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Negotiating Strategic Change

“We will make gender equality the new norm in our country,” blared the announcement from the radio. It’s one of many campaign slogans that the president-elect of Oknevia, Mr. Andrew Brocka, used to entice women to vote overwhelmingly in favor of his candidacy in the previous year’s elections. Oknevia has suffered for years from gender inequality: women are less likely to be educated past secondary school, hold a steady job, or be members of the government. Only until ten years ago, when women received the right to vote did they begin to be taken seriously as a voting constituent. An organization called The National Association for the Advancement of Women (NAAW), a champion for women’s rights that mobilized the fight for women’s suffrage in the country, has been vocal about their support for any candidate who supports their platform. When Mr. Brocka stated that “Women’s rights are human rights, and we must ensure that women have every opportunity that men are provided,” NAAW found the perfect candidate to bring their issues to the forefront. With the full support of NAAW and other like-minded civil society organizations, Mr. Brocka and his political party won the presidency and the two legislative bodies. Across the country’s provincial elections, Mr. Brocka’s party won the majority of seats for governorship and local village-level positions.

Immediately after his victory, Mr. Brocka and his cabinet passed, with majority support from the National Legislature, a landmark law that provided funding for the construction of water supply pipes throughout the country and seed funding for cities to create local community savings and loan¹ associations (CSLA), under the direction of the Ministry of Public Works, Water, and Sanitation. These microfinancing institutions provided access to finance for many cash-strapped people. Attached to this funding, however, is a law that requires local governments who accept funding to evaluate current governance structures and come up with better ways to be more inclusive of women in leadership roles. It was a law that was supported by NAAW and its partner lobbyists. Its passing was seen as a cornerstone not only for developing his country’s economy, but also improving women’s roles in society—two things that made him a popular political candidate.

Mayor Zambene, newly-elected mayor of the small city of Urbana, was curious about these microfinancing institutions. Urbana is a peri-urban area situated between a rapidly urbanizing industrial zone and an agrarian region, where the men work on farms, while women mostly stay at home to take care of their children, perform household chores and plant vegetable gardens. In the last decade, farms were abandoned by some 30 per cent of the men as they worked in low-paying and semi-skilled jobs in the nearby industrial zone. Some 30 per cent of the men have decided to keep working on their farms and another 40 per cent have offered themselves as day laborers in

¹ Verzosa, Cecilia and Fiutak, Thomas (2017). *Negotiating Strategic Change*. A negotiation case for the ‘*Transforming Leadership Lab: Women, Power and Potential*’ held in Berlin, Germany, March 28-30, 2017.

the industrial zone. This was a community in transition—economic pressures are tearing at the social fabric of society challenging traditional social norms.

The city has poor infrastructure, where less than 40 percent of the households have access to clean water and sanitation. Women often travel up to 3 kilometers just to fetch water for cooking and cleaning. Sanitation systems are inadequate and the benefits of good sanitation are poorly understood. Many people openly defecate in public on the fields surrounding their homes. Mayor Zambene had heard of a neighboring district that secured national funds to create a community savings and loan association (CSLA), which provided short-term money for people to build their own toilets at home and secure piped water supplies in their community. CSLAs were meant to be funded by savings from the community, usually by women who have saved the allowances that their husbands give them monthly. These associations were designed as self-sustaining programs. Initial seed funding and guidance from the national government would be enough to get the program started, but continued leadership from local community members was necessary.

The mayor hoped that if the city established community savings and loan associations (CSLAs) people could take out small loans to build these toilets at home and contribute to the building of more accessible community piped water facilities. The mayor believed this will create jobs for the artisans who often travel out of town to build toilets and plumbing elsewhere. Mayor Zambene also saw how new demand for water and other sanitation services could help build their city's economy and provide much-needed employment for the 40 per cent of workers who are casual laborers in the industrial zone and often unemployed.

But Mayor Zambene had a more urgent reason for wanting potable water and sanitation facilities built for the city. In the last two weeks, the physician of the city's health center has alerted the mayor of the sharp spike in the number of young children dying from diarrheal disease, in the low-income municipality of Zealandia, largely caused by contaminated water and lack of sanitary facilities at the onset of a particularly turbulent rainy season. Mayor Zambene fears that the city has no funds nor medical staff who can respond to a potential cholera outbreak during the next 6 months of the rainy season.

In response to the Mayor's inquiry with the State-level Ministry of Public Works, Water and Sanitation, the Ministry informed the mayor that the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation, will assess the viability of establishing a community savings and loan association (CSLA) for the purpose of developing the needed infrastructure of Zealandia.

The Director will be visiting the city in the coming week and would like to meet with a multi-stakeholder group from the local government, the private sector, civil society organizations, to come to a decision among these stakeholders how gender equity would be created, developed and sustained if funding for the CSLA would be made available.

The Mayor promptly identified the stakeholders and the Director of the Ministry of Public Works, Water and Sanitation invited the following stakeholders to render this decision:

- a. City Engineer
- b. Treasurer of the City Council

- c. Chair, Citizens Action Committee for Zealandia
- d. Director, Women Advancing through Education and Resistance (W.A.T.E.R.)
- e. Owner/Manager of the Water Trucks
- f. Mayor of Urbana