right. This pattern can be seen in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Burma and the Philippines, where Aung San Suu Kyi gained political prominence through the legacy of her father Aung San, and where Imelda Marcos shared infamy with President Marcos, who made her governor of Manila.

Since the Paris Peace Agreements of 1991, however, women's organizations have been active in seeking forums and avenues to enhance women's political empowerment as voters, political party representatives, leaders of government ministries, and as participants in village, district and provincial branches of the government.

Cited in Marie Alexandrine Martin, Cambodia, A Shattered Society, Translated by Mark McLeod, University of California Press, 1994, p.26.

Before the breakdown in the government in 1997, the role of international NGOs and agencies was crucial in providing the financial and mentoring support for Khmer NGO advocacy groups making appeals to National Assembly Commissions on gender concerns. For example, with assistance from international NGOs, UNICEF and UNIFEM, the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs working with local women's organizations, drafted gender-sensitive constitutional codes that conform to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.⁵⁴

Women for Prosperity is the first NGO that has specifically addressed the problem of lack of women political leaders by organizing a leadership training course in 1998 for middle level decision-makers such as commune or district chiefs located in the provinces, and department heads in government ministries. The course was designed and conducted by Nanda Pok, the director of Women for Prosperity with over a decade of NGO experience in California with immigrant communities. She explained the purpose of the training program as follows:

Most NGOs are focused on the grassroots and the impoverished groups in society but miss out on the middle class. But the middle class is an important group because without it, the grassroots cannot go forward. WFP is the first NGO to target this middle class and it is important because it wields power over the grassroots. We need leadership training not only to improve management skills but to educate the middle level and top level leaders in their rights and responsibilities towards those below them and towards the country as a whole. Women's training is important so that they can become equal partners in the country's political and overall development.⁵⁵

High and middle ranking politicians, bureaucrats, civil servants attended these sessions in the capital, and sessions were attended by district and provincial leaders in the provinces.

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Women for Prosperity was also active in promoting women's participation in the July 1998

Cambodia's Country Report, 29.

Author's interview with Pok Nanda, President of Women for Prosperity, October 16, 1998, Phnom Penh.

elections by organizing leadership workshops in the capital and in 11 provincial towns. Women candidates were invited to workshops where they were given training in media skills, public speaking, speech delivery techniques, and interview methods. In all, 698 women attended the workshops. Nanda Pok noted that this was the first time in Cambodian history that women received training in elections.

In addition, WFP interviewed representatives and leaders from the 39 political parties contesting the elections about their policies concerning women and gender issues, and the number and profiles of their women candidates. The information was compiled and published in a Khmer-language report entitled "Women's Role in Political Life" where each party is profiled, its women candidates featured, its leader explains the party's platform concerning women's issues. 14,000 issues of the report were published and distributed throughout the NGO community that were active in voter education programs. According to WFP, publication of the report was initially hampered by the mixed reaction of the Ministry of Information. Approval for the publication was initially provided by Vice-Minister Ieng Mouly, but this was later retracted by the Minister, Khieu Khanarith who voiced concern that the report was "too political". The matter was resolved when WFP approached the National Electoral Commission, established by the government to oversee all legal matters of the election, and received permission to publish the report.⁵⁶

Empowering women in politics is a long term goal of women's organizations who explain that cultural constraints and the lack of political will by the major parties are the biggest obstacles for women. Ung Yok Khoan, a woman board member of the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COFFEL) and director of the women's organization, Amara explained:

There are few concrete results of democratization for women. All regimes have called themselves democratic but women have had little power in any of these. To build up

Examples of how the political environment have hampered women's activities are examined in Chapter 3.

democracy we must think of a baby crawling. We are still in the infant stages in Cambodia and so therefore we must be patient. Women are important actors in democracies and must not be left out. If women are ignorant of the political situation then it will be possible for men to continue to look down on them. Men will look down on women's knowledge and their roles saying they are not important. So it is up to women to change this, we must free women from domestic and child rearing burdens, so they will have time and the ability to learn, get involved in projects and politics, and training programs. Men share their experiences outside the home, and women must also build up networks and build up their confidence. Democracy must start in the family so that husbands and children engage in group decision making that recognize women's needs and contributions.⁵⁷ Another obstacle in the political empowerment of women is that there is still much pressure on women candidates to tow the party line rather than unite with women from other parties on gender issues. A common complaint heard from several respondents

Author's interview with Ung Yok Khoan, board member of the Committee for Free and Fair Elections, and director of the women's organization, Amara in Phnom Penh, 13 October 1998.

speaking in confidence was that the women elected to office have never used their position to try to advance gender issues or influence their own party's stance to be more pro-active on issues such as pay-equity, criminalizing trafficking of women and children, increasing the numbers of women in politics.

A WMC programmer spoke of her frustration in this regard, when a Cambodian People's Party representative took offense because her on-air time interview about women's issues was some number of seconds shorter than a representative from the rival FUNCINPEC party. She threatened to withdraw her agreement to be aired unless she was premiered and given equal air time. These kinds of petty arguments are precisely what is preventing women politicians from initiating intra-party dialogue on gender issues..

Economic status and power

In general terms, women's organizations have identified three key areas of concern to women and have developed programs and lobbied governments to address these problems. The three areas consist of: 1) women's disadvantaged economic position vis-a-vis men, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of women-headed households in rural and urban areas; 2) gender bias in schooling whereby girls are vastly under-represented in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education; and 3) domestic violence against women and trafficking of women and children.

Considerable progress has been made by women's organizations in researching these problems, identifying their cultural, economic and political features, and lobbying government ministries and also international agencies to acknowledge and take action to ameliorate these problems. These accomplishments should not go unnoticed considering the main difficulty in carrying out basic research in Cambodia is the dearth of trained Khmer social scientists. Additional factors inhibiting research are political insecurity, periodic military clashes among political factions, and an extremely poor system of roads and infrastructure.

The problem of domestic abuse is extremely sensitive in Cambodia due to the legacy of war violence from the Khmer Rouge years, and the propensity to culturally mask or hide conflicts from even the most intimate family members. It is worth noting that this issue was not initially made public by Cambodian women themselves but came to the fore via the research of an American woman who later set up the Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV).⁵⁸ The PADV is now an entirely Cambodian-run women's NGO whose activities are geared toward raising public awareness of domestic violence through traveling theatre shows, workshops, and training sessions, and providing shelters for women and children victims. The importance of the PADV is its pioneering research into this widespread social problem which had heretofore been taboo and unspoken, which culminated in the report of research findings "Plates in a Basket Will Rattle"⁵⁹. With the publication of this report, the subject has come to be recognized by Women's Affairs Ministry and has been taken up by the NGO community at large as a problem of national concern. Not everyone supports such breakthroughs, however. There are conservative voices in the media, Buddhist clergy and government that criticize "outsiders" for setting up NGOs such as PADV and others on the grounds that modernizing influences from the West will destroy Cambodian traditions and that Khmers must look after their own problems.⁶⁰

In the field of education, CARE International has embarked on an ambitious project in liaison with the Ministry of Education to develop curricula that is gender sensitive and which aims to encourage teachers, parents and girls of the benefits of not only going

PADV was created by Cathy Zimmerman who worked closely with the present director, Sar Samen for several years before leaving the organization in 1997.

Cathy Zimmerman, *Plates in a Basket will Rattle: Domestic Violence in Cambodia*, Phnom Penh, December 1994..

This is based on conversations the author has had over the years with some Cambodian nationalists who fear that foreign influences will destroy Khmer culture. Western feminists in particular are viewed with suspicion and at times, contempt, for bringing gender consciousness to the fore. Although this is a minority view, at least as publically expressed, it does present a challenge to Khmer women in their struggles for gender change.

to school, but staying to complete secondary levels.⁶¹ While those involved in the National Taskforce on Girls' Education, including Ministry of Education officials all agree that the situation of girl drop out rates is a serious concern and that curriculum development along gender sensitive lines is one of several key changes necessary, there is one serious obstacle blocking the movement forward: the lack of commitment to endorse the curriculum changes by key decision-makers in the Ministry of Education who are of the "old school" and find gender-sensitive materials a threat to "traditional culture"⁶². Here again, we see that there is conflict between NGO initiatives, this one being an international NGO, and Ministry officials who are threatened by the cultural cost of gender transformations.

Progress in achieving the objectives of financial assistance to women-headed households, parity in education, and action against domestic violence to take three examples, is slow to come about. The main reasons for this stems from the relative newness of women's organizations and thus their limited impact generally, and more worrying, from a powerless National Assembly and the lack of political will by political leaders and relevant ministries.

Draft National Action Plan on Girls' Education, 1998-2003, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, August 1998.

Personal communication by persons well placed in the project wishing to be left anonymous.

Chapter 3

Factors Affecting the Performance and Impact of Women's Organizations

This chapter will identify and analyze factors which have affected the performance and impact of women's organizations. By far the most disturbing trend which negatively affects the ability of women's organizations to grow intellectually and perform well is the political environment.

The political environment and its impact on women's organizations.

As detailed in the last chapters, women's organizations in Cambodia have rarely been independent of political goals of nationalist, revolutionary, royalist or republican parties that have dominated the political landscape of post colonial history. Since the early 1990s, coinciding with the United Nations brokered peace agreements, women's organizations began to form with intellectual goals independent of political party agendas, serving needs of gender equity and representation first and foremost rather than national goals which had in the past made gender issues subservient to political ends. But there has been a backlash to these efforts. And ironically, the greatest source of political backlash has come from the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

There are three fundamental problems to be identified with the Ministry of Women's Affairs: its leadership, structure, and political agenda.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs was established after the historic UN organized elections in 1993. It took over the functions of the CPP-affiliated Women's Association and along with the association's staff, the UNICEF programming and funding moved to the new ministry building.

Like all ministries, there was representation from the three main political parties of the coalition government. In a move which many women activists say demonstrates how little

regard the government had for Women's Affairs, a male representative of the least powerful party in the coalition government became the Minister: Keat Sokhun, of the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party. The Vice-Minister was Ms. Im Run of the dominant Cambodian People's Party, the communist party which had ruled Cambodia through-out the 1980s and early 1990s.

For many women activists these appointments signified several problematic issues. For one thing, having a man with no prior experience or commitment to gender lead the government's only Ministry dealing with women's and gender issues was a slap in the face, a severe setback in efforts to increase women's participation at leadership levels in the government, and a clear sign that male politicians undervalued women's potential to contribute to society. The protests that were sparked by this appointment were met with contempt and dismissal by the Second Prime Minister Hun Sen, who said he was tired of hearing women complain about their problems, and that the reason a man was appointed was because there were no competent women to run the Ministry.⁶³

Secondly, Vice-Minister Im Run, did not protest her party leader's statements and has since maintained that having a man as Minister was not a problematic issue for Women's Affairs.⁶⁴ Beginning in 1995 when the government was beset by political deadlock, Keat Sokhun had relatively little influence over the functioning of the Ministry. The day to day running of the ministry was left to the powerful Vice-Minister Im Run, and her CPP loyalists in charge of the sub-departments who were brought from the Women's Association when it became defunct.

Thirdly, as in all power structures in Cambodia, rigid hierarchical social systems were firmly in place, so that the ministry was a top-down run organization with virtually no built-in mechanisms to counter, challenge or influence the leadership except through a

Phnom Penh Post, 1994.

Author's interview with Im Run, June 1997, Phnom Penh.

patron-client system. In government this often means corruption. Further, in this system, the competency of the leaders make or break the organization.

Since its inception, the ministry has suffered from incompetence in leadership that has paralyzed the ministry's ability to function professionally internally, and caused difficulties in external relations with women's NGOs and international agencies. A first clue to these problems comes with a visit to the ministry building itself. The building is in poor physical condition, with dusty and ill-lit corridors, leaking roofs, and an often empty reception desk. It lacks the hustle and bustle of other well-run ministries such as Health or Education which have developed good relationships with donors and NGOs. Visitors to the Women's Ministry have to look for staff who have authority to set up appointments or offer information. There are few working telephones and the library is often closed and has very few materials for researchers. Most of the 200-member staff have little work to do, limited by resources and direction and many appear for only a few hours a day as they must find alternative means of income to make ends meet. Appointments are therefore usually made directly with the department chiefs. Even prior to the political disruptions of July 1997, the Ministry suffered from poor organization, lack of leadership, and a staff who suffered from low morale, poor wages, and lack of training. However, after the coup d'état which obliterated the political opposition to the CPP, the ministry deteriorated further. After July 1997 Minister Keat Sokhun left Cambodia along with dozens of other opposition MPs who feared for their safety. Vice-Minister Im Run took his place. He returned to Cambodia under a United Nations protection plan for returning MPs in late 1997, and attempted to return to assume his position as Minister. However, after appearing at the ministry one day to find a letter threatening to kill him, he dropped from sight. It is not clear who was responsible for the letter. Keat Sokhun apparently believes the threat did not come from within the ministry but rather from a group of disgruntled youth attached to his Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party who were dissatisfied with a meeting he had held with them.⁶⁵ However, since he did not return to

Personal communication, Laura McGrew, former United Nations officer attached to the returning MP protection program, who during the course of her work learned of this incident, and who met several times with Keat Sokun as a result of it.

the ministry, it is likely that he did not feel welcome there any longer.

Im Run moved up in rank to assume the position of interim Minister until the July 1998 elections and positioned her supporters in key positions beside her. While publicly the ministry says it is not beset by the political party divides that haunt other ministries, it is evident that there are no threats to the CPP dominance of the ministry. For example, Im Run's second in command is Ek Virak, one of the former leaders of the Khmer People's National Political Front (KPNFL) women's associations which operated on the Thai-Cambodian border during the civil war years (1979-1991). Although ostensibly from the CPP's political opposition, Ek Virak has come to be a close associate of Im Run and has been rewarded by being promoted to the position of Deputy General Director of Programs. This is unfortunate according to insiders who say she is not particularly impressive or knowledgeable about gender issues and defers all issues to Im Run.

Regarding the internal workings of the ministry, there are five departments: administration, health and social action, training, education and public information, family development and research and planning. None of the departments have sufficient staff or financial resources to initiate programs and therefore must work with foreign or local NGOs whose programs "fit" with those in the relevant ministry departments. This was most evident during a 1997 visit to the research department where the director explained that the ministry could not plan projects for the ministry or engage in research that was self-devised because there were no funds and her staff did not have the skills to accomplish projects on their own. Rather, international agencies such as UNICEF or local NGOs with gender components to their development programs liaise with the ministry as required by law, and incorporate ministry staff into training components of programs in order to help the ministry become more self-sufficient and involved in the programs of gender and development. When asked what specific programs her department was engaged in, the director was flustered and could not summarize these without reading from a prepared sheet of itemized projects. It was an embarrassing moment and one that demonstrates why

the ministry is generally known by the donor and NGO community to be lacking professional credentials.

During a 1998 meeting with the Inspector General of the Ministry, who is responsible for overseeing the day to day operations of the ministry, it was made clear that questions regarding the general situation of women in Cambodia, and what the Ministry had accomplished in bringing women's issues to the government's attention were considered irrelevant and outside the scope of the Ministry's mandate. For example, when asked to give a brief summary of gender concerns in the areas of health, education and staffing in civil service sectors, the Inspector General replied that such information had to be obtained from each relevant ministry as there was no reference section or library within the ministry itself she could consult to find such information. She did not lament this situation but rather appeared not to understand the importance of knowing such basic information herself or developing an information unit that would provide it to the various department heads to use in the course of their work. As she explained: "Some people do not even want to have a Women's Affairs Ministry because in each ministry there is a gender component. So we don't consider knowing such information as you asked about a priority, to know statistics about gender issues in health and education for example, this is not our concern and if you want such information you should go to other ministries for it."⁶⁶

Indeed there are important points that were raised here about how government ministries are dealing with gender issues in relation to the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Because Women's Affairs has not been competent to work with NGOs on a sectoral basis such as Education or Health, for example, they have worked directly with relevant ministries. So for example, NGO programs involving homeless women deal directly with Ministry of Social Affairs, and programs addressing the under-enrollments of girls have a base in the

Author's interview with Chou Bun Eng, Inspector General, Ministry of Women's Affairs, 9 October 1998, Phnom Penh.

Ministry of Education. In theory, the Ministry of Women's Affairs is the advisor to other ministries on gender issues, and there is some cooperation between the various ministries and the relevant departments at the Women's ministry on a program by program basis. But the areas of cooperation and program design seem to be ill-defined and not well coordinated as none of the Women's ministry departments seems particularly hard at work on any projects.

The Ministry's official goals are twofold: 1) to develop the capacity of women in rural areas; and 2) to focus on poverty alleviation.⁶⁷ The rationale for these goals is straightforward: 80 per cent of Cambodia's population live in rural areas where food security remains a major challenge, and which has a negative impact on the health and overall working capacity of women and men.

However, with only .12 per cent of the national budget allocated to the Ministry, it is impossible to make progress in achieving these modest goals. In interviews with the interim Minister and with the Inspector General, both women said that they were satisfied with this budget outlay because it was important for the government to secure the peace for the country first and foremost before the problems of women could be addressed. In other words, the women running the ministry have no plans to try to lobby for more government money or push agendas which are of concern to women. Such views are a source of frustration to women who are committed and talented within the ministry who are held back in their work for lack of resources, and to those working within the NGO community who would like to see the ministry less subservient to the political line of the ruling CPP and more aggressive in promoting women's issues as a matter of national concern.

Regarding external relations, what is problematic has been the perception the ministry has of women's NGOs as "competition", its jealousy of NGOs which receive generous funding

Chou Bun Eng, 9 October 1998.

from USAID which it is denied, and its intrusive efforts to control or oversee NGO projects as a method of finding a niche for itself.⁶⁸ This has meant that many NGOs view the ministry as inherently problematic but there is little they can do but try and cooperate as much as possible and develop good working relationships with certain individuals who are capable partners and who demonstrate flexibility and commitment to supporting their programs. To take the issue of "competition", the Director General of Women's Affairs spoke with bitterness about the lack of USAID for the Ministry while women's NGOs received handsome funding to carry out large-scale projects. "Why doesn't USAID not help this government ministry? The government pays us little, and salaries are not sufficient to attract good people and train them. How come USAID does not help the government?"⁶⁹ She quickly acknowledged that to compete successfully with women's NGOs, the ministry would have to undergo reforms and a drive to professionalize its staff and its programming capabilities. Towards that end, she has developed a new cooperation project aimed at improving relationships with ten local NGOs and international agencies.

We are offering to become more involved with project-design, and this way, we will have greater access to training, funding and overall development that international donors supply to local NGOs now. As it stands we are not happy when NGOs benefit from work that we are also involved in. And all the NGOs must liaise with us as we have our networks throughout the countryside. So if for example, an NGO wants to set up a project in a certain village, we will contact the women's association branch in the district and work with local officials to ensure the provincial authorities provide whatever assistance the NGO requires. And by law, all NGOs must come to us before they embark on any programs. According to article two of the Law on the Creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, we are "capable to conduct and manage all affairs of women of the Kingdom of Cambodia". So by law, the NGOs must work with us.⁷⁰

These three points became clear through a number of meetings and long conversations with Ministry staff who admitted they could not hope to compete with NGOs, and with local women's NGOs speaking in confidence who corroborated these issues.

Chou Bun Eng, 9 October, 1998. This seems a remarkable statement to make for such a senior official in the ministry who knows very clearly the restrictions of USAID to government departments particularly after the 1997 coup.

Ibid.

Although women's NGOs do not readily admit to having strained relationships with the Ministry of Women Affairs, the attitudes that were expressed above do grate. But to keep working effectively, most NGOs keep the Women's Affairs Ministry informed as to their programs, invite their representatives to workshops and training sessions, and submit programs for "approval" when necessary. The fact that the Ministry is allied with the CPP is a source of concern because it means that when programs are deemed too political by CPP leaders, the Women's Affairs will back the party position rather than the program. And furthermore, most people in the international agency and NGO sector acknowledge that in reality, Women's Affairs is not taken seriously by the CPP-ruled government and that its existence is permitted largely because it takes up little revenue and does not lobby for more, and remains politically subservient to CPP policies.

Leadership Change in the Ministry of Women's Affairs--December 1998

According to several sources, there was much debate about possible successors to Keat Sokhun's position following the outcome of the July 1998 elections. Im Run was positioning herself to lead the Ministry. However, negotiations between the CPP and FUNCINPEC in November 1998 resulted in the appointment of a FUNCINPEC MP, Ms Mu Sochua to head the Ministry of Women's Affairs. This is a victory for women's NGOs, many of whom respect and admire Ms. Sochua, along-time advocate of women's rights, and the former director of Khemara, one of the largest women's NGOs in the country.

In my opinion, the appointment of Ms. Sochua will come to represent a turning point for positive and sweeping changes at the Ministry provided she is able to move competent people into lead and direct the Ministry's sub departments, particularly its research wing. The reasons why this appointment is significant lie substantially with the personal characteristics and background of the new Minister, who is a well educated Cambodian-American woman, who spent many years working in Khmer refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border in areas of social work and women's issues. She returned to Cambodia in the early 1990s to establish the first Khmer women's NGO, Khemara, which is

still operating and is one of the largest NGOs in Cambodia, She resigned to become the advisor on women's affairs to Prince Ranariddh, leader of FUNCINPEC. In the 1998 elections, she won in Battambang province and will join the new government as one of the few women MPs elected to office. Mu Sochua is an extremely intelligent, dedicated, and hard-working politician who can, I believe, be more than competent to bring vision and a sense of purpose that has been lacking at the Ministry since its inception.

Most importantly, the leaders and staff of women's NGOs have high regard for Ms. Sochua, which developed through the past several years as a result of collaborative work in the NGO community of which she was a part for so long. Thus her appointment represents an opportunity to end to the difficult and unproductive period of Ministry-NGO relationships that have been overshadowed by political agendas of the ruling CPP and by the incompetence of the women running the Ministry. The challenge for Mu Sochua will be to strike a balance of political power between the long-term CPP aligned staff there whom she will need to work with to make reforms effective, and the new staff she will require to bring the much needed professionalism and efficiency to the fore. This will likely be a daunting task as there will certainly be much resentment towards her from CPP stalwarts within the Ministry who disparage "returnees", i.e. Khmers from overseas with foreign education who are stereotyped as arrogant and uncompassionate towards Cambodians who lived through the PRK years. She will also be suspected for her political agenda as she is cabinet member of the "enemy party" FUNCINPEC at which the CPP has been at loggerheads since 1993. Finally, she will be resented for her good connections to women's NGOs which Ministry officials largely view as their "opposition" rather than as their constituents or partners. There is potential for positive outcomes, however, as the Ministry has long resented being outside the bilateral government funding loop. Mu Sochua's connections to the foreign aid community, will no doubt boost morale among ministry staff and raise hopes that under her leadership and direction, the Ministry will be able to attract sufficient funding to make their continued employment worthwhile and meaningful. This will be a crucial step in gaining the loyalty and trust of the Ministry staff, many of whom wish to rise above political partisanship and

work for the needs of women in the country, and in cooperation with women's NGOs who are heads and shoulders above them with regards to conceptual and theoretical understanding of gender issues, research and writing abilities, and in carrying out successful programs that bring about positive change.

Other Political Obstacles

The mushrooming of the Khmer NGO community in recent years has been a politically contentious issue for the government, and in particular the ruling CPP which has largely viewed the NGO community with suspicion and hostility, as a source of political opposition to its rule, and as a vehicle through which anti-government sentiments have been expressed. The response of government ministries and key CPP officials has been to curb, censor and in some cases deny the rights of NGOs to carry out their programs when they are viewed as having too much of a political impact. The response of women's NGOs has been to determinedly continue their work and to modify it when necessary to get around government censors. There have not been any major confrontations yet because the NGO community has been diligent in representing themselves and their work in a politically neutral manner, in which all political parties can participate and benefit from. The cost however, is that a relationship of tension and mistrust has developed between certain government sectors, particularly the Ministry of Information, and the NGO community which hovers beneath the surface.

Tensions are particularly high in the area of media and women's political participation. For example, the Women For Prosperity organization received funding from USAID via the Asia Foundation to coordinate and produce roundtable debates on women's issues by political party representatives for broadcast on national television as lead up to the July 1998 elections. This program fitted in with voter education goals that the United States embassy was supporting along with other members of the international community involved in funding the elections; and with the Asia Foundation's program "Global Women in Politics" to encourage and increase women's participation in governance. Nanda Pok, director of Women for Prosperity designed 12 topics ranging from women's health, to the

Platform of Action adopted at Beijing, and then sought interested candidates to debate the issues on television. However, Minister of Information Khieu Khanarith instructed TVK, the national television director not to air the roundtable's.⁷¹ As a result, the TVK director stone-walled Ms. Pok, by stalling, saying no air time was available, changing appointments, suggesting changes to the programming, complaining that the concept was too boring for Cambodian voters. Nanda Pok got the message and dropped the project for television but found a receptive radio station manager who aired some of the roundtable discussions. She explained, "the government refused to let us do the roundtable's because it was worried that if there was debate they would be confronted by their lack of results in gender areas and that this would be turned into a political means to attack the government by the opposition parties--so the Minister of Information blocked the project."⁷²

Wider societal alliances

There is virtually no culture of volunteerism and philanthropy support to sustain women's organizations that is local and Khmer. Cambodia is simply too impoverished after decades of war and its overseas community tends to send donations to help rebuild Buddhist temples or village development projects rather than to organizations to which they do not have personal or kinship connections. Moreover, the problem of aggrandizement of wealth by those in power has created a widespread mood of cynicism and disillusionment among poor people towards those who do have the means to share wealth.

However, Cambodians have been blessed by the very active foreign donor community and literally hundreds of international NGOs have set up offices and programs which have funded the development efforts of Cambodia. Women's NGOs are completely dependent upon foreign donors for their budgets and with few exceptions, none foresee

Author's interview with Nanda Pok. Khieu Khanarith was not available to provide his perspective.

Author's interview with Nanda Pok, October 16, 1998, Phnom Penh

financial independence at any time in the next decade.

In the past five years, there have been gradual alliances formed between women's organizations and other civil society movements with similar objectives for social justice, democratization, gender equity and economic development for the poor and socially disadvantaged. However, the constituency base of this support is tiny, restricted mainly to urban areas, and dependent on foreign aid. Moreover, there will likely be greater governmental scrutiny of NGOs who are perceived to have political agendas, such as women's NGOs and those in the area of human rights, electoral watchdog bodies, and organizations working for legal reform of the justice system.

Chapter 4 Women's Organizations and the International Community

Women's organizations are wholly dependent upon international agencies and donors for funding, and are thus subjected to extensive guidance and thematic exposure to the program planning objectives of funders. This chapter will examine the nature and effect of international assistance on women's organizations and how, in spite of the relationship of dependency women's organizations have on donors, they have begun to formulate their own identities and agendas.

USAID-funded Programs

USAID plays an extremely important role in Cambodia with one of the largest aid programs of any donor country and a programmatic commitment to gender issues. In the last fiscal year 1997-1998, \$329,000 came through the Democracy and Human Rights Fund, and \$120,000 came from AID, Washington. These amounts comprise approximately 42 per cent of all USAID funding for Cambodia.⁷³ Some 4.5 million dollars has been budgeted until March 2000, representing USAID's largest fiscal commitment to any country in Asia.⁷⁴

USAID funding for women's organizations is channeled through the Asia Foundation based in Phnom Penh. The Foundation's two Cambodian gender program officers together with the Foundation's Assistant Representative work closely with four of the largest women's organizations in Cambodia whose outreach and links to government, international organizations, and the broader NGO community are well established. These are Women For Prosperity, Khmer Women's Media Centre, Project Against Domestic Violence, and Khmer Women's Voice Centre.

Author's interview with Kim McQuay, Assistant Representative, The Asia Foundation, Phnom Penh, 22 October 1998.

Ibid.

Before awarding funds for a particular project the NGO must present a proposal which explains how it will accomplish its objectives. At times this process is consultative with Asia Foundation officers acting as facilitators in the writing process or hosts at workshops to help define and target goals. Projects submitted to the Asia Foundation by women's organizations must fit within the Foundation's strategic gender plan comprised of four subject categories for women: 1) Basic Rights and Security; 2) Political Participation; 3) Economic and Legal Rights; 4) Leadership.⁷⁵ These subject areas are separate but cross-cut the Foundation's overall thematic programming in Human Rights, Governance, Elections and Journalism.

Women for Prosperity has helped to promote women in politics through its training workshops and outreach to candidates for office, campaign assistants, and non-governmental organization members, among others. Its stellar abilities are often attributed to the personal qualities of its director, Ms. Nanda Pok, whose drive, commitment and communications skills have made the organization's programs popular and also controversial.⁷⁶ The Women's Media Centre (WMC) is equally lauded by Asia Program officers but for different reasons. WMC has demonstrated its capability to plan its programming and overall goals with a new three year plan, an almost unknown concept for most NGOs who struggle from contract to contract, often times from month to month, not knowing what lies ahead in the future, and without the capability and resources to plan ahead. The WMC envisions establishing its own television station so that it is not subject to the programming constraints and political agendas of the government stations. Funding for this initiative is presently being sought.

The Khmer Women's Voice Centre (KWVC) has been the most problematic of the four

Information on the Asia Foundation programs was provided by Muol Samneang and Sin Kim Sean, gender program officers, during the author's interview with them, 19 October 1998, Phnom Penh; and also through the Foundation's 1997 Annual Report and 1997 Asian Pacific Program Profiles.

The reasons for this were outlined in the previous chapter.

key organizations which receive USAID.⁷⁷ This is due, for the most part, in the organization's inability to write good quality proposals and express its strategic planning ideas to the Asia Program. The seriousness of the problem reached the point where the Asia Foundation was reconsidering funding the KWVC. However, it was decided to engage a local Asia Program staff member to help KWVC devise and define its strategic planning goals rather than give up ties altogether. Without a change in the management style of the KWVC, however, it does not seem likely that there will be a long-lasting benefit from the input of the Asia Program in assisting with the organization's strategic planning. At least two skilled staff members have left KWVC in the past year to take up positions with other organizations where their skills are better utilized and appreciated. If KWVC could incorporate a truly collective approach to its management, where writer's and programmers have more input into the organization's programs and proposal-writing, its long-term future would be more secure. For this to happen, KWVC will need to hire talented and skilled writers to assist the director in authoring reports and helping to direct the future goals of the organization.

KWVC reflects, on balance, a quality that is commonly found among local NGOs whose directors have had little formal education, or no updating of education obtained in the 1960s, who have had to operate within an intellectually constricted political environment, and whose staff have limited skills in administration, accounting, and organization due to break down in society that occurred during the long war years. On the plus side, KWVC provides a nurturing environment to its staff, many of whom have worked together for several years and who are committed to surviving salary cuts and the lack of future growth because of their loyalty to their director, and their belief in their work. Many were former school teachers during peace time, and they prefer the challenge and novelty of working in the NGO sector to the controlled and underpaid work they had in the state school system.⁷⁸

Personal communication, Kim McQuay, Assistant Representative, Asia Foundation, 22 October 1998.

Personal observations and discussion with staff, June 1997 and October 1998. For example, the director has tried to allay the cuts to salaries of her staff as a result of funding cutbacks after the July 1997 coup

The fourth organization which USAID supports is the Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV). The Asia Program officer's positive assessment of the PADV is related to its ability to change its course of action and direction by rethinking its overall position within the policy environment. As Kim McQuay stated, by moving from advocacy to training, PADV staff "understood the importance of tracking their own institutional history".⁷⁹

A novel program of street theatre was designed by PADV, whereby the difficult issue of domestic violence was staged by a local comedic theatre company featuring a nationally famous actor. The script was written and filmed by the Women's Voice Centre in collaboration with the PADV. It was then presented as a work in production to the University of Fine Arts, Ministry of Justice for feedback. When the production went on the road it caused a sensation with scores of villagers crowded into local halls and makeshift theaters who had been drawn to the event because of the famous *ayai* singer Prum Mayan. Asia Program officers also toured with the play. During tense scenes of physical abuse between husbands and wives, the audience reacted by yelling at the abusers to stop and advising the abused on what to do. The impact on the audience was so profound, that PADV decided to do advanced training for local communities, police and NGOs in the villages and districts where the play was to be performed. In all, almost half a million Cambodians saw the play and were exposed to the difficult and painful reality of domestic violence. According to Kim McQuay, this was one of the most successful projects that USAID has funded as it represented a local initiative that received guidance and steering but no intervention from the Foundation's office. Moreover, the outreach to distant rural areas which do not normally have access to NGO work of this nature was novel and hugely popular.

through her own personal sacrifice, an act that endeared her greatly to her staff.

Author's interview with Kim McQuay, Assistant Representative, The Asia Foundation, Phnom Penh.

A new USAID funded project focusing on women's economic and legal rights is organized differently from the others because it is initiated by the Foundation itself instead of by a women's organization. This marks the first time that USAID funds have been specifically targeted to economic issues. The first project is a savings and credit program for women in three markets in Phnom Penh which is being implemented with the Urban Sector Group, an NGO whose activities have not previously addressed women. The concept underpinning the project is that while women figure prominently in markets as the sellers, the administration, policing and security of the market areas is dominated by men who do not respond to the demands of women for credit programs and safe and clean markets in which to trade. The credit program is being designed with not only the goal of raising incomes for the very poor class of marketers, but to increase their knowledge of their rights under the law and to provide avenues with which to pursue these with positive outcomes.⁸⁰ This pilot project, in my opinion, will necessarily run up against opposition from local government officials whose livelihoods are determined by the payoffs they receive from marketers. However, this may bring to the fore a key constraint on women's ability to organize themselves and to demand changes to the way markets are administered: their lack of knowledge in how to organize themselves into an advocacy group, their inability to think about the future due to grinding poverty, and the threatening political environment that pervades markets whose administrators and security forces are loyal and in the pay of the ruling political party. The political sensitivity of this pilot project was made clear to Asia Program officers who were followed after they had approached poor women marketers to discuss their needs and to assess the deplorable conditions in which they worked.⁸¹

The nature and focus of other bilateral and multilateral support for women's organizations

Author's interview with Sin Kim Sean, Program Officer, Asia Foundation, 19 October 1998, Phnom Penh.

Ibid.

has differed from that of USAID funding in that it has been in safer areas of health, education and rural development. For example, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) has initiated a national program in women's reproductive rights, birth control and birth spacing with the Ministry of Health and several women's NGOs active in this sector; development assistance for women in agriculture and rice production is carried out by UNDP and the Cambodia Area Rehabilitation and Regeneration Project (CARERE); children's health and rights are provided core support by UNICEF; and the related issues of prostitution, AIDS, and trafficking of women and children is funded by Forum Syd. Oxfam Great Britain is in the process of incorporating gender components into each of its programs but its outreach to women's organizations is limited and constrained by the limited development of its new programming. Beyond these major funders, the financing of women's organizations is largely done through embassy funds of Australia, Canada, France on a project basis.

Sources of Tension and Cooperation

The complex nature of relationships between Western feminists and their Cambodian colleagues who come from different intellectual traditions and cultural worlds have sparked inevitable tensions and misunderstandings. Cambodian and Western women pointed out this issue was problematic in the early 1990s when local NGOs were heavily dependent on foreign advisors and consultants and each side experienced frustrations in attempting to reach the goal of local self-administration. Said one long-term foreign representative of a bilateral program: "It was only after a year of coming here to the office every day and talking to the staff that I realized that they didn't have a clue as to what I was talking about. They would nod and smile when I talked so I assumed they understood about the feminist issues and concepts I was using, but in reality there was very little comprehension about these, and so I realized that I had to find out their perceptions and then fit these to my own understandings instead. It's been a good learning process."⁸²

Author's interview with Rosanna Barbero, Overseas Service Bureau of Australia, a long-term consultant with the Cambodian Women's Development Agency, October 23 1998, Phnom Penh.

Not all Western advisors are so frank, however, or make the commitment of time necessary to understand the Cambodian cultural context. What this example brings to light is the wide gap in perceptions and understandings between Third World and Western feminists working in Cambodia on the one hand, who have had the benefit of decades of debate and experience to inform their views, and Cambodian women who have been cut off from the world for the last thirty years and who have not yet intellectually digested the diverse feminisms that have made global impacts and which continue to evolve.

It is my judgment that foreign advisors, whether Western or from other Asian countries, are often viewed by their local counterparts as being superior for their higher education, social status and position in the NGO community. Local Cambodians therefore place themselves in a socially inferior position as befitting the Cambodian social hierarchy of personal inter-relationships which exists between all members of society. The notion of equality is not an indigenous concept, or at least, is understood differently in the Cambodian cultural context from a European and Western one. For this reason, there is built-in to most foreign-Cambodian relationships an inherently unequal status, which can have the appearance and dynamics of neo-colonialism if these issues are not acknowledged and dealt with in building the relationships between Cambodian and non-Cambodian advisors, mentors, and funders. This is a subject which is rarely discussed openly, however, and should be on the agenda of NGO discourse more generally.

Tension arising from cultural clashes and misunderstandings between international and local women who work together is also not frequently talked about except in confidence, and rarely as an item for public debate. A main frustration among Cambodian women's activists is the lack of firsthand cultural awareness and understanding that international NGO representatives have when they first arrive in-country so that many months are spent by each side trying to communicate about issues that neither side may be understanding clearly. And with people coming in for a year here and there, instead of long-term commitments, indigenous NGOs need to be selective in forming their partnerships. There are very few NGO workers who have committed themselves to learning the Khmer

language in spite of being in-country for years. Their world is lived apart from indigenous NGOs after office hours, and the clubs, restaurants and bars in Phnom Penh are patronized by members of the international community and not by Cambodians. This is a sensitive issue and one that indigenous NGOs hesitate to comment on critically as they are financially dependent upon the international community but also increasingly resentful of the income gap that exists between local and foreigners who work together. The postmodern concerns of inequality, racism and neo-colonialism that have come to the fore in countries such as India, the Philippines and Thailand in their review of relationships with Western feminists has not come of age in Cambodia. This too, will eventually come through a growing self-awareness and confidence and experience with the larger world of gender-related intellectual debates and activist networks. At this stage, women's organizations in Cambodia are just coming into their own sense of self-awareness and have not yet the vision or capacity to reach beyond local worlds in order to establish relationships with regional and international networks of women's organizations. Sponsorship of Cambodian women's attendance at international conferences is still arranged by foreign donors. However, with growing awareness and knowledge, women's organizations may be able to design their own learning agendas separately from the foreign donors once they make their own connections with regional and global networks of other indigenous women's NGOs.

The situation of economic dependency also creates conditions for areas of tension to emerge between indigenous women's organizations and local branches of NGOs and PVOs. None of two dozen women's organization activists we met with felt comfortable addressing this issue, and assured us that their programs were of their own design and that they did not feel compelled to follow donor agendas. In part this is because women's organizations today are much less dependent on foreigners for their day-to-day administration than they were at the beginning of the 1990s. Budgeting and research design is still guided by foreign consultants for the most part, however.

What several women's organizations representatives did discuss, however, was the need to

continue to build skills and confidence among their staff so that their programs and overall objectives reflect their own voices, and emerge out of the particular needs and understandings of the Cambodian context, even when this means sacrificing funding at times.⁸³

Another concern raised was in continuing with programming which is not readily supported by the government. In this regard, women's organization representatives expressed some concern that when they did face obstacles in implementing programs from local authorities, they needed public and vocal support from international agencies to overcome them.

It has not yet been the case that women's organizations have been left out of the funding loop as a result of competition among themselves for international assistance. However, this could happen in the near future when the organizational capacities and programmatic outcomes of the past years are assessed by donors. Moreover, in the next decade, Cambodia is less likely to receive generous international assistance it was provided with in the 1990s due to the Asian economic crisis and to overall donor-fatigue with a Cambodian government whose repeated breakdowns and reversions to political violence make the country less attractive than other more needy countries in the Third World.

Interviews with the WMC, CWDA, Association of Nuns and Laywomen, October, Phnom Penh.

Chapter 5

Lessons Learned

Programmatic and policy lessons that can be drawn from assistance to women's organizations need to be made within a consultative environment with NGOs themselves and should include a means to make recommendations in a confidential and anonymous manner. This will be a difficult step to accomplish as the knowledge gap between the funders and NGOs is still enormous and will take years to bridge for dialogue based on equality to take place.

One of the most pressing policy considerations I foresee in Cambodia will be in the political arena. There has already been several instances of political backlash from government authorities attuned to the potential radicalization of women in politics and in society and transformation of gender roles that threatens traditional sources of male power and authoritarian power structures. Non-governmental organizations are the major building blocks of civil society in Cambodia and women's organizations are emerging as having the potential to be the most outspoken and pro-active of this sector because of their organizational sophistication, programmatic impacts on social relations within families, kin groups, and local officials and community members in matters of economic development, health issues, prostitution and HIV concerns, and political participation. No other NGOs have the capacity to initiate such far-reaching social change that is linked to political development. As long as women's organizations were operating as limited and marginal NGOs, they were not noticed by the government or targeted for censure. However, they are emerging as being important in the NGO sector and challenging the male-based authoritarian power structures that have kept women in subservient positions within Cambodian society.

What will be USAID's response to NGOs it has supported over the years who will inevitably face repressive measures by government officials and ministries who view their projects as politically threatening? This is a question that came to the fore

during the acute political crisis of August and September 1998 whereby opposition political parties organized pro-democracy demonstrations which were not only supported by vast numbers of ordinary Cambodians but also by people who have been working in the NGO community, and who as educated and informed voters, provided moral support to the movement. Cambodian NGOs including those of women's organizations, have however, been extremely careful not to back any one political party, and did not publicly participate in the pro-democracy demonstrations of August 1998. Doing so would have risked arrest, imprisonment and the closure of office.

Many Khmer and international NGO workers complain of the government's reluctance to take gender issues seriously at a time when Cambodian society is undergoing rapid change, much of it considered negative for women. Such views represent a recent trend in Cambodia whereby women are formulating views that are not consistent with state objectives. How these contending views will play out in the future remains to be seen. However USAID should be prepared for a time when NGOs may be faced with having their offices closed down, their directors and staff threatened, and their activities curtailed if they are perceived to be proceeding too quickly with democratization drives which the government does not support.

In conclusion, the following points may be useful in improving the capacity and future growth of women's organizations:

- * Provide advisors and mentors to help indigenous organizations articulate and translate concepts into concrete proposals.
- * Acknowledge and take measures to address the patron-client management style that frustrates interactive and consensual working relationships and retains power in the position of director who may or may not be competent.
- * Incorporate sponsorship programs for Cambodian women in middle and upper level

positions to study in short-term or semester-based academic programs in Asian, European and North American universities that will help bridge the gap between activists and academics and provide education necessary for Cambodians to take senior positions in international agencies, and in bilateral and multilateral programs.

- * Support mechanisms required to help negotiate difficult and tense relationships with government ministries or government officials.

- * Support regional linkages among women's organizations with similar program objectives through sponsorship of conference attendance and via internet and email communications.

- * Assist the outreach of urban-based women's organizations to rural areas by funding the establishment of local branch offices in provincial offices.

Appendix A

List of Women's Organizations in Cambodia

(correct as of Dec 1998)

1. Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia (**ANLWC**)
Wat Onalom, Phnom Penh
Ms. Chan Sobunvy, Secretary General, mobile tel:015-913 307
2. Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (**CWCC**)
#21, Street 282, PO Box 2421, Phnom Penh
Ms. Oung Chanthol, Director, Tel 720723 **Email cwccct@forum.org.kh**
3. Cambodian Women's Development Agency (**CWDA**)
No. 19, Street 242, Khan 7 Makara, Phnom Penh
Fax/phone (85523) 367 173, mobile: 015 917-679
Ms. Kien Serey Phal, President. **Email: cwda@bigpond.com.kh**
4. Cambodian Women's League for Development (**CWLD**)
No. 93, Street 141, Sangkat Vealvong, Khan 7 Makara, Phnom Penh
Ms. Sam Monkia, Director
5. Cambodian Women's League for Human Rights and Development (**CWLHRD**)
No. 22, Street 178, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh
Ms. Em Sovannary, President
6. **Indradevi**
No 23 E1, Street 184,
Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh
Ms. Dy Ratha, President
7. **Khemera**
Wat Ottaravatei, Mittapheap
District of Russei Keo
PO Box 1250, Phnom Penh
Tel/Fax 023-360 134
Ms. Korm Chanthan, Director
8. Khmer Women's Voice Centre (**KWVC**)
No. 22, Street 29, Tonle Bassac, Chamcar Mon
PO Box 590, Phnom Penh
Tel: (855 23) 721032; **email: seametr@forum.org.kh**
Ms. Koy Veth, Director

9. Human Rights and Community Outreach Projects (**OUTREACH**)
No. 17, Street 213, Veal Vong, 7 Makara
Phnom Penh
Tel: 015-913 503
Mr. Srey Chan Phallara, President
10. Project Against Domestic Violence (**PADV**)
No. 23, Street 278, Sangkat Keng Kong 1, Khan Chamcar Mon
PO Box 2459; Tel(855 23) 721 654 Email: **padvc@pactok.peg.apc.org**
Ms. Sar Samen, Executive Director
11. Women for Prosperity (**WFP**)
No. 19 Street 163, Khan 7 Makara, Phnom Penh
Tel: 015 916-304
Ms. Nanda Pok, President
12. Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMCC)
No. 64, Street 111, Phnom Penh
Tel:(85523) 364 882; **Email: wmc@pactok.peg.apc.org**

Provincial Women's NGOs

1. Aphiwat Strey (Women's Development)
258 Street 3, Kompong Kraber Village, Svay Por Commune, Battambang
province
Tong Tavrin c/o Oxfam UK
2. Association for the Disabled Soldiers, Widows and Orphans
Road 13, Oreussey 1 Village, Oreussey commune, Kratie district, Kratie province
c/o Medicine Sans Frontieres
Yim Lang Hun
3. Association Lumiere des Femmes Rurals
62-1583 Mithapheap Khmer Laos Prek Eng commune, Kien Svay, Kandal
province
San Simoan, tel: 361 053
4. Cambodian Association for Assistance to Families and Widows
Banteay Meanchey Provincial Town
Sour Y Yong
5. Help the Widows
Prek Ta Chrouk village, Prek Kory commune, Saang district, Kandal province
Suan Sareth, tel: c/o Cooperative Committee of Cambodia, Phnom Penh

6. **Kratie Women's Welfare Association**
Sre Sadaovillage, Oreussey commune, Kratie district, Kratie province
Yos Thy, c/o PACT

7. **Women's Service Organization**
KongNoy village, Kong Noy Commune, Kandal province
SreySokhon, tel 018-815 462

Appendix B

Women's Organizations Briefs

The following briefs cover four organizations which were chosen because they represent a broad spectrum of women's activism in religious, social, political and media affairs. The first two organizations profiled do not receive USAID and the last two do receive USAID.

Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia **Wat Onalom, Phnom Penh**

Ms. Chan Sobunvy, Secretary General, mobile tel: 015-913 307

The Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia (ANLWC) was formed in 1995 by Chan Sobunvy with over 100 a hundred nuns and other women representing 15 provinces. The inspiration for the association came from the sacred position that Buddhism has in Cambodia as the "soul of the nation", representing one pillar of the nation's motto Nation, Religion, King. The war years had a devastating impact on Buddhism as many monks and nuns were defrocked, temples destroyed, used as sites of killings by the murderous Khmer Rouge, and Cambodian people were denied the freedom to practice religious rites and ceremonies. The dearth of learned Buddhist scholars, and the limited ability of the state to provide funds for rebuilding of temples and schools for novice monks led to concern by ANLWC that Buddhism has still not recovered its central place in Khmer culture. Moreover, during the tenuous recovery of Buddhism, the position of nuns and laywomen has been largely neglected by Buddhist monks. Nuns are tasked with domestic chores in the temple compounds where they live, and cook, clean and care for the monks. Their religious knowledge and crucial role of intermediaries between lay people and the monks has been unrecognized and under-utilized.

The ANLWC was formed in order to restore the spiritual and religious authority to nuns that they once had in pre-war Cambodia and to initiate reform within Buddhist temples so that monks recognize the important role that nuns can and should play within the community as religious authorities, as advocates of social justice, and as spiritual mentors to a traumatized nation.

The main activities of the ANLWC revolve around the teaching of the Buddhist Dhamma or spiritual teachings of the Buddha to nuns in member temples across the country. To date, 5,000 nuns belong to the association and have participated in Dhamma training and education. This training is the foundation of knowledge that nuns require to realize their self-worth. It is also anticipated that religious education for nuns will give birth to a new generation of nuns who can become advocates for gender reform within the male Buddhist hierarchy.

The ANLWC believes that nuns and laywomen can be active participants in the process of building civil society and democratization in Cambodia. As Chan Sobun stated, "poverty of knowledge leads to poverty of culture and this in turn leads to oppression". The ANLWC has been active in the process of reconciling the Khmer Rouge remnant troops to Cambodian society. For example, in 1997, the Khmer Rouge invited the ANLWC to come to their base at Malai in Western Cambodia so that nuns could teach soldiers about the concept of human rights and its connection to Buddhism. And during the pro-democracy demonstrations of August and September 1998, nuns and laywomen within the ANLWC supported actions by Buddhist monks who staged demonstrations by preparing placards and making food for demonstrators. The price they paid was high, however, as police stormed temples and accused nuns and monks of being "enemies of the government". However, the ANLWC remains committed to the principle of nuns and monks as active participants in the democratization process.

In addition to workshops on Buddhist teachings, human rights and democracy, the ANLWC plans to open social service centres in the provinces for the elderly, for ill people, and those whose family members are not able to provide for them. The social centres will train nuns in the use of traditional medicines and funding is to be sought within each community.

The annual budget of the ANLWC is \$30,000 per year, a fraction of most NGO budgets. This is because the nuns themselves raise money within their communities to pay for their

activities and training, thus involving villagers and lay people in the process of strengthening and redefining Buddhism, and empowering women.

Cambodian Women's Development Agency (CWDA)
No. 19, Street 242, Khan 7 Makara, Phnom Penh
Fax/phone (855 23) 367 173, mobile: 015 917-679
Ms. Kien Serey Phal, President. Email: cwda@bigpond.com.kh

The Cambodian Women's Development Agency, a feminist NGO, grew out of the dissolution of the Phnom Penh Municipality Women's Association in 1993. The CWDA has a core staff of 24 women and over 300 volunteers who assist with the agency's projects country-wide.

The goal of the CWDA is to enhance the capacities of women in Cambodia's overall national development through the following programs:

- *promoting women's rights through lobby efforts in government, creating local venues and workshops for women's forums

- *HIV/AIDS awareness program involves conducting surveys among sex workers and providing education on hygiene, STDs and AIDS to sex workers based in brothels in Phnom Penh and in the provinces

- *Literacy programs for women have been established through the Agency office with the participation of 348 women who themselves decide on the schedules and the lesson plans. CWDA also works in cooperation with other NGOs in building literacy programs for women.

- *Child Care centers have been established in 20 locations with over 400 children to enable women to enroll in income-generation and literacy projects established by CWDA and/or other NGOs

- *Family Planning Outreach to rural communities where birth spacing and birth control are taught. Condoms and pills are provided to those who participate.

* Vocational Training to unemployed women and young women who have not finished secondary schooling. Courses include office skills, computers, accounting, typing in Khmer and English, and hospitality.

* Income Generation Program for 3500 poor widows in 25 communities, including loans to cover the cost of starting small businesses in raising cows, vegetable cultivation for marketers, silk weaving, and cow banks

In addition to these programs, the CWDA has pioneered research into the trafficking of prostitutes in cooperation with the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women. The project is based on participatory feminist research in several provinces whereby researchers and commercial sex workers collaborate on information collection and analysis. Further, the researchers are providing the information to the government and lobbying for measures to prevent trafficking from further escalating. The CWDA has also opened a refuge for victims of trafficking in Phnom Penh which can accommodate 20 women at one time. The agency is networking with other women's organizations such as the Khmer Women's Voice Centre, Khemara, the Women's Media Centre and the Project Against Domestic Violence to raise awareness and to collaborate on finding strategies to fight this problem in concert with the municipal government and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

International assistance to the CWDA comes from the Overseas Bureau of Australia and through project grants from the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and local embassies in Phnom Penh.

Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMCC)
No. 64, Street 111, Phnom Penh
Tel: (85523) 364 882; Email: wmc@pactok.peg.apc.org

The Women's Media Centre was established in 1995 as a politically neutral television and radio media organization which produces its own programs about women in politics, society and the economy from a gendered perspective. The goal of WMC is to transform gender stereotypes by encouraging women's participation in the media and to provide representations of women in positive and empowering roles. WMC also defines its role as developing the media with training, and lobbying for the participation of women in the mainstream industry. The WMC mission statement states: "As a result of war and continued political turmoil there are few women journalists in Cambodia. Public awareness of how social issues affect women is also very low. WMC was born from a movement to publicize these issues and to improve the participation and portrayal of women in the media."

The means to this goal is through the production of documentary and drama programs, short films, comedic shows, and news magazines that cover a wide range of topics in the areas of health, education, politics, and human rights. WMC broadcasts a weekly TV series about serious and controversial social issues that are relevant to women's lives which may range from the problem of trafficking of women and children, to the plight of single headed female households, to job stereotyping and discrimination in the work place.

WMC offers its services to NGOs, government and international agencies who wish to use visual media in their programming. Its all-women staff also organize workshops for women who wish to enter the field of media by providing training in use of film, video and radio equipment. Information workshops and conferences are also organized for the mainstream media so that journalists are made aware of gender stereotyping and become more sensitive in presenting news and social issues that include women's perspectives and non-negative stereotyping.

The WMC has a library of its several hundred radio and video productions which members

of the NGO community, government and international agencies can borrow for educational purposes.

Future planning includes an creating a television studio and television station where WMC and commissioned productions can be filmed and broadcast throughout the country. The rationale for the television studio comes from the difficulties WMC has encountered with the national and government controlled stations having politically sensitive material broadcast and in finding time slots that would reach the target audience.

Funding for WMC comes primarily from USAID and from a number of smaller project funds of local embassies such as the Canada Fund and international agencies.

Women for Prosperity (WFP)
No. 19 Street 163, Khan 7 Makara, Phnom Penh
Tel: 015 916-304
Ms. Nanda Pok, President

Women for Prosperity was established in 1994 by Nanda Pok, an American-Cambodian woman who returned to Cambodia to establish an NGO dedicated to the betterment of women. The brief of WFP is to "empower women in the exercise of their rights, on equal terms with men, through leadership and economic development." (WFP brochure 1998).

The WFP has developed two programs to achieve these objectives. The first is leadership training for women. In this program, women who are in positions of authority in government ministries, bureaucracies, political parties and non-governmental organizations are invited to training sessions for up to one week where they are taught about management, administration, interpersonal skills, self-presentation and assertiveness skills by staff members and by guest speakers from the government and business community.

The second program is "Women's Participation in Public Affairs". In this program, women who are interested in joining or leading political parties or becoming more active in political affairs are provided information and guidance in seeking their goals. In the run-up to the 1998 elections, USAID funded a major training project in which women from 10 provinces in local government, women in political parties, and women activists in NGOs participated in workshops and training sessions to provide them with skills in how to run for public office. They were taught about elections, campaign strategies, the role of the media in spreading their message to voters, and on general management skills. Women from different political parties participated in the training sessions and provided a venue to discuss the national importance of enhancing women's role in the political life thenation.

WFP is the only women's organization that specifically targets women in leadership positions at all levels of government and in the NGO community. It networks with other women's organizations, political parties and the Ministry of Women's Affairs in order to raise awareness of promoting women in all levels of government and encouraging

women to participate more equally as candidates for office.

Funding comes from USAID through the Asia Foundation.

Appendix C

List of Interviews

- 05/10 Ministry of Women's Affairs, Acting Minister--Ms. Im Run
Cambodian Women's Development Association--Ms. Kien Serey Phal
- 06/10 Women's Association of Cambodia--Ms. Youm Chhim, Director
Cambodia Women's Crisis Centre--Ms. Oung Chantal, Director
- 07/10 Women's Association of Cambodia--Ms. Chhim Paney, Librarian
Women's Media Centre--Ms. Chea Sundaeth, Director of Radio Program;
Ms. Som Khemra, Director of TV Program
- 09/10 Gender and Development Programme for Cambodia--Ros Sopheap and
Chhay Kim Sore, Trainers and Educators
Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ms. Chou Bun Eng, Inspector General
- 10/10 Meeting with Ms. Ung Vanna, for survey labor
- 12/10 National Archives, Mr. Peter Arfanis, Archivist
- 13/10 Amara Women's NGO, Committee for Free and Fair Elections Board
Member, Ms. Yok Khoan
CARE International NGO, Ms. Suan Champu, Project Manager, Girl's Education
Assistance Project
Mr. Bob McGlaughlin, Education Advisor, CARE International
- 14/10 UNDP/CARE (Cambodia Area and Rehabilitation and Regeneration
Project), Mr. Joel Charny, Deputy Programme Manager
Cambodian Women's Development Agency, Ms. Rosanna Barbero, Advisor
- 16/10 Women for Prosperity, Ms. Nanda Pok, Director
- 19/10 Asia Foundation, Ms. Sin Kim Sean, Program Officer, Women's Economic
and Legal Rights Program
Ms. Moul Samneang, Program Officer for Women's Program
- 20/10 Oxfam Great Britain, Ms. Prok Vanny, Gender Specialist

- 21/10 UNICEF Library; Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV), Huot Thavory, Education Program Assistant
Cambodia Women's Development Association, Ms. PunPhanna, Staff Member
- 22/10 Women's Media Centre, Video Documentary Viewing;
Asia Foundation, Mr. Kim McQuay, Assistant Representative
- 23/10 Ministry of Planning, Report on Gender and Development
LICADO Human Rights NGO, Ms. Kek Galabru, Director
- 26/10 Women's and Nun's Association, Ms. Chan Sobunvy
- 27/10 Khemera
- 28/10 Ministry of Health, National Aids Office, Mr. Heng Sopheab, MD, Outreach Officer