

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN CAMBODIA

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By investigating the roles of Cambodian women in politics, explaining the barriers that confine women from joining politics, and analysing government policies, the paper wishes to contribute to the strengthening and promotion of women's participation in Cambodian politics.

This article aims to address the challenges that Cambodian women face in political participation by both reviewing the literature and interviewing women who actively engage in politics and leadership roles. It will explain how Khmer culture and traditions shape gender roles in Cambodia. In addition, the article will analyze the laws and policies that Cambodian government have implemented in order to promote women's participation in politics in Cambodia.

1. Introduction

1.1 Short Description of Cambodia

Cambodia has undergone a long history of civil war and the country was returned to the year of zero during Khmer rouge regime (1975-1979). About 1.7 million people were killed and died from starvation and diseases. After Vietnamese military left the country in 1989, the United Nations organized its first national election in 1993. Cambodia since then has opened as a democratic country with a free market economy and it has attracted foreign investments and aids. The country has been gradually developed. Cambodia is one of the least developed countries in South East Asia with the total population of about 15 million people, slightly more than half of which are women with the majority of people (around 85 percent) living in the countryside mostly working in agricultural sectors. The population growth rate is 1.8 percent and the GDP per capita is \$1,006.8 (World Bank, 2013).

1.2 What is women's participation in politics?

Before moving to a deep discussion about the challenges that Cambodian women face in political participation, let me define the meaning of women's participation in politics in this research context.

Women's participation in politics in the context of this research refers to the political participation among Cambodian women in the national levels: primarily female representation in the National Assembly; and female participation in local level of politics (Commune/Sangkat Council). The paper addresses the roles of Cambodian women in society and their positions in politics. Young Cambodian women represent 33 percent of the country's youth population, i.e., those aged from 15 to 30 years (Youth Resources Development Program, 2012). However, very few females in the population are interested in politics. Mehrvar (2013) conducted a case study on young women's political representation and participation in local governance in Cambodia and found there were three types of responses among young female participants to question on the understanding of the word "politics". First, young women aged from 14 to 18 had no clue about the word "politics" and nothing was brought to their mind. This was due to the lack of awareness and limited interests and knowledge in politics. Second, older participants (20-35 years) who are garment factory workers or those who have higher level of education thought "politics" involved discussions about law, resources, the national minimum wage, employment, land and services. Third, the word "politics" was considered as related to money, power, particular groups (men), control, lies, corruption, and special interests. Young Cambodian women have a broad mistrust of politics, thinking that political parties do not address their interests and that they are powerless in relation to the political system (Mehrvar, 2013). Cambodian women often think that politics is not their

jobs but it is a man's job. These women have been living on the margins of the political sphere and are not given enough opportunities to fully contribute to politics and decision-making. The culture puts women into a lower status than men and they are confined with household responsibilities. Women are considered as in the shadows behind successful men. Moreover, the research will address the barriers that block Cambodian women from political participation. The study will also explain whether Khmer tradition still plays a role in discouraging women from political participation. Some suggest that young women in Cambodia are not entirely disconnected from political activities in their community but there is a narrow conception of politics and also a negative image. Women are sometimes reluctant to perceive their actions and engagement with their community as political activity (Mehrvar, 2013). This study also analyzes government policies used to promote women in politics. The research aims to discuss how much government and the ministry of women affairs can implement their policies or mechanisms on female empowerment with regard to political participation. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has publicly committed to increasing female representation at all levels of government in a number of documents, including the Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency, the National Strategic Development Plan and the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs). CMDGs set a target of 25 percent of women's representative at the Commune/Sangkat Council level and 30 percent of female representatives in the National Assembly and Senate by 2015 (CCHR, 2013). However, the level of women's representation at both the local and national levels remains low due to the lack of the implementation of government policies and the negative perspectives regarding women's abilities in leadership roles. By investigating the roles of Cambodian women in politics, explaining the barriers that confine women from joining politics, and analyzing government policies, the paper aims at contributing to the strengthening and promotion of women's participation in politics.

Having explained the meaning of women's participation in politics in the context of the research and short description about the situation of Cambodian women to play in political roles, let me examine the challenges that Cambodian women face when they participate in politics.

2. Challenges in Women's Participation in Politics

Women are elected in order to meet government quota; however, in practice, they are only figureheads and lacking real power. It is common, during elections, for political parties to list female candidates towards the bottom of the ballot to ensure that they are not elected to positions with power (Cambodia CEDAW NGO's Shadow report, 2013). Women remain underrepresented at all levels of political and public life as well as in the foreign and diplomatic service. There is a concern because the number of women represented in the National Assembly decreased after the elections in July 2013 (Concluding Observation, 2013). This is as a result of a lack of commitment on

the part of political decision makers at the national level in establishing an adequate legal framework or plan of action for promoting gender political empowerment and participation (COMFREL, 2011).

In addition there is a gender imbalance between, on the one hand, individual rights and freedoms and, on the other hand, individual rights and state power. Cambodia faces a cultural imbalance between men and women. Most Cambodian politicians are men and there are fewer opportunities for women in the political fields. Part of this problem is a result of the conservative traditional norms within Khmer culture that place a lower value on women than men in all sectors of society. Moreover, poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, lack of encouragement and opportunity, and the absence of a specific policy on promoting and providing opportunities to women, are obstacles for women who want to participate in politics and social activities (COMFREL 2011). Low levels of education amongst Cambodian women have been attributed to the lack of female representation in politics; women feel they do not have the skills, qualifications or experience to stand as candidates, represent their country and make decisions. A qualitative analysis conducted by Seithi (2013) finds that lower level of education results in the lack of self-confidence amongst women. Around 30 percent of Cambodian women have reached undergraduate level but they are not able to use their capacity to engage in public office due to the strong prejudice and stereotype (Seithi 2013). There is a mindset that politics is a man's role. Some people think that politics is not safe and thus women should not get involved. "Women and Politics" is also included in my gender studies course. I often asked my students "Do you think politics is dangerous to women?" Not surprisingly about 95 percent of my students raise their hands thinking that politics was very dangerous. The perceived danger was not just for women as politics was considered very dangerous for both men and women. This creates pressure on young women who are interested in politics.

Another problem is politicians doubting women's capability. Male politicians do not respect women (Seithi, 2013). They look down on women's capacity both in terms of education and qualification. Women are considered physically and emotionally weaker than men. Additionally, the stereotyping of women's roles within the home is deeply rooted in Cambodian society.

Cambodian Women's family roles: Cambodia, along with many other nations, is a country where men and their activities are valued more than women and their tasks. Family is focused on a strong bond between a husband and a wife, who each has links with siblings outside the marital relationship. However, the strongest enduring relationship found in village social organization is that between parents and children. This means women's roles as mothers are paramount, although their status also depends on how they behave as wives and sisters. The primary roles of wives and mothers demonstrate the importance of marriage and parenthood in Cambodian society (Surtees, 2003). Traditionally, Cambodian women are tasked with the care of the children and responsibility for the

household, including its economic survival, and ultimately with ensuring the success of their husbands (Surtees, 2003). Women gain social respect and prestige from the status of being good mothers and 'well-behaved' wives. This contrasts highly with the position of men. Family responsibilities make it hard for women to participate in politics; many Cambodian women are faced with a 'double burden' as they spend time on income-generating activities, as well as caring for other family members and completing household duties (Seithi, 2013). Such a conception of the woman's role in the family represents an obstacle for women wanting to actively engage in politics because they are always attached to and responsible for children in the family.

Husband's Control: Cambodian culture features male dominance. For example, the 2005 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey shows that 45 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, "It is better to educate a son than a daughter;" 42 percent of respondents also agreed with, "A married women should not be allowed to work outside the home even if she wants to;" and 53 percent agreed that, "The important decisions in the family should be made by the men of the family" (National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ORC Macro 2006; cited in Eng et al. 2009, p.238). Cambodian culture and gender inequality have placed women in a subordinate position; this is also a major risk factor for violence against women and discrimination against women.

HE Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister for Women's Affairs has addressed some challenges in promotion and advancement of women status during her presentation to the Government Congress May 30-June 01, 2008. Those challenges include "(a) The changing of the social attitudes and behavior is a long-term process that needs strong commitment and support, (b) National and international financial resources are needed to implement existing and future gender mainstreaming policies and programs, (c) National Capacity at all level in MoWA, line ministries and related institutions for gender analysis, research and evidence based advocacy is still limited, and (d) The coordination and communication with other line ministries and institutions for the effective implementation of gender mechanism and policies are still limited" (MoWA, 2008, p. 18).

After I have identified the issues that Cambodian women face in political participation, now let me introduce the international law, national laws, and policies that Cambodian government has implemented in order to promote women's participation in politics.

3. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Discrimination against women violates the equality of rights and respects for human dignity and is an obstacle to the participation of women on equal terms with men in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 which aims to eliminate any forms of discrimination against women and thereby promote women's rights. Discrimination against women is defined in Article 1 of CEDAW as referring to "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other fields". In order to promote women's rights and women's equal access to food, health, education, employment and justice and to ensure the equal rights of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, Cambodia ratified CEDAW in 1992. Accordingly, Cambodia has agreed to implement its provisions.

Article 2 of CEDAW addresses policy measures. The article illustrates that the state parties have the responsibility to create laws and policies in order to stop any forms of discrimination against women.

Article 4 of CEDAW addresses temporary special measures. The measures aim to accelerate the equality between men and women and the temporary special measures shall not be considered as discrimination against men.

Article 5 of CEDAW addresses sex role stereotyping and prejudice. The states parties shall eliminate any forms of social and cultural patterns that create the idea of inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or of the stereotyped roles for men and women.

Article 7 of CEDAW addresses political and public life. Women have equal rights to participate in politics and public life hence states parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in politics and public life.

Article 8 of CEDAW addresses that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations".

It is clear from these articles that Cambodia has accepted a number of obligations aimed at securing equality of women at all levels of society. More especially, Cambodia has agreed to take positive measures, in law and policy, to promote the rights of women. This can even mean, in terms of Article 4, adopting temporary special measures to promote women above men until such time as parity is achieved.

4. Cambodian Constitution

The Cambodian Constitution also reflects a commitment to equality between men and women and a desire to encourage the equal participation of women in politics. Cambodian

Constitution's Article 31 provides "Every Khmer citizen shall be equal before the law, enjoying the same rights, freedom and fulfilling the same obligations regardless of race, color, sex, language, religious, belief, political tendency, birth origin, social status, wealth, or other status" (Rights and Freedom).

Cambodian Constitution Article 35 stipulates that "Khmer citizens of either sex shall be given the right to participate actively in the political, economic, social and cultural life of nation" (Political equality).

5. Government Policies

In order to move forward with CEDAW and the equality requirements of the Constitution, the Royal Government of Cambodia has undertaken a number of measures. The government established the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs in 1993, which was replaced by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in January 1996, then the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs from 1999 to 2004 (MoWA 2004). When the new government was formed in July 2004, the Ministry again became the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). In February 1999, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Veterans' Affairs published its first Five Year Strategy Plan, Neary Rattanak (Women are Precious Gems). Neary Rattanak was aimed at creating "a new image of Cambodian women, moving from disadvantaged group to the nations' invaluable asset and one with great social and economic potential" (MoWA, 2004).

Neary Rattanak II (2004-2008) was focused on "Enhanced participation of women in economic development especially in micro and small enterprises, based on the principle of equitable distribution of economic resources including water, energy, land and information; right to legal protection to enable women to avoid domestic violence, trafficking, rape and all other forms of violence; women and girls' rights to health care to address serious problems such as maternal and infant mortality, nutritional issues and HIV/AIDS; women's and girls' rights to education, literacy and skills training; and substantive participation of women at all levels in the institutions of governance." In order to promote Cambodian women in decision making, Neary Rattanak II set a goal to "develop the skills and confidence of women to make a greater contribution to decision making at all levels of governance."

Table 1: Action Plan on Women in decision-making

Focus	Activities	Outputs, Targets & Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women in public service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of training in leadership and management, and other relevant skills Work with Secretariat for Public Function and CAR to advocate for gender responsive recruitment and promotion policies and procedures Advocate with political parties and Ministry of Interior to increase the number of women governors, deputy governors, district and village chiefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women public servants skills in leadership, management and policy making Increased proportion of women civil servants and promotion to higher levels of decision making Increased proportion of female Secretaries of State to 15% by 2010 (CDMG) Increased proportion of female under Secretaries of State to 17% by 2010 (CDMG) Increased proportion of female governors to 6% by 2010 (CDMG) Female deputy governors to 8% by 2010 (CDMG) Village chiefs to 15% by 2010 (CDMG)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women in Commune Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of prospective women candidates for 2007 commune election Advocacy with political parties Cooperate in training programs of new women members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of women elected in 2007 elections to 15% by 2010 (CDMG) Women are two of the first five candidates on the party lists Women members understand their roles and responsibilities and have skills to carry their work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women in National Parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of prospective women candidates for 2008 national election Advocacy with political parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of women elected in 2008 elections to 24% (CDMG) (NPRS) Women are one of the first three candidates on the party lists

Source: Neary Rattanak II (2004-2008)

The Ministry of Women's Affairs has achieved a great change of women's contribution to decision-making at all levels of governance. According to Table 1, overall there is an increase in number of female representatives in the National Assembly of roughly 13 percent between 1993 and 2003. However, the increasing rate of female representation from 13 percent to about 3 percent from year 2003 (19.51 percent) to 2008 (21 percent). Even though the percentage of women in the National Assembly has steadily increased

over the mandate, which is a positive sign, there is still a concern regarding the under-representation of women in the National Assembly. Cambodia has not yet achieved gender equality in political empowerment regarding elected officials. About 53 percent of eligible voters are female but female representatives make up only 21 percent of the Fourth Mandate (2008-2013). “According to UNDP’s Human Development Index 2009, Cambodia has one of the lowest ratings of gender empowerment in Asia: a gender development index of 0.588 and gender empowerment index of 0.427. This ranks Cambodia at 91st, with the worst ranked at 109th” (COMFREL, 2011).

Disappointingly, during the national elections 2013, the number of female representation decreased about 1 percent between 2008 (21 percent) and 2013 (20.32 percent). This is concerning as Cambodia may not be able to reach CDMGs, which target 30 percent female representation in the National Assembly by 2015.

Table 2: Number of seats held by women in the commune/Sangkat elections

Mandate/Year	Councils of Communes			Chief of Communes	
	Total	Women		Total	Women
2002	11,216	1,056	(9.4%)	1621	42 (2.6%)
2007	11,353	1,717	(15.5%)	1621	67 (4.1%)
2012	11,459	2,038	(17.78%)	1633	69 (4.2%)

Source: National Election Committee

There have been improvements in women’s political representation in commune/Sangkat councils. Overall, there is an increase in number of female councilors by 8 percent between the elections year 2002 (9.4 percent) and 2012 (17.78 percent). There is also a steady rise of female chiefs of the communes from 2.6 percent in 2002 to 4.1 percent in 2005. However, while these figures support the notion that women’s representation is increasing and are encouraging, levels of representation remain a far cry from the CMDG5 targets to which the RGC has committed itself. For instance, as only 17.78 percent of commune/Sangkat council seats went to women in 2012, it will not be possible to achieve the 25 percent of CMDG target by 2015. Women that are elected representatives are consistently being elected to relatively junior positions. During the commune/sangkat council elections in June 2012, 1,590 women received Member seats but 164 were elected to the position of Second Deputy, 189 to the position of First Deputy, and only 95 to the most senior seat of Commune Chief (CCHR 2013).

These figures show that Cambodia still faces challenges in reaching CMDGs, which projects that by 2015 women will hold 30 percent of the positions at the national level and 25 percent at the Commune/Sangkat level.

6. Quota Policies

Quota policies are globally considered as an effective way to increase female representation in politics. They are also acceptable in terms of international law through Article 4 of CEDAW quoted above. Quota policies have been adopted in more than 100 countries and their adoption has resulted in the increase in number of female representation, with an average of 22 percent in contrast to the countries that do not implement quota policies with only 13 percent female representation (Seithi, 2013). RGC supports women in politics but does not set quota policies because RGC considers that it can be a form of discrimination against men. While this is arguably correct, such discrimination is justifiable under Article 4 of CEDAW, as long as it is temporary and necessary to secure the goal of equal representation, or even just increase representation of women.

In order to make the paper more practical, I decided to conduct interview with four women who are actively engaged in politics and leadership roles. The research has been conducted following the mentoring from the Raoul Wallenberg Institute. After finishing the initiative human rights research training in Thalat, Laos in February 2014, the research outline was finalized.

A mixed research approach has been selected for the study including desk review and in-depth interviews. For the research, I conducted literature review from journals, textbooks, government's policies and national action plans used to promote women's participation in politics. To make the study more practical, four women who actively engage in Cambodian politics, leadership role, and human rights defending were interviewed. I conducted in-depth interview with the minister from the Cambodian ministry of women affairs for approximately 90 minutes. The interview was conducted in Khmer language and recorded with a Smartphone recorder. The minister signed on the consent form and permitted the whole interview to be recorded and the minister agreed to be quoted as the minister of women affairs. The interview with the minister started with her personal experience as a woman who actively engages in Cambodian politics. This interview helped to analyze the women ministry's work regarding the implementation of human rights of women in political participation. Also, the interview looked at the barriers to and challenges facing Cambodian women in political participation. The second participant of the research was a human rights defender from LICADHO. LICADHO is one of the main human rights organizations that aim to promote human rights in Cambodia. This interview was conducted in English and the participant has signed on the consent form and allowed the interview to be recorded. The participant agreed to be quoted as the human rights defender and the interview took about 90 minutes. Similar to the interview with the minister this interview looked at her personal experience in promoting human rights, analyzing women's roles, and discussing whether Cambodian tradition still plays a role confining women from joining politics. The other two women are the women leaders in the local level from Kampong Cham province. Attempts to secure interviews with two other women who played very active roles in empowering Cambodian women

in leadership and another female prominent politician from the opposition party were unsuccessful. Hence, this study was conducted with just four interviews. Since the study is based on a qualitative approach, with only four interviewees it cannot be used to generalize and applied to Cambodian society as a whole. However, the research can be utilized as a way to explain the reasons behind lower participation among Cambodian women in politics. It is thus still of considerable academic value.

To begin with, let me introduce the personal background of the four women whom I interviewed based on their narratives.

7. Background of Women in Decision Making

The research finds that women who hold positions in higher level of politics and decision making mostly come from a well-off and supportive family and have high education. For example, the Human Rights Defender (HRD) is a highly educated woman whose mother was the first female member elected in Cambodian parliamentary election during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community). The HRD is a physician. She said her family fully supported her. The HRD and her family have helped bringing Cambodia into the peace agreement after a long history of civil wars. Similarly, the Minister of Women's Affairs is also a highly educated person, though she never wished to be a politician at first. She is a doctor and has participated in politics in 1990s. She also claimed that her family supported her.

On the other hand, the two women leaders from the local level are not highly educated. Mrs. Chantha (pseudonym), the director of Women's Affairs Office in one of districts in Kampong Cham province, finished school in grade 9. She participated in politics and leadership roles in 1980s and her parents did not support her at the beginning of her career path. She decided to take leadership roles because she wanted to understand about women's roles, promote women, and help to manage the family and the society. At the beginning, she did not receive any salary; her family was very poor, and she almost gave up her job. Her parents did not want her to work because they thought a woman like her should just stay at home and do farming. Interestingly, other people saw her differently. The villagers thought she looked cool and it was good to have a female leader. Her male counterparts, on the other hand, discriminated her. They think women cannot walk around the kitchen (Khmer proverb meaning women are supposed to take care of housework and they are not supposed to work outside) and cannot work like the men. She faces many challenges in her career. Her office did not have budget to help poor rural women. Mrs. Chantha mentioned that during the commune/council election, men only put their male team on the top of the list while women are put in the bottom list. Hence, there is less likely for women to be elected as the chief of the commune.

Similarly, Mrs. Maly (pseudonym) is currently the chief of one of communes in Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham and she finished school in grade 9. Mrs. Maly became

the member of commune council in 2002 and participated in the commune work by helping women who were the victims of violence, elderly, orphans, and raised money from NGOs to support poor people. She said she never wished to be a politician or hold a high position in the higher position. She participated in the commune work because she wanted to learn and work. She saw people who worked in the offices dressed up nicely, while a pork seller like her was poorly dressed up. She was elected to be the chief of the commune in 2007 but she refused to take the position due to the lack of self-confidence. She then was elected again in 2012 and decided to take the role because other people including provincial governors persuaded her to take the position. Villagers love her and want her to be their chief of the commune. The officials from her party told her that if she did not take the position, her party would lose trust and vote from the people. Mrs. Maly mentioned that she faced many challenges but she worked hard to solve them. She mentioned that there was much work that she had to take care of after she became the chief of the commune. Her husband supports her but he is sick very often so she is both the chief of the commune and the leader of the family. She has to wake up at 3 am almost everyday to take care of her family business and children before she can go to work. Because she is married with children, it is very hard for her to go far away from home. For example, she was once invited to join a meeting in the Philippines but she declined the invitation because of her family. Interestingly, she mentioned that she was not discriminated by her male counterparts. The male team supports her and she always discusses and seeks for advice from her team and the former chief of the commune. However, she is discriminated by her female leaders. She mentioned that those female leaders were jealous of her because many villagers loved and supported her. Those female leaders were afraid that Mrs. Maly would take their positions in the future as she did a lot of good work for her commune. She raised money to support the poor villagers and even built the road for the village.

8. Women's Participation in Politics

There is still gender inequality in political participation in Cambodia. Even though there is decrease in discrimination against women in politics, gender stereotype still confines women's ability to fully engage in politics. Responding to a question of Cambodian women's situation in politics, the HRD pointed out that in the past there were very few women who were interested in politics. She returned to Cambodia from France in 1989 and established LICADHO organization. At that time she wanted to have half female and half male staff working in LICADHO. She tried to convince women to work with her but they rejected her request. Those women said no because they had to stay at home and look after their children. The HRD said it was very difficult at that time because women only wanted to stay at home. She believed that Women Codes of Conducts (Chbab Srey) was the main obstacle for women. The HRD continued that older grandmothers or mothers or older sisters often told their younger female relatives not to go for higher education or enter politics. There was a stereotype that politics was the men's job. There was progress of women's participation in politics from 1993 to 2013.

9. Progress and Change

The HRD appreciated the progress of Cambodian women's participation in politics even though she noted it changed very slowly. She recalled that during her first visit in Cambodia women were very reluctant to talk about politics and did not want to get involved. She stated that the Prime Minister has appointed one female deputy governor in each province and district. Also, there is an increase in women representation at the commune level. However, the HRD would like to see half female and half male governors in the 25 provinces and cities, not just female deputy governors. Cambodia has only one female deputy prime minister and recently it was announced that she would retire.

According to the HRD, it is very important for Cambodian women to join politics. About 52 percent of the population is female and if Cambodia uses all the economic forces [both men and women go to work], the country will develop tremendously. When women have higher education, good jobs, and independent financial resources, they tend to have fewer problems at home, she claimed. The country is developing because of the population. She expressed concern over reliance on foreign aid and continued that if all women could work they could share the men's work and help grow the economics of Cambodia. She disagreed that it is only women who have to take care of the family and questioned why women work more than men. In her opinion, it is not fair to the women when men take all the higher positions in the country and women just stay at home.

"If a woman can take care of her family...she can take care of her community...her country the same way as her family...I see no obstacle that why women can or cannot participate in the development of the country..." said the HRD.

When she was asked about her opinion regarding quota policies, she explained that the policy was not a discrimination against men. Quota policy is considered as temporary special measures in terms of CEDAW and that is not discrimination in favor of women. More than 100 countries adopt quota policy and it is internationally accepted as a special measure. The special measure is just temporary and it shall be eliminated after it reaches equality. The HRD teases that failure to adopt quotas is because the government does not understand the convention.

"Government said they didn't want to set quota because they didn't have enough quality female candidates or not enough high education women...I said that was just an excuse...I asked do you think all male candidates have high education? ...they didn't answer to me...it's because men only trust men...It's the lack of political wills," said the HRD. She also mentions that if we look at those elected male candidates' background, some of them do not have higher level education at all. When the government said they did not have enough qualified female candidates that were just an excuse. The lack of political will from government is the main problem. She believes that more advocacies have to be done in order to push them [government] in political women empowerment.

10. Contradicting Points of View between the Government and Civil Society

It is very interesting to find that there is a contradiction in opinion between the minister of women affairs and the human rights defender. The minister claims that the lack of education, financial resources, and family support are the main problems behind lower participation of Cambodian women in politics. She said when men undertook political campaigns, they received more financial support from both family and others. The minister did not say anything about the lack of political will on the part of the government. She explained that the government did not set quota because sometimes government did not have enough qualified female candidates and it was wrong and unfair to men in the office. According to the minister, the government uses “Special Measures” instead of quota policy. The Special Measures aim to empower women such as appointing one female deputy in each province or district. The minister also pointed that women did not have confidence in themselves when it came to politics. There are not many women who are interested in politics and those women who are interested in politics often do not receive much support or trust from female followers. She said that the female followers often vote for male candidates rather than for the female candidates. The minister also stated that it is very difficult to empower women in politics due to the lack of trust from others. Hence, women have to work a lot harder to show that they are qualified to engage in politics. The minister also mentioned that family responsibility is another challenge. When men participate in politics, women will look after the family and children. However, when women participate in politics, there will be a question as to who will be responsible for the family? The minister does not really see tradition as the main problem, but she thinks that tradition is partially involved in lower participation of women in politics.

11. Conclusion

The research finds that there is an increase in number of female representatives in politics over the years 1993-2013. The Government has ratified CEDAW and set up CDMGs and Neary Rattanak Strategic Plans in order to promote women’s participation in politics. According to the minister of women’s affairs, the lack of education, financial support, family support, and tradition are the reasons behind lower women’s participation in politics. The Human Rights Defender accepts that women code of conducts, family, and lack of qualified female candidates are challenges but to her they are really excuses. Government has established CMDGs and many good national action plans, but failed to implement them fully. The lack of political will and the lack of concrete implementation of CEDAW, CDMGs, laws, and strategic plans are thus the major reasons behind lower participation of women in politics in Cambodia.

The study finds that there are some civil organizations, which are working to promote women in leadership and public services. For example, Women for Prosperity—WFP

that was founded by Nanda Pok—has provided leadership training to women so that they are qualified to hold political office. The organization provides “(a) Training potential female candidates, and organizing female debates for the 2003 general election, (b) Media campaign to promote female candidates, and free, fair, transparent, and non-violent elections, (c) UNIFEM-sponsored Peace for Prosperity, a program that promotes nonviolence, voter education, and the participation of women in the government through work with politicians, voters, and the media”. This research also identified the Harpswell Foundation Dormitory and Leadership Training Center that has a mission to promote and nurture the younger female generation towards becoming leaders. The organization was founded by Dr. Alan Lightman in 2006. It provides free room and board for young female university students who have high potential and ambition to become female leaders in the future. The organization provides leadership training, critical thinking skills, debating skills focusing on politics and economics, advocacy skills, freedom of expression and opportunities for young women to empower themselves to become leaders.

More of younger females in today's generation are interested in political participation. According to my observation, the social network opportunities (particularly Facebook) have provided broader discussion of politics in Cambodia. Moreover, female garment factory workers are more daring to speak their opinion and protest demanding more salary increases. Additionally, there are many female villagers who are victimized by land grabbing and come out and express their views asking for respect for their land ownership. The fact reveals a greater change among Cambodian women's participation in politics and social affairs. Cambodian women are not really trapped in household responsibilities or traditions anymore; many women understand about their rights and roles in the society. Therefore, I expect there is a positive change and progress among the young female generation in expressing their voice and taking part in politics.

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