



**Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-ninth session**

**National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and  
accountability, catalysts for change**

**PANEL DISCUSSION**

**by**

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\*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

We propose to approach this theme from the **perspective of strengthening the enabling environment for gender equality: institutions, partnerships, and policies to stimulate demand and supply for gender responsive good governance**. In Cambodia this framework structures our strategy for gender equality, where the overarching thematic programme is *Good Governance*, including promoting women's participation in politics and decision-making at all levels, and mainstreaming gender at the highest level through key national reforms such as sub-national democratic development, public administration reform, judicial reform and public financial management. Successful integration of gender equality measures at the reform level should in principal create an enabling environment and pave the way for successful mainstreaming at the sectoral level.

The overall role of **national mechanisms in advocacy and awareness raising and women's participation and leadership** is to strengthen the enabling environment for gender equality. This requires addressing both the supply and demand sides for gender-responsive good governance.

First of all what do we mean by '**gender-responsive good governance**'? In Cambodia we interpret this as the key mechanism through which we will achieve gender equality. This has several elements including:

- ✚ Engendering the policy cycle across government (from sector strategies, reform programmes, cross cutting policy issues): from the situation analysis, developing the policies and programmes, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and most importantly learning from the M&E results to ensure the next cycle builds on success and addresses emerging gender issues in the sector.
- ✚ Creating a critical mass of women in leadership in decision-making across government at all levels (not only in the Ministry of Women's Affairs, or in "social sectors", or at the lowest levels)
- ✚ Creating a critical mass of gender responsive male and female policy makers and government advisors, who will be in a position to take forward the "gender agenda" in their respective domains.

On the **supply side** the national machinery needs to be able to provide technical, analytical and advisory support to gender mainstreaming by identifying the evidence and key analytical findings to support gender responsive policy recommendations in all key sectors of development. We also need to be able to develop capacity of our counterparts across government, other line Ministries, sub-national authorities, to analyze their own strategic plans from a gender perspective, using our evidence based policy recommendations for gender mainstreaming as key input.

With respect to increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making we need to ensure that the "supply" of existing and potential women leaders and managers have access to the necessary education, training and professional and political opportunities that lead to higher levels of decision-making roles. These future women leaders will also contribute to creating political space and shaping the enabling environment by bringing a gender agenda to their respective mandates.

On the **demand side**, we need to raise awareness at several levels to stimulate demand for "gender responsive good governance". Gender advocates within government (the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the rest of the national machinery) need to be able to effectively articulate the specific changes they would like to see at the policy level using advocacy instruments such as evidence based gender policy advice, targeting policymakers and advisors in key sectors. Women parliamentarians can also be instrumental in taking forward the voice of the female electorate by ensuring gender equality is enshrined in the legal framework. If half of the potential voting citizens start to see real changes in their

lives as a result of having more gender responsive women leaders then this creates widespread democratic demand for increasing the number of women in decision-making positions.

Gender advocates within Civil Society Organizations at the national and sub national level play an important role in promoting accountability through dialogue for policy development and dialogue with parliamentarians, as well as raising awareness at the community level, among men and women citizens, about the gender issues and the role that government should play in promoting gender equality. This can feed into a gender responsive social accountability framework which allows communities, and women in particular, to understand their rights and government obligations to deliver gender responsive social and legal protection and services.

**Institutions, Partnerships, and Policies** are the key instruments for enhancing the enabling environment through this supply and demand model. The Ministry of Women's Affairs works within each of these domains to implement the Royal Government of Cambodia's strategy for gender equality. Cambodia has well established institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming at the national and sub-national level, within Government, the Development Community and Civil Society.

### **National Gender Institutions and Frameworks**

**The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and the Cambodian National Council for Women (CNCW)** are the national machinery for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Cambodia. MoWA acts as a catalyst and advocate to encourage public institutions, civil society and the private sector to integrate gender equality into their policies and programs, and as a coordinator and facilitator for gender mainstreaming across government. It is responsible for monitoring and evaluating policies and programs to assess their contribution to achieving the Government's goals in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. MoWA's role is to promote social accountability for women, as well as the provision of high-level strategic policy advisory services for mainstreaming gender equality across government.

CNCW is a high level inter-ministerial mechanism, whose members include Secretaries of State from all key line ministries and government agencies. The CNCW is mandated to "assist the Royal Government to coordinate, follow up and evaluate the implementation of national policies, laws, orders and measures relating to the promotion of status, roles and social welfare of Cambodian women". It is also responsible for following up on the implementation of international conventions in relation to women's rights, providing recommendations to the RGC and compiling national periodic reports on CEDAW implementation. CNCW is led by Her Majesty the Queen as the Honorary Chair, the Prime Minister of Cambodia as the Honorary Deputy Chair, the Minister of Women's Affairs as the Executive Chair, and representatives from relevant ministries as members.

MoWA and CNCW collaborate on developing innovative ways, implementation modalities and partnerships to promote women into elected, appointed and recruited offices, such as strategic alliances with the other sectors, e.g. civil society, legislative (both houses), executive, judiciary, private sector, civil service (not only decision makers, but also service providing professionals); legislating quotas/targets and affirmative action, lobbying male gatekeepers/leaders, collaborating with male leaders who demonstrate a commitment to increased gender equality; establishing women leaders networks and support groups, civil society network and alliance, legal literacy, campaign financing, etc.

### **Partnership and gender mainstreaming mechanisms in line ministries and institutions**

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has established a system of Technical Working Groups for each key sector or thematic programme. The TWG Gender (TWG-G) is chaired by the Minister of Women's Affairs with UNDP and JICA as co-facilitators. Members of the TWG-G include representatives from 31 government agencies, 14 development partners and 15 civil society organizations. The TWG-G is a forum to facilitate dialogue amongst the RGC, development partners and civil society in regard to the formulation of gender-related policies, laws and strategies, for harmonization and aid-effectiveness. For better results, the TWG-G formed sub-working groups to coordinate the implementation of three thematic programs: on Gender-Based Violence (chaired by MoWA and co-chaired by Germany-GIZ and UN Women); on Women's Economic Empowerment (chaired by MoWA and co-chaired by JICA and UNDP); and on Gender and Good Governance, which is in process of being established.

The TWG-G has also formed Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups (GMAGs) in line ministries to support mainstreaming gender in their respective sectors. They are led by a Chair at the Secretary of State or Under Secretary of State level, Vice Chair at Director General or Deputy Director General level, and include members from all line departments. Their role is to ensure gender is mainstreamed in the Line Ministry's Policies, Strategies and Programmes, and to promote women's status within their agency.

Through GMAGs, 24 out of 29 government ministries have developed and implemented Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (GMAPs) by sector. 23 GMAPs received government budget for their implementation, including capacity development and the organization of important gender events within their agencies. At the sub-national level, some ministries and agencies have established gender working groups in their departments and provide training on gender.

MoWA's advocacy work with line ministries to integrate gender in their sectors is through active participation in sectoral TWGs as well as Capacity Development support to GMAGs.

### **Government Reform Programmes**

MoWA is an active member of the following national governance reform programmes: Deconcentration and Decentralisation, Public Administration Reform, Public Financial Reform, Climate Change and Green Growth. As such MoWA plays the role of technical advisor to the reform committees, through provision of evidence, gender analysis of relevant policies and reform programmes, and advocacy for mainstreaming gender across the reform agenda.

This is one area where affirmative action has proven successful in other countries to break through the barriers and prejudices, and build up a critical mass of women leaders and decision makers. Both the SNDD and PAR reform programmes provide nationwide and high level entry points for addressing this imbalance, and GMAGs have made use of their GMAPs to promote increases in women in decision-making in their LMs. CSOs have been very active in this area by providing leadership training and platforms for public debate to women candidates, and organising networks of women leaders.

MoWA can supplement the demand policy side with additional supporting measures to increase the quality and quantity of the supply side such as technical, leadership and management capacity development support for women candidates and civil servants, women in leadership fora and support networks, and promoting women's access to higher education. This should complement and not substitute for ensuring that women participate equally in regular civil service capacity development programmes and opportunities. MoWA works with the sub national level mechanisms, the Consultative

Committees for Women and Children, at commune, district and provincial levels, which represent the voice of communities to their respective committees.

MoWA also plans to support the recently formed Women Parliamentarians' Caucus, for women in parliament to communicate with each other and organisations in civil society, and promote the application of gender lens to decisions taken by all parliamentary committees, and to collaborate with the Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia (PIC) to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment perspectives into their CD work with members of parliament.

### **Civil Society**

In Cambodia, there are a number of civil society organisations (CSOs) that promote gender and development objectives; 15 of these are members of the TWG-G, and some have formed strategic committees to address specific issues including:

The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW) is a coalition of 72 local organizations working to improve the condition of women. NGO-CEDAW focuses on the implementation of CEDAW in Cambodia. Its work also includes research, advocacy, awareness raising, capacity building, and information exchange between its members.

The Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP) is a network of 12 NGOs aiming to increase women's participation in political decision-making at all levels. Its key strategic priorities include effective and collective networking, capacity development, gender-responsive policies and encouraging young women's leadership.

### **National gender policies and plans**

Gender equality is recognised as a priority in the Government's Rectangular Strategy, and is mainstreamed throughout the National Strategic Development Plan.

The Cambodia Gender Assessments are key reports undertaken by the Ministry of Women's Affairs over the past decade (2004, 2008, and 2014) in order to inform on the status of women in Cambodia and provide a comprehensive overview of gender in all sectors. These reports and their development processes have served as good evidence-based consultative approach for policy making.

The Neary Rattanak is the five-year overarching policy to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Cambodia and to guide efforts for gender mainstreaming across Government. The current Fourth National Strategic Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2014-2018), Neary Rattanak IV, emphasizes developing capacity for gender equality across government, with MoWA taking the lead in coordination, technical advisory services, advocacy and oversight. This requires MoWA to reach out across government and focus on upstream policy analysis and formulation, through monitoring, planning and budgeting, programming and reporting.

MoWA is also developing a National Policy for Gender Equality which will enshrine the overall goals, objectives and responsibilities for mainstreaming gender across government in policies at the highest level.

Each TWG develops a set of Joint Monitoring Indicators (JMIs), these are policy or institutional reform level indicators that all stakeholders must approve and ultimately be accountable for. The TWG/G has set

JMIs related to the approval of the National Gender Policy, effective implementation of national plans related to economic empowerment and violence against women, and achieving the CMDGs on increasing women's participation in decision-making in the public sector.

**International commitments** play an important role in shaping the demand side for good governance:

The RGC signed on to the Beijing Platform for Action for the Promotion of the Status of Women (BPfA) and has produced progress reports since 1995. With respect to the roles and functions of national machineries for gender equality and the advancement of women, MoWA has taken on board the BPfA's recommended four key factors to successful functioning:

- + A high profile in and support of the government;
- + A comprehensive system enabling active support and participation of a broad and diverse range of other institutional actors for the promotion of the status of women, including legislative bodies, academic and research institutions, professional associations, trade unions, local community groups, women-focused NGOs, media, religious groups, youth organizations and the private sector;
- + Sufficient allocation of financial and human resources;
- + Opportunities for women to participate in all decision-making processes in the government.

As mentioned above, the RGC has localized and engendered the MDGs, and in that process created new and innovative targets and indicators for gender equality including the first (globally) indicators and targets on reducing gender based violence. In the process of formulating the CMDGs, all the 12 areas of concern in the BPfA were integrated into CMDGs, including 6 targets on eliminating gender disparities in public institutions. Going forward in the post-2015 development context, Cambodia recognizes that a stand-alone goal on gender equality is needed as part of the Sustainable Development Goals that will set global development priorities and be localized in a national context.

RGC is committed to the effective application of CEDAW, and in particular the recent concluding observations, by integrating the basic principles and recommendations into its national policies, plans and legal standards. Following publication and dissemination of the Cambodian-language version of the Convention, the government and NGOs conducted a series of training courses to improve understanding of CEDAW among public servants and citizens. The RGC has submitted CEDAW reports, the most recent reports being the Fourth and Fifth report submitted in 2010, and received *Concluding observations* in 2013 that outline specific measures and recommendations for achieving CEDAW objectives, including several related to increasing women's status in politics and decision-making.

As a member state of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Cambodia successfully completed its mandate as a Chair country of ASEAN in 2012. A series of high-level talks were hosted by Cambodia, which included gender related issues. ASEAN has adopted a number of documents and work plans pertaining to the promotion of gender equality and the protection of women's human rights.

All of these international instruments represent high profile global platforms for advocacy and awareness raising around promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres, and the global indices (GDI, GII, GGGI) hold up a mirror to reflect national level progress indicators and enhance mutual accountability between the state citizens and to the rest of the global community.