

AMARA

Interview with UNG YOK KHOAN (Director and Founder) held by SONJA BARWITZKI (Heinrich-Boell-Foundation)

Founded on the 14th of July 1994 by a group of women working in NGO's and the social service of the government, AMARA originally was thought as a women network to prepare a report for the 4th world conference of women presented by the UN in 1995. Afterwards the movement of women was officialised and since then intends to provide capacity building training to women and educate female councilors. 20 Years later the organization has 20 staff members taking care of three main projects:

1. Promoting engagement of people in democratic development at subnational level

In this program training is provided on following topics: good governance, decentralization, deconcentration, social accountability and the basic right of citizen. People who work for the poor are invited to come together to promote citizen rights and train how to express themselves.

2. Empowering women in leadership & politics

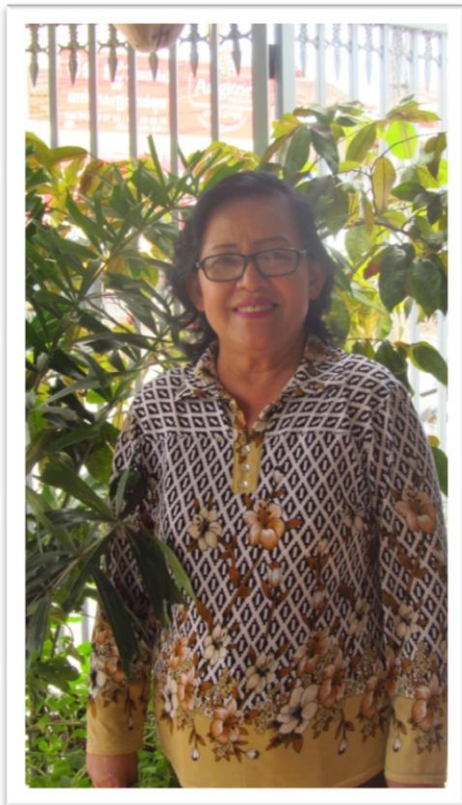
The main goal of this project is it to realize a higher participation quote of women in political (grassroot) positions according to the principal of millennium development goals of Cambodia (CMDG - <http://www.mop.gov.kh/Home/CMDGs/tabid/156/Default.aspx>) which the government signed. In specific: Increasing the proportion of seats held by women in commune councils from 8% in 2003 to 25% by 2015 (Target 3.15) and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in the Senate from 13% in 2003 to 30% by 2015 (Target 3.9). At the moment there are only 13,8% women in subnational level. For this purpose AMARA is offering trainings and education for female activists to provide the missing knowledge on Cambodian Constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, woman's (human) rights and skills on gender equality.

3. One window service

The aim of this program is to encourage people to use public services and to distribute information about the government's projects which are available to the civil society.

AMARA's mission

“Women are generally very interested in taking part in the project”, Mrs. Ung says. “They are enjoying it and it makes them proud and brave to contribute to a change and see each other grow. They learn how to understand, how to encourage each other and how to give ideas.” But nevertheless many women are still following the traditional path which implies for them to remain in a silent position where they don't dare to stand up and speak out their thoughts. “After Pol Pots regime and the communist regime people are still afraid and think: Leading is for leaders, not for me”, Mrs. Ung remarks. “But leading is everywhere: In families, in communities, between friends. Whenever you talk in front of others you are a leader. Many women never got education or information on their rights and this is why so many feel insecure”. To support a change in these habits AMARA teaches citizen rights and skills like communication or public speaking which promotes the personal development. Furthermore the organisation helps the participants to learn to understand politics and provides them with knowledge about good governance, decentralization and deconcentration, social accountability and basic human rights. AMARA's overall goal is to encourage as many women as possible to participate in democratic development and become a Female Councilor. It is important to show women the difference that they are able to create in their community by themselves. In the second step those women can then encourage others to attend in their own commune. **“Often people get threatened when they criticize social injustices or corruption by getting accused to belong to the opposition party. There is no democracy. There is just the image of it.”** Ung Yok Khoan says. “Therefore it is very important to promote people's engagement in democratic development to create a solid basis for change.”



Ung Yok Khoan, Founder of AMARA



AMARA at work in a province near Siem Reap