

# ATTITUDES

GENDER RELATIONS AND ATTITUDES  
CAMBODIA GENDER ASSESSMENT

Cover photo:

**Sorn Seavmay** (19) is the Taekwondo Champion and Cambodia's first Gold Medalist at the Asia Games.



# 2. ATTITUDES

## GENDER RELATIONS AND ATTITUDES

### POLICY CONTEXT

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia is the supreme law of the State. It ensures citizens are equal under the law, and are free to participate in politics, economics, society and culture (Article 35). Article 45 states that: “All forms of discrimination against women shall be abolished; the exploitation of women’s labour shall be prohibited; men and women have equal rights in all fields, especially with respect to those of marriage and family; marriage shall be carried out according to the conditions set by the law and based on the principle of mutual consent by monogamy.”

The Rectangular Strategy Phase III continues the Government’s commitment to improving the situation of women. The strategy is the backbone of the economy and society, and promotes gender equality. The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is aimed specifically at the realization of gender equality and women’s empowerment, and in particular focuses on education, economic empowerment, and public institutions preventing violence against women. The Government is committed to this goal.

The National Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018 demonstrates gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue. Gender will be mainstreamed in policies and programs related to the economy, legal protection, health, HIV, nutrition and politics.

Neary Rattanak IV is a national plan that promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment. Coordination and implementation is done by mainstreaming




gender in national mechanisms, with the support of the Cambodian National Council for Women (CNCW), the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and the Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups (GMAGs).

▲ The Good Men campaign is changing attitudes and behaviours.

Guidelines from the Ministry of Civil Service recommend increasing recruitment of women from 20 percent to 50 percent in public institutions. The Ministry of Interior encourages increases in the number of women elected as village leaders and appointed as governors across the country.

## FINDINGS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Cambodian women are progressively enjoying wider freedoms and claiming their rights through increased employment opportunities and Cambodia's broader economic development. However women are expected to follow social norms, and beliefs which allow men to enjoy their 'gender privilege', while women under-value their own capacity and potential. Invisible social norms continue to confine women to household and childcare duties, while at the same time the family's economic status pressures women to engage in income-generating



work. Gender dynamics have not been thoroughly examined and reflected in designing national policy, and limited attention has been paid to addressing and changing negative gender stereotypes that suppress women's freedom.

Continuous efforts by government institutions, civil society organizations and development partners have had positive impacts, and more than 90 percent of adults are aware of the Domestic Violence Law. Between 2005 and 2009, fewer respondents to a Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) survey perceived violent acts as acceptable, demonstrating an increased awareness of women's rights. On the other hand, gender stereotypes, social norms and attitudes are still barriers to women participating in all sectors, and to having equal access to rights and opportunities as stated in national and international laws. Traditional social norms are deeply rooted in Cambodian society and prevent women from fully utilizing their capacities in every aspect of their lives.

Persistent gender inequality is measured in the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which captures the loss of achievement due to gender inequality in three realms: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation. Cambodia ranks 96th out of 148 countries (2012) <sup>1</sup>. Using the Global Gender Gap index, which benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health-based criteria, Cambodia is ranked 108th of 142 countries (2014) <sup>2</sup>.

## Women's economic participation is high, but traditional stereotypes do not allow women to expand their opportunities

Despite high levels of participation in the economy (increasing from 76 to 80 percent between 2008 and 2012 for women aged 15-64 years), women benefit less from participation than men. About 70 percent of employed women, compared to 59 percent of men, remain 'self-employed'<sup>3</sup>. Among all waged workers, on average, women earn 81 percent of men's earnings<sup>4</sup>. Because of traditional perceptions as to what are 'appropriate jobs for women', such as street/market vendors, small family businesses, and unskilled work such as garment factory and domestic work<sup>5</sup>, occupational segregation is extensive and women continue to be concentrated in lower-skilled occupations<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> UNDP, Gender Inequality Index, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>


<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index 2014, <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap>

<sup>3</sup> In the Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (CSES) 2010, persons who worked in the past seven days contributing to their own household, that is, operating their own enterprise (e.g. farmers cultivating their own land, small shop keepers or small restaurants) without payment or income of any kind are classified as own account workers or self-employed.

<sup>4</sup> International Finance Corporation (2008) Voices of Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs. Phnom Penh.

<sup>5</sup> Nakagawa, K. (2006) More than white cloth? Women's Rights in Cambodia. Phnom Penh.

<sup>6</sup> Srurn, R. (2013) Gender and Human Capital Development: Key Challenges. Phnom Penh: USAID.



Traditional norms limit women's ability and opportunity to enter into more skilled occupations, or those in the public sector. Women have limited access to male-dominated business associations and networks where informal information can be shared for business opportunities and expansion.

Women and girls perform the majority of essential but unpaid domestic and care work in households and communities. This imposes invisible barriers for girls and prevents women from obtaining levels of education that would result in higher paid employment, thereby limiting life options and economic autonomy throughout their lifecycle.

An increasing number of young women are migrating to urban areas in search of employment due to traditional norms that expect them to support their families. A large number of these women are living in unsafe and unhealthy conditions in order to save money to send remittances to their family in rural areas, often at the expense of their own health and well-being. Without the support of their family and friends, they find themselves vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Recent research indicates that violence against women in urban areas is approximately double that of rural areas<sup>7</sup>.

Women have less access than men to the resources necessary to expand their businesses because of traditional stereotypes that assign women less power than men in decision-making processes. They have less access to information, such as government regulations (registration, required trade documents) and face cultural barriers based on traditional mindsets and attitudes, including challenges around work-life balance<sup>8</sup>.

Although women own 65 percent of all businesses, they are mostly small scale with limited access to business development services. Women owned street businesses account for 75.7 percent of the total number of street businesses in Cambodia, yet traditional perceptions that women should be confined to the household impede women from developing their business and expanding further afield.

---

<sup>7</sup> Astbury, Jill and Fareen Walji (2013) Triple Jeopardy: Gender-based violence and human rights violations experienced by women with disabilities in Cambodia. Phnom Penh: AusAID.

<sup>8</sup> Identified barriers among women entrepreneurs are: places where she can or cannot be, type of job she can perform, who she can or cannot be with, respect of male counterparts, and acceptance by spouse when successful. Work-life balance issues include the necessity to perform well in her role as mother/spouse and workload. See Sambath, L. (2012) Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs: Constraints in Doing Business. Phnom Penh: IFC.



## Expanding opportunities for education and further training for girls to enhance their economic empowerment

While gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary education enrolment, drop-out and non-completion rates for girls remain high, as well as regional differences between urban and rural areas. Beyond lower secondary, girls' access to education is limited and completion rates remain low. Social norms that prioritize boys' over girls' education is just one of the barriers to education for girls<sup>9</sup>. Parents' perception that daughters must help with household chores and take care of younger siblings undermines their ability to pursue higher education<sup>10</sup>.

Traditional norms in Cambodia result in females marrying earlier than males, which can limit educational opportunities. Girls start school later than boys, and the combination of late start and early withdrawal from school results in shorter education spans. According to the Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) 2010, one-quarter of women in Cambodia aged 25-49 are married by the age of 18; the average age of marriage is 20.3 for women compared to 22.6 for men. Early marriage limits educational opportunities for girls, as once married, traditional norms pressure them to take responsibility for the housework and take care of children and elders.

ASEAN economic integration in 2015 is expected to further increase employment opportunities across the country, but concerns remain about the current low educational attainment and lack of technical skills of Cambodian women compared to other countries in the region. Integration could draw young girls away from education in search of work. Because of gender norms assigned to daughters to support parents and younger siblings, they may be pressured to pursue the increased employment opportunities that integration will bring, rather than continue their education.

There are few female teachers in higher education and a low percentage of women at management level. This is a reflection of the traditional gender norms which impede women from holding leadership positions, even in the education sector where a large number of women are working as school teachers.

---

<sup>9</sup> Royal Government of Cambodia (2010) Fourth and Fifth National Report on the Implementation of CEDAW in Cambodia. Phnom Penh.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2011) Report on Study of Emerging Gender Issues among Women, Girls and Youth in Cambodia. Phnom Penh.





## Women's health of is gradually improving but women still have limited control over their reproductive health and sexuality


▲ Cultural values have a significant influence on gender attitudes and behaviours

A dramatic decrease was observed in the maternal mortality rate, which declined from 472 per 100,000 in 2005, to 206 per 100,000 in 2010<sup>11</sup>. Recently, more than half of all babies were born in public facilities, with mothers accessing maternity care and safe delivery services. This figure increased from 22 percent in 2005 to 54 percent in 2010. The number of deliveries by midwives who had received training from the Ministry of Health (MoH) more than doubled in the past decade. These positive trends are due to the expansion of health centres, especially in rural areas, the expansion and health education programs by village health agencies on the importance and appropriate value of health centres, and MoH investment in training midwives. However, women's ability to seek treatment is low due to socio-cultural and economic factors<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Directorate General for Health, Ministry of Health (2010) Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

<sup>12</sup> Frieson, Dr. Kate Grace (2011) A Gender Analysis of the Cambodian Health Sector. Phnom Penh.





Contraception uptake rates doubled over the decade (2000 to 2010) among all women, with 31 percent of women in 2010 using contraception. This demonstrates an increase in women's awareness about their reproductive health rights and their improved skills to negotiate with their partners. Women still have limited control over their own sexuality; this is still considered a taboo subject for most Cambodian women to talk about openly<sup>13</sup>. Traditionally, women are socialized to refrain from speaking about sexuality and are not expected to be sexually active<sup>14</sup>.

Results of the CDHS 2010 show the majority of women agree that a wife has the right to refuse to have sex with her husband under some circumstances, such as if she is 'tired, or not in the mood'. The MoWA 2009 Violence against Women Follow-up Survey reported that 12 percent of respondents thought a man had the right to force his wife to have sex<sup>15</sup>.

The Cambodia Violence Against Children Survey (CVACS) found that approximately half of females and males of all ages agree that 'men decide when to have sex'.

Women's nutritional health continues to be a serious concern: 21 percent of women aged 14-49 were undernourished in 2000<sup>16</sup> and this figure remained almost unchanged in 2010, at 19 percent<sup>17</sup>. Married women in particular will go without food to ensure that everyone else in the household is fed, however no study on these gender dynamics within the household and family has been carried out, to inform policy.

## Traditional norms relating to women's sexuality negatively contribute to high HIV infections among women

The percentage of women among all adults living with HIV has increased from 38 percent in 1997 to 53 percent in 2014. This is significantly higher than the regional average of 32-35 percent<sup>18</sup> and stems from women's greater biological susceptibility to infection and their subordinate status and relative lack of power to negotiate safe sex.

Cultural ideals and norms underscore the importance of female marital fidelity and sexual morality among women and girls, as well as female attributes such as

<sup>13</sup> Department of Media Communication (2013) Let's Talk About Sex, in DCM, Taking a Look, Cambodia 2013. Phnom Penh, Department of Media Communications, RUPP.


<sup>14</sup> Nakagawa, K. (2006) More than White Cloth? Women's Rights in Cambodia. Phnom Penh.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2009) Violence Against Women, Follow-up Survey. Phnom Penh.

<sup>16</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Directorate General for Health, Ministry of Health (2000) Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

<sup>17</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Directorate General for Health, Ministry of Health (2010) Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

<sup>18</sup> UNAIDS (2013) Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic.



sexual innocence and submissiveness. Men are seen as having stronger sexual urges and needs than women, and sexual experience is perceived to be important in defining masculinity. These ideals and norms, together with women's overall inferior status to men, challenge women's ability to negotiate the terms of sexual activity, including whether to engage in sex (lack of consent) and condom use.

Engaging in paid sex is relatively common among men; according to the CDHS 2010, more than one in ten men (11 percent) aged 15-49 paid for sex in the year leading up to the survey, and 1.6 percent of men engaged in multiple sexual partnerships in the year leading up to the survey. A recent study on men frequenting entertainment venues in urban areas found an HIV prevalence of 1.6 percent among male clients of female sex workers.


Overall, women have limited power to negotiate consent, safe sex and condom use in the context of paid sex (due to fear of violence and financial motivation), or sweetheart relationships and marriage (due to the association of condom-free relationships with trust and intimacy).

CVACS found 85.1 percent of females and 72.5 percent of males aged 18 to 24, and 77.9 percent of females and 68.9 percent of males aged 13 to 17 agree that 'men need more sex'. Among those aged 18 to 24, 67.9 percent of females and 71.4 percent of males believe that 'women who carry condoms are loose'. Among those aged 13 to 17, 62.0 percent of females and 69.2 percent of males agree with this statement.

Attitudes toward the role of gender in sexual practices and intimate partner violence were also discussed in the qualitative component of CVACS. There were divided opinions on whether it was acceptable for a woman to carry condoms, with a number of younger females and males associating women who carry condoms with prostitution. Older participants of both sexes expressed more understanding of the reasons that women might carry condoms and stated that although it might be detrimental to a woman's reputation, the right to protect herself from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy was more important.

## Violence against women (VAW) is widespread and tolerated but the 2nd NAPVAW presents opportunities to reduce its prevalence and acceptance

Statistics on VAW, a clear indicator of gender inequality, show a high prevalence of domestic violence in Cambodia. The 2009 MoWA survey found that deeply entrenched unequal gender relations, underpinned by male domination and con-



trol, continue to shape the attitudes of most men and women towards their acceptance of the use of violence.

The MoWA 2009 Follow-up Survey found that fewer respondents perceived violent acts to be acceptable than in 2005. There is some indication that awareness-raising efforts about women's rights have increased knowledge on the forms of violence, how violence relates to the law and how attitudes have changed regarding women's freedom of mobility.

30 percent of males in the MoWA survey (2009) indicated that they believe that certain types of life-threatening<sup>19</sup> violence are sometimes acceptable. The CVACS also showed that nearly two in five females aged 13 to 17 and one in three females aged 18 to 24 believe that it is acceptable for a husband to hit his wife under one or more circumstances<sup>20</sup>. Two in five males aged 13 to 17 and more than one in three males aged 18 to 24 endorse a husband's use of physical violence under one or more circumstances. Roughly seven in ten females and three-quarters of males of all ages believed women should tolerate violence to keep the family together.

In the qualitative component of CVACS, answers to the question whether a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together depended on the location for female participants. All females in Phnom Penh groups agreed because the consequences of not tolerating violence could lead to divorce and affect their children's futures. In contrast females from Prey Veng disagreed with the statement. Younger males mostly disagreed that women should tolerate violence because that would not lead to happiness and for older males tolerance of a violent situation was seen as unacceptably perpetuating violence. Both boys and girls were concerned that a child would end up separated from their parents if a mother did not tolerate violence.

In the Partners for Prevention (P4P) Study<sup>21</sup>, men perpetrating rape acknowledged that the motivations for rape were that they wanted to do it, felt entitled to do it, felt it was entertaining or saw it as deserved punishment for women. Few men had experienced any consequences or legal sanctions, a result of a culture of impunity. This lack of legal or social sanctions or penalties for men, together with the attitude that some women are 'bad' and deserve such treatment, perpetuates these crimes.

---

<sup>19</sup> Most extreme types of violence include hitting, threatening with a knife or machete, burning or choking and throwing acid, stabbing or shooting.

<sup>20</sup> Acceptance of a husband beating his wife includes her going out without telling him, neglecting the children, arguing with him, refusing to have sex with him or making bad food.

<sup>21</sup> Fulu, E., X. Warner, S. Miedema, R. Jewkes, T. Roselli and J. Lang (2013) Why do some men use violence and how can we prevent it? Bangkok: UN Women.




Perception among survivors of violence that they provoked violence or that they did something wrong stops them from reporting crimes. Women are pressured because of traditional attitudes that they should be tolerant and remain silent about violence, particularly in the domestic sphere, such as in marriage or the family. Policy interventions on service provision need to look into power dynamics between women and men in the family and within the household in order to effectively deliver services to survivors.

▲ Women are starting to benefit from more freedoms and rights.

Implementers and authorities are guided by gender perceptions on violence, rather than laws.

### While more women are in public decision-making positions, they are still under-represented

Legally, women have equal status with men in relation to political participation; however in practice, women face both direct and indirect discrimination, mainly because of gender stereotyping which pressures women into being submissive and to not assert their opinions in public. Because of these perceptions, the political participation of women



remains low, with only 20 percent of women in the National Assembly and only 14 percent in the Senate. Although the number has increased in the last two decades, female representatives are marginalized.

Women leaders at Commune/Sangkat level have increased, but they do not influence decision-making. Political parties have limited commitment to improving female representation.

Social structures and political culture prevent women from aspiring to be equal partners with men in public decision-making. Social perceptions of female inadequacy in politics continue to be used as a basis for their marginalization and segregation in decision-making positions. Traditional beliefs which under-value women's capacities and potential are an invisible barrier to their active participation. This is particularly true for young women who believe they are less capable than their male counterparts and less suited to play a prominent role in politics and governance<sup>22</sup>. In addition, a candidate requires internal support systems – contacts, financial resources and knowledge of political dynamics – in order to be elected, and once engaged in politics, to then be promoted. Limited financial independence is a barrier to women running for office.

Support and encouragement for women from family members and the community is an important factor in strengthening women's participation in public decision-making<sup>23</sup>. Discrimination against women impacts on the ability of women to be promoted to positions of increased responsibility in public decision-making.

Gender mainstreaming is recognized as a key priority of the Government's political platform, but gender mainstreaming in different sectors remains limited with regard to commitment, technical aspects and budget.


### Women with additional vulnerabilities face multiple layers of discrimination, but are often overlooked in policy discussions

Women and girls from disadvantaged groups are often subjected to multiple forms of discrimination; their vulnerabilities are increased due to their socio-economic situation. Women's access to basic health services, education and the justice system is strongly linked to their economic status. However, women with additional vulnerabilities struggle to find decent employment due to their sexuality, their disabilities or their cultural background, and have limited access

---

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2011) Report on Study of emerging gender issues among women, girls and youth in Cambodia. Phnom Penh.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



to services. To support their economic empowerment, specific legal and policy measures, such as affirmative action and targets, are essential for guaranteeing the inclusion of women from marginalized groups within both the public and private spheres.

Traditional stereotypical perceptions of what is an ‘appropriate woman’ suppress diversity of women from a variety of backgrounds, such as class, age, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Limited attention has been paid to the different needs of women with additional vulnerabilities; evidence-based research is essential to enable their voices and concerns to be heard and to ensure appropriate policy responses. Lack of concrete data and statistics with in-depth analysis of their vulnerabilities means policy makers cannot effectively intervene in the issues.

Discrimination against transgender women is reported to be very common<sup>24</sup>. Transgender and lesbian women are forced to adhere to traditional gendered stereotypes which discriminate against those who are outside socially accepted norms. Ostracism by family and community members increases their economic vulnerability, hindering their access to health services. Alongside poverty, transgender women face multiple forms of discrimination which can influence their decision to enter sex work. Social exclusion is a huge barrier and their voices are not heard in public policy dialogues<sup>25</sup>.

Women and girls, especially indigenous women, poor women, widows, women with disabilities and the elderly face multiple barriers, but policy responses to address these issues are limited.

More than half of women aged 15-64 years employed nationwide (53 percent) and an even larger share in rural areas (63 percent) work in the primary sector (agriculture, forestry and fisheries) which is characterized by low productivity, implying low return for women’s labour<sup>26</sup>. Women in rural areas experience limited access to the resources necessary (knowledge and skills) for agricultural production because of social perceptions which are discriminatory against women and prevent them from securing loans and assets. Women own less land than men (18 percent)<sup>27</sup> and are less able to purchase land under their names due


---

<sup>24</sup> Jarrett Davis, H. L. (2014) More than gender: A baseline study of transgender persons in the Phnom Penh sex industry. Phnom Penh: LOVE146.

<sup>25</sup> Vicente S. Salas, MD, MPH and Srun Sorn (2013) An Exploration of Social Exclusion of Lesbians, Gay and Transgender Persons in Families and Communities in Some Areas of Cambodia and Their Ways of Coping. Phnom Penh: SPCU-CARD Press.

<sup>26</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh.

<sup>27</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh.



to social norms and financial constraints. However, the impact of gender stereotypes on traditional women's roles and their experiences of social constraints or discrimination are not well documented, so their voices are not reflected in policy.

There are 37.6 percent of women-headed households with household Identification Number 1, and 31.4 percent with household Identification Number 2. During times of flooding, attitudes concerning the roles of women and men make it difficult for women to leave their homes and move away, due to their household workload and the double responsibility of family and work. Women are more vulnerable than men to climate change, especially flooding. This requires more attention at policy level to increase equity and awareness<sup>28</sup>.

Flooding makes it difficult for pregnant women to access health centers, exposing them to health risks, while women giving birth at home are at increased risk<sup>29</sup>. Women and girls are severely affected by floods and droughts, with increases in diseases such as red eye, skin diseases and diarrhoea. This can be due to physical weakness, lack of hygiene or lack of clean water.

Women are known to be responsible for energy, hygiene and waste management within the household, thus women are in the best position to help reduce some of the household level impacts of climate change. Equal access to information could improve family health, nutrition and education and ultimately help reduce these impacts of climate change on families and the community at large.

Indigenous women whose native language is not Khmer have limited access to participation in local governance, education and information on HIV and reproductive health. While schools and health centers had been built, they are often poorly staffed or not able to communicate in the indigenous native language.

### **‘Private Nature’ continues to limit women’s freedom in family matters**

Social attitudes in Cambodia favor men in every aspect of life, while negatively impacting women's lives. Traditional norms for masculinity which state that men should be strong leaders and protectors still prevail. A 2010 study by Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) confirmed that men perceive that they should fulfill the role as the head of the house, be the breadwinner and dominate women. Women normalizing male privilege is a concern. Addressing harmful perceptions of masculinity in the private sphere for positive change is essential for realizing mutually respectful relationships.

---

<sup>28</sup> National Committee for Disaster Management (2014) Post-flood rehabilitation assessment report. Phnom Penh.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.






Women tend to undermine their own capacity because of traditional social norms. The vast majority of women surveyed in the 2010 CDHS did not believe that wives should have the right to express their opinions. The P4P study found that 62.6 percent of men and 57.1 percent of women agree that men should have the final say in all family matters, and both men and women believe men have more right to be the main decision maker in their family<sup>30</sup>. Women's reliance on husbands in decision-making in the private sphere is mostly invisible, but is reflected in their limited confidence to join the public decision-making sphere.

▲ A change in attitudes has resulted in more girls going to school.

Arranged marriage is still prevalent and once a couple is married there is great pressure on them to stay married. However, attitudes toward marriage are changing and the proportion of women whose families arranged their marriage fell from 51 percent in 2000 to 35 percent in 2005<sup>31</sup>. The traditional practice of child marriage still prevails and some parents pressure their daughters to marry a man they selected when she was still a child.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2009) Violence Against Women, Follow-up Survey. Phnom Penh.

<sup>31</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Directorate General for Health, Ministry of Health (2005) Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Divorce is considered to be a very shameful act, especially if a woman initiates it. Divorce often puts women in a more vulnerable situation, as they may lack the capacity to assert their property rights, or a court order for alimony may not be enforced appropriately<sup>32</sup>. However no study is available which provides an analysis of divorce and consequences of divorce from a gender perspective. Women's specific hardship and stigma surrounding divorce is still undocumented, and must be researched to enable policy to effectively intervene for the benefit of women and children who are more vulnerable in terms of inheritance; assets and property; suffering social discrimination; and being in single female headed households.

Cambodia is still in transition from a war-torn legal system, and many new laws have been adopted in recent years. Progressive laws to protect women are essential, but laws need to be accompanied by social attitude change to make gender equality a reality<sup>33</sup>. With regard to family matters, the family and marriage law (1989) had some problematic provisions for women, including the divorce process. The new civil code, which was adopted in 2007, is expected to gradually bring better protection for women's rights in civil matters with a legally established principle of equality between women and men, as per the constitution of Cambodia. Article 6, relating to the 'Principle of equality of legal capacity', states "all natural persons are entitled to have rights and assume obligations in their name". This provision, if appropriately used by the courts and the judiciary, should help guarantee full equality between women and men in all civil matters.

## Information and communication technology (ICT) use among women is growing rapidly and have potential to bring about effective social and attitudinal change


Mobile phones have been an instrument of change in Cambodian society. More than 90 percent of the population has access to a mobile phone, with roughly half owning their phone<sup>34</sup>. Unlike traditional communication methods, the mobile phone provides privacy. It can dramatically increase a woman's access to private communication with others about personal issues such as sexual and reproductive health issues, which are not normally openly discussed. More women than men, especially educated, young, single women in urban areas, have smart phones, which enable them to send and receive messages in Khmer<sup>35</sup>. Huge opportunities

<sup>32</sup> NGO CEDAW (2006) The Cambodia Shadow Report to the UN CEDAW Committee. Phnom Penh.

<sup>33</sup> Plischuk, M. (2012) Women and law in Cambodia, in Introduction to Cambodian Law. Phnom Penh: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

<sup>34</sup> USAID, 2011, Rapid Assessment of the Political, Legal and Institutional Setting Cambodia, Phnom Penh.

<sup>35</sup> Kimchhoy, P. et al. (2013) Existence and use of phones that permit written communication in Khmer script.



exist to empower women through the use of phones, but no systematic policy response has been initiated, largely due to the absence of a national ICT policy.

Facebook, Twitter and blogging, which are increasingly popular among young women, are online communication tools that can empower women in many ways. Through social media, women can communicate with other women anonymously about private matters. In Cambodia, 14 percent of adult women use Facebook (compared to 29 percent of men), furthermore MoWA and several gender NGOs run Facebook pages to publicize their activities and raise awareness. With freedom of expression a central principle of social media, some specific interventions can bring positive changes for women's potential to be leaders.

Social media contributes to supporting the formation of women's gender identities and can bring about positive change in gender relations and attitudes through raising public awareness of women's issues. Some outstanding young women leaders are emerging through the medium of Facebook, which provides opportunities to express themselves to a wide audience, and reach other women in Cambodia who share their aspirations and desire for change.

Traditional media can support women's empowerment in a variety of ways. Women's access to mass media is relatively high in Cambodia. The 2010 CDHS found that 68 percent of women have some weekly exposure to mass media. Media exposure enables women to gain more information about health, education, democracy and women's rights. Media has a stronger impact than formal education in disseminating knowledge about women's rights<sup>36</sup>. MoWA runs a regular TV and radio program about women's rights and gender equality called 'Neary Rattanak'.

---

Phnom Penh: Open Institute.

<sup>36</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Directorate General for Health, Ministry of Health (2010) Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Women's economic participation is high but traditional stereotypes do not allow women to expand their opportunities*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include stronger focus at policy level to change gender stereotypes and enable women to expand their economic opportunities. Such interventions need to target parents, educators, community members and the private sector to support and promote women, and collaborate with civil society, community leaders and the media<sup>37</sup>.</li> </ul> | MoWA, MoI,<br>MoP, MLMUC,<br>MoIH, MAFF<br>MRD, MoME,<br>MoC, MoLVT,<br>MoSVY |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In any awareness-raising campaign about women's rights and gender equality, policy interventions should systematically include a clear message about the potential contribution of women to economic growth in order to bring positive change in perceptions and attitudes which currently lead to discrimination against women.</li> </ul>            | MoWA, MoI,<br>MoF, MLMUC,<br>MoME, MAFF<br>MRD, MoLVT,<br>MoC, MoSVY,<br>MoPT |

### *Expanding opportunities for education and further training for girls to improve their economic empowerment*

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop measures aimed at ensuring the effective retention of women and girls in schools, particularly when transitioning from primary to secondary school, and at higher levels of education<sup>38</sup>.</li> </ul> | MoWA, MoEYS<br>MoIn, MoCFA,    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage parents to recognize the importance of their daughters' education as a long-term investment for their future by highlighting some outstanding female leaders in Cambodian society.</li> </ul>                | MoIn, MoCFA,<br>SNA, CSOs, DPs |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Neary Rattanak IV, include an effective and comprehensive communication strategy aimed at eliminating patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes that discriminate against women<sup>39</sup>.</li> </ul>                | MoWA                           |

<sup>37</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 19b.

<sup>38</sup> CEDAW 33b.

<sup>39</sup> CEDAW 19a.

- Improve quality and effectiveness of gender mainstreaming and gender policy implementation in national and sub-national education curricula to reduce gender gaps in society and to empower women. MoEYS, MoWA

***Women's health is gradually improving but women still have limited control of their reproductive health and sexuality***

- Focus efforts at policy level to intensify the provision of sexual and reproductive health information and services to women, including modern methods of contraception, particularly to women living in rural areas<sup>40</sup>. MoWA, MoH, MoIn, MRD, MEF
- Policy should include effective measures for disseminating information, specifically focusing on perception changes among women so they can openly discuss sexual health issues. Adequate budget should be allocated and full utilization of information and communication technology (ICT), particularly targeting rural women, should be considered by policy makers. MoIn, MoPT, CSOs, DPs
- More research is essential to identify the underlying causes of women's malnutrition. This needs to be done through a gendered lens to assess how social attitudes and gender norms which discriminate against women result in women's poor nutritional health. MoH, MoWA, MoIn, SNA, MoPT
- Improve the quality and efficiency of education on sexual health in school curricula and increase the number of relevant books available in schools. MoEYS

***Traditional norms relating to women's sexuality negatively contribute to high HIV infections among women***

- Develop and implement programs that aim to change perceptions among both women and men toward sexual and reproductive health issues, with adequate budget allocation. The main focus on such a program would be to increase awareness of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. The program would need to use ICT, incorporating positive messages on women's reproductive and sexual health issues, HIV prevention, available care and support. MoIn, MoPT, SNA

<sup>40</sup> CEDAW 37.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support and monitor behavior-change programs for men and boys that aim to promote messages on equality and respect between men and women, and responsible sexual behaviors.</li> </ul>	MoEYS, MoWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the quality and effectiveness of efforts to prevent human trafficking, especially of women and girls at school, and out of school.</li> </ul>	MoWA, CSOs, MoT, MoI, MoJ, MoEYS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote research on the gender-specific vulnerabilities of women at higher risk of HIV infection (entertainment workers, street-based and transgender sex workers, women who use or inject drugs, women in prisons and correctional centers), including their relationship dynamics and gender-specific needs and interests.</li> </ul>	MoH, MoT, MoI, MoJ

***Violence against women (VAW) is widespread and tolerated but the 2nd NAPVAW presents opportunities to reduce the prevalence and acceptance of VAW***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an effective and comprehensive strategy aimed at modifying or eliminating patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes that discriminate against women, including those based on ‘Chbab Srey’<sup>41</sup>. In alignment with the 2nd NAPVAW implementation, a communication strategy should be developed as a cross-sectoral strategy directly targeting perception and attitude change among women.</li> </ul>	MoWA, Relevant Ministries, CSO, DPs
--	---

***While more women are in public decision-making positions, a hierarchical and patriarchal system reinforces male domination in decision-making positions at all levels***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and adapt comprehensive legislation governing gender equality, which includes the definition of direct and indirect discrimination against women<sup>42</sup>. Such legislation needs to include affirmative action, specifically the implementation of targets aimed at increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions<sup>43</sup>.</li> </ul>	MoWA, CNCW, CoM
--	--------------------

<sup>41</sup> CEDAW C.19a.

<sup>42</sup> CEDAW 11c.

<sup>43</sup> CEDAW 29.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish and support a parliamentary women's caucus to work across party lines through the development of a common gender-equality agenda for positive attitude change. This will enable female representatives to gain more confidence to make women's voices heard in decision-making.</li> </ul>	CNCW, MoPT, NA, Senate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ICT can be used to communicate among members of the women's caucus . with female leaders at sub-national level.</li> </ul>	MoIn, MoP, CSOs, DPs

***Women with additional vulnerabilities face multiple layers of discrimination but are often overlooked in policy discussions***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and revise all policies and laws to ensure they are more inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of women from disadvantaged groups.</li> </ul>	MoWA, MoSAVY, CSOs, DPs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policies need to strategically challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes of marginalized women from a variety of perspectives, covering their diverse socio-economic backgrounds.</li> </ul>	MoWA, MoSVY, CSOs, DPs

***'Private Nature' continues to limit women's freedom in family matters***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct research on divorce by analysing the influence of gender and inequality, as well as the impacts.</li> </ul>	MoWA, MoJ, MoI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public policy analysis should examine and consider invisible unequal gender relations between men and women in the private sphere in terms of access to assets, utilization of property and decision-making. More emphasis needs to be put on the positive aspects of sharing work between women and men, such as unpaid domestic work and caring for children and the elderly.</li> </ul>	MoEYS, MoWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the current practice of child marriage against the legal age of marriage (18 years) and take appropriate policy measures to change attitudes among parents about the importance of education and the legal right of a girl to negotiate marriage.</li> </ul>	MoEYS, MoWA



***Information and communication technology use among women is growing rapidly but limited policy interventions have been initiated to bring about effective social and attitudinal change***

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and adapt a comprehensive ICT policy with a focus on challenging traditional gender stereotypes to empower and promote women to decision-making positions.</li> </ul>   | MoWA, MoIn                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage the private sector and social media in sectoral policy formulation and implementation in order to promote positive role models for women in politics and business by changing perceptions and attitudes regarding women's capacity to be leaders. Facilitate strategic networking opportunities for women leaders at both national and sub-national level, through the use of communication technology and social media. Ensure that women's voices are heard and reflected in policy formulation through the use of social media<sup>44</sup>.</li> </ul> | MoWA, MoIn,<br>MoPT, MoI,<br>MoEYS, CSOs,<br>DPs |

***Rural women and girls, especially indigenous women, poor women, widows, women with disabilities and the elderly face multiple barriers, but policy responses to address these issues are limited***

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure indigenous and vulnerable women have access to information, knowledge and technical skills in responding to climate change.</li> </ul>  | CCCA                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote women's participation in public decision-making in commune planning processes in responding to gender and climate change.</li> </ul>   | MoE, MoWA                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate with line ministries, institutions, development partners, civil society organizations, especially with the Ministry of Environment, to mainstream gender and climate change into national strategies and other programs to ensure vulnerable groups receive appropriate responses.</li> </ul> | GMAG, CSO, DPs,<br>MoSVY, MoE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take affirmative action to enable rural women to access education, both formal and non-formal, and play a role in decision-making<sup>45</sup>.</li> </ul>   | MoEYS                         |

<sup>44</sup> CEDAW 19c.

<sup>45</sup> CEDAW 41c.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pilot programs to promote women’s livelihoods with other institutions and development partners working on gender and climate change.</li></ul>	MRD, MAFF,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examine the dynamics of gender relationships which oppress women in rural areas, to inform policy formulation in rural development and agricultural sectors. Include ICT and information dissemination strategies for economic empowerment programs for women in rural areas.</li></ul>	MoPT, MoIn, MRD, MAFF, MoWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve the availability and quality of education in rural and remote areas and encourage indigenous people to send their daughters to school. Enable women and girls from poor families and indigenous populations to access general education, to achieve adequate levels of literacy and life skills. Suggest additional advocacy for more education programs, including bilingual programs, and indigenous teachers for indigenous communities.</li></ul>	MoWA , MoEYS, CNCW, MRD, MoIn, MoPT, MAFF, MLVT



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**The Cambodia Gender Assessment 2014** was produced under the overall leadership and coordination of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, with support and contributions from Government Line Ministries, Development Partners, and Civil Society. MoWA would like to express its sincere gratitude to all our partners in this collaborative effort.

Our deep appreciation goes to the following groups, who in various ways supported this endeavor:

**The MoWA CGA Working Group** was responsible for the overall process, oversight, and approval of the document. Under the overall leadership of HE Dr Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister of Women's Affairs, the CGA working group was chaired by HE Khim Chamroeun, Secretary of State, with direct support from HE Keth Sam Ath, MoWA Senior Advisor, HE Kim Siphat, Director General, Mr The Chhunhak, Deputy Director General, Ms Nhean Sochetra, Director of Gender Equality Department; and Ms Te Vouchlim, Director of Department of Planning and Statistics. Inputs for each chapter were provided by members of the CGA Working Group and other relevant officials with technical support from the UNDP/SIDA PGE III team led by Ms Mia Hyun, Senior Policy Advisor to MoWA, supported by other team members including Ms Dy Many, Management Specialist; Mr Pen Bory, Gender Policy and Aid Effectiveness Specialist; Ms Heng Seltik, Women's Economic Empowerment Specialist; Mr Chhuon Thavrith, Gender Budgeting Specialist; and Mr Kim Sopor, Technical Assistant. **The Technical Working Group on Gender** provided a forum for consultation with other stakeholders including line Ministries, Development Partners, and Civil Society. **Peer Reviewers**, including experts from MoWA, Line Ministries, Development Partners and Civil Society, assisted in reviewing the draft documents in their respective area of work. **Communications**, photos, design by *Good Morning Beautiful*.

**Chapter and Policy Brief 2: Gender Attitudes and Relations:** Overall guidance by HE Hou Samith, Secretary of State of MoWA; drafted by consultant and Professor of Gender Studies, Ms Kasumi Nakagawa, MoWA consultant sponsored by UNDP/PGE. Inputs from relevant officials of MoWA and other stakeholders with overall assistance by Mr Kim Sopor.







## **Ministry of Women's Affairs of Cambodia**

Trung Morn Street, Phum Dam Nak Thom III

Sangkat Steung Meanchey

Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia

Tel/Fax : (+855) 23 880 737

Email : [mwa@online.com.kh](mailto:mwa@online.com.kh)

Website : [www.mowa.gov.kh](http://www.mowa.gov.kh)

Facebook : [www.facebook.com/mowa.gov.kh](http://www.facebook.com/mowa.gov.kh)