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## Democracy and Decentralisation in Cambodia - Capacity Buildings for Female Commune Councilors with the Goal to Increase the Development of their Communes

MARAILE GÖRGEN

*Georg August Universität Göttingen, Germany*

### Abstract

With the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals, world wide poverty reduction obtained a new importance. To eradicate or at least decrease poverty and hunger until the year 2010, many economical as well as political terms need to be ensured. The most important issue is the guaranty of an efficient, democratic political system. With the introduction of the decentralisation reform by the Royal Government of Cambodia in the year 2001, democracy became an important aspect in Cambodian politics. Decentralisation means that certain rights, responsibilities and resources are transferred from the central level of government to the democratically elected communes. It aims to promote democracy and to improve the living conditions of the populations. In this decentralisation process, the enactment of the Law on Elections of Commune Councils took place. In February 2002 the first commune council elections were held in all 1621 communes with 11261 councilors elected. Although the 1993 constitution guarantees equality between men and women, only 8, 5% of these elected councilors are female. That “the systematic integration of women augments the democratic basis, the efficiency and the quality of activities of local government” was recognised by the Cambodian government as well as by international stakeholders. Therefore capacity buildings were developed to strengthen the capacity of female councilors. Today, many of them are attending capacity buildings which aim to address specific challenges female councilors are facing and to enhance their capacity to perform their roles and functions. Moreover the capacity buildings provide space in order to experience sharing and networking. The capacity buildings have been successful so far: 75% of the female councilors attending capacity buildings/forums supported by the German Technical Cooperation reported that these forums contributed to an increased knowledge about their duties and responsibilities in the council. Female councilors are able to undertake own projects that contribute to the development of their commune. Moreover 86% of the interviewed female councilors want to re-stand for the 2007 commune council elections. As these results show, Cambodian women move towards a democratic, decentralised country and a society which aims to fight hunger and poverty.

**Keywords:** Decentralisation, Democracy, fighting Poverty and Hunger, Gender