What About Gender?

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YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IS A CATALYST TO affecting change in traditional politics that thrives on discrimination, inequality and despotism. However, as the following country papers will affirm, customary values and cultural complexities pose as unyielding barriers to young progressives in their involvement in politics. More so will this endeavor be a challenge for young women who seek to take active role in political debates and processes.

Women are not a category for themselves but are merely members of different social classes or strategic groups,[1] and therefore pursue a wide range of interests. But still women are united as one group in respect of "their subordinate position vis-à-vis men when measured against economic wealth, political power and social representation."[2] So it is obvious why women's participation in politics is essential: since women's conditions, situations and interests are often different from men's, in a democratic society women's needs and opinions must be represented as well as men's. Although a woman in a decision-making position is by far not a guarantee for gender sensitive politics, women are more likely to represent women's perspectives and interests.

In recent years, mainly as a consequence of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995 held in Beijing, most governments have formally committed themselves to gender democracy. According to Barbara Stiegler, specialist in women's research from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, there are several elements that have to be combined in order to achieve gender equality/democracy:

[1] For the theory of Strategic Groups, see Evers, Hans-Dieter u. Tilman Schiel. (1988). Strategische Gruppen. Vergleichende Studien zu Staat, Bürokratie und Klassenbildung in der Dritten Welt, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.

[2] Frieson, Kate. (2001). In the Shadows: Women, Power and Politics in Cambodia, CAPI occasional paper series: 26, ISBN 1-55058-230-5, Canada, p. 2.

- The goal of gender equality has to be integrated in the formulation of laws, guidelines and norms;

- Quotas aim at the reduction of the exclusion of women;

- Gender Mainstreaming;

- Autonomous structures and practices of women, like women's organizations and women's sections within organizations and institutions.[3]

According to Stiegler, "Gender Mainstreaming comprises the reorganization, improvement, development and evaluation of decision-making processes in all policy fields and areas of work of an organization. The objective of gender mainstreaming is to integrate the perspective of the relations between the genders in all decision-making processes and to utilize all decision-making processes for gender equality;"

Source: Stiegler, Dr. Barbara. (2004). Gender Powers Policy: Ten Questions and Answers on the Concept of Gender Mainstreaming. Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. p. 6.

The promotion of gender equality in the struggle of young progressives to broaden democratic space, to improve participation and coalesce with various progressive and opposition groups is essential for the inclusion of the perspectives and interests of both young women and young men. Moreover, Stiegler asserts that the success of the principle hinges on the capacity of men and women to view gender relations critically and to bring about their change, and as such the political essence of the learning process requires democratic discourse.[4]

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[3] Stiegler, Dr. Barbara. Gender Mainstreaming. Available online http://www.fes.de/gender/. [date accessed 4 March 2005].

[4] Stiegler, Barbara. (2004). Gender Powers Policy: Ten Questions and Answers on the Concept of Gender Mainstreaming. Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. p. 6.

In 2004, the average worldwide female representation in decision-making positions stands at 15 percent globally.[5] Some figures in three Southeast Asian countries show the improving yet still disproportionate representation of women in elected positions in government. In Thailand, there were 53 women elected, which constitute to 10.4%, out of the 500 representatives in the House of Representatives for the election year 2005[6] (9.2% in the election year 2001). In Indonesia, there are 61 women elected (11.1%) out of 550 representatives in the Lower House for the election year 2004.[7] In the Philippines, there are 37 women (15.6%) out of the 237 members of the House of Representatives while there are 4 women (17.4%) out of 23 members of the Senate for the election year 2004.

Only three out of the five Southeast Asian countries studied in this publication instituted quota systems to promote women's participation and representation in politics. However as data from "Gaining Ground?,"[8] a recent FES publication show, the quota systems put in place in the three countries to provide women candidates opportunities to get involved in the decision-making processes and gain positions in the government are being manipulated by politicians for their own political advantage. In the country paper of Malaysia, it was cited that while it is necessary to introduce temporary measures such as quotas to encourage women's increased political participation, this policy in itself does not guarantee that women will involve themselves in this traditionally male realm. In Indonesia, the 30% quota as a

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[5] IDEA. (2005). Women in Politics. Available online http://www.idea.int/gender/ [date accessed 22 February 2005].

[6] Thailand Embassy. (7 March 2005). Press Release: PM Speaks on Thailand's Educational Development. Available online http://www.thaiembdc.org/pressctr/pr/pr4748.pdf [date accessed 20 April 2005].

[7] IDEA. (2005). Global Database of Quotas for Women. Available online http://www.quotaproject.org/asia.cfm [date accessed 22 February 2005].

[8] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Philippine Office. (2004). Gaining Ground? Southeast Asian Women in Politics and Decision-Making, Ten Years After Beijing. Manila: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Philippine Office.

"voluntary" step does not compel political parties to abide by the stipulations of the law. In Cambodia as in other Southeast Asian countries, women are given token political roles, made to appear on stage but not given real opportunities to participate in decision-making.

Gender issues are the primary reasons why young women do not participate in politics.[9] The myriad of factors such as conservative institutions, inadequate and lack of access to functional education, sexual division of labor, multiple burden, gender discrimination and inequality that continue to socialize women in subordinate status in the society pose as obstacles to women's ability to be part of the decision-making process in government.

The following are some factors that continue to restrain young women's political participation. Although these factors may not apply to all the five countries studied in this book in the same way, they will give an idea about how young women's preconditions for political activity might differ from that of their male counterparts:

1. Lack of Access to Quality Education

One of the most striking reasons for the lack of women's participation in decision-making is the lack of access to quality education, including political education. Evident in all five Southeast Asian countries studied here, poverty, illiteracy and unemployment contribute significantly to the inability of young people to effectively participate in politics. Education is one of the basic necessities for the young people to realize their full potentials as persons. However, lack of prioritization by

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[9]   Nuzul Izzah Anwar. (2000). Young Women Leaders: A real trend or Utopia? In Young Women = New Politics?! Bangkok: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Thailand Office.

governments on education, lack of funds and school facilities, remote villages difficult to get to for teachers, poor management and emigration of teachers to other countries for better employment opportunities remain major obstacles in making quality education available for young people. Although the basic right to education has been enshrined in many of the international conventions signed by most of the governments as in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the inability to provide quality education, an entitlement to every young person, is a manifestation of the passive adherence to these obligations. Without access to quality education, young people are already condemned to a life of poverty and unemployment.

For girls the situation is even worse than for their male counterparts, especially for those coming from low-income families. If families cannot afford to send all their children to school they usually prefer to provide their male children with education.[10] The reasons for this is found in traditional gender roles that perceive men as the main income earners, as well as in the labor market that offers better opportunities and higher salaries to men.

In Cambodia, for example, more than 40% of women at the age of 15 and above are illiterate and up to 70% are functionally illiterate (illiteracy of males is about 20%).[11] Only 5% of girls are enrolled in upper secondary school and only 20% of university graduates are women. Only 10% of National Assembly members

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[10] Thida Khus. 2004. Cambodia. In: Gaining Ground? Southeast Asian Women in Politics and Decision-Making, Ten Years after Bejing, p. 11-36. FES Manila. p. 28.

[11] UNESCO. (1996). Statistical Yearbook. Available online http://esa.un.org/socdev/unyin/country3b.asp?countrycode=kh [date accessed 22 February 2005].

are women and not more than 8% of Commune Council members are women.[12]

	Estimated Adult (15+) Illiteracy Rate (%) 2000-2004			Illiteracy Rate (%) for ages 15-24		Illiteracy Rate (%) for ages 25+	
Country	Men	Women	Year	Men	Women	Men	Women
Cambodia	19.2	40.7	1998	18.1	28.8	21.7	49.0
Indonesia	7.5	16.6	2000-2004	1.5	2.4	...	...
Malaysia	8.0	14.6	2000	2.8	2.7	...	...
Philippines	7.5	7.3	2000	5.5	4.3	8.3	8.7
Thailand	5.1	9.5	2000	1.9	2.2	5.4	12.1

Source: UN Statistics Division: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/illiteracy.htm (last updated 28 January 2005)

2. Gender Roles

Societal institutions such as the family, religious groups, schools and government often ascribe accepted roles to young women and young men. These roles are not determined by biological criteria and dispositions but by structural and individual conditions, cultural rules, norms and taboos. Gender roles and gender hierarchies vary from one culture to another and can be changed.[13] While in urban areas cultural change is fast and social control is less tight and thereby facilitates more individual lifestyles and modification of norms and values, traditional values and gender roles, however, are still valid to various degrees, especially in rural areas.[14] The Ministry of Women and Family Development

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[12] Gender and Development for Cambodia (GAD/C). Available online http://www.online.com.kh/~gad/Home.htm. [date accessed 22 February 2005].

[13] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. (2003). Practising Gender: The Tool Book. Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

[14] Kallauch-Stock, Irmtrud. (1992). Sozialisierung von Kindern auf Java (Indonesien). Frankfurt: Dissertation an der J.-W. Goethe-Universität zu Frankfurt a. M., p. 46 ff. and Magnis-Suseno, Franz. (1989). Neue Schwingen für Garuda. München: Peter Kindt Verlag. p 121 f.

of Malaysia, for instance, stresses the continuing relevance of Asian values as follows: "In the construction of gender role, each ethnic group in Malaysia is influenced by Asian values which determine that the role of women is in the domestic/private sphere while men dominate the public sphere which happens to be the locus of political activities."[15]

In most Asian cultures, prudence and discretion is associated with femininity. In reference to traditional values that highlight hierarchical orders of societies, young people are not supposed to speak out against their elders and additionally young women are not expected to speak up against men. Within a traditional socialization, girls learn to feel shy and fearful. Coming from traditional backgrounds, they usually start to fulfill household duties in a very early age that limits them to house and family, while boys are more likely to be allowed to play outside. That is the reason why many girls do not learn to speak in public and do not have confidence to get involved in discussions, especially when men are also involved in these discussions.[16] Additionally, going out at night is not only perceived dangerous but also improper for women. Since meetings and political activities often take place at night, it is difficult, if not impossible, for women to attend.

3. The Women's Multiple Burden

These traditional gender roles also trigger a differentiation between male work that is outside the house and connoted with high prestige and female work that is often household bound, in the

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[15] Kua Abun. (2003). Regional Meeting of National Machineries for Gender Equality in the Asian and Pacific Region: Towards a Forward Looking Agenda. Ministry of Women and Family Development of Malaysia 2003, p. 14. Available online http://www.moge.go.kr/board/eng_kwdi_report/data/Malaysia%20Country%20Paper.doc. [date accessed 4 March 2005].

[16] Sullivan, Norma. (1994). Masters and Managers. A Study of Gender Relations in Urban Java. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd., p. 83 ff.

social or service sector and perceived to be of low value. In most societies, work connoted as female is of less prestige than those fields of work that are perceived as male, no matter what skills they require.

Gender stereotyping in employment makes it difficult for equal pay and anti-discrimination legislation to effect the improvement of the position of women in the labor market and elsewhere. Indirect discrimination is often evident in highly gender segregated labor markets, where gaps within pay rates and conditions between "men's work" and "women's work" institutionalize existing labor market inequities.[17] So women often work long hours to make just a small income and can contribute only small amounts of money to the family earnings that again consolidates their low prestige within their families and societies.

These gender determined conceptions of work do not only influence women's position in the labor market but also leaves the burden of household duties and care for children, sick and old relatives on women's shoulders which again reduces their opportunities to get involved into politics. This holds especially true for women coming from families that cannot afford house help. Also young women who are not yet married and have no children are supposed to fulfill household duties in their parents' houses and take care of younger siblings.

The burden is especially heavy for Cambodian women. In Cambodia, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), "approximately 4.2 persons per 1,000 are amputees as a consequence of a land-mine explosion. [...] The unpaid burden of caring for people with disability has fallen disproportionately on women. Losers in the care economy, women are robbed of

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[17] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2000). Youth in the Philippines: A Review of the Youth Situation and National Policies and Programmes.

opportunities to reintegrate themselves into society, or to become active in public life when they are given no choice but to care for a sick, maimed or dying relative."[18]

A study of the every day lives of Indonesian female industrial workers showed that their average working day is 18 to 20 hours, including income generating activities, childcare and household work.[19] As simple as it sounds, time is a crucial factor for women's participation, especially if their family's economic situation is poor.

4. Image of Young Women Portrayed in the Media

Media could play an important role in the political participation of young progressives. However, the projection of an image of ideal womanhood that is impossible to attain and reinforces the perception that all women are reducible to a set of bodily attributes and attitudes is prevalent in television commercials, in movies, popular and print media in all five Southeast Asian countries. The typical depiction of women, particularly those of young women as dependent, supportive, nurturing and submissive, perpetuate perceptions, values and attitudes that confine both women and men in their gender roles. These qualities influence the power relationships between women and men that are often used to justify the traditional subordinate roles of women who are perceived not to be suitable for leadership or decision-making positions.[20] In response to this challenge, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) that was adopted in 1995 at the Fourth UN

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[18] UNIFEM Women War Peace Portal. (updated on 11 February 2005). The Impact of the Conflict on Cambodian Women. Available online http://www.womenwarpeace.org/cambodia/cambodia.htm#impact [date accessed 1 March 2005].

[19] Sunarijati, Ari; Lilly Purba. (1993). Peranan Wanita dalam Serikat Pekerja. Jakarta: Lembaga Wanita dan Remaja DPP SPSI, p. 4.

[20] Cheung, Fanny et. al. (1999). Introduction: Violence Against Women as a Global Concern. In Cheung, Fanny et. al. (1999). Breaking the Silence: Violence Against Women in Asia. Hong Kong: Equal Opportunities Commission, p. 2.

World Conference on Women underscored women in media as one of its twelve critical concerns. It specifically called on governments to "promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media" and the participation and access of women in new technologies of media and communications. There have been some achievements, mainly through the continuous efforts of women NGOs. But still "women continue to have limited access to and participation in decision-making in the media industries and governing authorities and bodies that oversee formulation and implementation of media policies. Women media practitioners continue to face gender-based discrimination including sexual harassment at the work place. Therefore, the power to shape and influence media still eludes women."[21]

5. Conceptions of Politics

Politics are rather associated with male characteristics than with female ones. Engagement in politics is often perceived to be a loss of femininity. Traditional cultural norms are so internalized that most women have apparently become psychologically unprepared for any political participation. Many have developed a sense of inferiority and believe they do not have the necessary skills for political work. Many have also hesitated to enter politics because of its dark, negative connotations[22] of violence and corruption. Furthermore, women are often not aware of the importance of women's participation at all levels of politics, they lack political efficacy and, therefore, seem less confident.[23]

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[21] WomenAction. (2000). Alternative Assessment of Women and Media based on NGO Reviews of Section J, Beijing Platform for Action. http://www.womenaction.org/csw44/altrepeng.htm.

[22] Ani Widyani Soetjipto. (2004). Big Party Politics – Still a Man's World. In Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Philippine Office. (2004). Gaining Ground? Southeast Asian Women in Politics and Decision-making, Ten Years After Beijing. Manila: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Philippine Office, p. 40.

[23] Romy Fay Gumba,.(2000). The Philippines. In: Young Women = New Politics?! Bangkok: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Thailand Office. p 24.

6. Lack of Access to Financial Resources

The lack of access to financial resources that are needed for promotion of women's participation in politics is another hindrance for young women to actively take part in political advocacies and practice. "Political campaigns are expensive and financial transparency of political parties is often not there. As such the economic cost creates a barrier for women who could otherwise be suitable candidates to stand for election."[24] Even with the existence of national machineries, such as gender budgets, aimed to allocate money in the effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programs, have so far failed to practice gender budgeting in a sufficient scale.

7. Violence Against Young Women

Multiple factors contribute to the occurrence of violence against women, which cuts across ethnicity, age, economic and attained educational status. Violence against women originates from unequal power relations where male power and control over women is exercised as a matter that is often supported by society's norms and institutions.[25] It affects the capacity of women to participate freely and fully in society and brings harmful consequences to women's physical and psychological health. Furthermore, a culture of violence against women interferes with women's rights to be political citizens. One incidence of political violence against women took place in Cambodia where 16 political candidates of which three were women were killed. The candidates who were killed were trained by the Cambodian organization,

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[24] Miriam College-Women and Gender Institute (WAGI). (2004). The Purple Book, Quezon City, p. 49.
[25] Javate-De Dios, Aurora (1999). Hidden No More: Violence Against Women in the Philippines. In: Cheung, Fanny et. al. (1999). Breaking the Silence: Violence Against Women in Asia. Hong Kong: Equal Opportunities Commission, p. 154.

Women and Prosperity, to take active roles in decision-making and leadership in government.[26]

For a person to be a political citizen, she must be able to participate, free from domination, as a self-determined equal, in the deliberation that is essential to a democratic form of government. But self-determination and equality are difficult, if not impossible, in the face of an omnipresent threat of violence. A culture of violence against women therefore interferes with women's ability to participate fully in political life.[27] The main obstacle still faced is that not all religious leaders, government officials, police and other law enforcement agencies as well as important public figures recognize the issue as a serious one and ensure that the behavior related to violence against women is condemned by those people in authority.[28] Thus, there is an urgent need to raise public consciousness and understanding of the equal rights of women and men, the debilitating impacts of violence against women and the value of young women's political participation.

8. Lack of Gender-Disaggregated Data on Young People's Participation in Politics

Though young people make up one-fifth of the world's population and are the inheritors of the successes and failures of previous generations, young people particularly young women progressives still have to achieve recognition in Southeast Asian societies. Without accurate and accessible gender-disaggregated data on

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[26] Nanda Pok. (undated). My Vision: Inclusive Governance. Available online: http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/0386a.html [date accessed 13 April 2005].

[27] Lawsky, Sarah B. (2000). A Nineteenth Amendment Defense Of The Violence Against Women Act. Available online http://www.saf.org/LawReviews/YaleNote2000.htm [date accessed 8 March 2005].

[28] Saparinah Sadli and Tita Marlita. (1999). Violence Against Women in Indonesia. In Cheung, Fanny et. al. (1999). Breaking the Silence: Violence Against Women in Asia. Hong Kong: Equal Opportunities Commission, p. 102.

young people's political participation, young women's contribution could not be identified, gauged and replicated. Furthermore, the lack of gender-disaggregated data on young people's political participation contributes to the invisibility of young people, particularly young women's needs in affirmative mechanisms such as gender budgets. Young women need to see themselves as vital stakeholders of their communities, societies and countries in the region.

Challenges to Increase Young Women's Political Participation

The vital role of young progressives' participation in political processes is its potential to generate changes and give representation to both young women and young men in the development of their countries in the Southeast Asian region. As young progressives strengthen their capabilities for involvement and network with other groups in the region, the incorporation of the perspectives and interests of both young women and young men might not be so far at hand.

Democratic reform should enable all citizens to participate fully in political decision-making and to benefit equitably from its results. But, around the world, legal and customary barriers often deny women equal access to institutions of governance and prevent them from seeing themselves as agents of political change.[29] Young women can and have to participate in all fields of politics if only opportunities are not hindered by cultural, socio-economic and political reasons. These levels encompass both the public and private spheres from the context of the family to global governance.

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[29] The Asia Foundation. (June 2001). Women's Political Participation in Indonesia. Available online http://www.asiafoundation.org/pdf/indo_wpp.pdf#search='Violence%20Against%20women%20%20political%20participation' [date accessed 8 March 2005].

There have been significant strides in the promotion of women's participation in politics such as quotas, commitment to gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, measures that have been more or less successfully implemented. As we have seen, however, reasons for the lack of young women's participation in politics are not limited to institutional shortcomings and structural discrimination but comprise from a broad variety of political, social, and economic as well as infrastructural factors. Laws and guidelines are relatively easy to formulate if only commitment to gender equality follows suit. Importantly, implementation and achievement of gender equality requires more than just commitment. Technical expertise, professional experience, international conventions and sufficient mechanisms in place will provide conducive setting for the promotion of gender equality. Engendering gender sensitivity in the long-established traditional values calls for the involvement of various actors in society such as the media, the educational system, the judiciary, legislative and executive branches of government, civil society organizations and religious groups. Awareness raising and empowerment of young people particularly young women are imperative in the fulfillment of gender justice and equality. The key for young women to be able to participate in decision-making is the promotion and implementation of gender equality in the basic democratic institutions that still fail to provide an environment conducive to young women's participation.