

### Cultivating Gender Champions

Even the best capacity development programmes will not have enduring results if not accompanied by a heartfelt commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Advocacy for gender-responsive legislation is about a strong desire to change that can only come about with persistence, hard work and dedication. Here is where nurturing gender champions come in; gender champions may be few but they are the ones who produce results. UN Women should be able to identify and nurture them.

Among the tasks of gender champions are: 1) sustained advocacy for the enactment of cutting-edge laws on gender that are CEDAW-compliant; 2) systematic monitoring of the implementation of these laws; and 3) sensitizing the staff and management of their respective organizations to gender issues from a CEDAW and women's human rights perspective. UN Women should identify gender champions in each CEDAW-SEAP country to establish a core of advocates to be nurtured and cultivated. They can be known as the "GAD-CEDAW Champions Team." A specially designed capacity development programme should be designed for them that will include not only competencies but results as well.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Mainstreaming gender in legislation is not as simple as understanding the nature of a system (presidential or parliamentarian), or following the legislative mill or the formal stages of how a bill becomes a law. Neither is it only about assessing legislation from a CEDAW perspective. Comprehending the legislative process and applying CEDAW in legislation are not enough. Grasping the dynamics of the political environment is even more crucial. Underlying the legislative process are political forces like the party system, the political leadership or the maturity of political institutions. For example, in countries with a single party-system like Vietnam and Lao PDR, the extent and impact of citizen participation in policy-making in general and legislative decision-making in particular is substantially limited. In Vietnam, all legal normative documents are checked/verified for their "relevance to the Party's directions and policies."<sup>54</sup> The same is true in Lao PDR where the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) is the only political party. Though there is increasing openness in the debates on policy issues, more participation from other branches of government and involvement of civil society, no law can be enacted without the approval of the party. In Cambodia where there are several political parties but there has been only one dominant political party for years, mechanisms are in place to ensure all stakeholders are actively involved in the legislative process, but they do not function as intended. In Timor-Leste on the other hand, political institutions like the legislature are still building their capacity to formulate and implement policy decisions.

If advocacy for mainstreaming gender in legislation is to succeed, it is extremely important to keep in mind both the formal process of legislation and the dynamics of the political environment. To ignore the latter is to be divorced from political reality and become ineffective in pushing for concrete, specific legislative initiatives to promote gender equality and amend gender discriminatory legislation.

54. Viet Nam National Assembly, 'Law on the Promulgation of Legal Documents', p. 22.