

7. Progress and challenges in gender equality

Summary

- Economic growth and change over the last decade has had distinctly gendered effects on employment and incomes. One of the main drivers has been the emergence of the garment sector, where women represent over 80 percent of the workforce. There is parity in the number of economically active women and men, and women's income frequently covers a significant proportion of household expenditures.
- Female-headed households broadly defined are not worse off than male headed households in terms of consumption, although their capacity to earn and save income and invest in assets is often constrained, resulting in vulnerability in other respects. This is particularly true for households without an adult male and a high number of dependents.
- As in many other countries, access to education in Cambodia has traditionally been an issue in which gender differences are pronounced, with a strong bias against girls' schooling and literacy. In Cambodia, however, rapid progress towards greater equity has been achieved over the last decade, as the expansion of primary enrolment has been pro-girl. Despite this progress, because of the past, the median grade of schooling completed varies considerably (2.3 female compared to 3.6 male).
- The gender gap widens at higher levels of education, with three male students to every female student in tertiary education. As returns to education become significant above the primary school level, shortfalls in both overall enrollment rates and gender equity in enrollment at the lower secondary school level and above will tend to widen gender inequities.
- There are strong arguments for promoting women's education as it is closely associated with higher levels of their own and their children's health status. Several key indicators for women's health have shown improvement, such as contraceptive prevalence, a reduction in unmet need for family planning, improved access to antenatal care, and more deliveries by trained professionals and in health facilities. However, the maternal mortality ratio remains high at 473 per 100,000 live births and highlights the importance of continuing the efforts to upgrade both the accessibility and the quality of health services, particularly reproductive health services.
- The participation of women in decision making positions at various levels is very low but slowly improving and in some cases approaching the CMDG targets. However more efforts are needed to increase the number of women Ministers and Governors.
- Traditional attitudes combined with rapid socio-economic change have resulted in prevalent behavioral patterns which constitute a serious problem for women's health and opportunities. These include the prevalence of domestic violence, sexual harassment and violation. Trafficking in persons and the commoditization of women is a on-going concern. There are some indications of a positive shift in norms and attitudes towards support for increased gender equality, related to the importance of girls' education in particular, as it is linked to increased employment opportunities as well as improvements in maternal and child health.

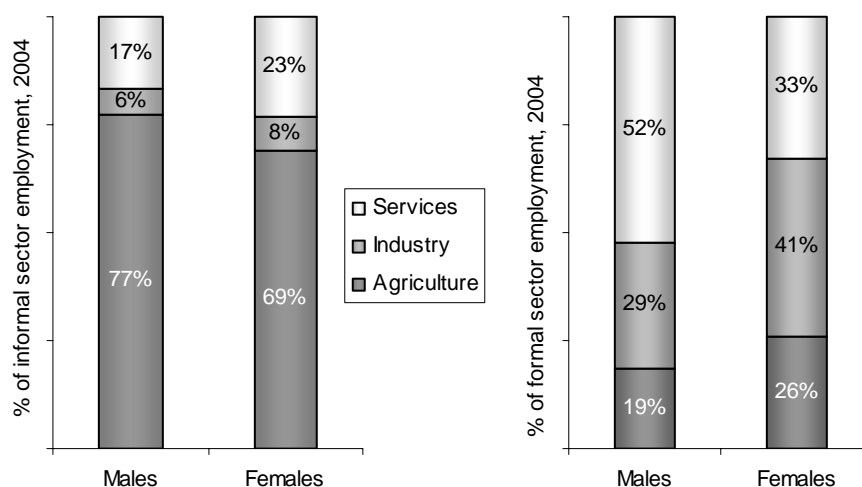
Gender inequalities in Cambodia, in common with much of south-east Asia, have typically been seen as serious but less extreme than in other world regions. Key “traditional” dimensions of inequality in the past have been with regard to girls’ education; the double burden faced by women in managing domestic tasks while also contributing to household subsistence or income-generating activities; and the low level of female participation in positions of public authority and decision-making. With economic growth structural change and improvements in human development outcomes over the last fifteen years, some of these disadvantages have become less pronounced. At the same time, however, other aspects of rapid economic and social change have resulted in the emergence of new forms of gender inequality. Inequalities exist in access to income generating opportunities and control of household assets and men and women experience different forms of vulnerability to violence: the incidence of violence against women, inside and outside the home, is high and, apart from constituting a critical development issue in its own right, also has negative effects upon household welfare (assets, income and consumption). Structural inequalities (e.g. lower average levels of female educational achievement) and gender attitudes which support gender inequality persist and are mutually reinforcing.

Economic growth has created factory jobs for women and construction jobs for men

In broad sectoral terms, patterns of male and female work in the dominant informal sector are roughly similar: the vast majority are occupied in agricultural self-employment, around a fifth work in services, and less than 10 percent are employed in manufacturing.

Figure 7.1 Women are more likely than men to be engaged in services in the informal sector, and manufacturing in the formal sector

- a. informal economy (self-employed, family workers)
 - 80% of total employment (83% of female employment, 76% of male employment)
- b. formal economy (employees and employers)
 - 20% of total employment (18% of female employment, 24% of male employment)

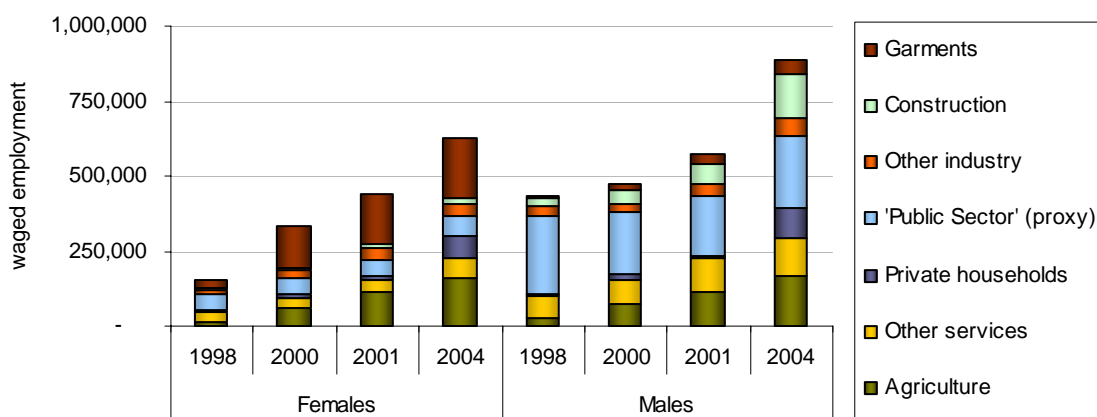


Source: CSES 2004.

Although growing, wage employment remains limited, accounting for only 20 percent of total employment (24 percent of male and 17 percent of female employment). In this growing labor market there are some clear differences between male and female trends and employment status. Construction, public sector jobs and “other services” are of considerably greater importance to men than women. The vast majority (80-90 percent) of the jobs created in garment manufacturing since the late 1990s are by contrast female: these jobs, now numbering around 350,000, account for 3.4 percent of total employment and 5.5 percent of female employment. They were also, by comparison to informal and even many other formal sector jobs in Cambodia, “good”, being linked through trade quotas and an ILO project to core labor standards.

The impact of garment sector jobs on the welfare of employees is however more limited than a simple analysis of their wages would suggest. Around 90 percent of garment factory workers remit a portion of their wages. The proportion that is remitted is typically very high: Dahlberg (2006) found workers remitting on average 35 percent of their earnings, which conforms well with other estimates¹. The impact of these remittances is very important to the mainly rural recipient households, in some cases sustaining current consumption (food or health expenditures), in some cases enabling investment in fertilizer, livestock or the education of younger siblings (Dahlberg 2006; ADI / CCC 2005). To remit this much, however, garment factory workers typically spend very little on their own welfare (food, housing and healthcare).

Figure 7.2 In wage labor, women are concentrated in garments; men dominate construction, public sector employment, and other services



Sources: Census 1998, Labor Force Surveys 2000 and 2001, CSES 2004

The distribution of paid employment can be further disaggregated by wealth quintile (Figure 7.3). Employment in public services is dominated by men from the wealthiest quintile. Nearly 60 percent of paid workers in agriculture are from the bottom two quintiles with nearly equal numbers of males and females.

¹ ADI / CCC 2005 found a mean of 27 percent; in the largest survey to date (CRD 2004), 40 percent of workers remitted 31-50 percent of earnings and 32 percent more than half.

Figure 7.3 Men, particularly men from the richest quintile, dominate public sector employment



Source: CSES 2004.

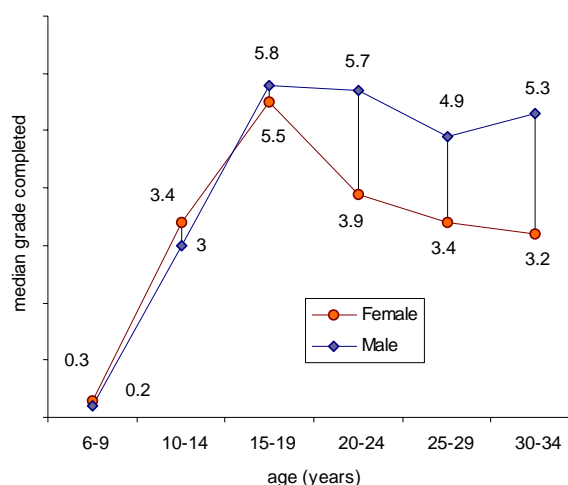
There is still considerable lack of clarity about the distributional nature of garment sector employment, in terms of whether those who receive these jobs come from poor or non-poor backgrounds. Data from the CSES 2004 provides some insights, but does not record enough information on migration or remittances to provide a complete picture of how factory workers now found in Phnom Penh relate to sending households in rural areas. Obtaining access to these jobs is easier with a certain level of education and some household savings to fund the move to Phnom Penh (and, in about one in six cases, a bribe paid to secure the job), which suggest that the poorest are indeed likely to be underrepresented amongst factory employees. The CSES data finds 8.7 percent of households to have one or more garment worker (21 percent in Phnom Penh, and 8 percent of rural households). Relatively few (12 percent) of the poorest quintile have a family member working in the sector. Findings from factory-based worker surveys and detailed case studies which link workers via remittances to their home villages suggest a somewhat greater distributional impact of garment sector jobs (ADB 2004; Dahlberg 2006). In terms of equity effects, however, it seems that the greatest impact of the growth of the garment sector may be in promoting gender equality rather than consumption or income equality.

Expanded service delivery has closed gender gaps, particularly in education

Access to schooling and education outcomes such as literacy have traditionally been one of the aspects of Cambodian gender relations in which inequality was most pronounced. As described in the previous chapter, contact with public services and

human development outcomes have improved considerably over the last decade. Progress has been particularly good in regard to education, where the increase in primary enrolment has been markedly faster amongst girls than boys. The result is that educational attainment—as measured in, for example, age-specific median values of highest grade completed—is near equal for those in or recently leaving school. While inequalities emerge amongst those aged 20 or above, and the ratio of male to female median grades for the population as a whole is high at 3.6 to 2.3, female educational status in the next generation should be much higher than in their parents' generation, and much closer to that of their male contemporaries.

Figure 7.4 Educational outcomes amongst recent school leavers show much less inequality



Source: CHDS 2005 p. 11-12.

The next challenge then is to improve aggregate outcomes and gender equity above primary school level, where participation, particularly of girls, drops off markedly. At the lower secondary school level, the ratio of girls to boys is 77:100; at the upper secondary school level, the ratio has slightly exceeded the target of 59:100 for 2005. Net enrollment was however only 9 percent of the age group and the vast majority of the students were from higher income groups (74 percent of upper secondary school students are from households in the highest two income quintiles). Finally, at the tertiary school level, women are outnumbered by men 3-to-1. While this marks an improvement over the 3.3-to-1 ratio in the current work force, it implies that gender disparities in professional and management occupations will persist in the medium to long term. As higher returns to education are discernable primarily above the primary school level, shortfalls in both overall enrollment rates and gender equity in enrollment at the lower secondary school level will tend to perpetuate both income and gender inequities.

A notable health concern for women—and a lagging indicator amongst the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals—is the maternal mortality ratio (MMR). Improvements in preventive and curative healthcare have benefited women as well as men. However, while a number of service utilization and intermediate outcome indicators (e.g. the percentage of pregnant mothers who receive antenatal care, and the percentage of deliveries that occur in a health facility and / or with the assistance of a trained health professional) have improved in the last five years, this has yet to result in improvement in the MMR. In part, this may reflect the limitations and lags in the MMR as a measure. Even accounting for this, however, it is clear that progress in ensuring safe motherhood is being achieved at a slower rate than is the case for other health indicators.

Men and women face different forms of insecurity

Prevalence and tolerance of gender-based violence remains high

In common with many post-conflict countries, Cambodia has a high rate of violent crime. Men tend to experience public violence from male gang members, peers, and authorities, while women are more likely to experience sexual violence and assault, including in particular domestic violence, from men (MoWA 2005). A series of studies conducted over the past decade (Zimmerman 1995; MOWVA and PADV 1996; MOWA 2005), including most recently the CDHS 2005, have estimated the proportion of ever-married women who have ever experienced violence at between 13 to 23 percent (Table 7.1): it is safe to assume that, as in most countries, the incidence may be higher given the tendency for domestic violence to be underreported.

Table 7.1 Estimates of domestic violence, 1996-2005

Year	Organization	Sample	% of respondents who have ever experienced		
			physical violence	sexual violence	emotional, physical or sexual violence
1996	MOWA	1,374 women in six provinces	16		16
2000	CDHS	15,351 women aged 15-19	16	4	25
2004	MOWA	1,580 women aged 15 and over	23		
2005	CDHS	16,823 women aged 15-19	13	3	22

In most cases of violent crime but particularly in the case of violence against women, institutional responses do not deliver effective justice. Domestic violence is often not seen as a criminal or serious offense by police and local authorities with the result that perpetrators are not punished. The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) made responding to domestic violence a high priority, with a new law adopted in 2005.

The impact of domestic violence, particularly on the poor, is severe. In the 2005 survey, 24 percent of the poorest group in the sample (those earning less than \$50 a month) who had experienced domestic violence said they lost two months income as a result of violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. A fifth of respondents experiencing violence reported that their children had missed school between five to twenty times in the past year as a result of the violence (MoWA 2005: 37).

While tolerance is high, there are some signs that attitudes may be shifting with domestic violence coming to be seen as a public rather than a private issue in at least some communities (Box 7.1). The main factors which appear to contribute to changing attitudes are media education, NGO training programs and, in some cases, greater intervention by local authorities, including fines, arrests, and 'advice' to the victim and perpetrator.

Box 7.1: Qualitative research suggests a decline in domestic violence in some villages

In recent CDRI studies (MOPS and the PPA), there are suggestions of a decline in domestic violence in some communities. In five of twenty four PPA villages, domestic violence was reported to be declining; it was seen as increasing in three others, and static in the remainder. In six of the nine MOPS study villages, both male and female participants reported that the incidence of domestic violence had declined significantly in recent years (with slower change or no change in the other three villages). This improvement was attributed to the impact of social and legal awareness campaigns, facilitated by the spread within the villages of television and radio. In both MOPS and the PPA, the decline was credited to human rights training workshops on domestic violence delivered by NGOs. Also important was the perception of stronger laws against domestic violence and of local authorities increasingly willing to intervene (which is itself a product of public education and legal awareness campaigns). The situation is still far short of ideal; the emphasis of local police and authorities, as in much of “living law” dispute resolution at the local level in Cambodia, is on reconciliation and relatively symbolic punishment through a few days confinement in jail, rather than the strict application of the law. Nonetheless, in some communities the combination of new laws and active rights education appears to have led to an improvement upon the previous situation, when domestic violence was clearly seen as a family matter in which it was difficult or impossible for outsiders—both other villagers and local authorities—to intervene.

Before, when a husband hit his wife, the wife didn't dare complain at the police station, but now, after people supporting women's rights have been here, the wife claims her rights at the police station to have him arrested and warned. (Khsach Chiros, Kompong Thom Province: MOPS)

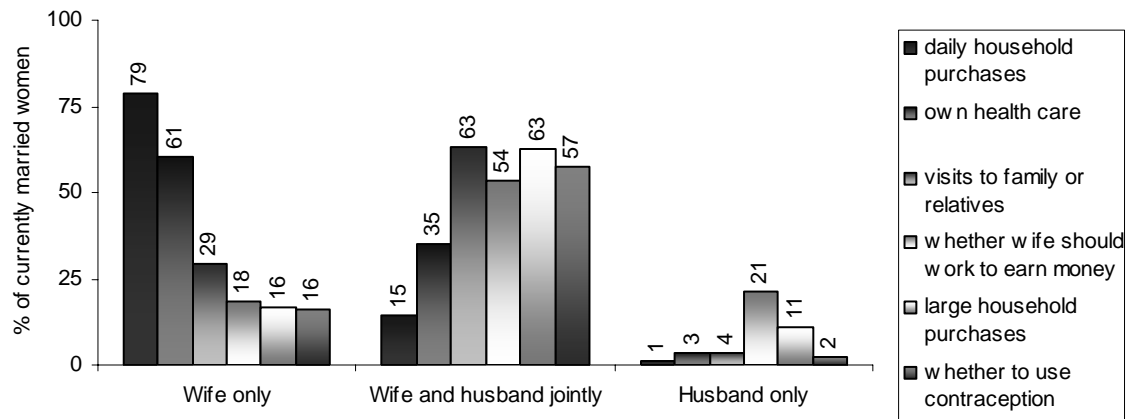
Now, we have much less violence in our area than the past five years because some actions against this misconduct have been taken over the same period. For example, the authority arrests the abuser and detains them at the police post for one or two days, so the abuser and those people who tend to abuse are afraid and stop doing wrong. (Dang Kdar, Kompong Thom Province: MOPS)

Source: CDRI 2007a pp. 136-7; 2007b (forthcoming).

Participation in decision-making

Most household decisions are made jointly

Joint decision-making is the norm in Cambodian households: for most of the sample issues on which questions about decision-making were asked in the CDHS, husband and wife jointly make the final decision jointly (Figure 7.5). When decisions are *not* made jointly, it is more likely to be the wife rather than the husband who has the final say. The notable exception, where more conservative attitudes are more apparent, is with regard to decisions on whether or not the wife should work to earn money where, once again, the decision is made jointly in the majority (54 percent) of households: but, when it is *not* a joint decision, it is more likely to be made by the husband (21 percent) than the wife (16 percent). Amongst the subsample of currently married women who had one or more living children at the time of the survey, three-quarters would make decisions relating to their children (e.g. on schooling, what to do if a child was sick, and whether or not to have another child) jointly: but once again, if the decision was made solely then it was much more likely to be made by the woman rather than the man.

Figure 7.5 Most household decisions involve both husband and wife

Source: CDHS 2005 p. 269.

While investment decisions (e.g. on land or livestock) are often joint or led by the husband, research confirms that traditional practices with regard to credit still prevail: men are generally agreed to find asking for a loan embarrassing, and leave these negotiations to their wives, who are seen as more competent in managing such financial affairs (Box 7.2). However, this does not necessarily ensure that she has a say in how the money is used; and in some cases women become liable for debts owed by their husband.

Box 7.2 Women tend to be responsible for managing borrowing

In the Khmer household, the wife and the husband have to discuss with each other before going to borrow money from the creditors. The wife's responsibility is to borrow money and the husband is responsible for earning money to repay the loan. The husband doesn't want to do the borrowing at all because he is embarrassed. (Village report, Koah Ta Pov Village, Kompong Thom Province: PPA)

Source: CDRI 2007a.

Women's participation in public life is increasing, but still low

Women's participation in public life in Cambodia is extremely limited (Table 7.2). There are some positive trends—following the 2007 Commune / Sangkat elections, women hold 15 percent of seats in Commune / Sangkat councils (up from 8 percent in 2002) and 4 percent of commune councils have a woman commune chief (up from 0.8 percent in 2002). However, overall rates of political participation are low (Table 7.2), giving it one of the lowest gender empowerment scores in Asia (Urashima 2007, UNIFEM *et al*2004).

Research on the responsiveness of local institutions found that women's participation in Commune / Sangkat councils is explained by their low levels of education, family responsibilities, and social attitudes which regard politics as something for which women are not suited—attitudes which clearly undermine the confidence of women councilors who do participate (Rusten *et al* 2004).

Table 7.2 Women are under-represented in all aspects of government

Public office	% of posts held by women
<i>Legislature</i>	
National Assembly member	16
Senators	13
Commune councilors	15
Commune chiefs	4
<i>Executive</i>	
Ministers	5
Secretaries of State	6
Under-Secretaries of State	12
Provincial or Municipal Governors	0
<i>Judiciary</i>	
Judges	12
Prosecutors	2
<i>Civil service</i>	
Civil service employees	31
- of which senior positions	9

However, women's participation in community level meetings (such as the commune planning process) tends to be equal to or greater than that of men (Rusten *et al* 2004, Brereton 2005). Separate meetings for women and the opportunity to participate in discussions about local issues which are immediately relevant to women's lives appears to support their involvement. The fact that women are more likely than men to be in the village during the day—which makes it harder for them to run for office, take leadership roles or travel to take part in meetings—does make it easier for them to participate in meetings at the village level. Women do not usually participate in planning processes above the commune level:

thus for example in 2004 only 17 percent of participants in District Integration Workshops were women (Brereton 2005).

Women's participation in civil society and community decision-making outside of elections is generally low (albeit somewhat higher among older women who no longer need to look after for children). Although women entrepreneurs do exist and women often play a key role in managing family businesses amongst the wealthier quintiles, men dominate not just public but also private sector institutions involved in economic management, including the private sector forum, chambers of commerce, market management, and the judicial system. There are few women in management positions in either the public or private sector.

Civil society development: from gender training to a women's movement

Levels of associational activity are rather low in Cambodia, for both sexes: only 6.4 percent of women are a member of any association, club or organization. Cambodia traditionally had few permanent village-level groups (Ebihara 1968; Delvert 1961; Conway 1999; Aranvind 2004). However, since the early 1990s there has been a rapid if uneven expansion of civil society and there are now a number of organizations working on women's issues who specifically target women as beneficiaries. To date, however, much of this has targeted women primarily as simply recipients of training. For the most part, activities are focused on gender awareness training; women in politics, particularly commune councils; HIV/AIDS; women's legal rights; and trafficking and domestic violence. Although relevant, this set of activities has largely reflected donor and INGO priorities. There are no grassroots movements advocating for gender-responsive action on other key gender concerns such as maternal health services or female education and there are few organizations supporting the economic advancement of women—or men for that

matter—outside of credit, handicrafts and traditional vocational training. There remains resistance to the term ‘women’s empowerment’ as this is generally interpreted as taking power away from men and against traditional culture.