



ECONOMY

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
CAMBODIA GENDER ASSESSMENT

Cover photo:

Phun Seang Kheng (41) is a small business owner with a market stall at the Central Market in Phnom Penh. Kheng has been selling seafood in the market for over 15 years.



3. ECONOMY

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

POLICY CONTEXT

Achieving gender equality is part of the Royal Government's Rectangular Strategy for growth, employment, equity and efficiency (Phase III 2014-2018). The Government recognizes that greater participation by women in the economy will accelerate the attainment of national goals, such as sustainable and inclusive economic development with a fair share for women.

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) aims to create income-generating opportunities for women through promoting decent wage employment and micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) development.

It is anticipated that creating sustainable economic opportunities will reduce vulnerabilities of women, such as human trafficking, illegal cross-border migration or even domestic violence as a result of increased incomes and ownership of assets.

If incomes increase, women will be able to invest in the development of their livelihoods and contribute to sustainable community development.

Therefore, WEE covers at least four policy areas related to wage employment, MSME development, migration and rural livelihoods:


1. In Cambodia, labour market development is one arm of the Rectangular Strategy, which considers the private sector the main driver of the economy. Wage employment and social protection of workers is governed by the Labour Law and various international conventions. The mandate for



implementing the Labour Law lies with the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT).

2. The promotion of MSMEs cuts across various line ministries. It is also covered by public-private dialogue to create a favourable business environment for MSMEs and the delivery of financial services.
3. A number of national laws related to labour migration have been revised and will form the basis for guidelines for recruitment agencies and training centres, as well as complaint procedures.
4. Improving livelihoods relates to basic village infrastructure, nutrition, sanitation and subsistence-based small economic activities, which fall under the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) and the Ministry of Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF). The governing policy for “Improving Livelihoods of Rural Communities, especially Poor Women” is outlined in the National Medium-Term Priority Framework (NMPF) of MAFF.

▲ Women's labour force participation rates are among the highest in the region.



The WEE strategy of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) will support and contribute to the implementation of the policies mentioned, with a specific focus on women.

Women's economic empowerment requires:

- (i) that women have opportunities for participation in agriculture and rural livelihood activities, business development and wage employment;
- (ii) that women benefit from these opportunities in terms of subsistence production, income and wages; and
- (iii) that women have agency in decision-making processes. While economic empowerment does not guarantee gender equality, it does provide an important mechanism for women to negotiate improvements in their well-being. Continued low levels of women's economic empowerment undermine Cambodia's economic growth potential, while increased economic participation, benefit and agency reduce inequality and advance inclusive economic growth.

FINDINGS

Key trends in the development of the labour force and the MSME sector


Despite increases in women's labour force participation rates, from 76 percent to 80 percent between 2008 and 2012 for the age group 15-64 years, gender inequalities in paid work remain, and the gender gap has increased in terms of vulnerable employment and employment in the agricultural sector¹. This indicates fewer productive employment and decent work opportunities for Cambodian women.

Women's participation in economic activities

Women comprised 49 percent of the total labour force in 2012, with a labour force participation rate (LFPR) of 80 percent, compared to men's LFPR of 89 percent, for the age group 15-64 years. At 66 percent, young women aged 15-19 years have a higher LFPR than young men, at 64 percent. This is consistent with the finding that they are less likely to be in school than their male counterparts at this age². In Phnom Penh, the difference in LFPR for young women and men aged 15-19 is even

¹ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2008; 2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

² National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



larger, at 43 percent for young women and 37 percent for young men. While Cambodian women have high participation rates compared to neighbouring countries, literacy rates are lower and the share of vulnerable employment is higher, indicative of inferior opportunities and outcomes³.

Women's benefit from economic development

Despite high levels of participation in the economy, women benefit less from their participation than men. About 70 percent of employed women, compared to 59 percent of employed men, remain in vulnerable employment, defined as the sum of unpaid contributing family workers and own account workers⁴. Women's employment is highly concentrated in three sectors, which account for 89 percent of all women's employment: (i) agriculture, forestry and fisheries; (ii) wholesale and retail trade and services; (iii) manufacturing⁵. In the MSME sector a high percentage of enterprises are owned and run by women, however those enterprises are mostly informal and contribute little to overall economic growth.

Women's voice and agency

Women have less access than men to higher-skilled occupations, public sector employment, business associations and networks which offer opportunities for lobbying and agency. Occupational segregation is extensive and women continue to be concentrated in lower-skilled occupations. In 2012, less than 4 percent of women (compared to 6 percent of men) were employed in the three highest skilled occupations: managers, professionals and technicians/associate professionals⁶. In public administration, the ratio of men to women was almost 5.5 in 2013⁷ [see Policy Brief on Public Decision Making].

³ International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market, 8th edition.

⁴ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁵ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2013) Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁶ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁷ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2013) Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Emerging issues

Wage employment for women

Wage employment offers many opportunities for women, but challenges include low wages, poor working conditions, a high number of new labour force entrants each year and ASEAN economic integration.

Wage work accounted for 30 percent of women's employment in 2012 (15-64 years of age), compared to 41 percent of men's employment⁸. Wage work is highly concentrated in the garment and footwear sectors which employ more than 500,000 women aged 15 years and older. This accounts for 58 percent of industrial employment and 15 percent of total employment for women⁹. Garment workers tend to be young women who have migrated from rural areas. Despite improvements in compliance with the Labour Code, promoted particularly by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Better Factories Cambodia (BFC) program, working conditions remain poor. Labour productivity doubled from 2007-2012, but the minimum wage remained constant (and fell in real terms) until it was increased to US\$100 per month in January 2014. Among all wage workers (employees), on average women earn 81 percent of men's earnings¹⁰. Wage work in the garment sector offers low wages for women relative to wages earned by women in other sectors.

The main barriers to women's participation in and benefit from wage work include: (i) low levels of participation in vocational training, education and literacy; (ii) a low minimum wage; and (iii) discrimination in employment practices such as multiple short-term contracts. Women are also disadvantaged by weaknesses in the labour legislation, such as the inadequate specification of equal pay for work of equal value and a lack of clarity in the definition of and mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment.

The working age population (15-64 years) is growing by about 300,000 persons per year¹¹. This demographic dividend provides an opportunity for economic growth, but the actual number of job opportunities remains low. The creation of decent work for women and men is a key development challenge.

⁸ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁹ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, International Labour Organization (2012) Cambodia Labour Force Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2013) Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Employment creation for unskilled workers, particularly for women disadvantaged by lower literacy, relative to men (and relative to men and women in neighbouring countries) will be critical with deepening globalization and ASEAN economic integration in 2015.

The export-oriented and open development strategy has contributed to employment growth mainly for women in the garment sector. The negative impact of the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 resulted in the loss of many jobs for women, underscoring the need for diversification and reducing reliance on markets outside Cambodia.

Women in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)

There is considerable potential for women to create and expand MSMEs, but it is curtailed by limited access to business-related services and resources, including finance. Most women-owned enterprises are concentrated in low productivity industrial sectors.

There were 505,134 business establishments in Cambodia, according

▲ The majority of businesses are run by women, however they are mainly informal micro-enterprises.

to the 2011 Cambodia Economic Census¹². The number of persons employed in these establishments was 1,676,263, comprising 650,179 males (accounting for 38.8 percent) and 1,026,084 females (accounting for 61.2 percent). Employment of women outnumbers employment of men in all business establishments.

The majority of women's businesses are informal micro-enterprises: 51 percent of them engage only one person, while 96 percent engage four or fewer people. Women's businesses are concentrated in a smaller number of industrial sectors than men's. They are: wholesale and retail trade and services, accommodation and food, manufacturing and other services, accounting for 97 percent of all businesses.

Business activities	Number of enterprises		
	Total	Male owners	Female owners
Total enterprises	505,134	176,128	329,006
	100.0%	34.9%	65.1%
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	289,130	73,516	215,614
	57.2%	14.6%	42.7%
Accommodation and food service activities	69,569	14,612	54,957
	13.8%	2.9%	10.9%
Manufacturing	75,031	39,998	35,033
	14.9%	7.9%	6.9%
Other activities	71,404	48,002	23,402
	14.1%	9.5%	4.6%

(Source: NIS, Economic Census of Cambodia, 2011)

Women have more limited access than men to the resources necessary to expand a business. They have less access to information, including about government regulations (registration, required trade documents) and training. The lack of transparency and monitoring of existing business regulations may particularly disadvantage women. Micro-enterprises, the majority of which are headed by women, are often pressured into paying unofficial fees. Norms regarding women's roles inhibit women's participation in business associations and networking, limiting opportunities to raise women's specific concerns.

¹² National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2011) Cambodia Economic Census. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Rural livelihoods and subsistence agriculture

The development of subsistence agriculture and rural livelihoods is limited due to lack of access to, and ownership of, resources and the impact of global climate change (flood, drought and temperature). Women do more unpaid domestic and care work than men and have little spare time for productive economic activities.


More than half of employed women 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 to women's labour¹³. The agricultural sector accounted for 36 percent of GDP but for more than 50 percent of employment among people aged 15-64 years, and grew more slowly than other sectors, on average, over the last decade.

Agricultural production is less susceptible to external shocks than the manufacturing sector, and it was the only sector that continued to grow during the global economic crisis. Women and men in rural areas are more likely than those in urban areas to combine economic activities to earn a livelihood. In rural areas, 47 percent of women and 53 percent of men have secondary employment. Agricultural tasks are generally segregated by sex. Women are primarily responsible for planting, weeding, hand threshing and taking care of small animals. Men are largely responsible for land preparation, irrigation, mechanical threshing and caring for large animals.

Agriculture remains the dominant sector of employment for women, but they experience more limited access to the resources necessary for agricultural production. Female-headed households (20 percent of agricultural households in 2008) have access to smaller amounts of land: 1.1 hectares compared to 1.5 hectares for male-headed households¹⁴. Further, married women may not control land registered jointly with their husbands, women are not equally included in the land registration process, and can lose their rights in situations of divorce, separation and abandonment. An increase in landlessness is the main cause of vulnerability. Women have fewer resources necessary for enhancing their agricultural productivity. For example, women receive only 10 percent of agriculture extension services; only 31 percent of female-headed households had access to ploughs, compared to 48 percent of male-headed households.

¹³ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization and National Institute of Statistics (2010) National Gender Profile of Agricultural Households. Report based on the 2008 CSES. Phnom Penh.



Women are more constrained than men in marketing their agricultural goods due to family responsibilities, concerns over safety and security when travelling in public spaces, low levels of financial literacy and informal fees imposed on vendors, as well as difficulties in forming and maintaining sellers' groups.

Global climate change, associated with more variable weather patterns as the 2011 and 2013 floods demonstrate, has had particularly negative impacts on agricultural production, employment in the agricultural sector and rural households. Households reliant on rain-fed agriculture are particularly vulnerable to climate change-induced agricultural production and rural livelihood losses.

Climate change is contributing to increased risk of natural disasters, floods and droughts, with particularly negative impacts on agricultural production and rural livelihoods. This can result in increased migration, increased borrowing to smooth consumption needs, higher rates of child labour and increased unpaid time burden for women. Female-headed households may be particularly affected by natural disasters as they tend to have less access to information about natural disasters, fewer connections to community consultations, are less able to draw on credit, have less free time, and may be less able to migrate. Climate change related natural disasters may accentuate women's unpaid domestic work burden, associated with collecting drinking water and firewood.

Women's high unpaid domestic and care work activities and low human capital constrain economic empowerment. Women and girls perform the majority of valuable unpaid domestic and care work in households and communities. This constrains their participation in paid work and in education and training. It is estimated that women spend 3.5 hours per day on unpaid and care work¹⁵. This unpaid work reflects a strong imbalanced division of labour and contributes to a higher total number of working-hours burden than men.

Despite decreases in the income poverty rate, poverty remains high, particularly in rural areas, and the number of vulnerable people is large. While the poverty rate based on the revised national poverty line fell from 29.9 percent in 2008 to 18.9 percent in 2012¹⁶, a large percentage of households moved only just above the poverty line, so that they are now considered near poor. The sum of households who are poor and near poor constitutes the households particularly vulnerable to shocks and crises.

¹⁵ National Institute of Statistics (2007) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2004. Time Use in Cambodia. Phnom Penh.


¹⁶ Ministry of Planning, General Directorate of Planning (2014) Poverty Estimate in 2012 in Cambodia. Available at <http://www.mop.gov.kh/Projects/tabid/148/Default.aspx>



In 2009, 18.6 percent of households were poor based on the international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day (in purchasing power parity) and 49.5 percent of households were poor based on the poverty line of US\$2 per day, indicating that half of the Cambodian population is vulnerable. The decline in the income poverty rate does not guarantee an improvement in well-being of women and girls, if resources are not shared equally within the household. Evidence of high malnutrition and anaemia among women, along with domestic violence, are indicative of women's inferior position and disadvantaged access to resources. Economic shocks exacerbate household stress and often result in increases in already high rates of emotional, physical, economic and sexual violence against women.

▲ Wage employment offers opportunities and challenges for women.

Compared to men, women experience greater vulnerability to shocks and risks; they have reduced access to resources and fewer employment opportunities to cope with shock. The type of risk varies with the stage of a woman's life cycle. The global financial crisis of 2008-2009 reduced economic growth and employment, especially among women, resulting in girls and women moving into other employment and



livelihood activities with lower wages and working conditions.

Rural households responded by sending more girls and older women into paid labour. The LFPR of girls aged 15 to 19 years in Phnom Penh increased from 36.5 percent to 40.6 percent between 2008 and 2009, whereas the LFPR of boys aged 15 to 19 years increased from 26.3 percent to 27.2 percent. This suggests that girls were more likely to be withdrawn from education in order to participate in the labour market.

The LFPR of older women aged 55 to 64 years in rural areas increased from 70 percent to 76.8 percent between 2008 and 2009; in contrast, the LFPR of men was 88.6 percent in 2008 and 88.5 percent in 2009¹⁷. The crisis further impacted vulnerable girls and women: food consumption was compromised, as 39 percent of households surveyed reported that mothers and elder sisters ate less in order to leave a greater share of food for other family members; poor households and female-headed households were more likely to take loans to cover food and health expenses.

Domestic and cross-border migrant workers

Women are increasingly migrating for work from rural to urban areas and to other countries. Generally, they face more risks than men, including physical abuse.


Women are increasingly migrating for work, both internally and across borders. In 2013, 29 percent of the Cambodian population (about 4.2 million people) were migrants, defined as living in a place other than one's birthplace. Women account for 50 percent of migrants nationally¹⁸. Internal migration from rural to urban areas in Cambodia accounts for around two-thirds of migration, with women working in the garment industry, small businesses and in the service industry¹⁹. Overseas migration accounts for one-third of migration. In 2010, women comprised 85 percent of documented Cambodian migrants in Malaysia (primarily in domestic work) and 44 percent of documented Cambodian migrants in Thailand²⁰. A temporary ban on migration to Malaysia for paid domestic employment has been in place since 2011, as a result the number of female

¹⁷ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, (2009) *Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey, Labour Table 4*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

¹⁸ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2013) *Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

¹⁹ National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2012) *Migration in Cambodia: Report of the Cambodian Rural Urban Migration Project (CRUMP)*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

²⁰ Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (2014) *Labour Migration Policy*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia (forthcoming).



migrants to Malaysia dropped significantly. The benefits of migration are severely curtailed by low wages, poor work conditions, under-age recruitment, illegal and exploitative recruitment practices and risks of trafficking and abuse. Despite employment in the garment industry being poorly paid relative to other industries, two-thirds of female migrant workers remit money to their parents and families, on average about one-quarter of their earnings.

Women's Development Centres (WDCs)

WDCs are vocational training centres that operate under MoWA's Provincial Department of Women's Affairs, providing mainly traditional training programs such as weaving, handicraft production, hairdressing, tailoring and food processing. A total of 138 administrative and training staff are assigned to WDCs. About 1,900 trainees complete courses each year, but training services tend to have only limited impact and outreach to rural communities is minimal. This is because the existing structure and budget of WDCs do not allow for delivering services other than vocational training.

As part of its WEE strategy, MoWA aims to utilize its network of WDCs to introduce innovative models for cooperating with the private sector, particularly in developing 'green' and social enterprises. To implement this strategy, MoWA needs to clarify various legal options for establishing public-private partnerships, public companies or other contractual models at WDCs. Possible solutions include cooperation agreements or memoranda of understanding between MoWA, NGOs and social or 'green' enterprises, creating income and employment opportunities for women.

The potential new cooperation models aim to match the skills and competencies of women to the demand of the labour market and the MSME sector. This will lead to better employability of women in the private sector as well as an increased number of women starting and improving their own MSMEs.

MoWA intends to collaborate with MoLVT Provincial Training Centres (PTC) to avoid overlapping and duplication of training services.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policies, strategies and programs on women's economic empowerment are developed and implemented together with stakeholders

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalize the mechanism to promote the Program Based Approach (PBA) on WEE based on the Operational Strategy on Women's Economic Empowerment (OS-WEE) and the Millennium Development Goal Acceleration Framework (MAF). 	MAFF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the National Employment Policy being drafted by MoLVT and incorporate and monitor gender-sensitive employment targets, including the elimination of discrimination against women and other vulnerable groups. 	MoLVT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for gender-sensitive impact monitoring of expenditure on employment generation in line ministries. 	MoWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify contractual options for cooperating with the private sector (social enterprises, NGOs). 	MoWA

Wage employment opportunities for women, including vulnerable women or those with disabilities, are increased and working conditions are improved

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalize the cooperation between MoWA and MoLVT regarding the implementation of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), with a focus on employment opportunities for women. 	MoLVT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperate with stakeholders in the labour market (ILO, GMAC, NGOs, private sector) in advocating for the elimination of discrimination against women in work places, introduction of labour standards, social protection, arbitration, etc., including the revision of laws and regulations to promote gender equality. 	ILO, GMAC, NGOs, private sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for revising and increasing existing resource allocations at WDCs to invest in the promotion of innovative skills development, including entrepreneurship and monitoring and evaluation. 	MEF

Women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises are created or improved.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperate with line ministries to promote the formation and operation of women's business associations and producer groups, and encourage women's membership in other business networks, such as the Government-Private Sector Forum (G-PSF). 	MoC, MIH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with public and private providers of business services, including micro-finance institutions (MFI), promote awareness on important business services for women-owned MSMEs, including financial services, financial literacy and business-related knowledge and information. 	MoC, MFI, MoWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for revising and increasing existing resource allocations at WDCs to invest in the promotion of entrepreneurship and development of MSMEs for women. 	MEF

Poor women and vulnerable groups in rural areas invest in developing livelihoods

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor the implementation of the Land Law regarding specific obstacles to women and vulnerable groups in obtaining land ownership and rights. 	MLMUPC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support women in diversifying and commercializing subsistence agriculture and increase off-farm economic activities. 	MAFF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate the promotion of life skills for women in programs of WDCs, line ministries, NGOs and DPs. 	MAFF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote public awareness on women's work/life balance and the need to improve basic infrastructure in communities (access to water, school, sanitation, etc.) 	MoWA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure gender sensitivity of the Ministry of Planning's ID Poor targeting mechanism. 	MoP



Women benefit from cross-border labour migration and risks are reduced

• Ratify the ILO Conventions on “Domestic Workers” and “Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families”.	MoLVT
• Support the development and implementation of bilateral Memoranda of Understanding for legal and safe labour migration for women.	MoLVT
• Support the monitoring of recruitment agencies supervised by MoLVT and assist in implementing nationwide complaint mechanisms, including the services of Migrant Resource Centres regarding reintegration of migrant workers.	MoLVT
• Coordinate with the National Committee to Combat Trafficking on the prevention of exploitation of labour migrants.	NCCT

WEE and Climate Change

• Promote low-technology climate monitoring (weather forecasting) tools.	MoWA, MoE
• Develop women’s skills to prepare for climate-related disasters.	
• Make use of WDCs for promotional campaigns related to climate change.	
• Encourage community-based sustainable forestry and low carbon economic activities among women, including clean (renewable) power supply for households.	



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