

Women leading change

Experiences Promoting
Women's Empowerment,
Leadership, and Gender Justice



Case studies of five Asian organizations



Oxfam

Editorial

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List of organisations

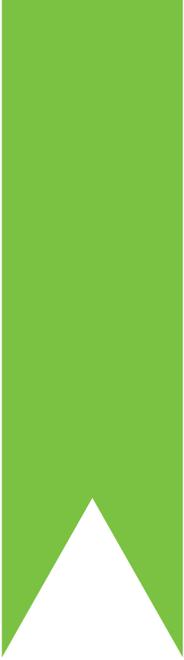
Agri-Aqua Development Coalition (AADC), the Philippines
Asosiasi Pendamping Perempuan Usaha Kecil (ASPPUK), Indonesia
Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP), Cambodia
Dairy Development Programme (DDP), Sri Lanka
Perkumpulan Sada Ahmo (PESADA), Indonesia

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Introduction

More than half of the world's population is made up of women, yet women are often still in positions of reduced power and their work inside and outside the home goes unrecognised. Oxfam International is investing time and resources in addressing this situation and in analysing good practice. It recognises that what it calls a 'transformative approach' is a long process made up of numerous small steps in which women set their own agendas. It also "recognises that support for a transformative approach to women's leadership is a key strategy for achieving gender justice"¹.

Oxfam argues that gender justice is not only about a more equitable position for women; it is about a more equitable society. "A transformative approach to women's leadership is rooted in the values of embracing diversity on the basis of age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and ability ..."² Oxfam's goal is that many more women gain control over their lives and live their lives free of all forms of violence. This can come about through changes in attitudes, ideas and beliefs about gender relations, and through increased levels of women's active engagement and critical leadership in institutions, decision-making and change processes.



A note about this publication

This introduction pulls together the key learning's from five of the six organisations in four countries. It features their experiences in design and implementation, their issues and challenges, their effectiveness in promoting women's empowerment and leadership. While each of the organisations operates in its own unique context and has its own approach, there are a number of common themes.

The introduction will first take a general look at the background in which women live, before moving on to what leadership means and how to achieve it by working with both women and men. Attention will be given to working within existing institutions and cultural norms, and creating new institutions. Finally, the paper will pull the approaches together in a section on lessons learned for Oxfam International and CSOs working with women to promote women's leadership.

Please note that this is not an Oxfam position paper. The views expressed in the five case studies are those of the individual organisations.

1 Oxfam International (Sept 2010) . "OI Statement on Oxfam's Support to a Transformative Approach to Women's Leadership", Oxfam International, 2008.
2 Idem.

Poor Women's Economic Leadership - PWEL

Oxfam's starting point for Poor Women's Economic Leadership is rights. Women have the right to participate equally and fully and enjoy equal control in the economy. Women's human rights are a key goal in and of themselves in compliance with international human rights agreements like the 1979 UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Oxfam's stand on PWEL is underpinned by a fundamental economic argument: gender inequality slows economic growth, and conversely, gender equality can increase the productivity of investments in agriculture and other livelihoods initiatives. Women are statistically the global majority. As the global majority, women's needs and interests must be as an integral part of any development policy as those of men.

Oxfam seeks the following changes

- Women having new or enhanced roles as skilled workers, managers or owners, with the skills and knowledge to analyse existing and new value chains, and access market services.
- Women earning a living wage or substantive income within reasonable working hours, with control over economic resources – assets, land, technology, finance and their own labour.
- Women being organised in relevant, effective economic organisations, for example with equal and strategic roles in trade unions, cooperatives or other producer and marketing associations.
- Women becoming members and significant decision-makers of local and national organisations engaged in formulating or influencing economic policy issues, or strategic decision-making roles in advocacy or campaigning initiatives to influence economic policies and practice.
- Women enjoying equal relations with men, including sharing of unpaid, caring work. Such work being recognised and valued.
- Removal of all forms of gender discrimination in economic development interventions, including financial services, training and capacity-building and other livelihood support, value chain development and local/regional economic development and policy decision-making.
- Establishment of a sustainable global grassroots-based movement for gender justice in institutional, local, national and international level economic decision-making.

In July 2009, Oxfam's East Asia Gender Justice Working Group (EA-GJWG) came together in Bali for the fifth time to learn and share experiences across the Oxfam country teams on approaches to women's leadership. Also at the gathering was a number of Oxfam partner organisations who could share experiences of practice. One of the gathering's focuses was political and economic empowerment of women, which are developed and promoted through two current Oxfam International frameworks: the Poor Women's Economics Leadership (PWEL) and Women's Empowerment,

Mainstreaming and Networking for gender Justice in Economic Development (WEMAN). These integrated frameworks strive to build women's power in markets and move it towards sustainable economic opportunities by explicitly addressing several dimensions of gender barriers in households and in markets.

Six organisations from four countries shared their experiences through presentations, interactive and participatory exercises, discussions in plenary and in small groups. The organisations and their individual focus were:

1. The Agri-Aqua Development Coalition (AADC) on the island of Mindanao in The Philippines which implements the PWEL approach;
2. The Dairy Development Programme (DDP) in Sri Lanka, which also implements the PWEL approach;
3. Perkumpulan Sada Ahmo (PESADA), which works on the islands of Sumatra and Nias in Indonesia building women's credit unions as a vehicle for political empowerment;
4. The Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP), the first network in Cambodia that empowers grassroots women through promoting political leadership; and two supportive frameworks
5. KAPAL PEREMPUAN in Indonesia that promotes the empowerment of poor women through feminist education; and
6. Asosiasi Pendamping Perempuan Usaha Kecil (ASPPUK), an Indonesian organisation working nation-wide to empower women at grassroots level through a micro business network.

1.1. Cultural and traditional barriers to women's empowerment and leadership

Across the four countries in the areas where the five organisations work, living in poverty is synonymous with social, political and economic exclusion. If you are poor, outside your home you often have limited or no voice, influence or decision making power and as a result little hope of betterment. And if you are a woman, you often do not even have these inside the home.

While women are often responsible for running a household and caring for the children and the elder members of the family, they are seldom in a position to make decisions in their own households. Their access to resources, assets, credit or cash is limited, and they rarely have any monetary resources of their own. So the greatest contradiction is that whilst women are expected to take responsibility over the household and family, they do not have the tools, such as decision making powers and or access to or control over resources, to actually carry out this responsibility.

Again in what seems like a contradiction, in all of the five case study areas, women were actually working and bringing in an income. They were rearing chickens, growing

vegetables, selling cows' milk and doing other small scale activities to bring in a regular source of income. But these are all home based activities and as such were not recognised as income generation and the women were not paid for their labour. Women thus find themselves in a cycle: if they are not permitted to take decisions or have their labour remunerated, they will not learn to do these and will remain dependent. Decision making and income generation remains in the hands of men who similarly do not learn other ways of organising a household. And so the cycle repeats itself with their children.

Disadvantage for women often starts at an early age. Looking at education for example, school may be out of reach for many people living in poverty, but for many girls and women it is unobtainable. In 2008 in Cambodia for example only 20 percent of women finished secondary school. While this is a significant improvement on the 1960s when only two percent finished secondary school, it still needs to increase further. The benefits to families and the wider society of educating women is well documented.



My mother and sisters would always discourage me from learning too much and made comments like 'girls do not need to study too much. Some day you will be married and become a housewife. Do not waste mother's money!

Aum Borany, trainer SILAKA, during interview

All the five CSOs see that inequality between women and men, both in the domestic and the public arena, lies at the heart of many problems. The CPWP case study states that '... the root cause of inequalities lies in households ... Husbands have a deep rooted belief that they are the heads of households and therefore the decision makers. There is still a strong belief that if a woman would be equal to a man he would no longer be respected and that is why men do not want to let go of power.' Disempowerment and marginalisation in all four settings starts at household level and goes all the way up through society to political level. Cultural values and traditions of course play a role in this as these 'mould' all individuals. Thus value is placed on men behaving as strong, decision makers, while value is placed on women behaving demurely, modestly and in a caring manner. Thus, AADC in the Philippines talks about overcoming the 'natural hesitancy' of women. However, a demure demeanour does not necessarily mean that women are not strong. As Batliwala points out, power is often 'hidden', where "... 'good women' – those dutifully carrying out the patriarchal agenda and protecting male privilege – often enjoy behind-the-scenes power to influence male decision makers, without any formal authority."³ By promoting women empowerment leadership this can be made visible, recognised and strengthened.

³ Batliwala, Srilatha (May 2010) "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud"; CREA-Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action, India.

1.2. Why promote women's leadership

Women's leadership goes beyond empowerment, though many would argue that women's empowerment is the first step towards leadership. While empowerment has to do with building an individual's or group's capacity, leadership is both concerned with the building of personal capacities and confidence, and with building the capacity to mobilise others. Promoting women's leadership has benefits far beyond the individual women themselves as women tend to plough back benefits into their families. Women who have access to resources, knowledge and decision making have a major positive impact on their families and communities and even beyond. Development can only take place if women have a voice and the resources to make a difference to their own and their families' lives.

At the family level, PESADA in Sumatra (Indonesia) believes that development can only take place if women have a voice and the resources to make a difference to their own and their families' lives. This would trigger a ripple effect and their impact would be felt beyond their families to their communities, regions and even their country. However, PESADA had to be sensitive to the position of women in society, and it found that the best way to proceed was to engage in community development, using small scale economic activities as an entry point for promoting women's empowerment and to set up membership credit unions to help fund these activities.

Activities such as a poultry breeding project turned out to be a great success. Small scale crop growing activities followed which were primarily aimed at women. Over time, through group organising, the women learned not only the technical skills needed

to successfully carry out these activities, but also the skills to negotiate and sell their products. Similarly, they learned about rights in relation to engaging in community decision making processes regarding access to resources. They were able to further contribute to the household expenses, thereby improving the lives of their children and families. They gained confidence in the process and their influence at the household level and beyond gradually increased, to the extent that many women started taking on leadership positions in the credit unions.

Political representation is a human right. Society needs representation of women at the political level, and not only for the benefit of women. It creates a more equitable society where the interests of families, children and women are represented. Women who have access to learning, social capital and business capital are better equipped to participate in decision making processes and to lobby for women's interests in a political arena. This is the experience of CPWP in Cambodia whose mission is to foster equitable representation in the political landscape. Where women have entered politics, there has been a ripple effect as benefits flow out to the wider society.



Why are more women needed in politics?

- It is a way of breaking taboos and showing that women can handle politics.
- Politics covers all fields and issues faced by women.
- It projects women in decision making and leadership roles.
- Women in politics will bring about change.
- General empowerment is not enough, you need to go to the heart of the action.
- It is in everybody's interest, and not just in women's interest, to have a more balanced gender representation.

(CPWP, Cambodia)

1.3. Women's leadership: agents of change

Leadership means different things to different people, there are as many interpretations of leadership as there are people. For some, it means holding a powerful position in politics or in a company, but for others it is the ability to motivate family, friends and neighbours to do something. In a context where a large group of people has had little or no power at any level, leadership becomes highly meaningful. The basis of leadership is self-empowerment, strength from within, and an ability to motivate others. Leadership skills and techniques can be inherent, a natural talent, but it can also be learned.

Oxfam defines transformative leadership as: "A social change strategy which focuses on providing an enabling environment for the actualisation of the leadership potential of individuals; influencing others to bring about fundamental change and facilitating the empowerment of others ... it includes every act of leadership identified in all arenas, including the home, formal and informal milieus, among others."⁴

Leadership starts with oneself. From there it ripples outwards to the home, the community and beyond. ASPPUK in Indonesia starts building leadership at the individual level by working with women in micro-businesses. It encourages small scale business women to join forces to establish small groups, or 'PUK's, that often involve an element of micro credit. This idea gradually took off as, with training and mentoring, women became more successful in their businesses, gained confidence and some of them started to take over the running of their PUK themselves, allowing ASPPUK to step out. Once established, the PUKs start a financing plan to support its members and become self-sufficient.

⁴ Oxfam International (Sept 2010). "OI Statement on Oxfam's Support to a Transformative Approach to Women's Leadership", Oxfam International, 2008.

For DDP in Sri Lanka, working against a backdrop of recovery from decades of civil war and post tsunami devastation, women’s leadership means women grouping together to run dairy cooperatives to negotiate better prices for their products. It also means women encouraging other women to join and to keep the cooperatives going without the support of DDP. Having learned skills and gained confidence, women become valuable change agents. From a position of women selling their milk individually at low prices to large dairy companies, the cooperatives have grown to 80 percent women membership and 60 percent of management positions being held by women. From this, women leaders have emerged who represent the interests of milk producers, be they women or men. The dairy industry in the area where DDP works, Vavuniya, is largely seen as a success because of the women. What started as one women run dairy cooperative has grown to many cooperatives, largely as a result of women motivating other women. *“The successful women have become role models and are able to motivate women in other village bodies. Women gradually became accepted as entrepreneurs and leaders in the community. It was then a short step to attain key positions in the Federation of Cooperatives and in the Dairy Stakeholder Advisory Group.”*⁵



Before we used to be scared to speak to any officers, but we now have the confidence to negotiate with business officers and managers.

DDP, Sri Lanka. A member of the Komatha Cooperative Society

All the five organisations work with women as agents of change. The success of women as agents of change builds on the premise *“that every individual is a leader in different spheres of her/his life, and that one shifts between leading and following roles depending on the context (family, political, or civic sphere)”*⁶. From the individual level to the other end of the spectrum, CPWP in Cambodia and PESADA in Indonesia focus on women’s leadership in politics. The goals may be same as for ASPPUK and DDP – improved incomes for families, a stronger voice for women, services for families, improved representation across the board – but its approach is different. By stimulating the leadership qualities in women entering the political arena, CPWP enables women to be able to cope in what is thought to be a dirty and dangerous place and unsuitable for women. This dramatically breaks down gender taboos as the whole country can see that women can handle decision making and leadership roles.

5 DDP, Sri Lanka case study

6 Pittman, Alexandra (November 2010). ‘Making Women’s Leadership Explicit: a Learning Review’, an internal Oxfam International document.



What makes a good woman leader?

A good woman leader:

- is knowledgeable and clever
- is unbiased and represents her community's and other people's interests, not merely her own
- is able to take decisions and take good decisions
- has strong communication skills
- is able to solve problems
- is flexible, confident and has a positive attitude
- is neutral, respectful and brave
- is able to convince and motivate others
- is respected for her actions
- is able to address issues in an open forum
- is able to negotiate
- is willing to take risks
- is able to engage men and women
- is accepted in a leadership role by her community

This list is a combination of points by CPWP (Cambodia) and DDP (Sri Lanka)

PESADA in Indonesia uses 'power analysis' and a rights-based approach that puts critical thinking, meeting basic needs, and access to resources at the heart of empowerment and women's leadership. PESADA is guided by the premises that:

- power comes with access to resources and capital;
- power comes with understanding and critical awareness of equality between women and men;
- power comes with participation and rights;
- power comes with the right to control over yourself, your body, your thinking and the ability to exert that right;
- power comes with being together.

1.4. Promoting women's leadership means working with women and men

1.4.1. Working with women

People who have lived with a low status for generations, internalise their status and they themselves can reinforce the patterns that actually keep them there. Critical thinking and critical awareness is the first crucial step to change. This is a pattern that all five organisations have experienced in terms of their work with women. Once there

is awareness, the steps towards confidence building and ultimately to empowerment and leadership can be taken. But women first have to change their own perceptions of themselves, overcome their hesitancy and embrace opportunities.



Only when women see that they are being treated unfairly will they think about changing their situation and will become politically active.

ASPPUK, Indonesia

DDP in Sri Lanka found that the women it worked with initially found confidence in collective rather than individual activities. Cooperatives provide safety in numbers and mutual support among its members. As the women's confidence grows, they gain the trust and appreciation of their peers as well as their family and community members. As owners and managers of small businesses, women now contribute towards household income, and this has increased their decision making power in their households. This has been critical in increasing their confidence and self-reliance.

Outside the home, the first group of women gradually became accepted as entrepreneurs and leaders in the community. As mentioned above, it was then a short step to attain key positions in the Federation of Cooperatives and in the Dairy Stakeholder Advisory Group. These women became role models, they are motivating others and are paving the way for women to come. In themselves, cooperatives are useful in encouraging people to accept new ideas and increase bargaining power. The cooperative concept helped to change attitudes and beliefs, and women were able to gain social acceptance in their new roles.

DDP is not the only organisation to make the link between women's income earning capacity and their leadership capacities. At PESADA in Indonesia, the impact that access to resources can have on women's and families' lives eventually led to political education for rural women. Through the credit unions, training and education, the women started to see their situation differently. They became aware of their position in relation to men. PESADA noticed that once women start to become aware of their rights and they bring an income into the household, the balance between them and the men begins to change. Women start to gain 'power' in their household and with their extended family, they become more mobile, and gain freedom. They strive to find ways to access resources – not only financial resources, but also market and information – to invest in their businesses. The credit union quickly became an entry point for political empowerment, advocacy, awareness raising, and education for women on human rights and feminist issues.

The other side of the leadership coin as referred to by AADC in the Philippines is that stereotypes means that women taking on new roles have to be more successful than men as they are often judged more harshly than men. If they make mistakes or do not achieve their goals, there is a tendency for others to put this down to their gender rather than to factors such as lack of experience or support.



In the process of working out ways to enable women to generate their own income, we realised that women's empowerment at the household level was just the first step on the ladder towards women's empowerment at the political level.

PESADA, Indonesia

1.4.2. Working with men

“Specifically, women’s leadership is transformative when it challenges oppressive and patriarchal power relations, structures, institutions and norms.”⁷

Empowering women is to empower men. None of the five organisations works with women in isolation as they feel this would not lead to the results they are aiming for. In their work they feel it is important to make clear that empowering women is not at the expense of men. CPWP sums it up clearly: ‘CPWP’s vision is a society in which women and men enjoy equal rights, there is equal access to opportunities and benefits from society, and women and men are represented in public office.’⁸

CPWP in Cambodia traces gender inequality to household level where the belief that men are the decision makers in the households is still strong, and that this position earns them respect from the community. One way of reaching men that CPWP has found effective is through entertainment and the media. It organises special evenings where public concerts or entertainment also showcase the stories of women role models. Sharing their experiences and hearing how their husbands and male relatives handle and support their wives’ income generation or political participation greatly encourages changes in attitudes in other men.

AADC in the Philippines runs similar activities to reach men. One such activity is the ‘family day’. Every member of the family is welcome and they can take part in various activities that are fun while the organisers bring messages of gender equity across. Among the activities are support groups to discuss issues at household level. When men see that other men support their wives and children, they are encouraged to do so too.

7 Pittman, Alexandra (DATE?) ‘Making Women’s Leadership Explicit: a Learning Review’, an internal Oxfam International document.

8 See CPWP, Cambodia, case study.

Before being able to reach this point though, in ASPPUK's experience, how you approach men to start a dialogue is important. It needs to be made clear that women's empowerment is not at the expense of men, and that they will see only benefits to themselves and their families. In the past bitterness and anger from women have led to much resistance from men to gender equality work and goals. Men thus need to be approached in a way that leaves room for open discussion. Having open discussions with community leaders that address issues that emphasise the positive aspects of cultural values is, for ASPPUK, a good way to proceed. The discussions often focus on the positive, emphasising the cultural and religious values that support gender justice.



PESADA is sometimes accused of encouraging women to divorce their husbands. This is not true, but as women become aware of gender issues, they start wanting to exercise their rights and some husbands feel insecure. We try to manage the cultural context by critical awareness raising among the menfolk. Generally they change and start to support their wives. Men are now proud to say their wives have credit.

PESADA, Indonesia

PESADA, Indonesia, is now starting to see the results of reaching men: their changing attitudes. When PESADA first started its work with credit unions and small scale income generation in rural communities, the men were very resistant. They were used

to having a dominant role as the income earners and decision makers. It took time for them to see the benefits that empowering women brings. But once they did see this, they started playing a greater role in family matters. What also helps is that PESADA has 11 men on its staff, all strong men passing on the message of the benefits to men and families of women who are economically or politically active.

In DDP's case, while it initially chose the path of women's cooperatives (for rationale see DDP Sri Lanka case study) it sought out the support of one influential man, the president of the men's cooperative. While this may not have been the decisive factor in DDP's success, it certainly was a contributing one. When the project began, the only dairy cooperative at the district level was run by men. Given the perceptions about women and their traditional place in society, DDP worked hard to avoid being perceived as a threat to men, to existing institutions and to power structures. Instead, it wanted to collaborate with men and approached the president, who supported DDP's philosophy about poverty alleviation through women. As a well respected man, the president was

able to convince the men in his cooperative that they would not lose power or status and that everyone would benefit from women running a cooperative. Together with him, DDP re-mapped the district and created new cooperatives and market channels. When the women's cooperatives were ready to develop and sell new products, they could do so without displacing men. The collaboration with the president of the men's cooperative was the first step in providing the space needed for women to enter the market.

1.5. Promoting women leadership means working with existing institutions

The first two steps in the long process of moving towards a more equal gender distribution of power are understanding and acceptance: understanding that equality in all forms brings benefits to society, and acceptance that both men and women can contribute to society. This awareness lays the foundation for enabling an open and supportive space for achieving women's leadership in social structures and institutions. Thus it is that CPWP (Cambodia) and ASPPUK (Indonesia) refer to their cultures' roots in strong matrilineal societies in working with various institutions from village elders to political discussions. In the case of ASPPUK, it is only a small area of west Sumatra that was based on a matrilineal society, while in Cambodia it was nationwide. Women contributing to household expenses or in positions of power are not a new phenomenon here. Cambodia was a strongly matrilineal society at the time that the country was at its peak of power, and this is still reflected in its language, many of whose words denoting leadership are female. The matrilineal system only started to change as a result of colonisation.

ASPPUK works with the premise that gender is not a Western concept, but is both Indonesian and Islamic in terms of culture and society. One of the areas where it works in west Sumatra has its roots in strongly matrilineal societies. Indonesia has the world's largest population of Muslims, and ASPPUK, like other Indonesian women's CSOs, uses many Islamic teachings to promote gender justice, demonstrating that gender justice is synonymous with Islamic values.

In the economic arena, women are and have been economically active in all four countries for generations, though their work, often home-based small scale farming activities, has gone largely unnoticed and unrewarded. With 60 percent of all registered small businesses in the hands of women in Indonesia, for ASPPUK small businesses were a convenient entry point to reach women.

AADC in the Philippines and DDP in Sri Lanka used the existing system of village cooperatives to reach and promote women in business and to address wider issues regarding access to resources, land rights and family income. In the Philippines, working within an existing institution took a legal turn. Given that the livelihoods of

its women cooperative members depend closely on the land, land rights became an important issue. Traditionally, when a husband or father died, access, ownership and control over land and its resources skipped the wife or daughter and went to the men in the family. In the mid 1980s the Family Code was passed which gives women the right to be named as land and property owners instead of just men, and gives equal access to both men and women to land and property should their respective spouses or parents die. Now if a husband dies, the wife gets half the properties and the other half is divided among the children. However, despite the Family Code, AADC found that women were still losing their land and property upon the deaths of their menfolk. AADC lobbies for the better implementation of the Code in rural areas.

For CPWP, working within existing structures meant entering the political arena and changing the male dominated institutions into more gender balanced institutions. Cambodia's Millennium Goals included increasing gender representation and CPWP was working within these ambitions. CPWP thus works with women at three levels to increase the number of women in politics. These are: sangkat, or commune, level; district level; and national level. The women entering the political arena face enormous challenges – of acceptance, of being treated equally, of being thrown into a world of privilege and power in the hands of few, and of corruption. CPWP provides the support needed to try to deal with these challenges and keep them in their political positions. While there is a way to go, CPWP's approach has been successful as it has succeeded in getting the government to fulfil its commitment to the Millennium Goals and make strategic positions available for women. Similarly, more women stand for election at all three levels of Cambodian society.

1.6. Transformation is a slow process

Nothing takes as long as attitude and behaviour change. All the organisations talk about patience, diplomacy and chipping away slowly to achieve each small step in the change process. People have to understand and see the benefits that change will bring before they want it, and nothing will happen if people do not want it. Women's empowerment can only occur if there is understanding about gender equality and respect for women.

Women too need to see the benefits of change. Patterns of role division are internalised and reproduced just as firmly by women as they are by men, and it can be a challenge to get them to take steps. Many women have been working on small holdings for generations, and initially do not see that their labour, which has gone unpaid or for which they earn next to nothing, is being exploited. Of the poor, women tend to be poorest and most exploited: a phenomenon referred to as the 'femisation of poverty'. Once women do become aware of their position though, and see that there are alternative ways of living, they start seeing the need for change and for taking action.

PESADA talks about the process of change being “visible” in how the women gradually took over the running of the credit union instead of remaining as recipients of support. They now take decisions about financial allocation for example. The success of the credit unions and the taking over of the credit unions by the women themselves, meant that they became the step towards political empowerment, advocacy, awareness raising, and education for women on human rights and women’s issues. PESADA notes that while it took time for the men to see the benefits that empowering women brings, now that they do see the benefits to their families, they are playing a greater role in family matters, taking on some domestic and child care tasks. Men often expressed pride that their wives are bringing in an income.

1.6.1. Increased equality in the home

Household chores and the tilt towards a fairer division of chores is an aspect that all the organisations mention in terms of attitude and behaviour change. It was difficult to get women to become involved in any activities, even those that benefited the family, as they had to do it on top of their domestic chores. Both AADC and CPWP note that, while many women were initially nervous about the impact of their activities on their home life, household tasks and family responsibilities were being shared more equally more often. The women who have been able to generate an income and contribute to the household finances, are becoming more vocal and assertive, and husbands’ attitudes are changing so that they are more likely to take on some of the domestic tasks. Interestingly, AADC observes that boys (rather than the men) are starting to take on some household tasks. This gives hope for gender equality in the future.

1.6.2 Creating a track record



Before we used to be scared to speak to any officers, but we now have the confidence to negotiate with business officers and managers.

A member of the Komatha Cooperative Society

DDP in Sri Lanka mentions another type of change. It has started to see a shift in attitudes towards women among financial service providers and buyers in the region who now take women seriously. It has taken time, and the women have had to build a track record. But the outcome is that now financial service providers, who used to be reluctant to lend money to women, base their decisions on the business proposition and not on the gender of the applicant. Similarly, operating in cooperatives instead of as individuals has helped shift the balance of power from large dairy companies to the cooperatives who can now negotiate for a fair price for milk. With women making up 80 percent of the cooperatives’ members and 60 percent of their management positions, they have gradually ‘forced’ financial service providers and dairy companies to take note of their increasing power in the market.

1.7. Using support structures to enhance economic development and capacity building

Support structures among the five CSOs fall into two broad categories: economic support and capacity building. For all of them, women's access to financial resources is a huge step towards women's leadership and gender justice. DDP (Sri Lanka) supports women accessing and building their own financial resources through dairy cooperatives and revolving funds; ASPPUK (Indonesia) supports networks of small business institutions; and PESADA (Indonesia) supports credit unions for women. AADC (Philippines) provides business services to two community enterprises, the Community Economic Development and Community Enterprise Organizing. It works with the women in these enterprises on access to income and income security; control over resources; gender relations; gender analysis and the risk assessment of vulnerability of women.

All the CSOs have chosen to create economic structures that are exclusively for women, or parts of which are exclusively for women. In the case of AADC, it opted to put the growing and selling of moringa saplings in the hands of women while the rest of the processing of the tree is open to both genders. DDP chose to set up women's dairy cooperatives instead of trying to have women join men's cooperatives, and many of the PUK groups set up by ASPPUK are exclusively for women, as are the credit unions established by PESADA.

In terms of capacity building, the biggest asset is the women themselves. Once women start having access to resources and a greater role in their families and communities, they often take on a leadership role and motivate other women. Thus CPWP (Cambodia) has created a specific body called the Women's Political Activists Network (WPAN) in which commune women go out to train other women in political awareness. DDP, a rural based CSO, focuses on training women to be advisors to other women smallholders on basic veterinary practice and farming. Both AADC and ASPPUK provide training on business practices and community enterprises.

1.8. Lessons for CSOs and cross partner learning

Looking across the five CSOs, promoting women's leadership in four different countries, the differences in approach and context are clear. But what is more interesting are the similarities.

- a. *Promoting women's empowerment, leadership and gender justice is a slow process and it requires a long term commitment. This is because it primarily has to do with changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. There is no blueprint or one strategy to bring about change. It requires creativity to spot opportunities and flexibility to change direction as and when needed. Change will only happen if a critical mass of people want it to happen, and reaching this critical mass is the time consuming element. Once enough people want change, it can happen relatively quickly and is more likely to be taken on by the younger generations.*

- b. *Changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviour means working just as hard with women as with men.* The assumption could easily be made that women are willing and open to enter into a change process, but this is not necessarily the case. Women too need to overcome internalised values too. Working with men means making it clear that they will not be pushed out by women, but that both genders will complement each other. Similarly, a more gender equitable society is not only beneficial for women, but for the whole of society.
- c. *Gender equality and justice is about ultimately creating a more equitable society rather than only about more equitable positions for women.* It is about embracing diversity in all its forms and transforming society.
- d. At the organisational level, *gender responsive strategies must be included in every aspect of the programme design* as a matter of course. Similarly, the CSO itself needs to embody gender representation. This means that wherever appropriate practising positive affirmation by assigning leadership and service roles to women. It also means investing in women's ideas and supporting them in building their assets and businesses.
- e. *Critical thinking is a major part of embodying gender justice.* Both genders and all age groups need the skills to question the world around them. This is especially important in passing on gender justice ideas down generations.
- f. *Role models inspire and multiply the potential impacts.* Identifying both women and men who affirm equality is important. Role models motivate others, especially if they are respected and liked individuals. This means getting these role models into the mainstream.
- g. *Protect the social and economic gains of women.* Sustaining achievements, protecting assets and women's livelihoods, no matter how small or large, needs to be built into the program. Invest in sound economic and market research as well as cultural and social inquiry from the outset.
- h. Gender justice is not a western concept, but can be seen to have roots in history, culture and religion. CSOs can work closely with community leaders to help promote the traditional values of a culture or religion that are supportive of gender justice.
- i. *Support both individual and collective action.* Initially, many women feel more comfortable in collective action than in individual action. A useful approach is to promote collective organising for women and for women and men in forms such as cooperatives, coalitions, associations or networks.
- j. *Economic empowerment is a major step towards gender justice.* Women's rights and control over economic and social gains must be protected.
- k. *Live gender justice yourself.* Change starts with individuals. In your power, ensure that women have an equal voice in the NGO itself, that women have leadership positions and are equally represented in the programme and activities. Involve women in the design of innovative products and services and invest in the ideas and aspirations of women.

1.9. Lessons and emerging themes

The experiences of the CSOs in these five case studies provide valuable insights into issues of women's leadership and gender justice in practice. While this document is not intended to be a policy document but a collection of experiences, there are a number of themes that emerge from the case studies that may be useful in guiding policy.

- a. Given the relatively large impact that women can have on families, communities and far beyond, greater support should be given to women and to organisations supporting women.
- b. The path to achieving gender justice is a long and rocky one. Mistakes will be made, success will come on the back of trial and error. This means that international development agencies such as Oxfam that are committed to promoting women's leadership and gender justice, need to commit for the long term.
- c. There is no one way to promote women's leadership and gender justice. For one CSO the first step is individual and collective empowerment of women, while for others leadership itself is part of an empowerment process.
- d. Similarly, while some CSOs will see women's leadership as a strategy, others will see it as an outcome.
- e. In some contexts it may be more effective to try to encourage women to enter the mainstream that is often dominated by men. In other contexts it may be more effective to establish structures that are exclusive to women.
- f. Leadership, and thus women's leadership, is only effective if it is inclusive and participatory and serves all sectors of society women and men, children and the elderly, the poor and the wealthy, the powerless and the powerful.
- g. Simply by being able to exist, women's leadership and gender justice show that important changes are being made towards a society with gender equity

Since 2009, Oxfam's global Gender Justice team has further developed in its positioning towards women's leadership, namely it has widened its thinking to include the element of transformation: Women's Transformative Leadership, as coined by Batliwala⁹. The case studies in this paper are not necessarily examples of transformative leadership. For reasons of clarity therefore, please note that is not an Oxfam position paper. The views expressed in the five case studies are those of the individual organisations.

9 Batilawa, Srilatha (May 2010). "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud

A case from Cambodia

The Committee to Promote Women in Politics



2.1. The Context

Cambodia's socio-political landscape has been shaped by its turbulent history, colonialism and communism. Political decision-making is concentrated in the hands of powerful male elites in a few key offices, and the central government is characterised by a lack of transparency, little accountability, and corruption. Although the government has committed itself to increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, little progress has been made and targets are unlikely to be met.

Since the peace settlement in the early 1990s, Cambodia has undergone rapid economic growth. Its economy is now based on a strong textile industry, agriculture, construction and tourism. However, Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in

the region. Poverty is extreme in rural areas, and the government has been unable to provide services such as health care and sanitation. Women, children, disabled and elderly people, and ethnic minority groups are particularly affected by poverty in rural areas¹.

Women face problems of poverty and economic inequality; limited access to education and health services; poor health status and vulnerability to disease; domestic violence and sexual assault; poor representation in decision-making; and no access to justice and other avenues to address these inequalities. The latest gender assessment shows that women still have a lower status than men, and gender discrimination is *'deeply embedded in, and reinforced by, social attitudes'*². Similarly, the Gender Empowerment Measure of the UN Human Development Report, which tracks women's participation in economic and political life, places Cambodia 83rd out of 93 countries³.

The level of education in the country is a major challenge. In the 1960s only two percent of Cambodian women finished secondary school. By 2008 this had increased to 20 percent, but needs to increase further. Many girls are still kept at home, and those that are not are often sent to work in factories or emigrate abroad for employment to support their families at home. This puts them at risk of being trafficked and vulnerable to their human rights being abused.

At the local level, poor women and men's lack of voice means that local development plans have rarely reflected their priorities. In recognition of this, in 2001 the royal government of Cambodia introduced a policy of decentralisation, with the aim of strengthening pluralist local democracy, promoting local and economic development, and reducing poverty. Local level commune/sangkat or commune elections were held in Cambodia for the first time in 2002⁴, while provincial, municipality, city and district council elections were held for the first time in 2009.

The present day status of women belies the fact that centuries ago, when Cambodia was at the peak of its power, it had a strongly matrilineal society. Women ran the country and dominated society at the time. Cambodian matriarchs reigned over the country when it was very prosperous. During this time it was the women who were considered leaders, while men were forbidden to reign. Historically and traditionally,

1 Strengthening the Voices of Women Leaders, Women's Leadership & Participation, Programme Insights, Oxfam GB. February 2008: 1

2 A Fair Share for Women 2004: 23

3 The gender empowerment measure (GEM) reveals whether women take an active part in economic and political life. It tracks the share of seats in parliament held by women; of female legislators, senior officials and managers; and of female professional and technical workers- and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence. Differing from the GDI, the GEM exposes inequality in opportunities in selected areas. http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_KHM.html Strengthening the Voices of Women Leaders, Women's Leadership & Participation, Programme Insights, Oxfam GB. February 2008: 1

4 Strengthening the Voices of Women Leaders, Women's Leadership & Participation, Programme Insights, Oxfam GB. February 2008: 1

Cambodian culture has always given women power. This only changed over the course of many centuries, because of the influence of others from the outside such as the Brahmins, the Chinese and the French. The power that women had is still reflected in the Cambodian language which emphasises the female form. One example is that the word for ‘leader’ is the same word as for ‘mother’. It is even reflected in the royal family where the princes were considered as both female and male and use the female version of the word ‘yes’. Even today, lineage is passed down the mother’s line instead of the father’s.

2.2. Background of The Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP)

In the face of limited representation of women on the political landscape, and the major challenges faced by those that are elected, a number of organisations⁵ banded together in 2005 to organise a conference for the women elected to political parties in 2002. The group eventually formed the Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP) whose goal was to promote women leaders in public office. Each organisation in the network complements the others. The collaborative approach allows CPWP to have a large impact. CPWP currently works with 375 network members in nine provinces. Being spread across the country, the network’s members keep each other informed of their activities and of political developments through a website. CPWP also produces newsletters and news flashes for the network, and organises meetings for the NGOs.

CPWP’s vision is of a society in which women and men enjoy equal rights, have access to equal opportunities and benefits from society, and are equally represented in public office. CPWP believes that the whole country will benefit from a more gender balanced political representation. This view is also in line with the Cambodian government’s Millennium Goals.

CPWP’s objectives are as follows:

- To increase the number of women councillors from 15 percent to 25 percent for the commune/sangkat elections in 2015 by stimulating political parties to place women at the top of their candidate lists.
- To achieve Cambodia’s Millennium Development Goals by 2015 by increasing: the proportion of women representation in the National Assembly from 19 percent to 30 percent; women ministers from 7.7 percent to 12 percent; and women governors from 0 percent to 10 percent.

⁵ These organisations are: SILAKA; Gender and Development for Cambodia (GAD/C); the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL); Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (NICFEC); Women for Prosperity (WFP); Cambodian Women for Peace and Development (CWPD); and the Cambodia Development Research Institute (CDRI).

- To stimulate NGOs, associations and the media to popularise the issues of gender equality and the importance of women representation at all levels.
- To promote and monitor the implementation of the Law on Administration and Management at all levels of authority to guarantee the presence of women in line with the ratified Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.
- To increase the capacity of local organisations to enable women candidates to develop proposals, improve their organisational skills, and implement campaigns in public forums by sharing experiences, specialties, knowledge and resources.



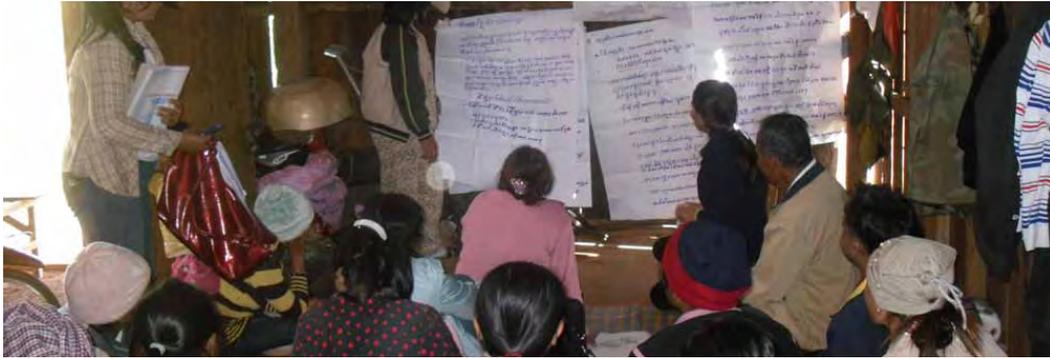
Women's Rights Day⁶

2.3. CPWP in Action

CPWP advocates for national policy to include rights to basic services for women, children and local communities. For women and girls in particular, important issues are access to reproductive health services; criminalising sexual and domestic violence against women; access to justice; access to basic education for girls; and access to vocational training for girls and women.

Advocacy is focused on: reaching political parties; reaching women; and raising awareness about gender issues among the general public.

⁶ All photos courtesy of CPWP



Coaching of sangkat women

2.3.1. Reaching Political Parties

Despite Cambodia's rule requiring a 30 percent representation of women in the main political parties, there is still a big gap between policy and reality. Over the last 10 years, CPWP has worked to have this quota met. Its strategies are:

- Training women in political parties to monitor good practice;
- Building up good relations with all main parties to foster direct dialogue with them and to ensure access to ministries and party representatives at national and sub-national levels;
- Organising high-level meetings with influential officials to advocate for the nomination of women candidates;
- Organising policy dialogues during election campaigns with members of the National Assembly, the Senate, and the National Election Commission; and with representatives of political parties, ministries, local authorities, and the government;
- Presenting parties with options to promote women in politics;
- Providing the elected women with a support structure;
- Lobbying at national level before national elections.



Question to CPWP: What Makes a Good Woman Leader?

CPWP considers good women leaders to:

- Be knowledgeable and clever.
- Represent other people's interests, not merely their own.
- Be able to take decisions and take good decisions.
- Have strong communication skills.
- Be able to solve problems.
- Be flexible, confident and have a positive attitude.
- Be neutral, respectful and brave.
- Be able to convince others.
- Be open to share information and listen to others.

2.3.2. *Reaching Women*

CPWP trains women to enter politics at three levels: commune/sangkat, district and provincial.



Working at the village level to change attitudes

The Commune/Sangkat Level

CPWP believes that a bottom up approach works better than aiming straight at provincial or national levels and thus most of its efforts are concentrated at the commune/sangkat level. Attitudes towards women need to change before women can become accepted in politics and thus be effective, and one way to achieve this is by working with people at village level. CPWP runs campaigns at commune level to encourage women to stand for election, and trains those that do. CPWP usually works with three of the five communes/sangkats in each district.

Presently, women form 15 percent of political representation in commune/sangkat councils as compared to 8 percent in 2002. These women face huge obstacles, and it soon became clear that a strategy was needed to support their work and to promote their position at the commune level.

CPWP links women from the community to organisations that work on health, education, economic development, and land ownership. It coaches the commune/sangkat network, partly through the WPAN (see below), with the aim of empowering the women. These women are an invaluable resource and are able to train other women in turn. CPWP asks five women activists from each commune/sangkat to group together and then link to each other at a district and provincial level in the nine provinces as a network. Each group, with the support of CPWP, plans and carries out

outreach activities that include organising public awareness activities such as day and night forums (see below); lobbying for the party hierarchy to place more women higher on candidate lists; monitoring reproductive health services; entering into dialogue with health service providers; and advocating for women’s and children’s services with the commune authorities in the commune investment plan.

A milestone was the creation of the Women’s Political Activists Network (WPAN) in 2008 at commune/sangkat level. WPAN meets monthly and trains its members in communication, planning and management skills, advocacy, and basic legal literacy. It also conducts outreach activities and monitoring. As the WPAN meets regularly at different sub-national levels, it contributes to the continuous coaching and support of its members. The women involved in the WPAN coach other women, and the trainers coach other trainers. The plans for the next few years are to recruit and train WPAN members as trainers, and to develop resource material.



WPAN training of trainers

The District Level

WPAN, supported by CPWP, meets quarterly at the district level. Between meetings it runs three day training sessions every month to women candidates of political parties. These sessions look at issues such as setting up an election campaign and

fundraising. Plans for individual capacity development are made according to need. Personal training is important, and covers topics such as how to network with staff from the Ministry of Women's Affairs. At this level, CPWP targets minority groups such as indigenous, Muslim, Lao and Khmer women.



Ms. Sary has been involved in the CPWP programme as a woman volunteer leader in Ba Phnom District, Prey Veng Province. She has been promoted to become a member of the district council. Her local health centre does not have enough space for women, so she leads her committee members in making the plans for additional space for women. After giving birth, women were usually sent home one hour after delivery, thus facing a high risk of health problems. Her plan to expand the health centre with a room for new mothers was accepted and she persuaded a donor NGO, RACHA, to finance the project.

'The training and support from CPWP members gave me confidence in my leadership and planning skills. Our team was successful in advocating for this facility for the women in our community. We know that we have to have plans ready so that they will be accepted by the district council.'

The Provincial Level

CPWP works in all 12 provinces, preparing women for national elections. Further, CPWP supports the WPAN, which meets annually at the provincial and national levels and runs Training of Trainers sessions to build the capacity of its members and partners at this level.



Question to CPWP: Why are more women needed in politics?

- Going into politics is a way of breaking taboos and showing that politics – usually considered dirty and dangerous – can be handled by women.
- Politics covers all fields and issues faced by women.
- Women in politics project women in decision making roles and leadership roles.
- Women in politics will bring about change.
- General empowerment is not enough; you need to go to the heart of the action.
- It is in everybody's interest to have a more balanced gender representation, and not just in women's interest

2.4 Raising awareness about gender issues among the general public

2.4.1 Changing attitudes



In most Khmer families, girls are given the responsibility of doing the housework or even working in the family business to help bring an income to the family. My sisters did most of the household chores while my brothers were given small money earning tasks and never helped with the housework. Their responsibility was to study.

Trainer, SILAKA

Nothing will change for women and girls without attitudinal change. People are starting to recognise that all women play an important role in society and that policies need to respond to the basic rights and needs of women and children. CPWP reaches out to men, women and the wider public through its media and community outreach programme.



Outreach to villages

2.4.2. *Day and Night public forums*

In preparation for the commune/sangkat councillors' elections in 2007 and the national elections in 2008, CPWP organised Day and Night forums. The Day forum promoted dialogue between political parties on women's political participation. Key speakers from political parties explained how their policies and programmes support women's development. Participants to the Day forum included around 200 commune/sangkat, district and provincial councillors, women activists, citizens and political parties.

The Night forum was for the general public, and everyone was welcome. The goal was to raise awareness on women's rights, women's leadership and gender. Local authorities, commune/sangkat leaders, activists and citizens gave presentations and took part in discussions with the public. Entertainment like films, songs, and role plays were used to convey gender equity messages to the audience.



The Night forum: entertainment is a good way of getting the message of gender awareness across

Society needs to move away from strict gender roles, and attitudes are changing slowly. Many men are starting to see that by taking over some of the housework they help women do things outside the home, and this brings honour to themselves and their families. Working outside the home is not a new phenomenon in Cambodia as 80 percent of the women are already income earners and do domestic work as well. This means that there is a heavy burden placed on women. CPWP is working to change this by promoting joint domestic responsibility between men and women.

2.4.3. *Media campaigns*

Radio and TV spots, radio talk shows, TV round table discussions and press releases all help raise awareness, promote women in politics and attract the attention of political parties. Broadcasting is costly, but two of the organisations in the CPWP coalition, COMFREL and the Women Media Centre, are radio stations and donate air time to CPWP. Media campaigns are highly effective: the number of women candidates in the 2007 election doubled as a result of our media campaigns and the Ministry of Women's Affairs has expanded its programme by using our strategy.



Media campaigns are an effective way of reaching large numbers of people.

CPWP also uses the power of television through the Voix populaire (popular voice) video interviews. People from different sectors are asked on film about their views on women in politics, women's empowerment and leadership. Most people say that they are open to women in politics. Many are dissatisfied with the current politics and politicians, and they see that women can bring about change. The responses are used in a short film for the general public. The film informs the public, makes women role models visible, and strengthens the public discourse on the importance of women's rights.

2.5. CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

In terms of organisational challenges, working in a nationwide coalition brings many advantages but there are many challenges to overcome. Simply getting together is a major logistical feat, let alone adjusting the strategy to fast moving situations. Cambodia is a country undergoing rapid transition and that means changes in all walks of life: government, local partners, economic crisis, inflation, food prices, and a decrease in investment. Any changes in the external context can mean significant shifts to programme strategies.

The low status of women that prevails in the country was recently reflected in a government survey which found that only 4.5 percent of the population believes that domestic violence is wrong. In CPWP's experience, the root cause of inequalities lies in households. Therefore it is important to work with both men and women in order to change attitudes at the household and community levels. Husbands have a deep rooted belief that they are the heads of households and therefore the decision makers. Many men believe that if a woman would be equal to a man, he would no longer be respected, and that is why men do not want to let go of power.

Even when a husband supports his wife's activities, this does not necessarily translate to changing roles at home. As husbands rarely take over these chores to allow their wives to be involved in community development, there is actually no change in gender roles. CPWP has found that economic empowerment of women is important as the power balance starts to shift when a woman brings in an income.



In many ways, the Cambodian family places greater value on sons than on daughters. My family was not any different. If the parents are forced to decide who will get the education, most will allow their sons to get the education rather than the daughters, because they think the boy has a greater chance of earning more. ... Being the youngest, I was fortunate enough to get the full financial support of my mother throughout my secondary school years.

Trainer, SILAKA

In terms of leadership outside the home, society gives men greater value while it believes that women have fewer leadership abilities. Society is dominated by an authoritarian tradition and culture, while the political landscape is characterised by new and fragile democratic institutions. The resistance that women in leadership positions and in politics face makes it a challenge to encourage and motivate them to stay in their positions. CPWP must maintain political neutrality, and this delicate balance is

tough to maintain. CPWP has started to make political contracts with the candidates, and it uses the women's caucus to ensure that government and parliament build structures to encourage them to become involved and stay in politics. CPWP works with the women on capacity building and creating a support network, and coaches them to strengthen them in their leadership roles.

A support network and continuous coaching are also crucial in other respects. Not all women who reach positions of influence – be they in the political, educational or home arena – promote the interests of women and families or promote women's rights. Ensuring that they do so requires commitment to a long process of education, advocacy and leadership by example.

2.6. Impact

Despite the challenges, there have been many successes. CPWP's support, capacity building and mentoring provided to the women political candidates have helped them develop their potential and build up confidence to stand for office. CPWP's training has brought candidates together from across the four main political parties. This has been crucial in building a network of women Commune councillors across party lines at the local level. The results of CPWP's efforts are directly visible in the increase in the number of women candidates at the 2007 commune/sangkat elections of the target provinces to 25 percent from 16 percent; and a 74 percent increase in the number of women being elected between 2002 to 2007. Similarly, in the 2008 national elections, the number of women members of parliament increased from 19 percent to 22 percent. Not only did more women stand for the national elections in 2008, but there were more 'quality' positions for women on the candidate list of political parties - positions requiring skills and knowledge.



Through lobbying, working at grassroots and national level, and advocacy, CPWP has succeeded in getting the government to make strategic positions available for women. CPWP was able to exert pressure here as it was the government's declared commitment to the Millennium Goals. Similarly, CPWP has succeeded in getting women included in the top three party candidate's lists for the commune/sangkat council and national elections. This is a significant achievement

because during elections people vote only for political parties and not for an individual within a party. Most people simply get elected by being placed at the top ranking of party candidate slates.

The public forums have raised awareness of the need for women to stand for office, as more people can see that women candidates tend to address the specific needs of women and children. The forums have contributed to a growing acceptance of women's engagement in politics amongst a broader group of people.

The coordination of the eight CPWP member organisations' activities creates a cohesive and strong voice, and a coherent approach. CPWP is thus also a valuable resource for other organisations that work on women's political participation. One of CPWP's strengths is that its members have connections with and access to representatives of all major political parties at the national and sub-national level. CPWP's principles are used to design activities around its member organisations, either in terms of training activities, promoting them to be visible in the communities, supporting each other in serving communities, and competing in local and national elections in an ethical way.



Mrs. Dim Kunthea, a WPAN member in Kampong Thom Province, joined a CPWP Study Tour to Takeo and Kampot Provinces to learn about small scale income generating activities. When she came back, she decided to start farming chickens and pond fish. Her initiative was successful and she is happy as she now generates additional income and is able to provide food for her family. She found a ready market for her chickens and fish, and traders regularly come to buy from her.

In her words: 'The idea of doing things by myself is the most important gift I have ever received. I can share this idea with relatives. Other people in my village now come to learn how I raise organic chickens. I still have contact with the farmer that I visited during the field trip and get free advice. I have also learned to produce the chicken feed myself. I grow the vegetables needed as a basis for the chicken feed. I am now planning to work with other producers in my village as that way we will be able to secure a good price for our chickens.'

2.7. Sustainability and into the future

CPWP is the only network in Cambodia that supports the empowerment of women in politics. CPWP and SILAKA (secretariat) are currently carrying out major assessments and strategic planning for the future. Each coalition member is involved in capacity building, gender based initiatives and research, and each member has its own network

spread across the country. This gives CPWP great potential for scaling up. CPWP expects more organisations to become members over the next few years. The coalition has come a long way since its inception, and it is now starting to extend its work from encouraging women to stand at commune/sangkat level to standing at district level. This is in line with the country's Millennium Goals.

With CPWP gaining ground, it is actively working to recruit new members. One strategy is to recruit young women who then train each other and thus expand the reach and work of the network. The WPAN (Women's Political Activists Network) is and will continue to be instrumental in this. Materials have been developed for WPAN, and CPWP is looking to WPAN to take on educational activities.



WPAN: A Training of Trainers session that includes men.

In terms of political goals, one of the Millennium Goals is to reach a 25 percent level of women representation at the commune/sangkat level by 2013. Women representation currently stands at 15 percent, so the next elections are crucial if the country is to achieve its Millennium Goals. Given that Cambodia has not yet achieved any of its goals, other than those around HIV/AIDS, CPWP is determined that at least one other goal be realised: that of women's representation in politics.

To work towards achieving this, CPWP uses Cambodia's history and ancient cultural traditions by explaining that working with women and on gender equality and women's rights is actually building on its matrilineal and matriarchic history. When people hear this they become more open to the idea of women in leadership.

CPWP feels positive about changes in the public's attitude. Though people in general support the idea of women in politics, their support tends to be mainly theoretical; they don't want to live with it themselves. The younger generations, though, are different, and their attitudes are changing. Many young women are studying, are doing well academically, and are shining at the university level. Many more young people embrace gender equality, and they are also more likely to exercise their rights of sexuality and partner choice. Boys and young men are accepting this more too. Equally, there is greater awareness of politics among the young. All of these developments, taken together, may be seen as harbingers of a gradual but irreversible change in the political landscape of the future.

Two cases from Indonesia

PERKUMPULAN SADA AHMO (PESADA)



3.1. The Context

In Indonesia, the monetary crisis and the fall of the Suharto regime in 1997/1998 led to worsened poverty levels and political instability as the country prepared for the first democratic elections in 1999. Unfortunately, the transition to democracy did not improve the position of women, and did not decrease the level of poverty. Women are still poorly represented in politics and their voices are hardly heard. The 30 percent quota for women candidates in parliament and in political parties has not had much effect – the number of women in parliament, while increasing from about 11 percent in 2004 to 18 percent in 2009 – is still far below the quota. Furthermore, most of the women in parliament are family members of the political and powerful elite. This is a powerful illustration of the Establishment’s resistance to women in politics.

This is the context in which Perkumpulan Sada Ahmo (PESADA) works with rural communities in the north of the island of Sumatra and on the island of Nias. Sumatra has been visited by many natural disasters, such as the tsunami of December 2004 and a major earthquake in March 2005, and these have impeded development. North Sumatra is one of Indonesia’s 33 provinces, and it has a multicultural population of 12.6 million (2006)¹. Over 52 percent of North Sumatra’s population lives in rural

1 Figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics, North Sumatra.



areas, and about 14 percent of its population lives well below the poverty line. The poorest of the poor tend to be women. Many live under a strong patriarchal system strongly interwoven with religion and local politics. Women rarely make decisions in their own households, let alone in religious or political institutions. They have limited access to resources, assets, credit, or cash, and they generally do not have any monetary resources of their own. political institutions. They have limited access to resources, assets, credit or cash, and they generally do not have any monetary resources of their own.

3.2. BACKGROUND OF PERKUMPULAN SADA AHMO (PESADA)



'Our philosophy is to create communities which have a spirit of sincerity, discipline, simplicity, solidarity, fidelity, equality and gender justice.'

About this quote²

PESADA started life as a foundation called Yayasan Sada Ahmo in October 1990. It was created by a group of people concerned about Indonesia's socio-political situation under the Suharto regime. One of its main concerns was for the Pakpak people, an ethnic minority group from Dairi District in Sumatra. The Pakpak were so marginalised and victimised by both the government and other ethnic groups in North Sumatra that they were barely surviving and had little prospects for the future.

In considering how to address the socioeconomic and political situation and the problems that the Pakpak people face within this context, PESADA researched the situation and concluded that 'gender issues were often at the root of the problem'. Development could only take place if women had a voice and the resources to make a difference to their own and their families' lives. PESADA believed that if they had more of a voice and more resources, they could not only make a difference to their families, but also to their communities, regions and even their country. However, it had to treat this issue with sensitivity given the position of women in a strongly male dominated society.

PESADA started looking for a community development entry point and found it in a poultry breeding project in 1991. This project built on what some women were already doing, was a great success, and was followed by other income generating activities

² All quotes in this paper come from Dina Lumbantobing, founding member and director of PESADA.

such as growing corn, chillies and coffee. These activities were aimed primarily at women to enable them to earn additional income for the household. They would not only improve the conditions for their children and families, but they would gain more influence at the household level and beyond.



'When we first came to work with the villages, people were not open or interested in working with us. We gradually won their trust, and women have become much more powerful and assertive.'

Preschool education was a next step. PESADA set up the first of many day care centres (DCC) in Tinada, the hometown of the Pakpak people. Very few fathers were involved in the care of their children; neither did they participate in parent meetings and discussion groups. Attendance of the children was also irregular, as many of the mothers who were dependent on their husbands' income did not receive money to pay for the children's education. Observing this, PESADA arrived at the understanding that women's access to and control over resources would make a huge difference, and responded by starting a savings and credit group for women.



Demonstration plot for growing crops on Nias island

In the process of working out ways to enable women to generate their own income, PESADA realised that women's empowerment at the household level was just the first

3 All photos courtesy of PESADA.

step on the ladder towards women's empowerment at the political level. While the two levels of empowerment - at the household level and at the political level - are strongly linked, and were worked on simultaneously, they are split in this case study in order to show the development of PESADA's work.

3.2.1. *PESADA'S Six Main Goals*

PESADA has adopted its strategies from Sara Longwe's conceptual framework for women's empowerment and equality.⁴

- An equal number of women and men in local leadership positions.
- Gender sensitive policies and practices in the local government.
- More women activists and independent women's organisations that have a powerful voice in the economy and politics.
- Respect and adherence to women's rights, including their access to and control over resources.
- Respect and adherence to children's rights.
- Fulfillment of poor people's basic needs: food, health, housing and education.

3.3. PESADA IN ACTION

3.3.1. *The Path to Financial Empowerment*

Ongoing evaluation and a participatory research exercise of PESADA's work in 1993 revealed that unequal relations between women and men, both in domestic and public arenas, lay at the heart of many problems. Many women were overburdened with household and family responsibilities and had limited decision making power and little access to or control over resources. With this situation against the backdrop of Indonesia's political and economic insecurity in the 1990s, PESADA adopted a basic needs approach as an entry point. At the time, rice was distributed free by the government to alleviate poverty. But PESADA asked the poor families to pay a very low price for it. The money was put into a women's group account in a rural bank and, with the women's permission, became the starting capital for a credit union (CU) for poor rural women. The CU scheme gave members access to capital and the opportunity to develop their small business management skills. As many women had never had an income of their own before, they needed to learn how to manage one and how to

4 The empowerment framework by Sara H. Longwe consists of five levels of interventions: fulfillment of basic needs; access to resources; conscientisation/critical awareness; participation; and control. The framework uses the definition of empowerment by Rowlands, 1995: 'Empowerment is not only about opening up access to decision making, but also must include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space.' It also makes use of the understanding of power by Williams et al, 1994.

manage their own business with their own capital. They also needed to be able to take control over the whole business process to reap the benefits themselves. The micro credit and loans were mostly used for agricultural activities to generate an income from which they would repay the loans and use the rest to pay the health and education expenses of their children.



A capacity building workshop at one of the Credit Unions

Almost as soon as it started, the Credit Union (CU) concept took hold. By the end of the 1990s, around 26 women's CUs had emerged and a team had been recruited to live in the strategic areas and facilitate the CUs in the villages. The number of CUs steadily increased year after year. By the end of 2004, there were 47 CUs with 1,917 members, and assets of IDR 876,264,494 (USD 92,000). Just one year later, in 2005, this had increased to 58 groups with 2,699 members. This is a remarkable achievement within a 10-year time scale, given that PESADA worked in such a poor area.

PESADA believes that while money may not be the solution to all problems, the lack of money puts women in a very vulnerable position. The impact that an income can have on women's and families' lives gave rise to the idea of community empowerment and eventually to political education for rural women. PESADA became involved in national networks on political education and voter education to prepare for the first democratic election in Indonesia (see section below: The Path to Political Empowerment). The CU quickly became an entry point for political empowerment, advocacy, awareness raising and education for women on human rights and feminist issues.



Ina comes from the mainly Christian island of Nias, which lies off the Western Coast of Sumatra and has a population of around 700,000. She is a housewife who had set up a pig farm using a micro loan. Before we met Ina, we had met her husband when we visited his village after the 2004 tsunami to provide basic needs like food and medicine. We met Ina when he married her, and we recognised her as a very special, intelligent and charismatic person. She became a board member of the Credit Union in her village and became a candidate for the district parliament.

During a political education meeting, one student asked: 'How can you [women] manage running as a candidate for Parliament and take care of the household as well?' Ina stood up and said, furiously: 'Why would only a wife have that responsibility? All of you intellectual women who are studying and are highly educated! Why don't you do anything for women like us?' (By 'us', she was referring to rural, less educated women.)

Although Ina was not elected, she successfully addressed the issue of corruption in local government; the double standards towards women candidates in politics; and the discrimination faced by minority groups who are refused entrance to university. There is little hope for women to attain political positions in Nias, as the power system is heavily controlled by certain families, and those voting for other families are threatened. Given that Nias has the worst election system in North Sumatra, Ina's achievement is even more extraordinary. We see Ina as an example of why economic empowerment comes before political empowerment. She is a role model for rural women.



A meeting of the Big Credit Union on Nias Island

With its philosophy of sharing and strength in unity, it was time for PESADA to expand operations. This would extend the benefits to a broader group of women, while increased capital would allow for greater impact. In August 2006, three CUs were merged, creating the first 'Big CU'. More mergers followed, gaining momentum in 2007.

By 2009, there were 104 CUs in seven districts and two municipalities with 6,360 members, and assets of IDR 5,845,705,882 (USD 615,000), and 56 small CUs had merged to create three Big CUs. Big CUs have a larger economic and political impact. By merging to form Big CUs, the smaller CUs benefit from more effective management and a bigger pool of capital. There is strength in numbers, and when women become part of a group with thousands of members, they derive confidence and strength as well as the respect of the government, which sees the group as a major independent women's organisation rather than as just a number of small, scattered rural groups.

3.4. The Path to Political Empowerment



PESADA's 'No Power' Credo

- No power without access to resources and cash, capital.
- No power without understanding and critical awareness of equality between women and men.
- No power without participation and rights.
- No power without the ability and the right to control over yourself, your body, your thinking.
- No power without being together.

All PESADA's programmes are based on the principle of equality; and equality starts from an understanding of the principle of power sharing. As gender inequality and poverty are at the core of many problems, to address this situation, PESADA developed a community empowerment programme for women, children, poor families and other marginalised groups. Its focus on women proceeds from its conviction that women who have access to learning, social capital, business capital, and who can deal with women's specific health needs, find themselves in a stronger bargaining position, better able to participate in decision making processes and lobby for women's and children's interests in a political arena.



Board election for the Big Credit Union in Dairi Region

PESADA emphasises the fostering of collective power in all its programmes. It uses a power analysis and a rights-based approach that puts critical awareness raising, meeting basic needs, and the poor's access to resources at the heart of empowerment. Empowerment does not mean power in the hands of one person or a group of persons. Power should be shared and not exerted over others. Empowerment only works when people empower each other. When 'powerless' groups – be they based on gender, economics, ideology, or class – become aware of their position in relation to others and start to understand their rights of participation, they will become more confident to participate in the processes of decision making and implementation. PESADA uses Sarah H. Longwe's Women's Empowerment and Equality Framework (see Box and Footnote 3) to guide its thinking.

3.5. Challenges along the way

Among the many challenges faced by PESADA in achieving its goals, one was the huge challenge posed by societal attitudes towards women. Many people resist anything in any area of life that is 'different' or 'not normal'. Besides, they are hindered by their limited understanding of religious norms, democratic governance, political systems and corruption.

A second hurdle was that many women had difficulty attending the monthly meetings and the activities of the savings and credit union. They were simply too busy with domestic work and child care, and were not used to being involved in decision making or having control over resources. They needed time to get used to these concepts and to create the space in their lives to attend the sessions. It takes many new members a while before they fully understand the social and political significance of the CU. This is why PESADA supports training and other activities such as attendance at Parliamentary hearings or rallies. The women gradually become aware of the importance of what they are doing and of course start enjoying the companionship and the fun.

3.5.1. Check Flow



‘There are many challenges in achieving gender equality, starting with the lack of gender awareness among PESADA staff. There is also the lack of understanding about women’s empowerment and feminism, and stigma towards women activists. They are accused of being ant-men, lesbian, radical feminists, anti-marriage, pro-divorce and opposing every institution including the government, religion, culture, customary law etc.’

To meet these challenges, PESADA too constantly works on itself as an organisation to change attitudes internally. It strives to embed women's empowerment within the organisation so that it is in a position to encourage others. Of its 46 staff members, 38 are women. The number of women helps in its work in the communities.

One other challenge was to instill the idea that credit should be used only as business capital. All too often, credit was used to access cheap money or to buy consumption goods instead of being used for income generation – which would result in increased skills and capacity, and thus further empower women. When credit is used for non-business expenditure, it makes the loan difficult to pay back, and the women lose confidence in themselves.

Finally, PESADA's ultimate goal of building a movement is constantly under pressure. Mobilising women, getting them to understand that they are part of a movement and motivating them to commit to the cause is hard. Unity is another issue as conflicts between the members must be managed. One example of an issue that nearly split the organisation was the controversy surrounding the government's proposed Bill on Pornography, which PESADA and many of its members perceived to be gender blind. This revealed the differences in attitudes between Muslim and non Muslim women. Most of the Muslim women activists did not want to be involved in the discussions; some were even in favour of the Bill, as they considered it to be in line with Muslim values. Ultimately the rifts between the groups were resolved.



'Women get tired and want to leave. It takes time before they understand that being an activist is a struggle for rights. It is a way of life and not work. Women are not confident about what it means to be a gender activist.'

Even when women are committed gender activists, they find the next step - taking responsibility and becoming leaders - a challenge. This is especially so when roles have not shifted at household level and society's view of women's roles have not yet changed. Most of the women still need much encouragement and stimulation, and PESADA is gradually working towards helping them become less dependent. It is now working towards a supportive role instead of an organisational role so that it will be sustainable into the future.

3.6. Impact

Through the CU and its training and education, women have started to see their situation differently, and have become aware of their position in relation to men. Once women start to become aware of their rights and bring an income into the household, the balance between them and the men begins to change. Women start to gain 'power' in their household and with the extended family; they become more mobile; and they gain freedom.



'PESADA is sometimes accused of encouraging women to divorce their husbands. This is not true, but as women become aware of gender issues, they start wanting to exercise their rights, and some husbands feel insecure. Husbands have even threatened CU staff. We try to manage the cultural context by critical awareness raising among the menfolk. Generally they change and start to support their wives. Men are now proud to say their wives have credit.'

About this quote⁵

This points to another impact: the changing attitudes of many men. When PESADA first started its work, many men were resistant and even threatening – after all, they were used to having a dominant role as the income earners and decision makers. It took time for them to see the benefits that empowering women brings. They now play a greater role in family matters, and some men are proud that their wives are bringing in an income through the CU. Importantly too, PESADA has 11 male staff members who act as role models.



New skills are learned, such as basic bookkeeping

There are clear benefits of the CU on children. Each CU reserves a certain percentage of its profits to encourage the children of its members to do well at school. When the children achieve a first, second or third ranking at school, their mothers can claim a gift, such as a school bag or other useful items, for the children and for the school.

⁵ All awareness raising, not only of men, but mainly women themselves, refer to the 3rd level of the 5 levels of empowerment (see above Sara H.Longwe concept on Women's Empowerment & Equality Framework).

Entina left her husband and home and moved with her two children to a new village far away. The village happened to be in the area of the Batak ethnic group, where outsiders have no right to land and can never become leaders. Not only was Entina considered an outsider, but she was poor, separated, and heading a female headed household. She was marginalised by the villagers.

The first time PESADA came to the village, we recognised her as a smart woman who was keen to work with us. She understood our work and soon became a board member. She borrowed from the CU to plant shallots. The first two harvests were good, but then there was not enough water. Her next crop failed. When a village man came to help her it created a scandal, and Entina was accused of having a relationship with him. Her position in the community became even more difficult. On top of all this, she could not pay the CU back because of her failed shallots. Failing to pay back damages women's self-confidence, and especially that of a woman like Entina, who is particularly proud and brave. This was a low point and she almost gave up.

We could not say we wanted to help her, as she would not have accepted help. We wanted her to come to one of our shelters, but she would have felt like a victim. So we openly discussed her debt and repayment situation with her and came up with a plan. As part of the repayment plan, she came to work for the shelter. She later moved to our branch office in Medan. She now works for our training centre and is paying back her credit. Entina has represented her group at our planning event in the regional Sumatra Island Congress of Women in Small Business, and she is an active member of the Indonesian Women's Coalition.

While Entina has changed her life dramatically, there is still some way to go. She can be aggressive in her style of communication. While this is also her strength, it contributes to her not being accepted, and the association with a masculine style of communication can be perceived as threatening. For this reason, we are working with women on communication skills and assertiveness so that they can communicate more effectively.

About this box⁶

6 'Women's political empowerment through the Women's Credit Union (CU Perempuan): Experience of PESADA in North Sumatra', by Ester Veldhuis, 2009. Oxfam report.

While the impact at the household level may vary, there has been a clear impact on each and every household. Increased income controlled by women has in general brought better health care to the family, education to the children, and an improved quality of life reflected in aspects such as improved nutrition and better preventive health care. One clear benefit is the confidence that the women now have, and the respect that they have gained from their communities. In the words of one PESADA staff member: 'I remember that when PESADA was doing its research in 1993, many women said that "women look older than they are; it's natural, it's God-granted at birth." But now I see that they look younger, they are more beautiful and I can even see their inner beauty which is a reflection of their confidence. Their husbands and children must be so proud of them!' Perhaps one of the most significant indications of the positive impact of PESADA is that some women are starting to say they do not need microcredit anymore.

Despite the initial resistance from both women and men when we first started our activities, the women have come to trust the CUs. They recognise PESADA for its commitment to community development through women's empowerment. From being largely second class citizens with no voice, the women who have been part of the process have emerged as a new power group in society. For the first time, women from rural areas are running as candidates for parliament and as local leaders. They travel to other places, meet other women's groups, and develop networks. Simply by doing this they show that they have become strong enough to resist the social pressures on them.



The women of the CU Humbang Hasundutan celebrating the opening of the CU office.

The women's newfound awareness and strength has had a clear impact on the political and academic scenes. On the one hand, the government has become aware that PESADA acts as watchdog for any abuse of power or injustice relating to gender. On the other hand, it acts as the government's network partner on gender issues. Similarly,

the University of North Sumatra acknowledges PESADA as a valuable source of information not only on gender and women's issues, but also on participatory research methodology. It even uses PESADA's book, *Labirin Politik* (Political Labyrinth), in its Political Studies course.



'We think it is significant that the government sees that it must take the CU groups into account and that it has become more positive towards them. We can see that we are having an impact on the government, as it often asks us not to be too critical. It recognises that PESADA is instrumental in women's empowerment, but it is not happy if we criticise it too much on issues like lack of safe drinking water, too few women in leadership positions, or a local health care budget that does not cover health facilities for women.'



Rastiba is a Muslim Pakpak woman who helps her husband in petty trading. She says that she helps her husband, but in fact she runs the business. She became a board member of the Credit Union.

At the time that the candidature for the general elections was opened to the public, we asked women members of the CU for their vision on politics. Rastiba had a strong vision about the general election system and women's representation in politics. She had a long list of arguments on the subject of why women were unable to participate in politics. Our field staff helped her to write up her ideas. She became one of the 20 women candidates sub listed for the General Election Committee at district level. The Committee was amazed by her ideas. Rastiba grew so much in the process that she is now very comfortable with herself.

Rastiba loves cooking too. Her home is close to the training centre and she often helps us in the kitchen. In general, cooking is considered the work of a maid. But Rastiba does not feel like a maid or in any way less valuable. She feels comfortable cooking in the training centre while she is involved as a trainee there.

As Rastiba's family lives close by, we could notice the changes occurring in her household. Interestingly, Rastiba's husband's role has changed and he now often takes care of the children.

PESADA uses the micro credit scheme to support women in reaching and staying in the political arena. Five percent of the CUs' profits are dedicated to this purpose. So far 37 women members have stood as political candidates at different levels. Fifteen women representing four districts stood for district parliament level; 14 women were elected to the Control Committee for the General Election for sub-district level; two were nominated for the General Election Committee at district level, of whom one was eventually elected; and five women were elected to positions of power at village level, among which four were village leaders and one was elected to the village council.

PESADA's work soon became a recognised force on women's issues and microcredit even beyond its own borders. Its involvement in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) and the Microcredit Summit (1997) in Washington DC reinforced an economic approach and advocacy for gender equality as key to women's empowerment.

3.7 Sustainability and Into the Future

Even after 20 years, sustainability remains a challenge. One way in which PESADA plans for the future is by investing in its staff, thus putting into practice its philosophy that empowering people effects change. Capacity building is key for internal development, as is the recruiting of new staff for business development. PESADA's philosophy of empowerment is to empower each other. By supporting women at grassroots level, PESADA also empowers itself. In a cyclical process, PESADA staff work continuously on improving their knowledge, skills and experience which they can take along with them when working with the women and the CUs and thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainability.

Similarly, the PESADA philosophy of solidarity has meant that over the years the small village CUs have slowly grown from a basic needs approach to enabling economic empowerment. Many of the village CUs have merged to create Big CUs that are stronger, and this trend will continue. The result is that the Big CUs have become much more than an economic institution: they are a collection of powerful women, and an arena to gain access to various resources and raise awareness.

For the first time, political education is being imparted openly, and for the first time, women are learning about politics, law and their rights; and about democracy, general elections and human rights. The result is that women are starting to take part in the political arena themselves, and they are becoming powerful role models for other women. If women are elected to leadership positions, this reflects a greater understanding among the general population that political parties are platforms for

change. Political participation by women is still in its early days, but it is an area that PESADA is developing. As of 2008, PESADA dedicates five percent of the CU profits every year to finance the political participation of women candidates and to give women a budget for campaigning. Since then, women have run in elections from local up to the national level. Women are now starting to influence decision making processes.



'We always have a personal approach. If a woman candidate is not elected, we organise a constructive reflection session where she can first vent her frustration and then analyse the situation. We always emphasise that although she did not get elected for parliament, she is still a real leader. We now have a list of potential leaders.'

'We do not want to grow too big. We want to know the people we work with. Through the network, we can have a major influence and impact at district and provincial level.'

Despite successes in the economic and political arenas, PESADA's plans for the near future are modest. In the political arena in particular, PESADA wants to know each woman representative personally and to be well connected to her. This 'personal touch' helps ensure that gender issues remain on the agenda, and PESADA feels that it may be the key to its sustainability over the next few years.

Two cases from Indonesia

ASOSIASI PENDAMPING PEREMPUAN USAHA KECIL (ASPPUK)

4.1. THE CONTEXT

Indonesia is made up of 17,508 islands spread over a vast area. Its political power centre is located on the island of Java. Women in Indonesia play an important role in all aspects of the nation's life, including its economy. An estimated 46 percent of Indonesia's women are registered as economically active. If the informal sector were included, this percentage would be much higher. Nearly 40 percent of the nearly 49 million micro, small and medium enterprises are operated by women. Women make a significant contribution to the economy. On the home front, about seven million households throughout the country are headed by women. Despite the significant role that women play in the economy, that role is barely recognised and they are rarely included as players in the economic development sector. As business players and entrepreneurs, women in small-micro businesses often face injustice and inequality. These include a lack of access to capital; unequal property and inheritance laws; assets being held in their husbands' or fathers' names; requirements that husbands act as signatories to loans; and so on.

4.2. BACKGROUND OF ASOSIASI PENDAMPING PEREMPUAN USAHA KECIL

Given the situation and status of women in Indonesia, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working towards the empowerment of women joined forces in the mid 1990s. They believed that the way to empower women was to enable them to establish small micro businesses, or *Perempuan Usaha Kecil* (PUK-micros). Many women were already working in small businesses, but in the informal sector and without external financial or advisory support. This meant that PUKs were an easy entry point to reach these women. The NGOs saw that what was needed was a women's movement of small strong PUKs that were functional and independent, and which would be seen as democratic, fair and equal partners in civil society.

In December 1997, these NGOs held their first National Forum and created a network called *Yayasan Pendamping Perempuan Usaha Kecil* (YASPPUK), or the Foundation for Women in Small Business Assistance.

YASPPUK's mission was:

- To facilitate the development of women in small micro businesses in an equal and gender-equitable civil society that is also democratic, prosperous and egalitarian.
- To facilitate the development of an equal and gender-equitable PUK-micro movement as a way to strengthen civil society.
- To facilitate the development of economic resources for the country in the form of women in PUK-micros.
- To increase women's awareness of and participation in politics.

Over the course of time, as YASPPUK developed and grew, it decided to change its institutional form from a foundation to an association. This meant that the organisation moved from one which provided support to women, to one that was made up of member NGOs who supported each other and created a space for women's leadership to emerge. This was agreed to by the members during the second National Forum in February 2001. YASPPUK officially became an association and was renamed ASPPUK, *the Asosiasi Pendamping Perempuan Usaha Kecil*, or the Association for Women in Small Business Assistance.

ASPPUK currently has 54 member NGOs spread over 21 provinces on the islands of Java, Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Kalimantan.

4.3. ASPPUK in action

ASPPUK works on three levels: strengthening women in small businesses; strengthening its NGO members; and advocating for women's leadership and gender justice.

4.3.1. Strengthening women in small businesses

ASPPUK targets women working in small home-based businesses such as chicken farming or food production. It reaches them through its member NGOs which establish PUK institutions at village level. These women (and children) had been working in these trades for years, but were either exploited as cheap labour or not paid at all. If they received payment at all it was less than what men received. Many women were in the centre of a vicious cycle: they borrowed money from money lenders at enormous cost to finance their businesses, and sold their products to middlemen who exploited them by paying them next to nothing for their products.

The women become members of their local micro-business association, the KPUK (women in small business groups). These are facilitated by a number of NGOs who are members of ASPPUK. The KPUK provides micro financing and training to the women in small businesses (PUK) so that they can run their businesses more independently and successfully. Beyond the business, the KPUKs work with the PUK (women in small

business) on raising awareness of their situation and encouraging critical thinking and political awareness. Only when women see that they are being treated unfairly will they think about changing their situation, become politically active, and take on leadership roles. They will strive to find ways to access resources - not only financial resources, but also market and information – to invest in their businesses.



A KPUK meeting

ASPPUK encourages each KPUK to establish its own network of women in small business at village and district levels. These networks are called KPUK at the village level and JARPUKs at the district level, and they are invaluable for enhancing the self-reliance of women. The JARPUKs have a number of distinct activities that include the following:

- Creating marketing information in their districts.
- Keeping each KPUK database updated in every district.
- Training business skills.
- Capacity building in terms of group organising, confidence building, understanding of rights.
- Finding capital from selected financial institutions.
- Establishing women's financial institutions (LKP).
- Building “showrooms” to display PUK products.
- Advocating on policy change.
- Forming alliances with other community service organisations to access local budgets.

Through the KPUKs, ASPPUK offers education, resource sharing, access to capital and to markets, a solid network, and knowledge sharing. These activities strengthen the PUKs and increase their bargaining power. They also enhance the PUK's critical awareness and leadership skills. These are the key pillars in ASPPUK's approach.

Surati: a determined entrepreneur and motivator

Surati is a successful small business woman from Sukoharjo, in central Java. Over the years, she had tried many types of businesses, but with little success. She then got in touch with the Krida Paramita Foundation, an ASPPUK NGO member. She registered a JARPUK (women in small business networks) called Kartini Sukoharjo and became involved



in her sub-district level Women in Micro-business Association, the KPUK. Through the KPUK and Krida Paramita Foundation she received the support she needed in terms of capacity building, political awareness, leadership skills and economic development. She learned the art of making cakes from the Sukoharjo Trade and Cooperative Office, and availed of every opportunity to improve her skills. It took a lot of practice to raise the standard of her cakes and their packaging to sale quality. She also needed to learn how to expand her market share in the cake-making sector. After a long period of experimentation and seeking the advice of the Java regional level ASPPUK, she was able to develop and market her products.

Surati became heavily involved in the KPUK and JARPUK and earned the trust of other women. In 2009, only a couple of years after becoming involved, she was elected as the chief of the Sukharjo JARPUK. In this position, and in her dealings with other PUKs, she has learned even more and has gained valuable business experience. Surati has many friends in the JARPUK, and is happy to share her knowledge and skills with them. Some JARPUK members have even followed her lead and have entered the cake making business. Surati is very supportive to anyone who seeks her advice in cake making and marketing. Recognising her business success, her leadership qualities, and her empowering attitude towards others, the Sukoharjo Coop and Trade Government appointed her as a cake producer trainer.

Not content with her achievements, Surati also invested her energy into advocating for a gender budget in Sukoharjo district. It took two years, but ultimately in 2011, the local government granted JARPUK Sukoharjo a small budget for women's empowerment.

After a long struggle, Surati is proud of herself because she is earning an income. Now that her husband is retired, she is able to support her family with her cake making business. She has become a motivator, encouraging her friends to start their own businesses. Becoming involved in KPUK is one way to get out of poverty. She may not, as of now, be a JARPUK leader, but she has committed herself to helping JARPUK members in developing businesses and promoting women's empowerment at the grassroots level.

4.3.2. Strengthening its NGO members

ASPPUK provides its member organisations with training to increase understanding and capacity on issues such as gender equitable perspectives, comparative studies, market studies, community organising, and improved awareness of women's rights and political awareness. The knowledge gained helps the member organisations in their efforts to establish, empower and build the capacity of the PUKs and its members at village and district level.

Being a network, the member NGOs also benefit from the skills and experience of their NGO colleagues. This includes a wide range of topics such as publishing, networking with others, fundraising and advocacy. Similarly, good communication among the ASPPUK members is important. It creates solidarity and cooperation, and strengthens the gender equitable perspectives within the NGOs and their programmes.

4.3.3. Advocating for gender justice and raising political awareness

Apart from its work with the CSO network to empower women economically, ASPPUK also advocates for gender equity, gender justice and women's leadership at the political level. Its starting point is that political awareness and economic development are both necessary for gender justice. ASPPUK runs training on community organisation, political awareness, political rights, and critical awareness. It also has a Women's Empowerment in Politics programme which carries out voter education at the village level in preparation for elections.



ASPPUK provides support to its member organisations

4.4. Challenges along the way

One challenge is the traditional attitudes of men and society. Despite women being responsible for domestic work, farm labour, and often being involved in small businesses, their efforts are rarely recognised as work. Similarly, until recently women were not accepted in the political sphere. ASPPUK faced the question of how to change attitudes so that domestic tasks are shared between all the members of the family regardless of gender, if the women of the household work outside the house in paid employment.

ASPPUK has found that how you approach men to start a dialogue is important. People need to be approached warmly and in a friendly way that leaves room for discussion. Having open discussions with community leaders is a good entry point. Discussions often focus on the positive, emphasising the original cultural values of a group that supports gender justice. One example of a relevant approach in the province of West Sumatra is to gently raise the subject that society there was traditionally matrilineal. While discussions with traditional community leaders should not be too radical, ASPPUK does try to encourage critical discussion.

Working within the cultural and religious beliefs is also important. ASPPUK advocates that gender is not a Western concept, but is strongly cultural and social, and is also based on religious beliefs. Indonesia has the world's largest population of Muslims, and ASPPUK emphasises the many Islamic teachings that promote gender justice, demonstrating that gender justice is synonymous with Islamic values.

4.5. Impact

ASPPUK has seen an impact on two levels: in its network and among the PUKs and JARPUKs.

At its network level, it has become a major force in the country for women's empowerment and leadership. It has started having its voice heard at national level in policy making. All its members now include a gender approach in all aspects of their work, and are thus having an impact in their areas. The members can also apply for ASPPUK accreditation of good practice if they meet the criteria based on ASPPUK's vision and mission. To further support its members, ASPPUK is currently developing a code of conduct and an independent advisory body. ASPPUK's professionalism has meant that it now has access to the government's livelihood programme which reinforces its approach at supporting women to start businesses.

At the KPUK and JARPUK level, women's financial institutions have been established that is building up capital for women and helping them establish their own small

businesses. The JARPUKs have been able to form alliances with village and district level community service organisations. This has had the result not only of being able to access more funds, but they have had an impact on the authorities' gender policy which has been reflected in local budgets. A clear sign of the JARPUKs being taken seriously as a force for development came in 2004 when the then minister of women's empowerment ordered regional governors to recognise JARPUK's role when submitting economic development programmes. On the operational level, the JARPUKs now have access to markets that they never had before. As a result, the lives of the women in small businesses and their families have improved considerably.

5.6. Sustainability and into the future

While the JARPUKs are doing well, and the member NGOs are getting stronger all the time, ASPPUK feels that the NGO members have become overly dependent on it. Together with the members, ASPPUK will be looking into the sustainability of each member and assessing what needs to happen to create independence. It will then draw up plans with them to further develop skills such as in business techniques or marketing.

While the members are too dependent on ASPPUK, ASPPUK itself considers itself to be too dependent on donors. The membership dues are simply not enough to sustain its work with the network. ASPPUK needs to increase its income. It will do this by strengthening its own marketing skills, by building a showroom of the products made by the JARPUKs, and by holding trade fairs.

Networking is very important for ASPPUK. It cooperates with NGOs whether they members or not. It also collaborates with organisations outside Indonesia who work towards the empowerment of women in small businesses and who promote women's leadership. In fact, the more it networks with like-minded organisations, the more it sees that solidarity is one of the most important aspects of dealing with the problems that arise. The wealth of knowledge and experience, and the creativity of its members, are almost always enough to tackle situations that come up.

A case from the Philippines

The Agri-Aqua Development Coalition



5.1. The Context

The Agri-Aqua Development Coalition (AADC) operates on the island of Mindanao, in the south of the Philippines. Mindanao is the country's second largest island, and its economy is based on agriculture, forestry and fishery. The export of agricultural products such as banana, pineapple, corn, coffee, coconut, durian, raw rubber, palm oil, cotton, cut flowers, and seaweed account for a large proportion of earnings. Tourism is playing an increasingly more significant role while the traditional forestry and fishery activities have declined in recent years.

Ethnic and religious tensions, coupled with high levels of poverty, have brought instability and social unrest to the island. Since the 1960s, the predominantly Islamic south, through the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, has engaged in a quest for independence from the predominantly Christian north, while a nation-wide conflict with communist insurgents has also taken its toll. In this conflict, 160,000 have died and more than two million have been displaced. A truce was signed in 2009 between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Many believe that much of the violence is fuelled by deep poverty rooted in decades of under-investment in

infrastructure, education, health, agriculture and so on. The consequence of this is that poor people cannot climb out of poverty. There is little community level support, and the communities do not have the funds or the experience to lobby for their land rights at the national level.

While agriculture is the main driver of community economic development, it is a largely underdeveloped sector. Average yields still continue to be far below Asian standards despite the use of modern synthetic chemical inputs. The result of years of prolonged chemical inputs is decreased soil fertility and productivity. Environmental stresses such as the increasing variability of climate, extreme weather events (too much rain, too little rain), and increasing natural disasters have contributed to the decreasing income of small farmers from their already meagre agricultural land. Another looming threat to smallholder agriculture in rural Mindanao is the influx of agricultural plantations and extractive industries such as natural resource mining. These have reduced the access of smallholder farmers to their agricultural lands.

Another contributing factor to the low incomes of farming households is that men have dominated the task of earning incomes for the family. Women members of the households are not given the opportunity to earn and to contribute to the overall income of the family.

5.2. Background of the Agri-Aqua Development Coalition



An impression of AADC's work¹

¹ All photos courtesy of the Agri-Aqua Development Coalition, Mindanao, the Philippines.

It was against this backdrop of poverty, social instability, and the vulnerable position of women and girls that the Agri-Aqua Development Coalition (AADC) was founded in 1994. AADC brings together people's organisations of farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, and peasant women from across Mindanao. Its roots can be traced to the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR), the broadest coalition of peasant groups in Philippine social history, a group that lobbied for genuine agrarian reform law in the 1980s. From the start, AADC's focus has been on coalition building to achieve its vision of sustainable rural communities.

AADC is committed to creating sustainable rural communities which benefit from reforms in government, and ensuring that people's participation is genuine and meaningful. It is also committed to consolidating coalitions that work for change and for the development of the community. It strives to effect progress within the ranks of the rural poor through its flagship programme, Community Economic Development (CED). Using their common interests, the CED mobilises government, the private sector and civil society to make efficient use of resources (natural, financial and human) to achieve economic growth and equity. The foundation of the CED's work is gender equality, food sufficiency and environmental protection.



Training of people's organisations leaders

AADC subscribes to the following principles of coalition building: collective action; decision making by consensus building; the promotion of solidarity and unity in diversity. By affirming these, the coalition has become one of the most dynamic players in Mindanao's social movement.



“The cooperative manages the moringa enterprise (See Box: The Moringa Project). We negotiate with the buyer on behalf of the farmers, and ensure that there are enough fresh moringa leaves to be sold to the buyer.”

Irene Morales, bookkeeper, Libas Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative

AADC’s programmes are managed by its secretariat and local coalition members. Its work in the communities is founded on the coalition’s values. These are the following.

1. Power comes from solidarity and mutual trust.
2. Collective action brings a community closer to its developmental goals.
3. Participation is an exercise in people empowerment.
4. Generosity is a sustaining path towards righteousness and purity.
5. Above all the supreme values of love and faith must reign.²



Strategy session on agrarian reform claim-making

² 2006, May 31 : International Newsletter on Sustainable Local Development. Newsletter #29. June 1, 2006. Article by Poirier, Yvon.

In order to reach its goals, AADC has identified eight points that form the basis of unity as the locus of collective action.

- Agrarian reform and rural development
- Fishery and aquatic reform
- Participatory governance
- Sustainable development
- Ancestral domain
- Gender Equity
- Economic development
- Peace building

AADC has undergone shifts in focus over the years. From an initial focus on advocating for agrarian and fisheries reform, the focus shifted towards political organisation, local coalition building, advocacy, participation in local governance, and economic empowerment. Its strategies over the past 17 years have earned political power at the village and municipal levels for members of its 196 people's organisations. Recently, AADC has started developing strategies to accrue economic gains as well, both for individual members and for their cooperatives.



Fisheries conference

AADC has identified gender and equity as one of its eight themes. Women are particularly vulnerable in Mindanao within the context of widespread poverty and the lack of enforcement of land rights. At the household level, women and girls are often exposed to gender bias and domestic violence, while at the community level they have few opportunities to participate in community activities and attain leadership positions. Economically, their access to income generation is curtailed, as are their access and control over resources.

AADC has operated as a coalition of people's organisations in rural Mindanao. It has relied mainly on the mobilisation of its people's organisation members to affect the interventions that the coalition has deemed as relevant and appropriate, based on its reading of the realities of rural organising in Mindanao. By far the most significant adjustment was when AADC shifted its focus from socio-political to economic empowerment in 2000. This brought the twin strategies of community economic development (CED) and community enterprise organising (CEO) to the fore. These are currently well under way through the collective efforts of coalition leaders and members alike.

5.3. AADC in action

5.3.1. Working towards gender equality and empowerment

AADC advocates political, policy, and social recognition of the fact that women and girls have distinct needs that must be addressed in terms of education and leadership skills. This means that programme design and implementation at different phases need to pay specific attention to women's needs. AADC believes that generic community development with efforts to increase women's participation is not enough.



AADC strives to increase women's participation in economic activities

Economic development and women's participation in economic activities is crucial. AADC stimulates economic development at the community level through two types of community enterprises: Community Economic Development (CED), and Community Enterprise Organizing (CEO). The CEDs and CEOs are run collectively by coalition

leaders and members. Apart from providing business services to the CEDs and CEOs, and capacity building for its members, AADC strengthens these bodies by developing and consolidating tools that include gender variables. It works specifically with women on access to income and income security; control over resources; gender relations; gender analysis; and the risk assessment of the vulnerability of women.



“We are giving moringa production a lot of attention. It is good for our health so it is a good plant to have, and it helps our daily needs. Our income has increased. What we now earn from moringa we save for the time being. This is because we are planning to expand our production of moringa to other areas.”

Virgie Montilla, Cuvago Women’s Association

AADC does this by creating opportunities and spaces for women’s self-determination. Women can undergo training to learn management skills to enhance their community enterprises. Community enterprises in which women play a major role are charcoal processing and moringa farming (see box). AADC supports the women in negotiations and marketing, and in becoming more assertive and proactive in seizing opportunities as they manifest themselves.



The MORINGA Project

AADC used Oxfam’s Poor Women’s Economic Leadership (PWEL) framework together with gendered market tools to assess the viability of a new economic activity for women. It used the following steps to analyse procedures, processes and stakeholders.

- Step 1 - Gather product information (market demand, production requirements, financing needs and operational data).
- Step 2 - Perform value chain analysis, including identification of stakeholders and their roles. Gather gender disaggregated data.
- Step 3 – Determine the factors that may hinder or facilitate women’s participation and leadership.

(...Continued to next page)

The MORINGA Project (...Continued from previous page)

Step 4 - Determine leverage points for women: What are the gender relations in the production systems? And what are the strengths and weaknesses of women?

Step 5 – Identify required market services with available and potential providers.

Seeing the need for an alternative income generating crop, the moringa enterprise [was] started in 2009. The moringa is an indigenous tree with multiple uses and a wide range of product sub-sectors. Its leaves are highly nutritious, and the government already uses moringa products in its childhood feeding programmes. Almost every part of the tree can be used. The moringa can be used for food supplements, animal feed and pharmaceuticals. It even produces a special ion which can be used as a natural electrolyte to purify water for drinking. As it is a natural organic product, it may eventually replace the aluminium sulphate currently used.



As the project is still in the pilot phase, the leaves are presently harvested and sold directly to the purchaser, in this case Secura International, Inc.

Requiring less land to grow, moringa is an environmentally beneficial replacement for soya. Similarly, research is being carried out on the viability of the moringa nuts being used for biofuel, and AADC believes that the future of moringa cultivation lies in this prospect and in the moringa's potential to replace palm oil. One hectare of moringa produces 3,000 gallons of oil when compared with a yield of 1,600 gallons of palm oil per hectare. However, AADC believes that at present the greater opportunity lies in the food fortification and health supplements sector. Moringa thus makes sense, for people, planet and profit.

For the women in the AADC coalition, the moringa enterprise is a good vehicle to enter into economic activities and take the lead. The entire management team in the business is composed of women. This will give them the opportunity to demonstrate their management skills. The enterprise was initially started as nurseries where women were able to grow saplings in their own yards and sell them on for additional income. By making this activity exclusive to women, AADC is intending to give them an initial boost in a relatively new industry that is expected to grow. Further processing of the tree parts is open to both men and women to develop into a business. AADC has observed that women are good at planting and growing saplings, and is nurturing them to assume the lead role in selling to larger scale growers later. As moringa growing is a new industry, it will be a good way of getting women integrated into the mainstream agriculture industry. It will also involve women in writing the rules and taking leadership roles. While the project is still in its early days, AADC expects that, at the household level, it will enable women to contribute to the household income and will help create greater gender balance with more sharing of domestic work, decision making, and access and control of resources.

5.4. Challenges along the way

While women's membership and presence are accepted in the cooperatives, changing the perceptions of both men and women on the subject of 'women' and breaking the stereotypes and biases about women are extremely difficult. AADC needs to work with men to empower them as well to break free of the traditional view of women. They need to 'unlearn' their beliefs and to make use of the spaces available for them hand-in-hand with women.

The prevailing biases regarding women require that women taking on new roles have to be more successful than men; besides, they are often judged more harshly than men. If they make mistakes or do not achieve what they set out to do, there is a tendency for others to ascribe this to their gender rather than to factors such as lack of experience. These can often be expressions of resistance to changing gender roles and relationships.

Women's own perceptions of themselves also need to change. AADC works with women to help them overcome hesitancy and embrace opportunities. To this end, AADC provides training, tips and knowledge, and supports women in negotiations and marketing.

Another issue that AADC is tackling is having land rights for women enforced. Traditionally, women had no rights to land, either in terms of own purchase or upon the death of their husbands or parents. While the Family Code has decreed equal access to land by both men and women, it is often not yet fully adhered to. Losing land rights can have tremendous negative consequences for women and their children, because they lose their livelihoods.

5.5. Impact



Women farmers

Change is a slow process, mostly achieved one small step at a time. The most significant signs of positive change can be observed at the household level. Despite many women initially being nervous about the impact of their activities on their home life, AADC has noticed that household tasks and family responsibilities are being shared more equally between family members and more often. Where women have been able to generate an income and contribute to the household finances, they are becoming more vocal and assertive. And with their wives becoming income earners, husbands' attitudes are changing, so that they are more likely to take on some of the domestic tasks.



“With the moringa production, we have lots of advantages now. Our husbands do not blame us anymore. In the past they used to blame us for not helping them. But it’s different now – the women are now working for the family. The moringa project is an important source of income – it paid for the schooling of my children. Two of them recently graduated from college.”

Erlinda Bayod, Camaway Farmers and Fisherfolks Association

Women are becoming more active. For example, at the community level, women are becoming more involved in community activities, and some are even taking on leadership roles in the cooperatives. AADC members are now 56 percent women (over 25,000), while the number of member organisations has grown from three to sixteen. While men still dominate the leadership positions, the number of women representatives is gradually increasing.

5.6. Sustainability and into the future

A new approach to achieving gender equity and women’s empowerment is to educate men. One of the new activities designed to achieve this goal is the ‘family days’. Every member of the family is welcome, and they can take part in various activities. Among the activities are support groups to discuss issues at the household level. When men see that other men support their wives and kids, they are encouraged to do likewise.



Earning an income is an important step towards placing women in leadership roles.

AADC is optimistic that gender equality will be achieved in our lifetime. The younger generation is changing, partly because of pressure from their peers, but also because of their parents' increasing awareness. For the first time, significantly, boys are learning to do household tasks. The younger generation is seeing more women in leadership roles in organisations, the political arena and in higher education; and they see women asserting their rights. Education is crucial in this, and AADC is working on having gender principles mainstreamed in the education system so that this will continue into the future.



Area Reporting by women leaders

Engaging in some introspection regarding its own performance, the AADC secretariat, which for a long time was dominated by men, has changed to become more gender balanced. Nevertheless, being a female leader still presents a challenge, even within the AADC's own secretariat. The office joke is that the men should not stay longer to work but should go home to be involved in the family. AADC believes that both genders need to make time for their home responsibilities as well as their work responsibilities.

AADC is optimistic about these trends toward change continuing into the future. Its strength lies in its being a membership coalition of organisations which are embedded at the community level and whose programmes are managed by members. The communities will continue even if, for some reason in the future, the secretariat happened to fold.

A case from Sri Lanka

THE DAIRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



6.1. THE CONTEXT

Sri Lanka is an island nation in the Indian Ocean, located off the southern coast of India. Until recently, the country was gripped by a civil war that lasted for more than 30 years. While peace is slowly being restored, the conflict caused immense suffering, forcing people from their homes, causing high unemployment and under-employment, and driving businesses out of the northern and eastern regions of the country. More than one million people have been affected, and many families have lost their livelihoods.

Amidst these problems, Sri Lanka was hit hard by the tsunami of 2004 which ravaged large parts of the country. While a huge amount of resources poured into the country, they were primarily focused on the Tsunami affected areas. Funding and human resources were diverted away from other regions, leaving areas like Vavuniya, in the north, already battered by the conflict, struggling with limited support. The aftermath of the conflict and the diversion of resources has left Vavuniya to deal with multiple problems. These include the loss of assets; the breakdown of social networks; the lack of investment and funding; security restrictions that limit mobility; and stray cattle, ownerless as a result of the conflict. These factors have meant that development has stagnated for decades and the people have remained in poverty.

Vavuniya's struggling economy was largely based on dairy production, in which women were involved informally. However, women had very little power in the market. Individual farmers sold their milk directly to large companies and were not in a position

to negotiate the price. A multiplicity of such disadvantages left the women in this region among the poorest people in Vavuniya. On top of having to deal with their shattered lives and the challenges of keeping their families together, the lack of employment opportunities, of access to the few resources that may be available, and of decision making power had left the women of Vavuniya poor, powerless and demotivated.

6.2. BACKGROUND OF THE DAIRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The town of Vavuniya lies in an agricultural and dairy producing area. While most of the women work at the production and family farm levels, their work is often regarded as unpaid family work. Despite their generating an income from agriculture, customary laws and traditional social norms tend to be biased in favour of men, preventing women's access to resources.¹

In 2006, a Community-based Needs Assessment confirmed that dairy farming was still an important livelihood activity for households in Vavuniya. However, the dairy sector was very weak given the destruction of infrastructure, the lack of veterinary and extension services, and sparse financial services. Nevertheless, dairy farming was a secure source of secondary income for 15,000 households, of which 3,000 (20 percent) were headed by women. Despite the number of women in the industry, they had little access to and control over the market, and limited access to supply channels. This placed them in a very vulnerable position, and gave them no bargaining power.



The first group of farmers to receive livestock management training in 2006²

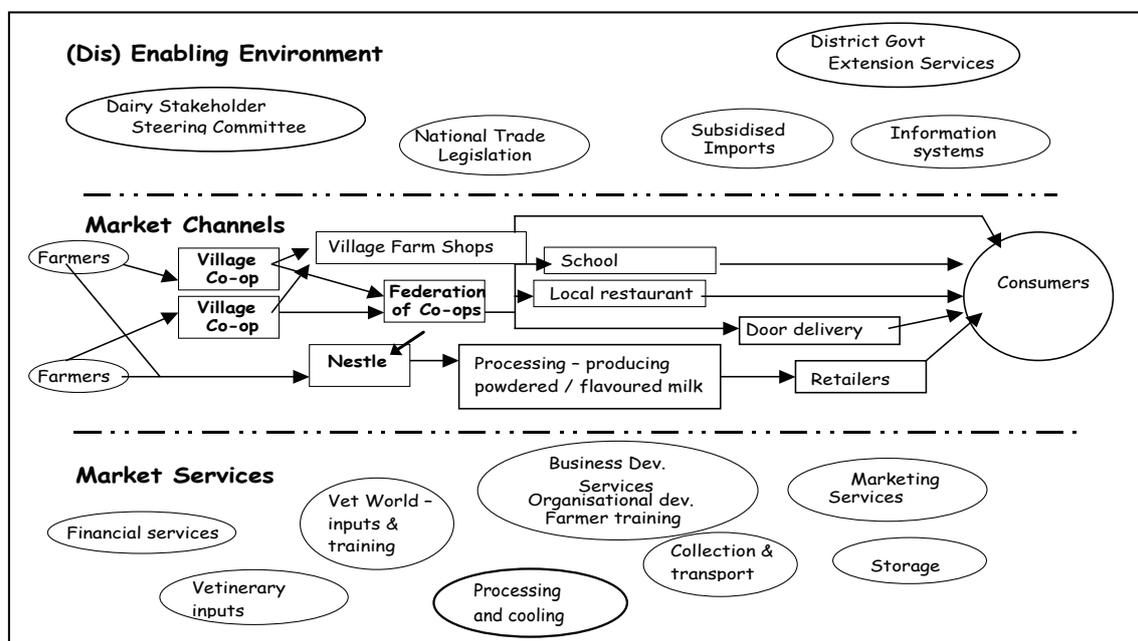
- 1 FAO, Asia's women in agriculture, environment and rural production: Sri Lanka. <http://www.fao.org/sd/WPdirect/WPre0112.htm>
- 2 All photos and illustrations courtesy of DDP.

A market assessment showed that the dairy industry was a good entry point for the Dairy Development Programme (DDP) to start its work with women. Furthermore, the demand for milk and dairy products in Sri Lanka is high, and is projected to grow by over five percent per year. As domestic production only supplies around 20 percent³ of the total demand for milk and dairy products, and will only grow by 2.5 percent, there will be a widening gap between supply and demand. Currently, most dairy products are imported. Local producers face two major challenges: cheap imported milk powder from subsidised dairy industries abroad; and the perception among consumers that milk powder is hygienic and convenient while 'local milk' is inferior and unhygienic. On top of this, most consumers are unaware of the nutritional benefits of fresh, local milk.

DDP's Main Goals

The high concentration of women in the dairy sector at the home level provided an excellent entry point for the DDP to work towards its goals, which were as follows.

- Incomes for women
- Greater confidence among women, and in women
- Recognition, trust and respect for women by household and community members
- Leadership positions for women, and women's empowerment
- The development of new dairy product supply channels
- Consumer understanding that local, fresh milk is more beneficial than imported powdered brands



A market map highlights the different market actors along the dairy value chain. It also highlights the market services required to develop the chain and any elements in the environment which may affect the development of the chain.

3 Department of Animal Production and Health, 2007.

6.3. The Dairy Development Programme in action

From the outset, the Dairy Development Programme was planned to run in three phases.

1. The Pilot phase, in which 200 households took part in programme activities.
2. The Learning phase, in which activities were analysed in preparation of scaling up activities through government and private institutions.
3. The District development phase, in which activities were scaled up. Dairy Development Stakeholder Advisory Groups were created to coordinate dairy development activities.

Below is an explanation of the programme's strategy to address each of its objectives:

6.3.1. Incomes for Women

Without an income, the position of women in the Vavuniya area was weak. One way to address this was to collectively involve women in organised income generating activities. This led to the creation of Small Producers' Cooperatives, which had the goal of increasing the earning power of women and thereby their bargaining power. When the project began, there was only one dairy cooperative at the district level, and this cooperative was run by men. One of the first steps therefore was to develop and institutionalise Women-Managed Dairy Cooperatives, and to link them to the formal dairy industry. This proved to be a successful approach, and by the end of the pilot project, there were eight village level dairy cooperatives led by women.

6.3.2. Greater confidence among women, and in women

Women's empowerment can only occur if there exists an appreciation of the importance of gender equality and respect for women. This, together with mobilising communities to take a stand on violence against women, is a basic philosophy that is continuously promoted by DDP. DDP also works towards increasing the leadership and management capacities of women, and advocates for a better policy environment for women engaged in economic and political activities.

6.3.3. Recognition, trust and respect for women by household and community members

As the women's work in the cooperatives took hold, their bargaining power increased. They demonstrated their business skills to their communities by first improving the quality, supply and timely delivery of the milk, and then undertaking collective marketing to set the pricing at a fair level. They started to bring an income into the household, and the community members soon started to see the ripple effect of the benefits spreading outside the household level to the community level.



The elected committee of CBO Tharanikulam, Vavuniya

Leadership positions for women, and women's empowerment:

As the women's confidence grew, they gained the trust and appreciation of their household and community members. The successful women have become role models and leaders, and are able to motivate women in other village bodies. Women gradually became accepted as entrepreneurs and leaders in the community. From there, it was just a short step for them to attain key positions in the Federation of Cooperatives and in the Dairy Stakeholder Advisory Group.

6.3.4. The development of new dairy product supply channels

Once established, the women's cooperatives started to develop new markets and generate demand. One new market was pre-schools and schools, which the cooperative developed in collaboration with the Department of Education. Another was providing door-to-door delivery services from three village based milk sales centres to 3,000 households.



Pupils and teachers queue up at a school to buy milk during their break.

"Before, my mother refused to give me pocket money. But she was here on the opening day of this stall. She recommends that I drink milk, so she now gives me money to buy milk."

Pupil, Standard 8, Vavuniya



Milk hygiene, storage, collection and distribution were improved.

To further expand markets, the women's cooperatives started to develop value-added products like flavoured milk, curd, ghee, ice-cream and milk toffees. The success of these products improved the incomes of the cooperative members.

6.3.5. Consumer understanding that local, fresh milk is more beneficial than imported powdered brands

The public's initial concerns about hygiene and the reliability of the supply needed to be addressed. Milk simply did not remain fresh to the point of sale and the supply was not constant. The cooperatives addressed these issues step by step. They first mapped the milk collection and distribution routes to ensure that they established the shortest and most efficient collections; and they organised two collections a day instead of one. Investing in better chilling systems and strict quality control systems ensured that the consumer was guaranteed a good supply of fresh, clean milk.

6.4. Challenges along the way

At first, the cattle were not cared for regularly. They were mostly left to wander around unattended to find their own food, and they were not given medical attention when sick or when giving birth. This meant that the quality of the milk was poor and the yield was low. On top of this, the breed itself was low yield. One hurdle was thus to work with the communities to improve the health care and nutrition of the cows in order to increase milk yield per cow. This included adding nutrients to the feed, creating pastures with nutritious grass, cross breeding to produce higher yield animals, and working with government veterinary services to keep the cows healthy.



A woman from the Komatha cooperative learning to plant and harvest nutritious grass for cattle feed

Overcoming the attitudes of men and of the male dominated structures was another major challenge. Initially, financial service providers were reluctant to lend to women as they had never done so before, and as women had no track record of taking loans and repaying them. They looked at the gender of the applicant rather than at the viability of the business proposition. That gradually changed as the women's cooperatives became a success and the women re-paid their loans. The financial institutions now look at the business proposition and base their decisions on its viability, regardless of who submits it.

A third challenge: To ensure a regular supply of milk and create stable incomes, the women farmers needed to increase milk production. DDP worked with the women at individual and collective levels to improve livestock management; to better manage the limited land resources that they had (further limited by security concerns and land mines); to improve cattle husbandry practices and improved breeding. These activities were executed with the help of a revolving fund.

Fourth, the project tackled the lack of skills in the area by training women to become local technical functionaries. The women provided advice, knowhow and support to farmers. These services not only increased the quantity and quality of the milk supply, but also resulted in an increase in income and assets owned by women.

Successful approaches

Given the perceptions about women and their traditional place in society, the project worked hard to avoid being perceived as a threat to existing institutions and power structures. It did not want to displace men, and did not want to be perceived as doing so. DDP thus developed its own institutions and market channels. It resisted trying to integrate women into the one male dominated cooperative. Instead, it approached the President of the men's cooperative. He supported DDP's philosophy of poverty alleviation by empowering women, and together with him, DDP worked to remap the district and create new markets for women's cooperatives.



Some of the new added value dairy products made by the women's cooperative

The initial collaboration with the President of the men's cooperative was the first step in providing the space needed for women to enter the market. Together, they supported the women's cooperatives and increased women's power without the men feeling like they were losing out. When the women's cooperatives were ready to develop and sell new products, they could do so without displacing men.

Support of a man in power was key

At the start of the project, there was only one cooperative and it was run by men. However, the President of this cooperative was very open to our work, and he played a critical role in the success of our project. He was very concerned about poverty and human rights, so gladly became engaged in our work. With his support we were able to re-map and restructure the cooperatives in the district. The President convinced others to go along with the proposed changes. Even more significant was his convincing the rest of the men in his cooperative that they would not lose ground, and that everyone would benefit.

Eventually we were able to show that everyone did indeed benefit, and now the men in the cooperative are supportive of the women's cooperative.

6.5. Tools

The cooperative concept in itself was a useful tool in encouraging people to accept new ideas. Previously, poor women felt inferior and unable to participate in community activities. Widows and single person households were generally excluded, and could not risk their already insecure incomes by trying to change their status. Cooperatives provide safety in numbers and mutual support among its members. In this way, the cooperative concept helped to change attitudes and beliefs, and women were able to gain social acceptance in their new roles.

The project used the Gendered Value Chain Analysis – a PWEL tool that analyses the processes needed to bring a product from its conception, through all the steps required to reach the consumer. This knowledge helped the project identify and develop opportunities through the cooperative for women that would improve their livelihoods and enable them to participate in economic decision making. In this way, they were able to gain control over income and resources on an equal footing with men in the dairy industry.

What are the characteristics of women leaders?

Women leaders:

- Are non-biased.
- Are good leaders who raise issues on behalf of other members.
- Know how to convince others.
- Are able to address issues in an open forum.
- Are not selfish – they talk about the community, and not about themselves.
- Know how to negotiate with the government and the private sector.
- Are willing to take risks.
- Are accepted in leadership roles by the community.
- Are able to engage men – to convince them without being too confrontational.

6.6. Impact

DDP's work with the women of Vavuniya through the cooperatives has had a significant impact on the region. With women now making up 80 percent of the cooperatives' members and 60 percent of their management positions, they have gradually begun to gain power in the market. Women have become leaders and role models for other women.

DDP has seen increases in incomes and economic opportunities for women, and has seen women taking up management and decision making positions within the dairy sector. This has enabled them to gain social acceptance as farmer-owners, managers and leaders.

Significantly, DDP has begun to see a shift in attitudes towards women. One clear shift is that many financial service providers in the region now take women seriously. Previously, they would automatically reject any requests by women. Now they base their decisions on the business proposition and not on the gender of the applicant.



“Before, we used to be scared to speak to any officers; but we now have the confidence to negotiate with business officers and managers.”

Member of the Komatha Cooperative Society

As owners and managers of small enterprises, women now contribute towards household expenditures. Their contribution has increased their decision making power in their households, which has been critical in increasing their confidence and self-reliance.



Tharmapuththri Illanganathan, dairy farmer and member of Komatha Live-stock Breeders Cooperative.

DDP also supported the women producers to anchor their economic activities in the region. They did this by analysing the market demand and identifying market opportunities across the dairy value chain. The result was to diversify their products beyond fresh milk to produce sweets, curd and ghee, and to enter into new production areas. They linked the cooperatives to business experts. Women have thus gained business planning and marketing skills to take along with them into the future.

Women have been able to influence economic decision making at the household level and in

the marketplace. This has resulted in greater equality between men and women, and increased confidence among women, who now demand services and negotiate better conditions for themselves and their families. As a group, women are now collaborating to lift themselves up from poverty.

The success of DDP and of individual women has helped to foster social acceptance of women as entrepreneurs and leaders in the community. The newly emerged women leaders now represent the interests of milk producers, be they women or men. The dairy industry in Vavuniya is largely seen as a success because of the women.

Apart from the impact on the women themselves, families have benefitted from increased household incomes and better diets. Animal protein through milk and meat has improved families' health.



'I am earning an income, and my whole family benefits.'

Previously, Pavalarasa Saro worked as a casual, irregular agricultural labourer, earning less than Rs. 300 a day. In April 2007, she received a pregnant cow. She also received training in cattle management practices, and became a member of a cooperative which buys her milk for a fair price. Her income increased dramatically. A higher income

means that her children are healthier, and that she can pay for medical services and buy their school supplies. She has even managed to save a once unthinkable sum of Rs. 3,000.

With her savings supplemented by a small loan, she now plans to buy a second cow. She explains what her new situation means to her: "In those days, it was my husband who mostly earned, and we would use his earnings. Now, we are eating from my salary. I am earning an income, and my whole family benefits."

6.7. sustainability and into the future

The challenge for the future is to build on the successes of Vavuniya and to leverage additional resources to extend this successful approach throughout the country's dairy sector. By reaching thousands more women in Sri Lanka, thousands of families will move out of poverty, with all the resultant effects such as improved health and education.

DDP has demonstrated that small enterprises in the dairy sector have the potential to expand and become national level enterprises. It has also demonstrated that poor women can be effective leaders in the economy, their communities and their families.

The success of this programme is a result of having rooted the decision-making in a solid market analysis; focusing on one programme without being side-tracked; having a donor with a clear exit strategy from the start; and stimulating the engagement of the private sector with the local communities and the local and national government departments.

The government is now integrating the DDP into the District and Provincial Development plans, and is even consulting the Dairy Stakeholder Advisory Group on the plan. This plan will outline the investment in the development of the dairy sector at district and provincial levels.



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