

# WOMEN IN CAMBODIA'S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: THEIR WORK, THEIR KNOWLEDGE, THEIR SAFETY

Up to 30% of workers in the construction industry in Cambodia are women. CARE's research identified that these women workers have little knowledge of how Cambodian law applies to them. Assumptions about women's skills and capabilities mean women and men are treated differently; women are often relegated to the most lowly paid work and are not valued or recognised. CARE is working in partnership with Cambodia's Ministry of Labour & Vocational Training and local organisations to raise awareness of women workers and address assumptions about women's capabilities so that female construction workers in Cambodia can have safer workplaces and increased opportunity.

## WHO THEY ARE



**The majority of female construction workers surveyed are married women (72%) over 30 years old (78%) with little or no primary school education (77%).**

- All women interviewed have migrated from other provinces to work in construction, mainly because they are poor or have no other work near their home.
- Over 25% are seasonal workers and most women (78%) have worked in the construction sector for less than three years, with 42% employed less than one year.
- Many women have joined their husbands or other relatives in construction work.
- Only 20% of women working in construction are members of a union.

## WOMEN'S WORK



**There is a clear gender division in construction work in Cambodia.**

- Men do heavier, more dangerous work, and skilled tasks while women do less physical and more detailed work requiring patience, deemed appropriate for women not men.
- Over one-third of the women did "detailed work" such as tying metal rods, sealing ceramic tiles, or "women's work" such as cleaning the area.
- The majority (73%) of women perform two or three tasks such as carrying, preparing and handing construction materials such as bricks, sand and cement to male workers, essentially working as assistants.
- Over 50% of women said they either did not receive any training or did not have the same opportunity as men to get training or be promoted on the job.

## WOMEN'S PAY



**Nine in ten women report they are paid \$1-3 per day less than men for work of the same value.**

- Three in four women are paid between \$3.75 and \$5 per day, while only 10% earn more than \$6.25, similar to lower paid male workers.
- Most company managers and supervisors have a preference for male workers as they can do more "different types of construction work" and are generally considered more skilled.
- Women's lower rate of pay is explained by reference to women workers doing "less physically taxing" and therefore "less" overall work.
- Only 28% of women said they earned enough to meet daily expenses and one-third of all women do not save any money.

## WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE



**Women working in construction have little knowledge of how the Labour Law applies to them.**

- About half of the women surveyed did not know if their employment conditions were regulated under the Labour Law, and 18% believed they were not covered.
- 92% did not receive any written information regarding working conditions at the start of their employment and over half (54%) did not receive any verbal information on working conditions.
- 85% work eight hours or less, 76% have one day off per week and all are paid weekly or bi-weekly, generally in accordance with the Labour Law.
- Almost no women in construction understand the concept of paid leave days for public holidays, annual leave, maternity or illness.

## WOMEN'S SAFETY



### Much more could be done to ensure construction sites are safe, especially for women.

- Half of women do not receive any safety equipment or protective wear from their companies and of those who do, one-third must pay for it from their own wages.
- 92% of women received either no safety training or training that lasted less than one hour.
- One-third of women surveyed said children were allowed on the construction site.
- 32% had witnessed sexual harassment towards other female workers, with single women doubly likely to experience sexual harassment than married women.

### 40% of women workers do not feel that their living conditions are safe. Domestic violence is common.

- Virtually all women working in construction live in company-provided temporary housing on or near the construction site, with as many as 1,000 other workers.
- 36% of women have experienced emotional, physical or sexual violence by their husband or intimate partner in the last 12 months.
- 74% of women agree that men are justified in beating their wives for at least one reason, with only one in four women rejecting all forms of domestic violence.
- One in five women report that their living conditions feel unsafe because of their neighbours' domestic violence and men's alcohol consumption.
- While toilets and bathing facilities are provided, sanitation and hygiene conditions are poor and at times insufficient.

## WOMEN'S LIVING CONDITIONS



## WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING



### Employment can be a source of empowerment for women and control over decisions and financial matters are important aspects for gender equality.

- Seven in ten women participate in decisions on spending money they earned, while 7% had no say.
- The majority of women participate in decisions on major household purchases (88%) and health care (86%).

## CARE's work is helping women and employers understand how to make the most of the skills women have to offer the construction industry



- 40 peer leaders are improving women's understanding of key areas such as managing their money, health, safety and hygiene, reducing conflict at home and progressing at work.
- CARE's partners are supporting women to ensure they are safe and treated fairly at work.
- Construction company owners, managers and supervisors are working with CARE to understand what they can do to protect women in the workplace and encourage women's participation so they can retain skilled workers of all genders.



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This information is taken from research conducted by Carol Strickler and Pou Sovann for CARE's *Female Construction Workers* project, which is funded by the European Union and the Austrian Development Cooperation. The research was conducted from May-June 2016 using qualitative and quantitative methods.

#### The research:

- 286 female construction workers interviewed
- Twenty-nine women and thirteen men joined focus group discussions.
- Ten company managers and supervisors interviewed.
- Seven construction sites in Phnom Penh.
- Four districts in Phnom Penh.

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