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EVALUATION REPORT 2019

Executive summary

Cambodia

Women into Politics! Greater Female Participation
in Cambodia

Background

Cambodia has one of the youngest populations in Southeast Asia, but the young people there, in particular women, are underrepresented in the country's political sphere and the media. This is due to factors such as a lack of knowledge on elections, low levels of education and insufficient encouragement and opportunities for women and youths to engage in democratic processes. Furthermore, restrictions on independent media, the dissolution of the main political opposition party and various defamation cases against critics weakened freedom of expression, access to information and political plurality in the country during the project period (2016-2018).

Funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Women into Politics!" aimed to increase women's participation in political processes, particularly during the 2017 Commune Council and 2018 National Assembly elections.

The project empowered women to become aware of the key role they can play in their country's development – as politicians, community leaders, as voters and engaged citizens. The three-year project took place in Siem Reap, Battambang and Kampong Thom provinces. The media products that came out of it reached the entire nation. Activities included training and coaching for female political candidates, public forums, media-based content on voting and democracy for young people, as well as increased reporting on issues relevant to women by WMC.

DW Akademie managed the project as its lead applicant, together with two local co-applicants, the NGO Banteay Srei (BtS) and the Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMC). The local partners were responsible for the community-based activities in Siem Reap and Battambang (BtS) and Kampong Thom (WMC). In addition, WMC produced all of the project's media components. Furthermore, two youth

groups, the Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC) and the Cambodian Volunteers for Society (CVS) received financial support to third parties (FSTP) to carry out community-based activities.

The evaluation took place during the final phase of the project from November 2018 to January 2019. Its aim was to assess lessons learned beyond the internal monitoring and evaluation process that was part of the project cycle. OECD-DAC criteria guided the evaluation, in addition to project-specific research questions derived from the logical framework. The DW Akademie rating system was used to assess whether the evaluation criteria were fulfilled. The evaluation was qualitative in nature, using focus group discussions and key informant interviews to complement the project's quantitative M&E data and end-line survey.

Project Evaluation Results

The relevance criterion was rated as "comprehensively fulfilled." The project was relevant to the needs of young people. It helped them access information on voting and democracy and encouraged them to make use of their right to freedom of expression, as well as to participate in democratic processes, even though the political system does not invite youth engagement. The project was also significant for women, as it empowered them to get involved in the male-dominated political arena and encouraged female leaders to push for the resolution of women's issues. It also created greater awareness overall of women's issues and female role models. The multimedia content created in the project enriched the digital media landscape and primarily reached audiences in cities, as they have better internet connections. At the same time, media content created for traditional media and the project's community-based outreach elements were designed to reach rural beneficiaries. The project achieved

a focus on political and media issues by incorporating female former opposition party members into its workshops in their roles as community leaders. This aim was also achieved by holding interactive media-based forums as an alternative to public forums, and by focusing media content on women's issues rather than on the national elections.

The effectiveness criterion was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Female political candidates became more confident in their communication and leadership skills. They applied these skills in public forums and community outreach events to win votes by identifying community issues and proposing solutions for them. Nonetheless, strengthening their social media skills was not useful to them as many did not use smartphones at that time. Of those female political candidates who participated in the project, 24.8% were elected in communal elections, although a num-

ber lost their positions after the government dissolved the main opposition party. Although the project initially had the government's support, all partners experienced close monitoring and administrative pressure from local authorities after the dissolution of the opposition party. This strained their organizations and discouraged beneficiaries from participating. As a result, instead of training female National Assembly candidates, the project further supported female leaders on a communal level. In addition, public forums were cancelled in Kampong Thom.

Political parties in target areas placed a greater focus on women's issues. Effectively, more women, especially those who took part in capacity building, became more actively involved in the structures of their party and were therefore able to identify, promote and address women's issues within the party. Furthermore, women in leadership roles in their community could raise their issues

to the attention of the parties at public forums.

Although women's knowledge of the electoral process mostly stayed the same or declined in the project's end-line survey, the increase in knowledge on voter registration opportunities was significant. Qualitative findings suggest young people learned more about their rights and the process of voting. This is significant because many young voters struggle to register correctly and therefore cannot vote.

The visibility criterion was rated as "comprehensively fulfilled." Strong visibility was achieved through project press releases, WMC's reporting, the closing event, a best-practice booklet, and through disseminating branded content nationally and regionally.

The efficiency criterion was "partially fulfilled." The project was efficient, as the partners implemented the activities within their existing structures with DW Akademie support. The project also maximized how activities and content were applied. Third-party youth partners were efficient, reaching thousands of young people and community members. Political tensions created some delays and changes to activities in the second half of the project, but the project team remained resilient and adaptive to the situation.

The impact criterion was rated as "overall fulfilled." Female politicians and community leaders were empowered with skills and confidence. They worked effectively to address problems and advocate for women's issues within local government. This had a positive impact on entire communities, especially in terms of often-neglected women's issues, such as domestic violence and health. As a result,

these women won the trust and further support of citizens (particularly women) and became role models to young women in their communities.

Young people applied their new knowledge about voting rights and elections and went to the polls. They became more interested and active in local governance and political processes, including attending public meetings and engaging with local authorities. This indicated a greater understanding of their role in political processes. It also showed that they were confident to break out of social norms that prevent them from engaging with those in positions of authority. This suggests that structures for dialogue and participation have been established that could persist into the future. The fact that young people share information peer-to-peer can be seen as an indirect impact of the project. It was particularly visible among those youths specifically trained in information sharing by third-party partners. Nevertheless, freedom of expression decreased overall after the dissolution of the main opposition party – especially on social media.

The project equipped women and young people with the information, skills and opportunities to demonstrate their value in democratic processes and community development. This contributed to a positive shift in the attitudes of men and male politicians. These changes and other gender interventions have led to long-term changes in the enabling environment. However, cultural barriers and discrimination toward female leaders and young women remain, highlighting the need to revise deep-rooted attitudes in the long-term.

While the project contributed to a greater awareness of women's issues through WMC's reporting, it was not able to im-

prove how the wider media landscape or civil society reported on women's issues. This was due to challenges with the dissemination network and difficulty influencing the wider media environment.

The sustainability criterion was rated as "overall fulfilled." Female leaders can continue solving problems in their communities in the future using the confidence and skills gained during the project and the trust they have built with their constituents. Young people will bring their newfound knowledge into their adult lives and continue participating in democratic processes. Nevertheless, they may need additional education on voting if they cannot retain this right after the latest election cycle. Young people trained by third-party youth partners are particularly well-equipped to share knowledge and were enthusiastic about using the experience and skills from the project in other development work. Female leaders as well as youth will continue to share their knowledge with others, in particular with female role model figures. This will empower the next generation of female leaders. However, female leaders need further support to improve their knowledge base and skill set, specifically in terms of engaging with higher levels of government and will thus need more consistent training.

The project produced a significant amount of content that can be adapted and used in the future, including information units, the best-practice booklet and training materials. These resources remain valid and useful, even if workshops and forums are unlikely to continue without additional projects by partner organizations, as they are cost intensive.

Lessons Learned

Empowering women to become leaders allows them to positively impact how women's issues are addressed by political parties and local governments.

Youth groups are effective and efficient partners in community-based activities, as they work with youth volunteers, who are approachable and accessible to other young people.

Providing an opportunity for women and young people to prove their value in political processes contributes to men and male politicians developing more positive attitudes toward them.

Female leaders and young people (especially those engaged as youth volunteers) can increase their long-term impact by sharing knowledge with others in their communities.

Online media content in particular is sustainable as it can be reused, adapted, and rebroadcast in the future.

Selected Recommendations

Assess the relevance of media skills training for female leaders based on their use of technology before organizing any workshops and skills training.

Hold training workshops and forums for female candidates earlier (more than six months before any elections) to have a greater impact on their campaigns.

If media products are created based on issues or topics raised by women, these women should be connected with this content after it is completed in order to allow them to take ownership over it.

Youth in Cambodia may need additional information on voting in the future if they are not able to retain this right after the current election cycle ends.

Further training and support are needed to strengthen the knowledge of female leaders in the project and empower them to engage with higher-level political actors.

Training for female politicians and leaders should take place consistently two or three times a year throughout a project's implementation period to be most effective.

Men will need specific training and engagement in terms of women's empowerment to bring about long-term attitude changes and gender equality.

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DW Akademie


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