

About the Forums

Working groups: All Decentralization Forums, including this Forum on Decentralization and Gender are designed to create an environment conducive to the creation of working groups by participating organizations. Working groups that are created from the Forum are autonomous and do not necessarily reflect the views of all Forum participants.

Particulars: The Forum is held in Phnom Penh two times per year. Invitations are sent to participants to inform them about the theme, date, time and location of the Forum. Each Forum lasts one day with up to 200 people attending.

Organizers: The Decentralization Forums are organized by the Decentralization Forum Working Group. Working Group members for this Forum come from: the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, Pact Cambodia, GTZ, Partnership for Local Governance/Seila Program, Unicef, Ockenden International, VBNK, CONCERN, CIDSE, Gender and Development (GAD), Women for Prosperity (WFP), Banteay Srei, Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID), Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), Kamara, Khmer Youth Association (KYA) and Seila/Danida. All interested organizations are welcome to join the Decentralization Forum Working Group for future forums.

What's Next?

The National Forum on **Decentralization and Good Governance** will be held in early 2006. Please contact Pact Cambodia (vanthen@pactcambodia.org or 012 992 338) for more information.

Supported By



For more information about the Decentralization Forum please contact:

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The National Forum on Decentralization and Gender

1 September 2005

Summary Report



National Forum on Decentralization and Gender

Introduction

On 1 September 2005, the Decentralization Forum Working Group held its third National Forum on Decentralization. This forum focused on issues of gender in the context of decentralization and aimed to promote dialogue and cooperation among relevant stakeholders. 275 individuals (168 women) attended from Commune Councils, local and international NGOs, CBOs, government, donors, the private sector, the media, and academia.



Forum Events

Opening speeches by HE Ms. Khim Chamroeun, Secretary of State of MoWA, Ms. Pok Nanda, Executive Director of Women for Prosperity, and Ms. Ung Yok Khoan, Executive Director of AMARA on gender issues in the context of Cambodia's decentralization & deconcentration (D&D) reform process.

Panel discussion with a male and female Commune Councilor, a representative from a community-based organization (CBO), and a Women and Children's Focal Point (WCFP).

Twelve small groups discussions on key issues and challenges in mainstreaming gender in the context of D&D reform: citizen participation, political participation, planning and service-delivery, local governance, income generation and women and children's focal points.

Video presentation by UNICEF depicting the experiences of Women and Children's Focal Points.

Closing remarks by Kurt MacLeod, Pact Cambodia, HE Ms. Khim Chamroeun, and HE Mr. Kung Hunthearith, Secretary of State of Ministry of Interior.



Group Discussion Findings

Progress made and obstacles encountered in promoting gender equality in the D&D reform process

Political will to promote gender: Political parties have promoted women's participation in Commune Councils by including women on candidate lists. Families and communities have provided moral support to women standing for election and acting as Councilors. National and international NGOs have provided resources, capacity building, and other programs to promote gender mainstreaming. Some Councilors have demonstrated an understanding of gender issues by addressing women's needs in the Commune Investment Plan and by taking steps to reduce domestic violence.

Cultural barriers: Because of a cultural preference to invest in the education of male children, many women lack the self-confidence, skills, and education necessary to run for and secure a Council seat. Those who are elected are not shown equal respect by male councilors. For these reasons, women Councilors are often excluded from the decision making process.

Stereotyping the role of women in Commune Councils and committees: Most Women and Children's Focal Points are female community volunteers, and not elected councilors. Thus, they are often excluded from Council activities. In many cases, Councils perceive WCFPs as wholly responsible for addressing the needs of women and children and expect them to implement projects singlehandedly. In addition, there is currently no mandatory financial resource allocation for WCFP activities.

Role of Commune Councils and the electorate: There is a lack of understanding among citizens of the role and responsibilities of Commune Councils and their obligations to citizens. Civic participation by both women and men is low.

Recommendations to further promote gender equality in the D&D reform process

Political parties should develop clear policies and strategies, such as putting women's names at the top of each party list, that will increase women's representation in Commune Councils from the currently low 8.7%.

Families and communities should motivate women to run for office and support candidates and elected women by helping to share household and childcare responsibilities.

Women should organize themselves to promote female candidates and encourage women's voting and actively participate in Council meetings to advocate for women's issues.

National and international organizations should:

- ♦ work to build the capacity of women at the local level, both potential and elected Councilors, in communication and presentation, planning, proposal writing, community mobilization, and project management skills;
- ♦ provide additional training to all Councilors on gender issues, including methodologies to encourage women's participation in Commune Council activities as well as ways to mainstream women's issues;
- ♦ consider direct support to projects that cooperate with Commune Councils to address women's issues at the local level and consider providing capacity building and financial support to WCFPs, which would enable them to implement projects;
- ♦ consider organizing local level forums on decentralization and gender.

Commune/Sangkat Councils should:

- ♦ advocate for gender policy reform within their party to promote higher representation of women on Commune Councils in the future;
- ♦ run an awareness raising and support campaign to encourage women to stand for the next election and promote candidates once identified;
- ♦ allocate funds to WCFPs for projects that address women's needs;
- ♦ integrate a gender-related agenda item into each monthly Council meeting;
- ♦ consider establishing a working group that ensures gender mainstreaming in Council activities;
- ♦ make an effort to mainstream gender into the Commune Investment Plan and/or develop proposals for external funding that support gender-related projects; and
- ♦ undertake public education activities to raise awareness about the Councils' roles and responsibilities.

District and provincial authorities should practice gender mainstreaming in their own activities and encourage the incorporation of gender-related projects in Commune Investment Plans.

Donors should ensure that there is a gender mainstreaming component in all their investments/programs and a focus on addressing social development issues of specific interest to women when allocating funding.

Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Women's Affairs should work together to:

- ♦ develop a systematic capacity building program for WCFPs and female Councilors;
- ♦ strengthen women's networks within and between communes; and
- ♦ mobilize funds to support Council projects focused on women's needs.

The Government should:

- ♦ increase the salary of Commune/Sangkat Councilors to enable them to dedicate full attention to addressing needs at the local level;
- ♦ provide financial incentives to Women and Children's Focal Points; and
- ♦ incorporate a quota into the election law.