

Annex 4: case study # 1

“I am strong and confident “



Ms Chea Syna was working with the NGO Forum on Cambodia for about 6 months when she was invited to be one of 40 members of a community of practice addressing women's civil and political participation in Cambodia. Ms Syna is one of the youngest members of the community of practice. Whilst she does not have a lot of work experience, she has good academic credentials and the ability to think critically. At the first meeting of the community, Syna expressed dissatisfaction with the method of transformative learning that was used at the meeting; she said she learnt nothing new. Her expectation to learn about gender issues from the facilitators was not met; transformative learning seemed strange to her. But the facilitators of the community of practice did not give up. They met with Syna to explore her concerns, offering coaching and support.

Then, Syna attended a community of practice event at which guided meditation was used to help the community members reflect on how they learn best. This was a turning point for Syna. She began to realise that, with support, she can learn more from her own experiences than by listening to experts. When another guided mediation was held three months later, to deepen the women's awareness of themselves (using a mirror), some women were unsure if they really felt comfortable to participate in the exercise. But Syna was the strongest advocate. She explained to the other women how, if only they open themselves up to new ways of learning, they can learn in richer and deeper ways.

Syna works as a gender officer. Through the community of practice, she has learnt about how she might help to integrate an understanding of gender into the work of the NGO Forum. Syna already had an understanding of 'gender mainstreaming' from reading textbooks but it was hard to figure out how to make it real in a workplace. Syna admired that "one member (from the Ministry of Women's Affairs) shared about her experience in working on gender mainstreaming." With her new learning on her mind, back in her workplace Syna accessed ideas and support to make a presentation on gender indicators. She shared this in the training session that was conducted by the Executive Director with project managers and coordinators. She continued, "This is a way I can bring an understanding of gender into our programs and projects. All participants including project managers and coordinators gained an understanding about mainstreaming gender and the senior people were less resistant once they were helped to understand more about gender inequality. Now, I feel more confident working with people, even those who have stereotypes and a negative mind set about the importance of gender in development."

"I hope that this case helps me to apply the lesson of stereotype and I am pretty sure that NGO Forum staff will change their mind to work on gender...before they value gender in a limited way but after this event I noted that they value much more."

Syna said with passion, "I have confidence to stand up to whomever undervalues gender issues". Syna recognizes that she is a stronger and more mature woman because of the things she is learning. People pay respect to her. She explained, "Before I have no idea what to say in the meeting with senior management - just sit and listen, but now I have many ideas to share with them; a manager has come to ask me for advice and I notice that some volunteers (international experts) are quick to support the ideas that I contribute. Sometimes I challenge my supervisors and this is OK."

With her strength, Syna also realizes that there are still many steps to go in applying the new learning. Syna stressed that she knows more about self-awareness but to apply new learning, challenges her. Therefore she is not fully satisfied with herself yet, but as she has realized how transformative learning can help her to grow, she is eager to learn more and to participate in the community of practice in the future. "Sometimes I feel like I do not know who I am. But the community is building up what is inside of me," she said.

