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**Gendered Political Economy:
The Economic and Social Factors that Affect Women's Political Participation**

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December 2015

Master's Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
International Affairs at the City College of New York

COLIN POWELL SCHOOL FOR CIVIC AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

There is a prevailing attitude that increasing women's economic participation leads to their empowerment, or increases their agency in influencing decision making. This is despite large data evidence to the contrary and acknowledgement by financial institutions that a link cannot be established. This thesis examines what impact labor participation has on women's influence in their community and their political participation, how non-income related skills like advocacy increases women's self-confidence and agency, and the role non-formal training and networks play in increasing women's participation in decision making and political participation. I find that when conducting a data comparison there does not appear to be a relationship between labor and political participation, but that Cambodian women believe income is key to increasing their influence. Also I find that non-income related skills, non-formal training and networks are important tools to deepen women's confidence and capacity, leading to sustainable improvement in participation in decision making. Also there is a new area of study, men and masculinity, which is now being used to provide gender relevant gender training to men. In other words, gender is not just about women changing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Gender inequality has been one of the most enduring forms of inequality across all societies over the course of human history...one of the deepest and most resistant forms of inequality existing in the world.”¹ We can see that even countries who have taken the lead in shrinking the gap between men and women in areas like health and education there remains significant inequality in economic and political participation.

In many countries women make up a majority in the workforce but women continue to receive unequal pay, unequal access to high level positions and higher paying jobs. Additionally women trail men in political leadership positions in every country, many times by a large margin. And this is particularly true in developing countries where those women that do participate in the economy are most likely to be employed in vulnerable, low pay and low skill jobs. And though women’s participation in the economy may increase they continue to have little influence on local and national level- decision making that might increase their ability to influence changes that improve their lives. A popular way to describe increasing women’s ability to influence or their agency at the international level, and especially in development, is to “empower” women through the economy (most often) or politics.

Empower and empowerment are not clearly defined terms. For the purposes of this study I use the term empowerment as informed by the definitions of Kabeer and Batliwala.² Empowerment is reflected in a person gaining the ability to make choices in

¹ Shawn S. Dorius and Glenn Firebaugh, “Trend in Global Gender Inequality.” *Social Forces*, Vol. 88, No. 5 (July 2010), pp. 1941 – 1968. Pp. 1957 – 1958.

² Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities - Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London: Verso (1994); Srilatha Batliwala, “Taking the Power out of Empowerment: An Experiential Account.” *Development in Practice*, Vol. 17, No. 4/5 (Aug. 2007), pp. 557 – 565.

life where they were unable previously. This happens by challenging and changing entrenched ideas and practices and increasing a person's access to decision-making that can lead to behavioral changes. Each of these, changing ideas and behaviors, and increasing access, then can lead to a person's increased influence on power structures that can alter institutions and traditions that are inequitable to them.

“Empowering women is not only the right thing to do -- it makes economic sense,” Christine LaGarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund.³ Today strategies in the private and public sectors focus on empowering women economically and it seems the implicit argument is that economic empowerment would lead to increasing women's agency and access to resources.⁴ However, in every country there remains a significant gap between women's participation in labor and their participation as decision makers in comparison to men.⁵

Because of persistent gender gaps and their effect on the status of women and development, there is currently extensive strategic planning and investment in women's economic empowerment. However there is a growing body of research that challenges the implicit assumption that women's economic empowerment is helpful in improving the status of women. This literature, though, has conflicting arguments in the degree to which economic access for women contributes to their overall empowerment. And to complicate matters, there is very little gendered political economy literature available that

³ Christine Lagarde, “Empowering women is not only the right thing to do - it makes economic sense.” Emerging Markets website (Oct. 10, 2014), accessed March 14, 2015. Go to: <http://www.emergingmarkets.org/Article/3389107/CHRISTINE-LAGARDE-Empowering-women-is-not-only-the-right-thing-to-do-it-makes-economic-sense.html>

⁴ Here are just a few of the organizations and the publications that reflect their assumptions: UN Women, “Economic Empowerment of Women.” *In Brief* (no publication date); International Monetary Fund, “Women, Work, and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity,” *IMF Staff Discussion Note* (Sept 2013); Financial Times editorial, “Ambition and growth help narrow gender gap,” *Financial Times Special Report, Women in Business: Emerging Markets* (7 March 2014) pp. 1-2.

⁵ The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII) Report 2014 shows that while a high number of women are in the workforce (66 percent of that of men), globally women hold only 21 percent of parliamentary seats.

sufficiently analyses the effects of economic empowerment on women's improved societal and political status. There are also data and knowledge gaps tracking the outcomes of women's economic empowerment, though that women are empowered seems an implicit assumption in ongoing country-based strategic planning and investment. Nevertheless there is not a great deal of literature or consensus as to how women's income and access to decision making are related. This area of study is ripe for an in-depth analysis as women's economic participation is the current logical underpinning of development planning and policies.

Women must be proactive agents of change in their status and to do so they must have access to the information and tools that will assist them. To add to the growing knowledge in this area, this thesis focuses on women's status and empowerment specifically through women's participation in labor and politics, examining their level of participation in each and whether women's economic participation influences the access to decision-making or political power. I will attempt to identify some economic, political and social levers that influence women and also their families, communities and nations. Also I will analyze how these may change women's perspectives that presently allow for or perpetuate norms and practices that are harmful to women.

Methodology

In order to answer the above I will investigate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: I argue that earning an income increases a woman's influence in her community, leading to increased access to decision making and political participation.

Hypothesis 2: I argue that non-income related skills such as advocacy increase a woman's self-confidence and her desire to influence her family and community, leading to increased access to decision making and political participation.

Hypothesis 3: I argue also that non-formal training and networks have the greatest influence on women's status and participation in her community, leading to increased access to decision making and political participation.

I employ a mixed methodology to evaluate the above hypothesis. I begin with a macro analysis using data from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report. The World Economic Forum provides comparative gender data between 2006 - 2014 for economic participation and opportunity, specifically labor force participation and political participation, including elected and non-elected positions. I will use a comparative analysis of this data to demonstrate that there does not appear to be a relationship between women's labor participation and political participation.

The qualitative portion of the methodology focuses on a case study of Cambodia and how traditional gender roles are evolving. The qualitative evidence will be provided anecdotally from interviews carried out in January 2015 and June - August 2015 in Cambodia with development leaders, government officials, community leaders and organizers, and women workers. In this case study I will outline economic and political development strategies used by the government, development agencies and NGOs to address gender gaps in Cambodia, e.g. advocacy training for women and gender training

for men to help traditional gender roles evolve, and inherent challenges faced, e.g. education, culture, and tradition.

Additionally I will include the perspective of those working in development and Khmer women themselves in how income influences women's status as well as their perspective on strategies to close gender gaps. Most Khmer women argue that contributing income increases their influence while also arguing that formal and informal education (i.e. advocacy training) increases their influence and participation. These perspectives must be included in any legitimate debate about causal factors as women's perceptions and experiences directly influence their behaviors.

Thesis Organization

This study will be arranged as follows: In Chapter 2, I will provide a survey of literature that discusses how women's status and empowerment are defined, what economic empowerment is and how it is used in development discourse. I will then offer critiques of neoliberal development policies and how the term empowerment has been co-opted in development dialogue as "economic empowerment." Next I provide alternative discourses on how women become empowered. I will then discuss what political participation is, its relationship to empowerment and how it can be both an outcome and a pathway to empowerment. Finally I will point out gaps in the literature and questions that remain. Chapter 3 will focus on evaluating data to examine if women's labor participation increase their political participation and local-level decision making. Does the large data support the hypothesis that women's labor participation leads to their political participation? I will show that the large data does not support this assumption.

Chapter 4 will look at the case study of Cambodia. Compared to men, today Cambodian women have just under 80% participation in the labor market but only 18% participation as political leaders.⁶ In Cambodia the change in the status of women, or their empowerment, has been a gradual process lead partially by grassroots women's political leadership organizations, land rights and labor advocacy, and also through the active participation of the Royal Government of Cambodia in partnership with various international governmental organizations (IGOs), such as UNDP, the ILO and Asia Development Bank, and international NGOs. In this study I explore how labor and political participation, both direct and indirect, influence what is referred to as women's empowerment.

To better understand development work being done in-country to empower women, and related challenges, I conducted interviews with development leaders in Cambodia. I also conducted interviews with Khmer women from different strata of life in Cambodia to better understand the perspectives of Cambodian women themselves regarding their status, access to resources, and political power and influence. Following this I will provide an analysis from different scholars regarding the status of Cambodian women, evaluation of the change over time since 1995, and how economics played and continues to play a role in how the roles of women have changed and continues to do so.

What is the relationship between women and power dynamics at the community and national level? Also how does the increased level of influence translate into political participation or local-level decision making? Do women move from participating in

⁶ Gender Inequality data in the Human Development Report published by the UN Development Program, accessed May 2015. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>

community decision making as an advocate or influencer to an elected position? What other factors might play a role in women's election or appointment? Chapter 5 will focus on the sociological and political perspective of women's empowerment. Here I will examine how women's participation is affected by family support, pressures and household work. What role does women's self-perception play in their participation at the community and national level for changing the status of women? How do cultural norms and traditional gender roles affect women's influence and access to decision making? What levers change woman's level of influence in their communities and nationally? Is having an income sufficient to increase women's influence on shifting traditional gender power dynamics? What role does education and training play? And how does family support figure into this?

Chapter 6 will focus on outcomes of informal education, and advocacy and organizing training. How does becoming an advocate or community organizer affect women's influence in their communities? What are other ways than women's participation as political leaders that can be used to elevate women's participation in decision making at the community and national level (i.e. advocacy, community organizing, etc)? Building advocacy networks locally, nationally and transnationally?

Men and boys make up roughly half the global population and are the dominant sex in every aspect of life so they too must be part of gender parity work. In Chapter 7 I will examine how men are affected by gender stereotypes. What is their "buy in" to reduce global gender gaps? What exactly is the role of men and boys in eliminating the gender gap? What type of programming is prevalent (gender trainings, programs like the UN Women's "He for She" campaign, and so on) and effective?

Conclusion

This study will conclude by recapping the current discourse on women's empowerment and development, and men's role in bringing change. Next I will recap the present situation of women's global participation in the economy and how it compares to their political participation, , and how it is reflected in recent data. Then I will review my findings from interviews that informed my case study focusing on specific examples of perspectives of development leaders in Cambodia and Cambodian women. Finally I will outline prescriptives for further research that can help illuminate different issues related to gender gaps.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

It is a powerful incentive to tell national leaders that marginalizing women hurts their national economies and working toward economic equality helps improve it. And in fact when reviewing the literature, publications and news articles much of it centers on women's economic empowerment, far more than on political empowerment. To better understand strategies surrounding women's empowerment I will outline the theoretical framework that dominates current discussions about empowerment, and economic and political participation.

But before delving into literature that examines women's participation, it is first important to establish some basic definitions and concepts. First I will review literature on gender and power, what does the status of women and empowerment mean? And how can we understand power dynamics at different levels, i.e. women's access at the community and the national level?

Next I will examine economic participation and empowerment, and critiques of the current economic empowerment paradigm. For example, what do scholars say is the positive outcome of employment? Do the hiring strategies or type of jobs available help women or reinforce repressive gender norms? I will follow by outlining what "political participation" means, how culture and tradition affect political access, and how those are changing. What are alternate participation strategies? Finally I will outline areas in which there are knowledge gaps and remaining questions.

Gender and Power

Margaret Stacey and Marion Price discuss the history of women's relationship to power, and point out that throughout history women were granted access to political power through familial or kinship groups not as individuals possessing the right to access power.⁷ They argue that this is due to the division of labor in that though women were child bearers this did not then mean that men would then care for the children. And in fact roles were prescribed from birth as an ideology that is so deeply ingrained psychologically as to cause stress when there is deviation from them. It is perceived that these roles are natural and divergence would invite chaos. They point out that historically women only had private power or the ability to influence through indirect methods in which they exercised their power in the private domain over family members. In the private domain women perpetuated systems of power that suppressed other women. In the nineteenth century systems of power began to change as women gained the right to citizenship and the emergence of industrial capitalism in which women joined the labor market. The authors point out that though there was a lag between women's attainment of political rights and economic participation, the industrial revolution birthed the feminist movement through the suffrage movement as women fought to attain the right to vote. Though as we know women did attain the right to vote, men were still domestically dependent on their wives and their wives still politically dependent on their husbands as they had no power base through which to exercise their newfound political power. Both domestic divisions of labor and direct access to political power remained obstacles for some time, and arguably still are in many nations.

⁷ Margaret Stacey and Marion Price. "Women and Power." *Feminist Review*, No. 5 (1980), pp. 33 – 52.

Karen Bradley and Diana Khor write about the status of women as a phenomenon of social organization that is a result of differentiation and evaluation processes.⁸ And it is through the institutionalization of differentiation and evaluation based on a person's sex that societies construct systems of socialization based on gender that determine the status of men and women. It is these social constructions too that perpetuate the above mentioned power systems and thus reinforce women's status. This is something perhaps that we all understand intuitively but for the sake of clarity it is helpful to tease out these concepts. Bradley and Khor argue that status is composed of institutions and activities located in economic, political and social spheres. For example they say in the economic sphere we find women's financial contributions and resource management; in the political an expression of power relationships including direct political power, legal rights and civil society; and in the social infrastructure like familial relationships, education and mass media. The authors seem to exclude community relationships, and cultural or traditional norms in the explication of the latter or social space.

Bradley and Khor next introduce the public and private domains of status, through which the preceding concepts can be analyzed so as to gain a more full understanding of the status of women. So instead of simply looking at the status of a woman's access to work we might look at her access to education and her control over her reproductive rights, as clearly the two are inextricably linked to labor participation. Or if a husband shares domestic work and child rearing that could influence his wife's ability to hold public office. Another fundamental way in which public and private domains are

⁸ Karen Bradley and Diana Khor. "Toward an Integration of Theory and Research on the Status of Women." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), pp. 347-378.

important to understand the authors write is that in societies is in the collection of research. They explain,

Data that have been collected cross-nationally for general access typically reflect what is significant based on male experiences. For example, paid work is considered and enumerated, whereas unpaid domestic labor is not. ...Similarly, there has been precise documentation of warfare and military expenditure, but violence against women has only recently begun to obtain attention.⁹

Here we can see how the cultural or traditional norms of men's and women's societal roles influence the public domain in both economic and political spheres through data collection, and the public and private political and social sphere's by largely ignoring the status of women's physical security. This framework is helpful in parsing out the threads of inequality.

What is empowerment? Anju Malhotra et al argue in their survey of literature discussing women's empowerment that women's empowerment means their "ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance."¹⁰ They write that Kabeer's definition of empowerment most successfully outlines what empowerment means in the context of development: "The expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied them."¹¹

⁹ Karen Bradley and Diana Khor. "Toward an Integration of Theory and Research on the Status of Women." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), pp. 372 – 373.

¹⁰ Anju Malhotra, Sidney Ruth Schuler, and Carol Boender. "Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development." Background paper prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives (June 28, 2002) p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 6 from Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities - Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London: Verso (1994).

Here empowerment demonstrates a collaboration between a top down and bottom up approach to empowerment. There is little depth to either definition that might suggest fundamental, systemic and therefore more permanent behavioral shifts. It is helpful though that Malhotra et al tie status and inequality to empowerment, writing there are no clear boundaries between these terms. That is arguable but certainly they complement each other as status may be too complex for generalizability and empowerment insufficient to evaluate deeper behavioral shifts. They believe empowerment is a process, one that involves agency and resources. The authors define resources as enabling factors, and agency as “the ability to formulate strategic choices, and to control resources and decisions that affect important life outcomes.”¹² Like Stacey and Price, the authors contend that there is a normalization of women’s subordination in tradition and culture that causes women to view themselves as persons of lesser value.

An important part of the authors’ analysis of existing theoretical frameworks is their reasoning that development intervention which is successful in promoting one aspect of women’s empowerment does not necessarily mean it will positively affect all areas in need of improvement. This relates to Bradley and Khor’s argument above that the relation between public, private and social, and public and private is complex not linear. Here too the authors agree that there are economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions of empowerment, and suggest there are also interpersonal and psychological dimensions. In their discussion of indicators and measurement of empowerment-driven changes, the authors bring up another crucial point: empowerment is measured at the individual and national level but generally overlooked at the community level. This is a

¹² Ibid p.9.

serious flaw in existing research, they argue, because it is precisely in this area in which norms are changed, and at which programs and policies are implemented.

Srilatha Batliwala concentrates the previous authors' ideas into an operational or actionable definition based on Kabeers's South Asia document framework: "challenging ideologies that justify social inequality...changing prevailing patterns of access to and control over economic, natural and intellectual resources...[and] transforming the institutions and structures that reinforces and sustain existing power structures."¹³ In her conclusion, she pointedly adds a powerful critique to the modern usage of the term empowerment. Batliwala asks if the term has utility any longer since it has been "seized and redefined" by "populist politics, fundamentalist and neo-con ideologies, and corporate management...down-sized by micro-finance and quota evangelists, and otherwise generally divested of all vestiges of power and politics," thus losing credibility to explain changes in service to women.¹⁴ She suggests building a new language and framework to inform strategies to change existing and persistently unequal power structures by speaking with those who need enfranchisement: poor women.

Women's economic empowerment

Milton Friedman makes several observations in *Capitalism and Freedom* that appear to be influencing the shape of the discussion around development scholarship and policy.¹⁵ He writes "economic freedom is an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom" and that government is key in determining the "rules

¹³ Srilatha Batliwala, "Taking the Power out of Empowerment: An Experiential Account." *Development in Practice*, Vol. 17, No. 4/5 (Aug. 2007), pp. 557 – 565, p. 560.

¹⁴ *Ibid* p. 564.

¹⁵ Milton Friedman. *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1982).

of the game” in the market as well as interpreting and enforcing them.¹⁶ In this section I will present arguments from scholars who support Friedman’s thesis that economic empowerment brings about women’s empowerment, with either the implicit or explicit presumption of increased political and social freedoms. Following that I will present literature that challenges this idea, specifically that “economic empowerment” is a positive and successful path for women to break free from political and socio-cultural constraints.

Christine LaGarde, managing director for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said, “Empowering women is not only the right thing to do, it makes economic sense.”¹⁷ She explains that increasing women’s labor participation leads to “big jumps” in per capita income for nations, and would especially in regions where participation is particularly low like MENA and South Asia. She goes on to argue that companies that promote women internally see higher profits than companies that don’t by as much as 18% to 69%. Staff from the IMF write reports about macroeconomic gains that can be expected as an outcome of gender parity and how to increase women’s labor force participation.¹⁸ These are persuasive arguments for governments and corporations to increase women’s participation in the labor force.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁷ Christine LaGarde (managing director of the IMF). “Empowering women is not only the right thing to do - it makes economic sense.” Emerging Markets website (Oct. 10, 2014), accessed March 14, 2015. Go to: <http://www.emergingmarkets.org/Article/3389107/CHRISTINE-LAGARDE-Empowering-women-is-not-only-the-right-thing-to-do-it-makes-economic-sense.html>

¹⁸ IMF: Katrin Elborgh-Woytek, Monique Newiak, Kalpana Kochhar, Stefania Fabrizio, Kangni Kpodar, Phillippe Wingender, Benedict Clements, and Gerd Schartz. “Women, Work, and the Economy.” IMF Discussion Staff Note (Sept. 2013) SDN/13/10; Christian Gonzales, Sonali Jain-Chandra, Kalpana Kochhar, and Monique Newiak. “Fair Play: More Equal Laws Boost Female Labor Force Participation.” IMF Staff Discussion Note (Feb. 2015) SDN/15/02.

Esther Duflo writes that historically, access to economic rights preceded access to political rights.¹⁹ She begins by stating that general economic development has a powerful impact on the rights of women and girls because choices are no longer “life or death” or subsistence choices. And when women have access to resources this increases their access to decision making at the household level, especially in deciding whether or not to stay in a marriage or household. Also there is a strong correlation between women’s economic and legal rights, specifically land rights, cases of violence, abortion and so on. Duflo goes on to argue that working can change the way women and girls are perceived. If a woman has an income or a girl could potentially earn an income, families are more likely to ensure their health and access to education, which in turn increases opportunity for women and girls.

Conversely Duflo also argues that there is persistent employment bias, and therefore income bias, against women in both developing and developed countries. She writes that one of the reasons there is a wage disparity is that men are more associated with career and science, while family and liberal arts are associated with women. She also argues that this translates into political bias with studies showing political leaderships roles perceived as male and women leaders perceived in a negative light. Even when there are policies to increase the number of female political leaders, if women leaders are politically weak they may have little influence.

¹⁹ Esther Duflo. “Women Empowerment and Economic Development.” *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 50 No. 4 (Dec. 2012), pp. 1051 - 1079.

Evelyne Huber et al established a relationship between income or wages and gender power relations.²⁰ Like Duflo they argue that women's earning power increases her choices, especially within her household by freeing her up to choose whether or not to leave a marriage. Huber et al explain by showing that earning power increases their mobility, which changes gender models and norms and in turn increases ideological support for gender equity. A study by Susan Bullers supports these arguments, showing that work/family status has an effect on women's perceived control in that a woman's feeling of control was directly related to her socio-economic status.²¹ And like Duflo Huber et al she argues that policies of the state, in their case the "welfare state regimes," support women by regulating the labor market and ensuring benefits that increase women's economic independence.

David L. Richards and Ronald Gelleny write that women's status is causally related to a nation's involvement in the global economy through trade, which has a positive effect by creating jobs that women can access.²² Conversely, and seemingly contradictorily, foreign direct investment (FDI) and portfolio investments have a negative effect on the status of women. This is because governments have to create an open investment environment using budget austerity through cutting subsidies and reducing public sector spending, which results in reduction in services that help women and children. In fact, they argue that though FDI produces jobs for women it did not have a positive impact on the status of women because foreign companies do not invest in

²⁰ Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, David Bradley, Stephanie Moller, Francois Nielsen. "The Politics of Women's Economic Independence." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 1 - 39.

²¹ Susan Bullers. "Selection Effects in the Relationship between Women's Work/Family Status and Perceived Control." *Family Relations*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Apr., 1999), pp. 181-188.

²² David L. Richards and Ronald Gelleny. "Women's Status and Economic Globalization" *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Dec. 2007), pp. 855-876.

infrastructure or their workforce, limiting career opportunities for the female workforce. Viktorija Balciunaite agrees with this analysis. She writes that though trade liberalization creates jobs for women the labor market is unstable as women face a host of economic injustices, such as unequal hiring standards and opportunities training and advancement for men and women; more exposure to sexual harassment; and higher employment insecurity combined with reduced social protections.²³ Balciunaite adds that women also have to take up additional responsibilities for health and education previously provided by the state, adding more unpaid work to their domestic and child rearing responsibilities.

In case studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh, Balciunaite constitutes examples of the above: trade liberalization creates more jobs which women can access but that these nations keep women's pay low in order to remain competitive in the corporate supply chain.²⁴ Each government justifies this by arguing that female employees cost more than male employees due to their family commitments. A rather circular logic as these same nations cut services requiring women, not men, to fill the gap. In her conclusion she voices a common argument "a job in hazardous conditions better than no job at all."²⁵ To this she answers most women would say yes as their families have come to rely on their financial contribution for subsistence, and there is some degree of increased independence for working women.

Torben Iversen and Frances Rosenbluth challenge the implicit assumption of the family as a welfare maximization unit and provide a possible alternative explanation of

²³ Balciunaite, Viktorija. "The WTO and Female Labor Rights in Developing Countries." Institute for European Studies (IES) Working Paper (Mar. 2008), <http://aei.pitt.edu/60822/>

²⁴ Ibid pp. 28 – 34.

²⁵ Ibid p. 32.

why women supposedly cost more than men.²⁶ They write that early socialization determine the familial roles allocated to men and women beginning in childhood. As one outcome, women pay a penalty for interrupting their careers to have children and this is why their work opportunities are limited and they invest less in education. In their article Iverson and Rosenbluth also tackle the unequal division of unpaid household labor, how it is allocated to women, and how this unpaid labor reduces their bargaining power within the family. When women find work outside of the home she increases her market skills and work experience, increasing her bargaining power. This has the potential outcome of a more fair distribution of unpaid household work. How robust is the claim that women gain more bargaining power when they have an income? Yoo-Mi Chin writes the bargaining claim is not supported by her study on the effects of women's working status on spousal abuse.²⁷ She finds that in a patriarchal society higher financial independence of women increases the likelihood of spousal abuse. She found that labor force participation reduces spousal violence only when exposure is reduced, emphasizing she found did not find evidence supporting the claim that employment or earned income increases a woman's bargaining power in her family.

In the above articles illustrating how paid work positively influences women's status or empowerment, the authors acknowledged or at least alluded to the fact that women's participation in the labor market also had the effect of reinforcing gender inequality. Juanita Elias explains in greater detail how this happens. She describes the hiring practices of multinational corporations (MNCs) in Malaysia to demonstrate how

²⁶ Torben Iverson and Frances Rosenbluth. "The Political Economy of Gender: Explaining Cross-National Variation in the Gender Division of Labor and the Gender Voting Gap." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan. 2006), pp. 1 - 19.

²⁷ Yoo-Mi Chin. "Male backlash, bargaining, or exposure reduction? Women's working status and physical spousal violence in India," *Journal of Population Economics* 25: 175–200 (2012).

traditional Malaysian gender divisions are reinforced.²⁸ She first points out that there is a fundamental argument put forth by international development agencies like DFID (UK) and the World Bank that as the number of women in the global economy increases it has the effect of undermining patriarchal systems at the local level. Elias then argues that markets are not gender-neutral and in fact that gender inequalities are central to export-led market economies. In interviews with hiring managers at several MNCs or supply chain factories, Elias discovered that recruitment practices in Malaysia are based on and reinforce social divisions in the economy. Some examples are certain types of work hiring managers viewed as best for women and suited to women's innate skill sets, like sewing. And though sewing is more labor intensive than male dominated jobs, there are pay gaps between men and women. The author explains that this is due to two reasons, the first as mentioned above, the innate nature of sewing skills; and the second that since sewers make up more than 44 percent of the workforce, it is good economics to keep sewers salaries low. When the labor market further industrialized and the young, unmarried women moved to higher paying jobs, the textile companies hired married women with children with few employment opportunities in order to keep wages low. This reinforces the argument that rather than improving the lives of women through skills development and potential for growth, as is assumed in development literature, foreign firms instead exploit them for cheap labor.

For Sher Verick the quality of work is as important as participating in the work force. She writes that it is crucial to move past the binary of whether or not women are in

²⁸ Juanita Elias. "Stitching Up the Labor Market: Recruitment, Gender and Ethnicity in the Multinational Firm." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Mar. 2005), pp. 90 - 111.

the labor force, and to instead track what type of work is available to women.²⁹ She reiterates that women earn less than men, have lower skilled jobs and are engaged in vulnerable and unpaid work. Though women work more than men the quality of their work and how it is valued continues to subordinate them in society. Shyama V. Ramani et al write that state initiatives are required to bring access to better work for women.³⁰ In their article they write that the usual top-down government intervention alone has little effect on women's empowerment and must be paired with economic development programs. They argue also that a way to strengthen women in the informal sector of the labor market through bottom up initiatives such as gendered spaces in which they can have a dialogue unencumbered by patriarchal cultural norms.

Hazel Gillard et al offer a strong critique of the effects of development on women. They argue that women are moving from the private to the public sphere but that instead of equalizing men and women, development activities have increasingly marginalized women.³¹ The authors write that though inequality is recognized and policies legislated, equality initiatives fail leaving in place power structures, while also not addressing the productive but unpaid activity of women. Additionally, gender mainstreaming has become a drive to bring women into the workforce despite unequal and low pay, bad working conditions, and the increased responsibility of working at home and a job, creating problems at home. They conclude by defining gender mainstreaming and the

²⁹ Sher Verick. "Female labor force participation in developing countries," Policy paper, IZA World of Labor (Sept. 2014): 87. <http://wol.iza.org/>

³⁰ Shyama Ramani, Ajay Thutupali, Tamas Medovarszki, Sutapa Chattopadhyay, and Veena Ravichandran. "Women in the Informal Economy: Experiments in Governance from Emerging Countries." Policy Brief No. 5 (2013), UNU-MERIT, United Nations University.

³¹ Hazel Gillard, Deborah Howcroft, Natalie Mitev, Helen Richardson, and Elaine Ferneley. "Shaping the Global Economy: Gender, ICTs and Development Research." Working paper for 9th International Conference on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries, Sao Paulo, Brazil (May 2007).

current political economy of development as an offshoot of neoliberal policies that ignore gendered political and economic status quos, which in turn reinforce patriarchal societal norms.

Women's political participation and alternative strategies of empowerment

To provide historical context for the evolution of women's participation in politics in the West, we will take a look at the women's suffrage movement. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink write that women's involvement in the anti-slavery movement spurred the women to demand for suffrage in the mid-19th century in Britain and the U.S.³² Since women were unable even to vote at this time, they became political advocates for their rights lobbying for the right to vote. They used tactics including civil disobedience and provocation when peaceful strategies did not work. Some of the issues they advocated for were not different from those sought by women today: physical security, equal pay for equal work, better work opportunities, maternal benefits, and better working conditions. Keck and Sikkink argue that this women's movement institutionalized norms of women's right to vote and participate in politics that are enshrined in most national constitutions around the world. So where are we today?

M. Margaret Conway defines political participation as when citizens engage in activities intended to change government structures, influence who becomes government authorities and the policies they enact.³³ She then directs our attention to the fact that after gaining the right to vote in the U.S. it took nearly 60 years before women reached

³² Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1998).

³³ M. Margaret Conway. "Women and Political Participation." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Jun. 2001), pp. 231 - 233.

the level of voting that men did. She also points out that though women are politically active as advocates and legally have access to political leadership seats, a disproportionate amount of elected officials are men. She proposes a few different reasons for this: cultural and time demands, skill gaps, and the role of gatekeepers. Time demands refers to the fact that women in the U.S. are traditionally responsible for household work and child care, and these responsibilities combined with a job leaves little time for women to participate in political leadership. The skills gap links back to women's time demands in that women have little time to participate in unpaid nonpolitical activities during which they would acquire skills associated with a political career. And finally, the theory on which Conway focuses most is the gatekeeper's theory. Gatekeepers determine who can run for office through a selection process that may deter potential female candidates from entering as a candidate. To become a political candidate, an individual must garner support from party and interest group leaders, as well as acquiring endorsements and having successful fundraisers. Conway writes that since most powerbrokers in the U.S. are men, women often disqualify themselves as they are less likely to amass the support they need to run. Though the author does not note this, this also links back to cultural theory in that in the minds of gatekeepers and the general public gender stereotypes persist, and therefore so do obstacles that block more women from becoming political leaders.

In comparison to the U.S. model of participation, Jana Everett discusses ways that India brought women into political leadership. Social and economic barriers appear the same in India as in the U.S. Women there are also constrained by household responsibilities combined with work and class differences, which affects access to

resources including education.³⁴ Everett illustrates how India differs in that it passed a constitutional amendment for a quota system in place that requires a number of women to be part of the legislature making bodies. She writes that some Indian states and government officials also mandated training for women leaders to empower them and so they may acquire skills that allow them to be better political leaders. Everett argues that a challenge to women's participation is that elected women themselves must work to fit into the existing system. She points out that bringing women into governance and leadership cannot immediately change the patriarchal system and political and societal gender prejudices.

There is a body of literature that illustrates the role of government in women's political empowerment but none that can tie economic empowerment to women's political participation. The above two articles are good examples of the former and only seem to illustrate that women's labor participation can be seen to be an obstacle to their political participation and empowerment. The World Bank Development Report chapter on "The political economy of gender reform" offers governance prescriptions for both firms and governments that address challenges to labor and political participation mentioned above, especially child rearing responsibilities.³⁵ However though these prescriptions illustrate economic and political participation are parallel ways to empower women and bring greater equity, the report fails to tie economic empowerment to political participation. Of note though is the report's recommendation to include men in changing gendered structures of power. It states that because men's attitudes are crucial

³⁴ Jana Everett. "Governance Reforms and Rural Women in India: What Types of Women Citizens are Produced by the Will to Empower?" *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer 2009), pp. 279 - 302.

³⁵ World Bank 2012. "Chapter 8: The Political Economy of Gender Reform." *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, The World Bank (2011), pp. 330 - 359.

to the gender debate and policy development to bring equity. Interestingly the report argues that men and boys are also affected by gender norms, which provides a lever to engage men.

In an argument similar to Gillard et al above Alison Symington et al argue that neoliberalism and market liberalization strategies have resulted in undervaluation of women's work and an increase in their unpaid work.³⁶ In fact, they argue, neoliberal policies actually decreased women's empowerment as it diminished their economic and social right by contributing to economic insecurity, which gives rise to religious fundamentalism, poverty and conflict. The authors next provide a series of strategies to counter these inequities, including litigation, engaging with budgets, and with campaigns and popular movements, much like Keck and Sikkink discuss in their book.

Conclusion: What is missing?

In this section I surveyed literature outlining definitions for the status of women and their empowerment; economic empowerment and critiques of contemporary understandings of neoliberal influences on development; and finally political participation historically and in present day, comparing the political realities for women in a two nations. The empowerment literature explained what we commonly understand or hope for when we speak of "empowerment": women's ability to make choices they hadn't previously been able to make due to the processes of increasing their agency and

³⁶ Symington, Alison and Shareen Gokal & Tania Principe. "Achieving Women's Economic and Social Rights: Strategies and Lessons from Experience." Policy Paper at The Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2006. UN Women, "Economic Empowerment of Women." In Brief, http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women_ee-thematic-brief_us-web%20pdf.ashx

access to resources. However due to the perceived cooptation of this term in neoliberal development policies, we might wish to question the utility of “empowerment.”

When discussing literature about economic empowerment, there was a consensus among the authors surveyed that paid work provides choices to women they did not previously have access to, which fits the definition of empowerment. However, those choices come at a cost and part of that cost is to entrench systems of injustice that harm or at least limit future opportunities for women. Finally we looked at how women participate in politics in the past and today. When women exercised agency to achieve the vote they had resources to do so since they were able to work, had citizenship and the right to own property. To gain the right to vote women advocated both peacefully and through civil disobedience. As an outcome of being granted voting rights, most nations today have women’s rights enshrined in their legislation and constitutions. But what does this mean in reality? In the U.S. there are still entrenched prejudices toward women political leaders and there are no proactive political policies to ensure there is a minimum equal participation of men and women in government. However in India there is legislation requiring a quota of women participants in government and Indian states and leaders spearheaded policies to train women so that they have the skills necessary to lead.

What is missing in the literature is an evaluation of whether or not economic participation can be connected to political participation. Economic empowerment literature argues that when women join the workforce they are empowered but it is not clear how this translates. Is it through economic processes translating into political processes? Or is there a link between economic empowerment and social empowerment, or the changing perception and traditions associated with girls and women? There is a

dearth of literature on the social outcomes of economic empowerment, with most literature focusing on how firms and the state benefit but not how women do themselves. Also it would be of benefit to understand other forms of political participation as a measure of empowerment, such as advocacy, access to influence or participation in local decision-making, and how organizing (as in labor movements) influences women's empowerment. Finally, it would be helpful if there were literature on the psychology of empowerment and how self-perception, community and national perceptions influence empowerment. My thesis here adds to the literature by attempting to help fill that gap. In addition, I will apply this inquiry to a case study, Cambodia.

Chapter 3 - Data Comparison

The purpose of this section is to compare large data to illustrate that there remains a large gap between women's labor participation and their political participation at the global, regional and national level, here using from Cambodia, indicating it is unlikely there is a correlation between labor and political participation. It is important during this analysis to understand that current gender gap data used by leading international agencies (ILO, UNDP, UN Women, OECD, World Economic Forum and the World Bank) provides an incomplete picture. For example, labor participation data does not include unpaid labor such as household work, child and elder care work. And political participation includes only women's political participation in terms of office holders (elected and appointed) at the national level. This excludes measures of women's leadership at the regional, district or local level, and other types of political participation such as voting, local level decision making, and advocacy. And finally gaps in economic and political participation data. In such cases, the missing data is replaced by the previous year's measures in order to fill the gap for statistical analysis.³⁷

In this analysis, I will start by looking at global data, first reviewing change over time for women's participation in labor and political participation and then comparing the two. Next, I will provide a regional analysis, focusing on ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) country comparisons over time. And finally I will examine national data for Cambodia, providing an analysis. For example, I will compare change over time from 2006 - 2014 of labor and political participation to illustrate the gap

³⁷ See the WEF "User's Guide: How Country Profiles Work." written by Yasmina Bekhouche and Saadia Zahidi, Part 2 *Country Profiles* in the WEF *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, The World Economic Forum (2014).

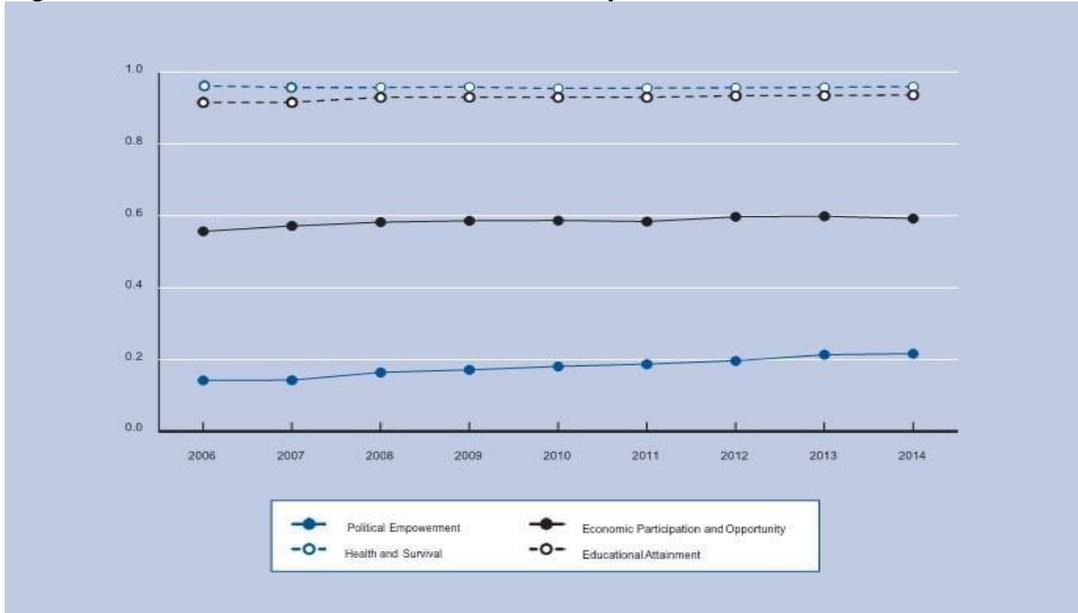
between each participation remains wide, and demonstrate based on country score that though on type of participation may increase, the gender gap in the other decreases, thus demonstrating that there is no visible consistent relationship between economic and political participation in the data.³⁸

Global Overview

Figure 1 below provides a snapshot of how the nations of the world have evolved their gender policies and traditions to be more inclusive of women in four areas: political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, and educational attainment. As we can see by these measures, the largest improvement has been in the area of political empowerment, followed by economic participation and opportunity. Educational attainment has increased marginally while health and survival has diminished, acknowledging both these gaps are measured around 0.9 or close to equity (measured as 1.0). For the purposes of this analysis, we will focus on political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity measurements.

³⁸ Ibid. For the above analyses I will employ World Economic Forum (WEF) scores, which provides a comprehensive and consistent long term analysis of gender-based information. The data the WEF used in their scoring is sourced from the International Labor Organization (ILO), WEF's Executive Opinion Survey 2014, UNDP, OECD, Inter-Parliamentary Union, UNESCO and the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI). The reason for this is that the WEF serves to aggregate the data from multiple sources and convert raw country data into female to male ratios. And though there is a section on "Income" (comparing rich and poor countries) the rating system does not attempt to compare developed and less developed countries - the measurements compare gaps between women and men within a country, not across countries. For more on the methodology of the WEF *The Global Gender Gap Report (2006 - 2014)* see "The Global Gender Gap Index 2014: Measuring the Global Gender Gap" prepared by Ricardo Hausmann (Harvard University), Laura D. Tyson (University of California, Berkeley), Yasmina Bekhouche (WEF) and Saadia Zahidi (WEF).

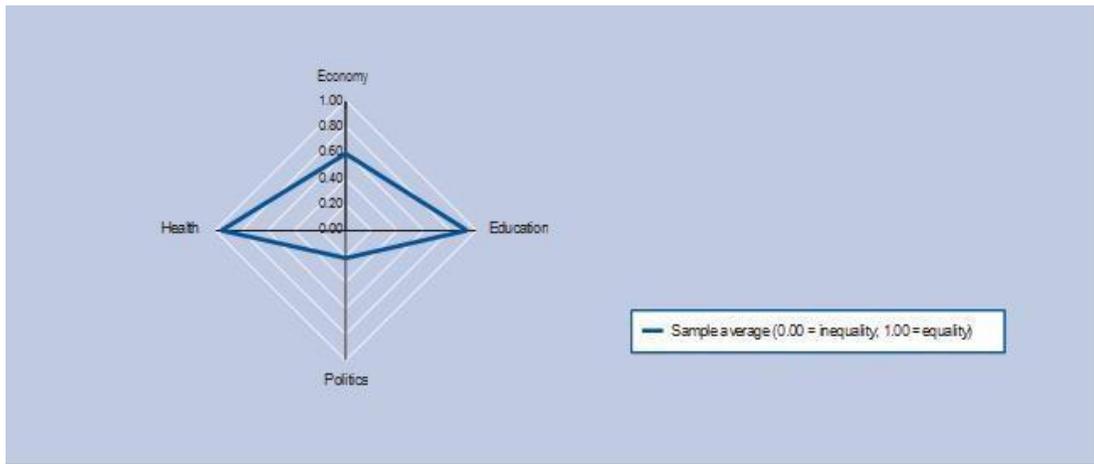
Figure 1: Global Index Evolution 2006-2014, by subindex³⁹



Though the change in political and economic participation presented above appear significant, there remains large gender gaps in the areas of politics and the economy as shown in Figure 2. Between 2006 and 2007 economic participation shows an increase while political participation appears to stay the same or increase only marginally. And between 2012 and 2013, economic participation appears to flat line or only increase marginally while political participation shows a sharper slope increase in the scoring. There are areas in which the two indicators appear to move in concert, for instance between 2008 – 2009 and again from 2010 – 2011. However these differences in change, sometimes moving in similar directions and sometimes opposite, indicates it is unlikely there is correlation between economic and political participation.

³⁹ "Tracking the Global Gender Gap Over Time," *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, The World Economic Forum (2014).

Figure 2: Global performance, 2014⁴⁰



**Scores are weighted by population.

The above figure shows that while gender gaps dramatically decreased in the area of the economic participation and opportunity⁴¹ in 2014 but gaps have actually increased in women’s political participation. Out of 144 countries analyzed in the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2014, only 2 countries, Finland and Iceland, closed the political empowerment⁴² gender gap by 60 percent.⁴³ The remainder of countries survey had a 10 percent or less improvement. In the areas of economic participation and opportunity most countries surveyed have done significantly better in terms closing the gap when compared to women’s political participation. Ten percent of countries surveyed closed the gap by 80 percent, with the majority of remaining countries closing the gap between

⁴⁰ “The Global Gender Gap Index Results in 2014.” *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, The World Economic Forum (2014).

⁴¹ Economic participation and opportunity is defined as equal participation, remuneration and advancement, or equal access to paid work, equal pay and equal access to better paying jobs. “The Global Gender Gap Index 2014: Measuring the Global Gender Gap” prepared by Ricardo Hausmann (Harvard University), Laura D. Tyson (University of California, Berkeley), Yasmina Bekhouche (WEF) and Saadia Zahidi (WEF) for *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, The World Economic Forum (2014).

⁴² Ibid. Here political empowerment is interchangeable with participation and is defined as the gap between men and women as a ratio of women to men in national political decision-making role, including ministerial, parliamentary and executive.

⁴³ “The Global Gender Gap Index Results in 2014.” *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, The World Economic Forum (2014).

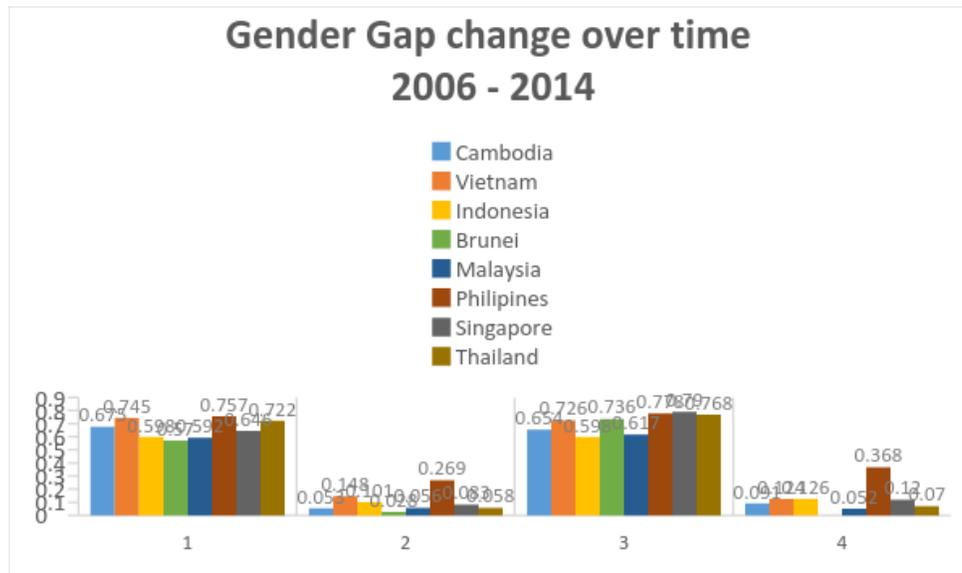
women and men from 40 and 80 percent. To put this in perspective, the lowest levels of shrinking the gender gap in the economy are comparable to the highest scores for decreasing the gender gap in politics, with the gap increasing in enough countries to reduce the overall score for political participation to a negative percentage globally.

Regional Performance 2006 - 2014⁴⁴

The global overview can give only a general perspective on the progress nations have made in narrowing the gender gap due to the vast differences in cultural norms regarding the role of women in the community and nation. For example, while it is the norm in the United States for women to work alongside men, this is not the case in more conservative societies where men and women are segregated. These types of differences skew data analysis and so it is helpful also to focus down to the regional level to do a comparison as there may be shared cultural norms and we can see how economic and political participation interact. As Cambodia is the case study that will be used to evaluate the hypotheses of this thesis, I will focus the regional analysis to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries: Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Philippine's, Singapore and Thailand (member states Myanmar and Laos were not included due to missing data). Though these cultures are unique from one another they share history and traditions, and they are currently working toward common political and economic goals and strategies, as is apparent in their work in ASEAN.

⁴⁴ Scores from ASEAN countries analysis in *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, The World Economic Forum (2014) pp 132 - 371.

Figure 4 Political and Economic Gender Gaps in ASEAN Countries 2006 – 2014⁴⁵



In Figure 4 above we can find change in participation over nine years in the economy and politics throughout the ASEAN (with equity being 1 and maximum inequality 0). We can see in the area of economic inequality ASEAN countries increased equality overall with an average score of 0.66 in 2006 and 0.71 in 2014. Cambodia and Vietnam increased their gap economic equality but most ASEAN nations moved toward decreasing this gap. Though Vietnam and Brunei increased their political participation gap, on average there was a decrease in the gap, which went from 0.09 in 2006 to 0.12 in 2014 as the majority of ASEAN countries improved. Though on average there was an improvement in decreasing the gender gap over the past nine years, there has been a significant loss in footing as well. Brunei went from 0.28 political participation to 0, while Vietnam’s decreased by 0.02 – not a significant amount but at the very least each of these nations appear at the very least stalled in addressing their political participation

⁴⁵ “Cambodia,” Country Data from *The Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, The World Economic Forum (2014).

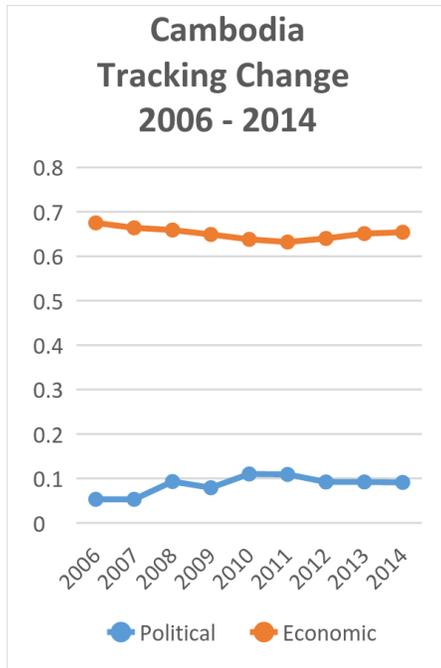
gender gap over nearly a decade. Changes overall in economic equality are not very impressive against the whole – a 7 percent change over nine years. The change for political participation is better with a 25 percent change, though the gap in political participation remains significant. From the above analysis we can see again that it would be difficult to establish a correlation between economic and political participation. While Brunei improved the gender gap in the area of economics it became worse in the area of equitable political participation. And while Cambodia increased its gap in economic participation and opportunity between 2006 – 2014 it increased women's political participation during the same time frame.

Cambodia – What does the data say?

From Figure 5 we can see that change in gender equality has been very gradual and both positive and negative.

Figure 5 Political and Economic Gender Gaps in Cambodia⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid.



In economic participation and opportunity we see that between 2006 and 2011 there was a significant increase in the gender gap. This potentially could be accounted for due to the recession that began in 2007, with a loss of jobs overall. Then in 2012 and again in 2013 we see a slight decrease in the gap and flat lining in 2014. However the economic gender gap remains wider in 2014 (scored at 0.65 out of 1.0) than it was in 2006 (scored at 0.67 out of 1.0).

Political participation has improved between 2006 and 2014, scoring at 0.05 in 2006 and at 0.09 in 2014. However looking at the data line the fluctuations in political participation and economic participation vary too much to draw a comparison that might infer a relationship between changes in economic and political participation.

Conclusion

While reviewing the gender equity scores at the global level down to the country level with Cambodia as the case study, we can view changes in the gender gap for economic and political participation. At the global level we can see there has been an overall improvement in both, but still a large gap between the two. And we were able to see that increases and decreases in the gender gap in economic and political participation did not appear to have any relationship as at times each increased between the same years and at others behaved the opposite of each other. Regionally we saw that while Brunei

increased its economic participation, its political participation decreased, while the opposite happened in Cambodia. Finally at the country level, Cambodia's scores for economic participation was on a steadily downward trajectory from 2006 – 2012, a slight upward one from 2012 – 2013 and stagnant at 2014. During the same periods, scores for political participation at times were the opposite of economic participation and at others mirrored it. These various phenomena indicate that it is unlikely there is a correlation between economic and political participation when comparing large data.

Chapter 4 Cambodia: A Case Study

There is an old saying in Khmer “men are gold, women are white cloth.”⁴⁷ This has a two-fold meaning. First, if gold gets dirty you can wash it off easily but cloth becomes stained, a clear moral judgement. And the second is a value judgement: gold is more valuable than cloth. This thinking is still pervasive today though there has been some change in the status of women in Cambodia. In order to better understand the status of women, we will first look at how the government has responded to changing traditional perceptions and attitudes toward women. Next I will review some studies and work conducted by local, national and international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, often in conjunction with the Cambodian government. Finally I will share interviews conducted with Cambodian women from different parts of life discussing their perception on the status of women, their participation, and how working affects the self-perception and that of those around them.

The Cambodian Ministry of Women’s Affairs

The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) began work on changing the status of women beginning with the first Neary Rattanak (“Women are Precious Gems”) strategic plan in 1999, the purpose of which was to change the traditional perception of women.⁴⁸ In each of the following Neary Rattanak five year strategic phases, the focus of the strategy was in areas in which women could be empowered, such as economically, through various forms of education (informal and formal), political participation and

⁴⁷ Daraka Chhay, “Women’s economic empowerment through microfinance in Cambodia.” *Development in Practice*, Vol. 21 No. 8 (2011), p. 1125.

⁴⁸ Draft, “Neary Rattanak II: Five Year Strategic Plan 2005 – 2009.” Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Royal Government of Cambodia (7 Sept. 2004), p. 2.

legal protections, and in areas of health. For the purposes of this analysis I shall focus on economic and political strategies. Neary Rattanak II, as part of Royal Government of Cambodia's Rectangular Strategy for development, focused on increasing women's economic participation in micro- and small enterprise, and women's participation in all levels of governance.⁴⁹ Neary Rattanak III emphasizes increasing rural development programs for women's economic empowerment, and in the area of political participation the strategy was to increase participation of women at the national and subnational levels, as well as in civil service positions.⁵⁰ In 2014 the MoWA Neary Rattanak IV published a development strategy with support from the United Nations Development Program Cambodia that focused on more sustainable outcomes as the Ministry shifted its strategy from short term project-based work to long term program-based work.⁵¹ The 2014 strategy outlines persisting challenges to women's economic and political empowerment, which include lack of access to credit for business development, low wages, underrepresentation in the public sector, political positions and the judiciary. Of special concern is that Cambodian women's political participation is significantly lower than nations with similar income levels.⁵² This has been attributed to discrimination against women preventing them from participating and that though Cambodian men hold the majority of decision making positions at all levels of government, women are held responsible for increasing gender parity.⁵³ One of the concerns voiced about Neary Rattanak is that it does not cover all sectors, specifically it does not cover all 28 line

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

⁵⁰ "Neary Rattanak III: Five Year Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013." Ministry of Women's Affairs, Royal Government of Cambodia (Sept. 2009), pp. 8 – 11.

⁵¹ "Neary Rattanak IV: Five Year Strategic Plan 2014 – 2018." Ministry of Women's Affairs, Royal Government of Cambodia (Dec. 2014), p. 6.

⁵² Ibid, p. 14.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 33.

ministries (i.e. irrigation and WASH), and that there are varying levels of successful implementation based on the comprehensiveness of understanding of gender issues and mainstreaming.⁵⁴

NGOs and Intergovernmental Organizations in Cambodia

An official at UNDP challenged the idea that there is a correlation between labor and political participation. She asked if there is a correlation between labor and political participation, when Cambodian women's labor participation rate is high why is the political participation rate so low?⁵⁵ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has done extensive work in women's economic empowerment in Cambodia. In a recent study they argue that women's economic participation is key to women being able to exercise their rights and exert influence in society.⁵⁶ Later though they acknowledge that while economic participation increases women's ability to improve their welfare, it does not guarantee gender equity. This is illustrated by the fact that though women's labor participation increased, the gender gap in Cambodia is persistent and their participation in the economy benefits them less than it does men.⁵⁷ Some of the reasons for this are women have limited employment opportunities, usually low-skilled and low-paying; patriarchal hierarchies persist in trade unions despite the fact that the majority of workers are women; and the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic labor.⁵⁸ Cultural biases and perceptions of women as business people lead to women business owners to lack of access to credit, becoming the target of harassment by market and security officials, as

⁵⁴ Interview Chhea Chandy, consultant at Asia Development Bank, 23 July 2015.

⁵⁵ Interview with Mia Hyun, Gender and Policy Advisor at UNDP, 15 June 2015.

⁵⁶ Asia Development Bank, "Promoting women's economic empowerment in Cambodia." Mandaluyong City: Phillipines: Asia Development Bank (2015), p. 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 4 and 11.

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 14, 16, and 19.

well as paying more unofficial fees and bribes than men do.⁵⁹ Seltik Heng at UNDP Cambodia said that there needs to be more collaboration with market authorities to facilitate better working conditions for women working in the markets.⁶⁰ She explained that women working in the markets do not have stability – their stalls may be closed by market police.

One way in which ADB has had an impact is by tying development loans to gender parity. In a 2006 Country Report, ADB explains the process by which a loan for its Northwestern Development Project (NRDP) was dependent on assurances that women be involved in “prioritizing, planning, implementing, and monitoring village-based infrastructure,” were given equal employment opportunities in road construction, and the implementation of special measures for a quota system of 30% women’s participation in trainings and in community-based organizations.⁶¹ Another loan, the Commune Council Development Project, did not have gender action plans (GAPs) as the above loan but did include provisions for training women commune leaders and civil servants, as well as activities to increase women’s civic involvement. The authors argue that in the case where loans were directly tied to implementation of GAPs, projects were successful and those not were less so.

Cambodian NGOs Gender and Development Network (GADNet), Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP), The Cambodian Women Caucus (CWC), and the Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW) issued a statement on their

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 24.

⁶⁰ Interview with Heng Seltik, consultant at UNDP Cambodia, 30 June 2015.

⁶¹ Juliet Hunt and Samvada Kheng, “Gender Equality Results in ADB Projects: Cambodia Country Report.” Gender, Social Development, and Civil Society Division Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asia Development Bank (Feb. 2006), p. X – XII.

20 year assessment of the Beijing Platform for Action and outcomes in Cambodia.⁶² In the statement they write that Cambodia failed its obligation to fulfill the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals and its obligations to fulfill requirements of CEDAW, to which it is a party, resulting in pronounced inequality between men and women. They state that this disparity is due to the persistence of traditional gender norms and social hierarchies, and the strong patriarchal political culture in Cambodia. In some cases even women's perception of themselves tend to reinforce traditional gender roles. In a study by CPWD, of the young women interviewed there was a prevailing attitude that politics is an "all male club" and irrelevant to them.⁶³ The author goes on to write that in their discussions, young women indicated that they were bound by social norms that give higher public status to men, providing them more privileges in decision-making, education and freedom of movement. Conversely young women were largely responsible for domestic work and child rearing.⁶⁴ This argument was supported by a senior program officer at the Asia Foundation. She stated that some of the barriers for women included women's lack of access to education; the difficulty of balancing household work, work for income and political/civil work; and the challenges of reconciling participation with traditional gender roles both at home and at commune councils.⁶⁵ In order to overcome the obstacles, the Asia Foundation provided a training program with Women for Prosperity with the goal of increasing women's self-confidence and building peer networks or women leaders in order to discuss concerns and work on strategies so that

⁶² "Key Messages from Civil Society in Cambodia." GADNet, CPWP, CWC, and NGO-CEDAW (2015), accessed August 2015. <http://gadc.org.kh/downloads/whatnew/Beijing.pdf>

⁶³ Mehrak Mehrvar, "Case Study: Young Women Political Participation and Participation in Local Governance in Cambodia." Study commissioned by the Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP) (March 2013), p. 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Interview with Moul Samneang, Senior Program Officer at the Asia Foundation Cambodia, on 13 July 2015.

women leaders would have more impact on development and policy making decisions.⁶⁶ Silaka, a national NGO, and UN Women provide similar training for women leaders at the district and provincial level.⁶⁷

At Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC), programming focuses on economic and social empowerment for women.⁶⁸ My Sambath, program director at GADC, argues that economic projects do not address power issues between men and women and more income does not necessarily translate into more power and decision making.⁶⁹ He said that GADC programs work at the household and community level, providing couples training on gender issues. And in addition to this work and work strengthening women's skills and confidence, he does extensive work with men and masculinity. He said he observed that engaging with men directly on gender concepts had a positive impact, reducing violence by a large percentage. Part of this was the impact of training and men's desire to change but also the outcome of increased monitoring by the community as a whole.

The Perspective of Cambodian Women

In interviews with women professionals, community leaders and government officials, and garment workers there appear a variety of perspectives on what has influenced the way Cambodian women take part in decision making in various political arenas. In this section I will provide anecdotal evidence from some of the interviews I conducted Cambodian women in different areas of life. Though the interviews were fluid,

⁶⁶ Moul Samneang, "Notes from the Field: Cambodia's Women Local Leaders Take Charge." Project report for Asia Foundation (6 March 2013).

⁶⁷ Interviews with Thida Khus, Executive Director of Silaka, on 20 July 2015, and Veth Vorn, Governance Programme Officer at UN Women, on 18 Aug. 2015.

⁶⁸ Interview with My Sambath, Program Director at GADC, on 7 Aug. 2015.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

I worked with a set list of questions including questions pertaining to their perspective on: their value to their community and their participation in decision making at the community level; how working influenced their self-perception or not and their communities' perception of them or not; how women are viewed in their family and community, and whether they felt there has been any change over the past 10 years. These interviews were anonymous to encourage frankness so they will be numbered as Interview 1, Interview 2, etc.

Interview 1 was with two young professional women in Phnom Penh.⁷⁰ Both women said they had come from the provinces and had mothers who supported them seeking an education in order to get a good job. The first young woman did not have a linear path to education. She began as a garment factory worker to help support her family, and then as a promoter of alcohol. During this time she said she only thought in terms of being beautiful so she could find a man to support her. But having suffered an assault while working as a promoter changed her dramatically and once she recovered she became determined to get an education, which she was able to do with the support of an international NGO program. During this time her mother could not provide financial support but did provide emotional support which was crucial to her belief in herself. Upon seeing her success, she said her community has changed their attitude to young women receiving an education and seek the same successes for their daughters. Both young women said financial success, making their own income, is the most important factor to changing women's self-perceptions and those of the community.

⁷⁰ Interview of two young professionals, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 20 June 2015.

Interview 2 was with three women community leaders and also took place in Phnom Penh.⁷¹ In response to change over time, the leaders said there has been an increase in women's and children's rights. When asked about community perception of women, they said it was bad before they began working with a local NGO that helped women take a bigger role in managing community decisions, especially regarding budgetary allocations for community development. Now that they and other women in their community are not only participating but taking the lead and that most community leader candidates in their commune are women. They said that the local organization they worked with played a big role but they wanted to change and that is why they became involved with the organization – to build capacity. One of their advantages they say is that they are older and can work as leaders, which is not a paid job. They say they began work in the late 90's and gradually worked to build roads through savings groups. Initially they said they were shy but as a result of training and community work they are able to directly negotiate with the government, men help more in the home with unpaid work, and there is more equality with men. They are also building networks with other communes and acting as mentors, and networking with other rights groups to build out their network. They said they believe training, advocacy and networking is what helped them know how to change their community.

Next in Interview 4, I conducted interviews with three district leaders to find out what their impression of women's status in leadership was.⁷² The conversation felt somewhat stilted, perhaps because of the constraints of being a political leader, but still provide insights into their perceptions as women appointed to political leadership

⁷¹ Interview with three women community leaders, Phnom Penh, on 17 Aug. 2015.

⁷² Interview of three district leaders in the provinces on 21 Aug. 2015.

positions. There were conflicting opinions among the leaders – one said that there was a great deal more inclusiveness of women in leadership and another said not much. But there was a consensus on a few things. Change has been very slow, and not much movement – on a scale from 1 – 10 on change in the past 10 years the answers ranged from 3 – 5. Another issue is self-perception. Each of the women interviewed said that additional training would be required and building networks was very important. And they agree that when the community, and the men especially, see that women are able to fulfill their assigned tasks that has a positive impact on the perception of women in the community and increased confidence in their abilities as leaders.

Interview 5, the last set of interviews I will present here, was with five garment factory workers.⁷³ The first woman I interviewed at first said there was no change in attitudes towards women. As we progressed through the interview, she said that because she was working there had been some change because she could help her family more, and therefore be part of decision making processes in her family. She said she would like to build out her network with other women who were head of households to discuss issues. The second woman I interviewed shared many of the same views – that working had increased her participation in decision making in the family but not much in the community. She said that men are superior to women. The third woman was learning union organizing and advocacy. She was the only one who said that this workers commune was her home and she was active in it doing political work, advocacy and older sister support for legal advocacy (sic). She said due to her advocacy training and work there was an enormous change in her self-perception because she now knows her rights and can speak “in a legal way.” She also argued that having a paid job changes

⁷³ Interviews with five garment factory workers in Phnom Penh on 22 Aug. 2015.

perceptions toward women because it allows them independence from their husbands. She recommends that women receive more training so they can increase the number of women's voices and "women give value to women." The fourth woman I interviewed said that there was no change in her self-perception since she began paid labor, though she felt cleverer. She said she works so much she doesn't have time to participate in community meetings but if she did she would ask to address gender based violence and men's gambling. The fifth woman said that from working she experienced more equality in her family but not in her community.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Women's Affairs in the Royal Government of Cambodia, NGOs and intergovernmental organizations continue to work to increase women's economic and political empowerment, though there remains a debate on how much their economic empowerment influences their ability to be decision makers in the community and nation. But in reviewing the interviews one can see some common themes. Advocates, programmatic workers and Cambodian women themselves agree that informal education and building networks are identifiable ways in which to deepen and improve women's self-perception and that of their families and communities. And interestingly, in all interviews conducted with Cambodian women, to a woman they believed that earning an income increased their self-value and improved their families' and communities' perception of their value, as well as their access to decision making.

Chapter 5
Culture and Tradition: The Socio-Political Aspect of Women's
Empowerment

“It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meannesses, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weakness.”⁷⁴

A contentious issue in pursuing women's rights has been the question of cultural relativism, meaning what is good for the West is not necessarily appropriate for other nations. Nor should the culture and ideals of the West, or more powerful nations, be allowed to subsume those of less powerful countries whose traditions and practices are not in alignment. However out the 192 member states of the United Nations, 189 are parties to the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).⁷⁵ This means that all but a few nations (Iran, Somalia, Sudan and Tonga) in the world knowingly and legally committed to counter discrimination against women even when they conflicted with culture and tradition. Additionally gender equality is part of the constitution of many nations. However, eradicating discrimination does not happen overnight and so it is useful to understand some of the challenges women continue to face in their communities and nations as a result of culture and tradition, and how they respond to them. In this chapter I will first discuss the role of culture and tradition in

⁷⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792), online book found at Bartleby.com (last accessed 22 Nov 2015) <http://www.bartleby.com/144/>

⁷⁵ “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,” found at United Nations Treaty Collection website (last accessed 22 Nov 2015). https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

relation to women's access to power, and some of the challenges. Then I will examine how women's interaction with their community can shift power structures and their identities.

Culture, Tradition and Power

Until recently, and still in many countries today, women's sole access to political power, which shapes women's access to power in every other realm, is through her husband. Colley write that it is more pragmatic to continue this tradition of working within patriarchal power structures rather than attempting to reinvent them in an unrealistic idealistic way.⁷⁶ Poulsen tells us of how many African leaders argued against women's equal rights and access to power because making any changes would destabilize cultural norms and upend cultural practices.⁷⁷ But the truth on the ground, Poulsen writes, was that many cultures in Africa were changing as a result of individualization and the breakdown of cultural social security nets due to economic shifts resulting from shifts to a global market economy. Even when cultural norms no longer provide the social safety nets they once did, culture is used as an argument to withhold women's rights.

Though they consider that the fight for women's representation in politics is mostly won, Paxton et al write that in many countries in the world, people still hold the belief that women do not have the temperament to participate in politics.⁷⁸ They acknowledge that even in countries like the United States, where women have gained access to political rights, it takes years for women to take part in voting and running for

⁷⁶ Linda Colley, "Women and Political Power." *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 16 No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 50-58.

⁷⁷ Karin Poulsen, "Human Rights for Women: Battles of Culture and Power." *Gender and Development*, Vol. 3 No. 2 ([Rights] (June 1995), pp. 36 – 42.

⁷⁸ Pamela Paxton, Sheri Kunovich, and Melanie Hughes, "Gender in Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 33 (2007), 263 – 270, C-1b, 271 – 284.

office. And interestingly, Paxton et al write that the recent increase in women's labor participation does not increase their political skill set nor does it provide them with economic power. A great deal of perceptions of men's inherent leadership abilities and women's inherent weaknesses are reinforced by religious practices, mutually reinforcing with cultural practices.⁷⁹ Entrenched power structures are difficult to shift, even in the economic context, as power positions are protected through cultural arguments, traditional male/female stereotypes, and religious practices. Rita Manchanda's case study in the India's Nagaland state shows that even when women's organizations are successful in lobbying the government to reserve 33 percent of seats in urban and town councils, it was opposed by many because, according to the opposition, it threatened Naga identity, and customary laws and practices.⁸⁰

The Realities of Overcoming Traditional Roles

In South Asia there has been much progress for women political leaders – there have been women heads of state and women participate in parliaments. However there is strong male backlash to the push for women's rights. Rangita de Silva de Alwis writes that having women participate in politics is crucial for two reasons: 1) their participation has a positive impact on women's status; 2) women legislators lead infrastructure investment that vastly improved the lives of average women.⁸¹ Another effect is these women then become role models for other women and girls, and change perceptions of

⁷⁹ Ibid. Also see: Nazmunnessa Mahtab, "Women in Public Administration: the Bangladesh Scenario." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 19 – 33.

⁸⁰ Rita Manchanda, "Women in Politics in South Asia: A case for Quotas?" Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 93 – 97.

⁸¹ Rangita de Silva de Alwis, "Introduction." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 1 – 7.

women community-and nation-wide. However the only way to ensure women's participation, de Alwis writes, is for there to be a quota system. The quota system reserves seats in government for women, with the two-fold effect of overcoming traditional barriers and allowing women with little or no education to participate in politics.⁸²

However even with quota systems in place and the changing perceptions of society, there continues to be strong male backlash in South Asia. The Defense Minister of India said that women that participate in parliament were the kind of women who deserved catcalls and whistles.⁸³ And some of the backlash is violent. In Bangladesh, this violence has been orchestrated through verbal abuse and character assassination, honor killings, and bombing – this includes even women who put their name on nomination lists and their families, supporters and friends.⁸⁴ Even when there is no violence, women in government face discrimination in other forms, such as few opportunities for promotion, inadequate family support, and relegation to roles that are considered feminine, like teachers, health and welfare workers, and administrators.⁸⁵ And counter-intuitively, as the middle class grows, and salaries and wages increase, women's

⁸² Vani Tripathi, "Women as Political Leaders: India the Success Story." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 34 – 39.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Also see: Vani Tripathi, "Women as Political Leaders: India the Success Story." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 34 – 39.

⁸⁵ Lise Grande, "Does It Matter: Women in Public Service." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 76 – 78. And Nazmunnessa Mahtab, "Women in Public Administration: the Bangladesh Scenario." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 19 – 33.

participation is decreasing as a result of their responsibilities increasing with no help from their families.⁸⁶

But there is an upswing in women's participation as an increasing number of women's groups and organizations work to ensure women have access to political participation in the face of cultural and traditional restrictions. Tripathi tells us that because of the work of women's movements in South Asia, there has been an increasing demand for quota systems that require reserved seats for women and this in turn has increased women's participation despite strong patriarchal political systems.⁸⁷ In light of traditional barriers to power based on a male-based power system, the only way women can achieve political power is not based on their merit but on their family connections, through their fathers, husbands or other male family members. Maithree Wickramasinghe writes that during ethnic conflict there were high profile cases in which women came into political positions as a result of the male members of their families dying.⁸⁸ However, she writes, out of 59 female representatives in Sri Lanka, 24 did not have any family connections, indicating they won by popular support. Additionally, Wickramasinghe writes, capitalizing on familial connections is not the sole purvey of female politicians, political parties seek out candidates whose family has political connections, regardless of gender.

⁸⁶ Vibha Puri Das, "Educating for Public Leadership." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 86 – 889

⁸⁷ Vani Tripathi, "Women as Political Leaders: India the Success Story." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 34 – 39.

⁸⁸ Maithree Wickramasinghe, "Women in Politics and the Politics of Women." Essay in *Women Leading Public Service and Political Participation in South Asia: New and Emerging Developments* written for the Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center for Scholars (2014) pp. 54 – 75.

Women, Communities, and Politics

There are also informal ways that women participate in politics. Naomi Abrahams writes that community work is a way that women take part in political and service work to improve the lives of their family and community as well as themselves.⁸⁹ She writes that their community work influences their personal identity and leads to the development of women's collectives with collective identities. Additionally she writes that in these informal collectives women focus on connectedness while in the formal political arena men focus on political offices or organizations through which to accomplish their political work. She continues by arguing that these collectives also take part in activism and women's roles both inform that activism, and the activism informs women's roles. This implies a reciprocal relationship between women's informal political participation, collective activism and the shaping of women's self-perception as their community roles develop and evolve. In fact, Abrahams specifically argues this. She writes that women working to better the lives of their children often lead to activism in public education and other institutions, and through this they developed skills and networks.

Elizabeth B. Erbaugh supports Abrahams argument and expounds upon this concept. She argues specifically that participating in community organizing helps women feel empowered, increases their critical political thinking and evaluation of gender meanings and rights.⁹⁰ She points out that discussions at meetings provide the opportunity for the participants to explore ideas about gender roles and whether them to persist or change them. These interactions as a group strengthens the group identity and

⁸⁹ Naomi Abrahams, "Negotiating Power, Identity, Family, and Community: Women's Community Participation." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 10 No. 6 (Dec. 1996), pp. 768 – 796.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth B. Erbaugh, "Women's Community Organizing and Identity Transformation." *Race, Gender & Class*, Vol. 9 No. 1, The Intersection of Race, Gender & Class in Social Service and Social Welfare (2002), pp. 8 – 32.

therefore that of the women who make up the group as they begin to feel a sense of solidarity and confidence to articulate problems they identify and challenge dominant ideologies.⁹¹

The above scholars and others acknowledge that women's groups and organizations are expanding and growing more influential in South Asia, asserting women's rights and pressuring governments to fulfill their constitutional requirements of gender equality. Phil E. Okeke writes that a similar phenomenon is happening in Nigeria.⁹² He writes that there has been an expansion of networking among women scholars, activists and community leaders, and these women's networks are increasing in the international spotlight. They have also begun to delve deeper into the roots of cultural stereotypes in order to reshape thinking regarding gender roles and issues. And he writes that women community groups have been speaking out against cultural practices that are harmful to women and girls like FGM, and advocating for women's rights regarding property ownership and access to communal land. Community, national and international networks are having a crucial impact on shifting or eradicating practices detrimental to the well-being of women and girls. I will discuss networks in more depth in Ch. 6.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the beginning, in most nations legal instruments are in place to bring about gender parity but there remain large gender gaps in terms of women's political participation, an area in society instrumental in determining the protections and opportunities for vulnerable populations. In large part this is due to prevailing stereotypes

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Phil E. Okeke, "Reconfiguring Tradition: Women's Rights and Social Status in Contemporary Nigeria." *Africa Today*, Vol. 47 No. 1 (Winter 2000), pp. 49 – 63.

of gender characteristics and roles that limit women's ability to participate in public life. In some cases the argument of cultural relativity has been made to protect patriarchal power structures, regardless of the fact that culture has not remained static. No culture has remained untouched or unchanged by the global market place and women now more than ever are taking on more responsibility with less support.

Some other challenges women have faced as they attempt to overcome gender gaps are enduring discrimination in their ability to advance in leadership both in the economy and politically. Many times they are relegated to what is perceived as feminine occupations or looked over for promotion because they are not viewed as inherent leaders. And in cases of political participation there is overt sexism and often violence.

However women continue to work to overcome these stigmas and seek protection that will allow them to expand their participation. What has been argued most often in the above literature and by other scholars is that quota systems, women's groups and activist networks have contributed enormously to advancing the rights of women. Women's groups fought for quota systems and emerging women's networks have begun to exert political influence that pushes forward strategies to practically implement gender parity policies.

Chapter 6 Informal Education and Networks

Today, the trend demonstrates an increasing number of women joining the workforce and yet this has not led to the same exponential increase in their political participation as a whole. This does not mean that women are not influencing local, national and international systems. More and more women have turned to politics and advocacy, worker organizing activities, and growing or utilizing formal and informal networks. Self-perception plays a big role in how women interact in their public and private lives and here I argue that informal education and building out of networks has increased women's self-confidence and determination to be agents of change in both aspects of their lives.

Here we will be looking at other paths women take to participate in order to change the status quo. Though women's participation is measured globally as economic and parliamentary participation, these measurements provide an incomplete picture of how women interact with and influence their communities, and at the national and international level. In Chapter 2, I define political participation as elected and unelected political leadership, local decision making, advocacy and voting. For the purposes of this discussion, I will first discuss political and advocacy training, then union organizing training, both of which are political. Finally, I discuss what effect these have on women. How does informal education, through political, advocacy, and organizing training, affect self-perception? And what are the different elements of each? Next I will take a look at how women's groups formal and informal networks that influence norms and traditions affecting women.

Political and advocacy training

As mentioned above, focusing solely on elected positions to determine women's political participation is inadequate. This does not mean we will ignore it— women's participation as political leaders is a key component of policy and legislative changes. And for this discussion the political training women receive illustrates how informal training can alter women's perception of their roles and abilities. Though change has been slow, various organizations at the international and local level have worked with women to develop their leadership capabilities as elected and unelected government officials, as well as through civic training.

In a UN Women brief, the author writes that getting more women involved in politics is challenging as women face structural barriers in national institutions and legislation, and capacity gaps like access to education, resources and contacts.⁹³ These barriers prevent them from participating in politics as voters, civil service members, advocates, candidates, and elected officials. UN Women,⁹⁴ Asia Foundation and EU aid agencies,⁹⁵ and USAID⁹⁶ all have worked on programs advocating for women as political participants and leaders, as well as providing programming that supplies informal education and training to fill existing gaps. Each international agency worked differently. UN Women focused on general country-level strategies, advocating and working with local government officials and civil society to help women build capacity. USAID

⁹³ "In Brief: Women's leadership and political participation," Policy brief, UN Women (21 November 2012). <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Moul Samneang. "Cambodia's Local Women Leaders Take Charge," *Notes from the Field*, Asia Foundation website (6 Mar 2013) accessed 28 March 2015. <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2013/03/06/cambodias-women-local-leaders-take-charge/>

⁹⁶ Mona Lena Krook, Darcy Ashman, Layla Moughari, and Milad Pounik "Women's Leadership as a Route to Greater Empowerment," *Desktop Study* prepared by Management Systems International for US AID (30 Oct 2014).

focused on preparing women as activists, voters, candidates and party leaders before, during and after elections to educate women on civil matters, provide candidate training and help political parties' develop action plans. Asia Foundation and the EU aid agencies worked with a local NGO on a project that helped train elected council women with confidence-building skills like public speaking, strategy and group problem solving. There are more organizations working in the areas of political training and information dissemination, all sharing a similar strategy but change is slow. Perhaps it is due to the finite nature of the programming, all of which have an end point and many of which are located in countries whose governments themselves have either low commitment or capacity to proceed with women's integration.

Union Organizing

With union organizing there tends to be a causal factor as those organizing feel they have no other choice. This can have the effect of galvanizing action leaving little room for self-doubt. However there is still the need for training in order to focus efforts for action.

Gunawardana writes that for workers in the Export Processing Zones of Sri Lanka, organizing is the "tactic of last resort."⁹⁷ When workers exhaust every other means of resolving an issue or have been fired, they will seek out a union to finally resolve the issue. However, there are gaps. Gunawardana explains that women's organizations foster political action in the workplace in Sri Lanka's EPZ by focusing on issues specific to women that traditional unions do not address. Women's organizations

⁹⁷ Samanthi Gunawardana, "Struggle, Perseverance, And Organization in Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones." In Kate Bronfenbrenner, ed., *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital Through Cross-Border Campaigns* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007) pp.78 -98, p. 85.

do not supplant existing unions, they do not bargain with the factories. Instead they provide women easily accessible spaces near their residential areas. They also provide organizing training and rights education, information, and referral networks to help build the “action-oriented empowerment of women workers.”⁹⁸ The mission for one, Women’s Centre, is to “counter derogatory societal attitudes toward women through organization and collectivism” and leadership training.⁹⁹ At these centers women have access to information about their rights; training and education about networking and group action; and importantly, spaces in which to meet with other like-minded women in order to share concerns, ideas and goals. However, women’s collective action organizations face challenges here too as women are concerned with losing their jobs or have difficulty finding time to meet.

Networks

In the previous two sections networks were considered some of the key benefits and goals of programs to empower women. In this section we will carry this conversation further and discuss formal and informal networks. We can start with formal networks and will focus on advocacy networks as these are predominantly the type of networks working on women’s equality. It is interesting to note that the first women’s movement itself was born out of a network of women abolition activists and activist groups that were fighting for the abolition of slavery, and who were not allowed to be seated at the World Anti-Slavery Conference in 1840.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid p. 91.

⁹⁹ Ibid p. 92.

¹⁰⁰ Magaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 52.

Keck and Sikkink provide the analogy of the “boomerang effect,” which illustrates the importance of advocacy networks, in this case international advocacy networks.¹⁰¹ The boomerang effect happens when NGOs cannot influence government so then seeks outside help from international networks to bring pressure to bear and influence the government to act. This concept also works at the local/national level, wherein a single community women’s group is not able to influence the local government and so reaches out to other women’s groups and brings pressure to bear either at the local, regional or national level. As a much larger group they have more leverage. There are other tools too that strengthen networks: leverage politics, as described above with the boomerang effect; information politics, organizing and sharing information for political impact; symbolic politics, using symbols, actions and stories to bring together a disparate audience on an issue; and accountability politics, making sure those who say they will do something do it.¹⁰² The most crucial, and according to Keck and Sikkink most overlooked,¹⁰³ is information. The authors write about information as an advocacy tool but we could also frame it as a tool facing inward to empowerment. When we better understand what information means, frameworks within which to understand it, it can be transformative. From the program reports written by the above organizations, information sharing was the foundation of their work and this ability to exchange and disseminate information had the effect of reshaping women’s self-perception.

¹⁰¹ Ibid p.12.

¹⁰² Ibid p. 16.

¹⁰³ Ibid p. 194.

In Ghana, prior to democratization in 1992, women and women's issues were excluded from the economy and politics.¹⁰⁴ To overcome these hardships women formed groups that would help them manage economic and social problems. After Ghana democratized women were allowed to be part of the political process and mobilized their informal networks to become politically active. However, as they were excluded by the dominant political parties before, they wanted to participate outside of them to gain access to direct power by voting for other women who best knew their issues and would legislate for them. As in the case of Ghana, Purkayastha and Subramaniam write that women's informal networks are often formed as a means for survival that eventually evolve to become a means for social change.¹⁰⁵ They point out that informal networks are flexible. They may have multiple functions: a credit and savings group that also contributes to resource decision making; savings associations that serve as information exchange and political participation networks. They argue that because women in newer democracies have only recently been brought into the political system and rely heavily on NGO support for their continued integration, focusing on formal organizing may not best serve these women. Instead women can focus on changing conditions through their existing informal networks while preserving their networks they value and feel essential to survival.

¹⁰⁴ Katherine Fallon. "Using Informal Networks to Seek Formal Political Participation in Ghana." in Bandana Purkayastha and Mangala Subramaniam, ed., *The Power of Women's Informal Networks: Lesson in Social Change from South Asia and West Africa* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004) pp. 75 – 88.

¹⁰⁵ Bandana Purkayastha and Mangala Subramaniam, "Afterword: Informal Networks, Gender, and Change." in Bandana Purkayastha and Mangala Subramaniam, ed., *The Power of Women's Informal Networks: Lesson in Social Change from South Asia and West Africa* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004) pp. 121 – 131.

Conclusion

Rather than focusing primarily on increasing women's economic participation, we can look too at other methods previously employed to empower women. Some local, national and international development agencies target the capacity building of women, focusing especially on skills that increase women's critical thinking and self-confidence. Political, advocacy and organizing training agencies use similar methods, providing space to meet, rights education, skills development, and assisting women to form or join networks. The outcomes have been positive changes in women's self-perception, women's access to new tools to integrate their issues and needs into policy and legislative dialogue, and knowledge and understanding of their legal rights, international human rights norms, and opportunities to share their issues with other women to develop strategies to address them. And of course this includes a steady increase in the number of women participating in direct political action whether in the work place, community or nation.

Building networks has been a key component of political participation, whether to increase support as a candidate or issue, knowledge sharing, strategy development or moral support. Formal networks are those created for the purpose of focusing on an issue and tend to be more organized, using information politics, boomerang strategies, and employing political pressure. Whereas informal networks are formed organically out of necessity to survive. These tend to be more flexible. And women in these networks have deeper ties because they are a survival-based group, their networks have a longer lifespan and can have multiple identities, and women have more influence with each other. Networks serve as a tool and as a space in which women feel less isolated. There they are

a collective identity, which makes them stronger as a group, and enables them to wield more power.

Ch 7 Men and Masculinity in Gendered Power Dynamics and Awareness Workshops

“If we do not talk about men and gender, we will not understand men’s position and privilege, and we will not be able to outline men’s responsibilities to work towards gender equity.”¹⁰⁶ Though “gender” issues are most often considered women’s issues there is a growing consensus that gender inequality affects men too. And there have been articles, in fact entire publications,¹⁰⁷ dedicated to the topic of men taking part in gender equity programming and development. However program strategies for women’s empowerment and development are focused primarily on women almost to the complete exclusion of men. As the traditional global power holders in the family, community and nation, men perpetuate power inequalities to protect the status quo in which they are the decision makers publicly and privately. This chapter will explain why this is the case and how men should be included in shifting toward gender equality.

Here I will explore masculinity and male stereotypes, and how norms for men perpetuate gender hierarchies and inequalities. Then I will discuss male backlash as men respond to women changing power structures. Following this will be examples of gender-awareness work conducted in the past and current trends. And I will conclude with some of the challenges in this area of gender parity work and its efficacy as an alternative to economic solutions.

¹⁰⁶ James L. Lang and Sue Smith, “Evolving the gender agenda: the responsibilities and challenges for development organizations.” *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*, ed. Sandy Ruxton for Oxfam GB (2004).

¹⁰⁷ *Gender and Development*, Vol 5 No. 2 [Masculinity] (Jun. 1997).

Masculinity and Male Stereotypes

In order to understand gender hierarchies one must examine not only women's role in society but also that of men, especially as institutions and power structures are inherently patriarchal. Dowd recommends we study masculinity scholarship so that we may understand the framework of male privilege and dominance, and also how these constructs have harmed men and boys.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, she points out that men subordinate other men as much as they do women, and though men are powerful they may often feel powerless. She goes on to write that masculinity requires constant proof of manhood that can never be achieved but is constantly sought and challenged. Paradoxically though men are the power holders, the harm they experience is often invisible.

Connell and Messerschmitt go deeper into the hierarchies and geographies of masculinity and male on male gender oppression.¹⁰⁹ They point out the incorporation into a hierarchical structure of manhood by ethnicity, disability, class and sexuality, especially stigmatized sexuality. Here concealed oppression occurs, though it can also be expressed through violence as experienced by the gay community. This hierarchy can then be seen too in the context of geography, at the local, regional and international level. They explain as follows: at the local level we see this hierarchy play out in families and communities, and in organizations; at the regional level it is constructed within national culture and traditions, and the institutions in the state; and at the international level these hierarchies are visible in world politics, transnational businesses and the media.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy Dowd, "Asking the Man Question: Masculinities Analysis and Feminist Theory." 33 *Harv. J.L. & Gender* 415 (2010), available at <http://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/facultypub/83>

¹⁰⁹ R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 9 No. 6 (Dec. 2005) pp. 829 – 529.

Geographical hierarchies push on each to influence behavioral changes, both top up and top down. For instance, the state may wish to incorporate antidiscrimination practices at the local level in order to fulfill its obligation to donors but might receive pushback from the traditional male leaders who wish to protect their domain of power. Alternatively, the patriarchal foundation of international institutions has the effect of reinforcing certain male dominance norms, such as the predominance of neoliberal decision making to the detriment of families and local communities. This process reinforces class and gender hierarchies as men at the local level then feel the pressure to be the bread winner and dominant decision makers in order to reinforce their masculinity.

Male Backlash

As stated earlier in this thesis, in development practices the idea that increasing women's economic contribution can also increase her leverage seems implicit in long term economic development strategies focusing on women. Yoo-Mi Chin challenges this idea. She argues that it is not clear that women-focused economic policies intending give women more bargaining power are successful.¹¹⁰ Chin points out instead that this serves to challenge men's power status triggering negative responses and in some cases violence. Specifically, women's greater independence through monetary gains by the women shows an increase in spousal violence. This can be linked to the challenging to the men's manhood and masculinity, which might cause him to respond in ways to reassert it.

¹¹⁰ Yoo-Mi Chin, "Male backlash, bargaining, or exposure reduction?: women's working status and physical spousal violence in India." *Journal of Popular Economics*, 25 (2012) pp. 175 – 200.

White confirms the idea of women's economic independence causing a negative male response in her story of a woman from a rural community in the Philippines.¹¹¹ In this story a woman discovers that her bread sales matched the earnings of her husbands and was the primary source of household income as her husband kept a portion of his earnings for drinking and gambling. When he a fellow worker mentioned she earned money, he became very angry because the notion of him as the "breadwinner" was being challenged.

Work with Men on Gender Parity: The Personal is Political

When first learning about gender equality or women's empowerment programming or work there is a natural fear among men that this process will take undermine their masculinity.¹¹² Lang and Smith write that this was one of the first phenomena discovered at the 1999 informal working group the UN Working Group on Men and Gender Equality formed by the UNDP, UNICEF and other UN entities. The three main points men brought up were fear of loss of personal and professional status because of loss of perceived masculinity, inexperience with gender issues, and organizational culture, which was based on long-standing patriarchal systems.¹¹³ The authors write that the transformation of these men happened when they embraced the concept that the personal is political a longstanding feminist trope. What happened was they realized their original belief in why they had become development advocates, sense of justice and a desire to help women like theirs, was inadequate. Through personal

¹¹¹ Sarah C. White, "Men, Masculinities and the Politics of Development." *Gender and Development*, Vol. No. 2, [Masculinity] (Jun. 1997) pp. 14 – 22.

¹¹² Lang and Smith, "Evolving the gender agenda: the responsibilities and challenges for development organizations." *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*, ed. Sandy Ruxton for Oxfam GB (2004).

¹¹³ Ibid.

conversations and self-reflection they discovered they chose this because they wanted to challenge the constraints they were under, the strain of living up to unrealistic ideals of masculinity.

At Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC), there is ongoing local-level programming that provides programming for men and women. They use a three-prong approach to gender awareness: 1) meeting with the husband and wife to establish communication around goals; 2) women to educate about national and international legal norms around women's rights and create a space for women only to discuss women's issues; and 3) work with men on international and national legal norms and behavior changes. For the purposes of this analysis we will briefly outline GADC's work with men.

The program for men at GADC is the Community Outreach Project on Men Perspective Project (MPP). In this program there is the Community-Based Men Core Group (CMG), which acts in concert with the Core Women's Group (CWG), mentioned briefly above. The men in the CMG receive training at the regional level and return their villages to share their training. The men are trained on laws and international conventions like CEDAW, but in addition to that they are also provided training on masculinity and gender perspectives. They are provided a discussion space for men only in which they are able to set aside their roles society roles and have frank discussions about what it means to be a man, what are their behaviors and consequences, and how they believe male [stereotypes and behaviors] should be modified.¹¹⁴ In an interview with the program officer leading the work with Khmer men, he reported that men were receptive to behavior change, to share resources and decision-making, to help with domestic work and

¹¹⁴ Interview My Sambath, , GADC on 7 Aug 2015.

child-rearing, and they were able to see how this benefitted them and their families. Measuring outcomes through domestic violence reports, at the local and province level, he was able to see a significant change in men who previously committed domestic violence that then stopped. He attributed the change to increased awareness in the community, and monitoring and reporting. Additionally men increased understanding of outcomes of violence – both personal and legal – as well as a better understanding of how women and men can work together in the family and community.

Challenges

While men and boys most often do receive preferential treatment in public and private lives, they also suffer from gender hierarchies. Outside the pressure to be and appear to be the “breadwinners” and carry the sole responsibility for decision-making, they also struggle within masculine hierarchies that restrict their choices. And they are under constant pressure to assert and reassert their masculinity in unfair power hierarchies among men. And as mentioned above, one of the biggest challenges is not the entrenched nature of masculinity. It is the dearth of gender programming available to men. Missing are safe spaces in which men can vocalize their fears and the ability to collectively problem solve. There is concern in the feminist realm that bringing men into the discussion of gender parity may offer them the opportunity to co-opt and dominate it¹¹⁵ but from the above examples the outcome seems to be a willingness to share responsibility with women and relinquish power that has become burdensome.

¹¹⁵ Lang and Smith, “Evolving the gender agenda: the responsibilities and challenges for development organizations.” *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*, ed. Sandy Ruxton for Oxfam GB (2004). And Nancy Dowd, “Asking the Man Question: Masculinities Analysis and Feminist Theory.” 33 *Harv. J.L. & Gender* 415 (2010), available at <http://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/facultypub/83>

Chapter 8 – In Conclusion

There is a prevailing attitude that increasing women's economic participation leads to their empowerment, or increases their agency in influencing decision making. This is despite large data evidence to the contrary and acknowledgement by financial institutions that a link cannot be established. This thesis examines what impact labor participation has on women's influence in their community and their political participation, how non-income related skills like advocacy increases women's self-confidence and agency, and the role non-formal training and networks play in increasing women's participation in decision making and political participation. I find that when conducting a data comparison there does not appear to be a relationship between labor and political participation, but that Cambodian women believe income is key to increasing their influence. Also I find that non-income related skills, non-formal training and networks are important tools to deepen women's confidence and capacity, leading to sustainable improvement in participation in decision making. Also there is a new area of study, men and masculinity, which is now being used to provide gender relevant gender training to men. In other words, gender is not just about women changing.

At the outset I define the popular term "empowerment" as a mean to understanding a much used development term that in essence tries to explain women's agency and ability to influence her surroundings. Next I share what economic empowerment is and critiques that this concept as a means of helping women when in actuality it simply perpetuates failed neoliberal policies and gender, social and political hierarchies. In the data analysis at the global, regional and country level there is no

visible relationship between labor participation and political participation, the proxy term for political empowerment. In the case study of Cambodia, I demonstrate that though there is an interest in giving women access to ways to increase their incomes, there is also much work being done to prepare women as political leaders and advocates. Also this study shows the process of changing minds and behaviors has been slow, even in the minds of the next generation. And the interviews I conducted show that trainings and work to build networks were impactful on the women interviewed but from most of their perspectives having an income and increasing their income was key to increasing their self-confidence and influence in their families and communities. Next I examined why the change in culture and tradition is slow and how entrenched ideas of traditional roles are being challenged. Though education features in many development discussions, many of the data collected are measures of formal education. Informal education, political and advocacy training, soft skills like public speaking and problem solving, and developing networks are also indispensable tools to changing attitudes about gender roles, both personally for women and for their communities and nations. And finally, a not much discussed or practiced tool is working with men to re-examine what it means to be masculine and the benefits of power-sharing.

Perhaps we can question the popular belief that increasing income is a means to increase women's agency as a linear outcome. Some questions that bear answering are: do beneficiaries believe economic gains increase their access to power because it actually does in some as yet unknown way? Or is it a reflection of the common perspectives of leading development agencies? In other words, do development agencies influence women's perceptions of how they (the women) can reliably access power? Or is this

perception based on popular culture and prevailing neoliberal economic trends? And finally will a holistic approach, taking into account financial, social and political development, rather than a piecemeal approach excluding one be a new trend in development?

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for taking time from their incredibly busy schedules to meet with me and for their invaluable contributions to my thesis.(in no particular order): Mia Hyun and Seltik Heng at UNDP Cambodia; Chhea Chandy at Asia Development Bank; Sokny Say at FTUWKC; Hilary Amster and Ben Kobren at Fontheim; Moul Samneang at the Asia Foundation Cambodia; My Sambath at GADC; Sina at UPWD; Chan Chhorvy at OGB in Cambodia; Thida Khus at SILAKA; Veth Vorn at UN Women Cambodia; Chenda Sem at NDDS; Dan Allman at the ILO Cambodia/Better Factories Cambodia; Jane Hodge and Laura Barisone at ILO/Labor Migration Cambodia; Kim Pichda at GMAC. And big thank you to Dr. Jean Krasno, my thesis supervisor. Our conversations were stimulating and your guidance invaluable. And to Dr. Jeffrey Kucik for your guidance prior to my long research trip, and for being my second reader.