

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## INTRODUCTION

This report assesses the gender “terrain” in Cambodia. The assessment is based on a review of existing information from government, donor and non-governmental organization (NGO) sources and also from extensive consultations with various stakeholders. Limited original analysis was carried out for this assessment, and there are several areas, such as changing gender relations and issues affecting men, that have not been covered due to lack of information or time.

Original drafts were prepared by the World Bank from information collected and used by the Government in the preparation of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy. The final version includes additional information and analysis contributed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) as part of a collaborative agreement to jointly assist in the preparation of a comprehensive overview. The ADB contributions to the labor chapter are a result of technical assistance to the Ministry of Women’s and Veterans’ Affairs, and the UNDP/UNIFEM contributions to each of the other chapters were made in the context of work done with the government to identify country specific gender-related targets for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

## 1. Social and cultural context

Cambodia’s population in 2001 was 13.1 million, of whom 52 percent were women and 80 percent of whom lived in rural areas. The population is projected to reach 16.6 million by 2006. Thirty-six percent of the population is poor, and 90 percent of the poor live in rural areas.

A baby boom in the 1980s resulted in a population bulge that is now of an age where they are entering the workforce and their reproductive lives. Fifty-five percent of the population is under the age of 20, although fertility rates in the past 10 years decreased from 5.4 to 4.0 children per woman aged 15–49.

The effects of 30 years of war and civil violence in Cambodia have left a devastating mark on the country’s men and women. Social capital in Cambodia was substantially destroyed by the Khmer Rouge and the protracted civil violence that followed the Khmer Rouge regime. Today, war widows and other women preside over one-quarter of Cambodian households.

One condition that survived the decades of turmoil and is now constraining the country’s development is the hierarchical order of the society, with notions of power and status conditioning social and gender relations. In this social order, women are considered to be of lower status relative to men.

Gender relations in Cambodia are undergoing tremendous change. While the culturally defined behavior norms for women, known as the *Chba'p*, constrain their opportunities outside of the household, economic, social and political developments are opening up new opportunities for them. And as Cambodian women pursue these opportunities, they are becoming a more integral part of the country's economic and social development.

There is also evidence that while the vast majority of men and women experience poverty, gender impacts that experience. Also, changes and opportunities for young men sometimes appear to be developing more slowly than for women, and changing gender roles are affecting relations between men and women. These changes are poorly understood, but potentially have serious social impacts.

## 2. Gender outlook on the labor market

Gender inequalities are endemic in Cambodia's labor markets. Traditional attitudes towards girls' education and 'appropriate' occupations for women and men have shaped existing inequalities and continue to perpetuate disparities in employment. Achieving greater equality is made extremely difficult within the context of the shift to a market-oriented economy, rapidly growing labor force, and limited new employment opportunities.

One of Cambodia's greatest challenges is to expand employment opportunities fast enough to absorb the 250,000 young people who are reaching working age and entering the employment market each year. The labor force in the group aged 20 to 24 grew an estimated 66 percent between 1997 and 2001, and the number of youth in the labor force age 15 to 19 years increased by 58 percent.

Women make up 52 percent of the workforce and Cambodia's female labor force participation rate, which is 82 percent, is the highest in the region. Women outnumber men in the labor force in all age groups from age 15 to 54, with the exception of those in the group age 25 to 29. Because Cambodia's population is largely rural, in 2001, 85 percent of the total labor force lives in rural areas, and of this, 53 percent of the work force is female.

Fifty-three percent of economically active women, as compared to 32 percent of economically active men, work in the unpaid family labor category and almost all of them are agricultural workers. The gender gap in unpaid family work has decreased in recent years as the percentage of women has fallen, and the percentage of men in this category has increased.

The paid employment market in Cambodia employs only 16 percent of the economically active population; 19 percent of men and 14 percent of women. The majority of employed women work in the garment sector.

Men, more so than women, are moving into a wider range of better-paid positions outside the agriculture sector. For women, the options are largely limited to the garment industry or the informal sector.

There are signs that women are beginning to enter formal employment at a faster rate than men, due mainly to growth in the garment sector and because more women are becoming paid labor in the agriculture sector. Eighty percent of the increase in the labor market between 1993 and 1999 was attributed to agriculture and fisheries, and 53 percent of these workers were women.

In the garment industry, women comprise up to 90 percent of the workforce. They are relatively well paid compared to women in other sectors and also relatively well educated: 61 percent have primary school education, 31 percent have lower-secondary education, and 8 percent hold high school certificates.

However, with the advent of increased trade liberalization, the future of Cambodia's garment industry is uncertain, and consequently, so are women's opportunities for paid employment. With growth in the garment industry, the trade union movement has grown as well. There are now more than 100 trade unions, and more than 90 percent of union members are women. However, only two women fill national leadership positions.

Outside of the agriculture sector, there is a pronounced segregation of occupations by sex: men tend to take up waged employment (61 percent of men and 33 percent women in non-agriculture employment), while women are more likely to be engaged in trade (49 percent women in non-agriculture employment).

Choices in employment for both men and women are shaped by their level of education. The gender gap in educational attainment strongly impacts women's opportunities for employment. When they have a higher level of education, women can compete with men for employment. However, as so few women are educated, only a small number are in a position to compete. In the white-collar professions, the proportion of better-educated workers is higher for women (40 percent) than it is for men (34 percent). However, men still out-number women three to one in this education group.

In the long run, achieving gender equity in the formal education system is clearly needed to attain greater equality in employment opportunities. More immediately, to increase employment opportunities for women already in the work force requires that greater attention be paid to reducing disparities in levels of literacy and levels of education, and in so doing improve occupational choices.

On average (taking experience, age and education into account), men's wages are 33 percent higher than those of women. The largest wage differences occur between young men and young women aged 15–29 who have no schooling. The wage difference across education levels is less for men than women. With an upper-secondary and post-secondary education, men and women can earn 42 percent and 80 percent more, respectively, in comparison with men and women with no schooling.

Although barely visible in official labor statistics, the flourishing sex industry is an issue that warrants special attention. It is estimated that there are up to 100,000 women working in the sex industry in Cambodia. As with other women in the informal sector, these women are open to a range of abuses varying from harassment to exploitation. The informal labor sector is not covered by the labor law or provided with any form of social protection. Sex workers, often forced or sold into the occupation due to poverty, are ostracized by their families and communities.

The rural labor market in Cambodia is fragile and rapidly changing. When local conditions for employment are adequate, out migration is low. When local demand for labor is small, out migration is the only answer for unemployed workers. According to the 1998 Census, more than 80 percent of migrants were of working age (15–64). There were more women migrants than men in the 15 to 19 year-old age group. However, the number of women who migrate was lower in the 20–39-year-old age bracket.

It will be difficult for the formal employment market to absorb much of the new work force without substantial new investment. Employment creation efforts will need to look beyond the formal sector if they are to provide sustainable livelihoods for the majority of the labor force.

The government is working with multilateral organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and UNDP to develop an integrated framework (IF) for trade-related technical assistance to support Cambodia's application for WTO membership.

Although it is assumed that increasing trade will result in increased employment opportunities, little attention is being paid to the quality or gender distribution of this employment. Pro-poor, gender-responsive trade strategies are needed to provide both agricultural-related and non-agricultural employment opportunities to women and men in rural areas. As technical assistance in developing these industries moves forward, there are numerous gender concerns that need to be addressed in each of the IF sectors, including garments, handicrafts, agro-processing, tourism and labor services.

One of Cambodia's MDG targets is to achieve equity in access to new waged employment opportunities by 2015. Persistent inequalities in access to new opportunities are due to lower levels of education and socially prescribed occupational choices. These greatly constrain the position of women. Ensuring equitable access to the new job opportunities that emerge out of trade development efforts requires equitable access to appropriate training. If women are to be able to compete for new employment opportunities, they will need greater opportunities for higher education, and recognition that traditional attitudes related to what should be 'male' and 'female' occupations could impact opportunities in emerging industries.

### 3. Women, agriculture and rural resources

Ninety percent of the poor live in rural areas. The highest poverty rates are found among farmers and those households whose heads have little or no formal education. The poorest households are asset-less. Agricultural productivity is extremely low (US\$480 per ha) and food insecurity is still a serious problem for people who are poor.

Agriculture remains the backbone of the Cambodian economy, with 75 percent of the labor force earning their livelihood from agriculture. Most farmers are small landholders with less than 2 hectares. Although agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for the vast majority of the population, this sector has been growing at an average annual rate of only 3.6 percent – half the rate for total GDP growth in recent years.

Rural women are responsible for 80 percent of food production, and more than 65 percent of women are farmers. Half of women farmers are illiterate or have less than a primary school education (compared to 29 percent for men), and 78 percent are engaged in subsistence agriculture. In rural areas only 4 percent women and 10 percent men are engaged in waged employment.

Despite the significance of agriculture, few farmers have access to high quality inputs, credit or information on farming techniques and markets. This is especially so for female farmers. Low agricultural productivity and increasing pressures on land are making it extremely difficult for most small farmers to survive. Access to agricultural extension services, market information, and financial services is very limited for all farmers, and even more difficult for women farmers.

Women household heads are more likely to work in agriculture than male household heads, and women are more likely to be landless or have significantly smaller plots of land. Nearly 80 percent of farmers are primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture. Women comprise 56 percent of subsistence farmers and 54 percent of workers in market-oriented agriculture. As a rule, women are unpaid family workers.

Few women benefit from agricultural extension services or credit made available to rural people, despite the fact that they comprise the majority of farmers and informal sector workers. Also agricultural research and extension efforts usually do not consider women's activities or take into account the fact that men and women tend to specialize in different rural tasks.

The vast majority of extension service staff are male and find it culturally difficult to engage in face-to-face communication with women farmers. As a result, women farmers do not have the access to information that they need to improve or increase production and their livelihoods.

Women's limited ability to protect their land rights also has had a negative impact on agricultural production and food security. Access to productive land and an accompanying land title granting secure tenure is a critical development and gender issue. A recent social assessment found that the rights of women, especially women-headed households, are often ignored, partly due to their lack of knowledge of land rights and of land titling procedures.

Land liberalization in 1989 and the confusion that followed due to unclear legislation, resulted in negative impacts on women's land rights, especially for female household heads. "War widows" own less land than the general population: of those that own land, 84 percent own less than half a hectare. Women in male-headed households face a different set of constraints with respect to land. Women's rights to land may be weakened by their subordinate status within a household where land rights are vested in the name of the male head of household. In cases of divorce, death or family break-up, women may lose their land rights, which leads to the impoverishment of women and children. The land law passed in 2001 includes a progressive measure to ensure that both women and men are identified as owners of the land, but women's low literacy limits their access to information about land issues, sales and rights.

Women and children from poor landless families, and especially women headed households, collect snails, shellfish, firewood, weeds, and other plants for consumption, as well as marketing. These activities are critical for food security, yet are threatened by natural resource degradation and limited community control over natural resources.

Women also have very limited access to credit. Credit providers reach only 20 percent of households. While women make up a high proportion of membership in credit schemes, they tend to be excluded from the decision-making processes and they receive smaller amounts of credit.

Also the travel or transport burden seems to be unequally shared between men and women. Women lack access to markets and services (such as healthcare and education) due to their restricted mobility for security and family reasons. This is a serious constraint, particularly in remote rural areas. Constraints can be significantly reduced by bringing services closer to women or by facilitating women's mobility so they can access services. Also related to travel, is the fact that due to lack of easy access to clean water, women and girls spend hours of their day collecting water for household needs. This is another drain on women's time and increases the opportunity costs of sending girls to school.

Women's significant contributions to the agriculture and rural development sector are not mirrored in their participation in decision-making and the civil service related to these sectors. Although women make up the majority of farmers, they benefit little from the provision of agricultural services. While women represent over 50 percent of all subsistence and market-oriented agricultural workers, they comprise only 20 percent of staff in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and most occupy low positions.

#### 4. Gender disparities in education

The gap between boys and girls in Cambodia increases markedly as they progress to higher levels of education. While almost equal numbers of boys and girls are enrolled in preschool and primary school, only 63 girls are enrolled for every 100 boys in lower secondary school. At upper secondary and tertiary education, less than 50 girls are enrolled for every 100 boys. Poverty and distance to schools are the major barriers reducing girls' access to education, in addition to higher opportunity costs of educating girls.

Enrollment of girls into primary school from communes in the poorest quintile has seen the highest rate of increase of any group. In 2001, the growth in enrollment of this group was 26 percent more than in the previous year. Overall, growth in enrollment for children from the poorest communes was 24 percent. By comparison, the growth in enrollment of children from the communes in the richest quintile was 7 percent. While progress with enrollment has been good, girls tend to drop out of school at a higher rate than boys. Repetition rates are also higher for girls and their attendance is lower.

The gender disparity increases dramatically at the lower secondary school level. The percentage of girls in the student body falls from 50 percent at primary school to 37 percent at lower secondary and 32 percent in upper secondary school. Nationwide, enrollments in lower secondary school were 19 percent in 2001–2002 and only 16 percent for girls. In remote areas, only 1 percent of children were enrolled in lower secondary school.

Senior secondary enrollments are not only small, they are decreasing, and at a faster rate for boys. In 1999, 9.3 percent of all children were enrolled, of whom 11.8 percent were boys and 6.8 percent were girls. By 2001, this figure had fallen to 7.4 percent for all children – 9.4 percent for boys and 5.4 percent for girls. The gender gap in enrollments has narrowed, but this is due to the faster rate of decrease in boys' enrollment, rather than to an increase in girls' enrollment.

Illiteracy rates are very high: 25 percent of men and 45 percent of women are completely illiterate, and 71 percent of women and 50 percent of men are functionally illiterate. Shortcomings found in the formal education system are also found in the vocational training system, where the opportunities for women are limited to “women's skills” such as dressmaking.

The government plans to address the gender imbalance by building more secondary schools, thus minimizing the distance children have to travel, as well as creating a scholarship program for poor girls. However, significantly more commitment and investment will be needed to achieve equality in education.

Gender disparities in education are directly related to MDGs 2 and 3, which concern education. Cambodia's efforts to achieve these two MDGs are reflected in the government's Education for All Program, which aims to achieve universal basic education by 2010. Upper secondary and tertiary education have not received the same attention as basic education in Cambodia. The government has set targets to eliminate the gender gap in upper secondary and tertiary education by 2015.

## 5. Gender issues in health

The provision of quality health services, especially for the poorest people, is also a fundamental development challenge. Life expectancy at birth is low: 54.5 years for men and 58.3 for women. Affordability of health care is a major problem, especially for the poor, and often leads families into debt and forces them to sell their productive assets, such as land. Utilization rates and family spending on health care are about the same for men and women. However, due to their reproductive health needs, women's health needs are greater than men's. Therefore, equal rates of health service utilization indicate that women's health care needs are not being met.

Maternal mortality, at 437 per 100,000 live births, is one of the highest in Asia. Infant mortality is 95 per 1,000 live births (no sex disaggregated data available). High maternal and infant mortality rates are a result of 1) insufficient access to birth-spacing information, supplies and services; 2) poor access to and utilization of maternal health services; and 3) low-quality health facilities. There is evidence of a large unmet demand for contraception — only 24 percent of women currently use contraception, yet the Ministry of Health estimates that about 78 percent of Cambodian couples would be interested in birth control or spacing if they had access to contraceptives. Poor availability of contraceptives also leads to a high rate of abortion, often resulting in death and contributing to high maternal mortality rates and unwanted births. It is estimated that 24 percent of births in Cambodia are unwanted.

Sixty-six percent of women and 87 percent of children younger than one year of age are anemic. Only 38 percent of pregnant women receive prenatal care from trained health personnel, and only 10 percent of births take place in health facilities. Trained medical staff assist at only 32 percent of births. Despite a strategy of basic training to increase the number of midwives, the number of nurses and midwives in the public health care system has declined.

Between the ages of 15 and 49, a man is more likely to die than a woman. The mortality rate for men aged 15–49 is 4.8 deaths per 1,000, whereas for women it is 3.5 per 1,000. For men, health issues include a higher risk of accidents. Compared to women, men are twice as likely to be injured in an accident, and the most widespread cause of accidental injury or death is a road accident. Twice as many men as women are physically impaired — mainly due to landmine injuries.

The Ministry of Health has prepared a sector-wide strategy for 2003–2007 that emphasizes improving maternal and child health, the right to health care and pro-poor delivery of services. The strategy recognizes that Cambodia will probably not be able to achieve the MDGs relating to health and have set alternative targets, which are still ambitious. The government's health sector strategy has raised some concerns from a gender perspective. While concerted efforts are being made by the government and donors to address reproductive health issues, strategies in the health sector tend to be “gender blind”, meaning that no distinction is made between the differing constraints confronting men and women in accessing general health services. Access to basic health services is a gender issue that requires gender-responsive strategies, actions and indicators.

## 6. Gender and HIV/AIDS

The epidemic poses a major threat to human development in Cambodia. Cambodia has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in Southeast Asia, though the epidemic rate has decreased. Since 1997, the national prevalence rate among adults has declined steadily, from 3.9 percent to 2.8 percent. The number of new HIV infections each year has been declining since 1994 among men, and since 1996 among women. The number of men currently living with HIV has been declining since 1997 and, while the number of women currently living with HIV continues to increase, it has begun to level off.

While progress has been made, especially in addressing transmissions between sex workers and their clients, there is growing concern about the increase in the rate of transmissions between husbands and their wives and consequently between mothers and children. New strategies are urgently needed to prevent transmission among these populations, but options are limited. Social and cultural norms and gender relations make it difficult for women to negotiate condom use with their partner. Women feel uncomfortable suggesting condom use to a spouse or sweetheart, as it implies infidelity, yet for men extramarital sex is widely accepted.

Another gender dimension of HIV/AIDS is that women, young and old alike, must shoulder the burden of caring for AIDS patients and AIDS orphans.

To address the increase in mother to child transmission, the government has developed guidelines to prevent such transmission and plans to expand access to drugs for pregnant and postpartum women through its program on expanding anti-retroviral therapy treatment in Cambodia.

As part of its effort to achieve MDG 6, Combating HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Cambodia's MDG target is to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS by 2015 and the government has set targets for reducing prevalence, intensifying prevention measures and providing care and support to people living with HIV/AIDS.

The national strategic plan for HIV/AIDS and STI Prevention and care (2001-2005) is focused on three elements, reducing transmission in high risk situations, increasing health education and prevention among the general population, and equipping the health system to cope with increased demand. The Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs is also implementing HIV/AIDS prevention activities and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Education and Youth has plans to start activities; while the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STDs (NCHADS) is responsible for the national sentinel surveillance systems, and also develops plans and programs for HIV/AIDS.

## 7. Violence against women

A reported increase in gender-based violence, such as domestic violence, rape (including gang rape), violence against sex workers, as well as a reported increase in the number of women and children being trafficked into neighboring countries, is a major concern. The government has made progress in establishing a legal framework to address these issues, but law enforcement is extremely weak and compounded by a corrupt environment.

Cambodian gender advocates, and particularly MoWVA, feel that freedom from fear of violence in the home and the community is a necessary prerequisite for gender responsive development. Thus Cambodia has added an additional target to MDG 3, which is to eliminate all forms of violence against women: domestic violence, rape, sex trafficking.

Achieving this target will require intervention at three levels. First, the development of a legal framework is essential, but it cannot be effective, and may even send the wrong message if it is not enforced. Only the development of enforceable laws and wide publicizing of such laws will challenge the prevailing culture of impunity.

Second, measures are needed to prevent domestic violence, rape and trafficking, including prevention action plans, adapting school curricula to include these issues, commune level programs on prevention of violence against women, and other forms of education in the mass media.

Third, the social and economic reintegration and rehabilitation of survivors must also be addressed. Training of professionals in health and social work to provide counseling to victims, which is just beginning in Cambodia, should be expanded. Currently, victims' services, community-based interventions to reintegrate victims of trafficking into communities, skills training for former sex workers, and other interventions are underway, but only on a pilot scale, mostly through NGOs. These will need to be expanded and replicated.

## 8. Women's voice in politics and decision making

Cambodia's Gender Empowerment Measure is among the lowest in Asia, reflecting the extremely low representation of women in government and parliament. Some progress has been made. Following an election in November 1998, two female Ministers were appointed among the 25 ministries and four female Secretaries of State were appointed out of a total of 50. This is an improvement over the 1993–1997 government in which only four women were political appointees and there were no female Ministers, Secretaries of State or Provincial Governors. In the 2003 elections, 15 of the 123 people elected (12%) were women.

Although a quota of 30 percent of seats was proposed prior to the 2002 election of Commune Councils, it was rejected and only 8.5 percent of the councilors elected were women. Only 9 percent of the 169,000 civil servants are women, and only 8 out of 110 judges are women. Nor are any prosecutors women.

The government has committed to increasing the number of women in decision-making, but in practice there has been little progress and their ambitious targets are unlikely to be met.

## 9. Legal framework and laws

The Constitution of 1993 clearly reflects the principle of gender equality and Cambodia is a signatory to several international agreements including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Several laws and amendments have been passed, including ones to modify the restrictive national law on abortion. The 1997 Labor Code recognizes gender specific concerns and affords liberal rights to women in employment, inheritance laws and to counter human trafficking. A law to address domestic violence is being debated.

There has been significant progress in establishing a level institutional “playing field” for women and men. This has created a policy environment quite favorable to protecting the equal rights of women. But in practice, the situation is very different. Socio-cultural norms and a weak enforcement capability mean that these laws are rarely enforced, and the strategies are poorly implemented. Efforts to strengthen the enforcement capability of the country’s judicial and administrative agencies are critical if gender equality in basic rights is to be achieved.

## 10. Institutions and policies to promote gender equality

The Ministry of Women’s and Veterans’ Affairs (MoWVA) became a full ministry in 1996 and has a mandate to influence and guide the line ministries and lower-level administration units to mainstream gender. They have sought to influence the Second Social and Economic Development Plan (SEDP II) and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS). They also work directly with sectoral ministries and implement their own programs in areas such as legal and literacy skills training. However, gender-mainstreaming strategies produced by MoWVA are not reconciled with overall government strategies and have no associated budget. Gender mainstreaming in ministries tends to be donor-driven or carried out by MoWVA, and there is little ownership by the executing ministry. While there is a reasonably high level of awareness among ministries of the need to address gender issues, there is little capacity to put this into practice.

The Cambodian National Council for Women was established in March 2001 and is tasked with advocacy, monitoring and evaluation of laws, regulations and policies of the government from a gender perspective, and with monitoring compliance with international conventions. The Council consists of Secretaries of State from 14 ministries and thus has the potential to influence the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs within these ministries.

Through the process of developing the Socio-economic Development Plan and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy, MoWVA has had increasing opportunities to provide inputs to national strategies. Non-government organizations have also made significant inputs with respect to gender. However, the integration of gender in these documents is not consistent across all sectors — land rights, legal reform and governance, for example, pay little attention to gender. Maintaining the role of MoWVA and the NGOs in monitoring the implementation of the NPRS is going to be a challenge.

The Governance Action Plan published in 2001 by the Royal Government of Cambodia includes gender equity as one of five cross-cutting areas and identifies four broad gender equity objectives: 1) to implement and coordinate programs to promote the rights of women and children; 2) to influence various reform programs so that they can fully take into account the particular needs of women and children; 3) to recognize women’s contribution as full-fledged members of society; and 4) to invest in promoting the leadership role of women. Progress has been made in some areas, but not in the matter of increasing the number of women in decision-making positions.

There is still a long way to go to mainstream gender in the line ministries. In the face of competing priorities and demands, gender is often not high on the list, and much of the gender work tends to be donor-driven. MoEYS is the only ministry to have its own Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, and the skills and capacity in other ministries to develop and implement something similar are limited. MoWVA has created a network of gender focal points in ten ministries. However, these people are not in high-level positions, are not influential, and lack support and funds. There is no functional

mechanism in Cambodia to ensure that relevant gender issues are incorporated into the planning process and adequately funded. In addition, throughout the various ministries, inadequate collection and reporting of key information makes it difficult to assess the extent to which strategic plans are followed by adequately budgeted programs and the extent to which adequately budgeted programs meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries.

In addition to capacity and budget-related issues that inhibit the implementation of gender-sensitive laws and programs, there are also concerns about whether there is political will to make these changes happen. Some critics argue that the government will pay lip service to promoting women in the government to please donors but have resisted substantive change, and will continue to resist taking action on this matter.

## 11. Conclusions and recommendations

In just a decade, Cambodia has made significant strides in rebuilding the human capital and social fabric that had been so brutally destroyed. Social indicators for health and education have shown steady improvements, along with economic indicators, and the country has enjoyed relative stability in recent years.

However, there is a pressing need to create jobs for the rapidly expanding workforce—the “population bulge” generation—so they can contribute to the country’s economy. If these opportunities can be found, this generation will become the engine for Cambodia’s economic growth. In the absence of opportunity, they, and their children, will increasingly burden the State; and their frustrations will put the security of the nation at risk.

Proactive measures to break down the persistent barriers and constraints to women’s active and equal participation in social and economic development need to be implemented if the gains made to date are not to be lost.

Several important challenges to achieving gender equality in Cambodia are presented here, along with recommendations made to help prioritize the activities needed to address them:

### **11.1 *The challenge of economic empowerment increases as the adult population expands***

Formal paid employment opportunities need to expand rapidly to absorb the growing labor force. The labor force is increasing at a rate of 3.5 percent (or roughly a quarter of a million people) per annum, yet paid employment opportunities are severely limited and not increasing at a rate that can go anywhere near to absorbing this increase. The ability of the country to attract foreign investment will be critical, yet the latest indications point to decreases in foreign direct investment. A weak governance environment and endemic corruption are pinpointed as major disincentives to potential investors.

#### ***A broader range of formal employment choices is needed for both men and women***

As the agriculture sector shifts from subsistence to market-oriented production, both men and women are moving into waged employment in this sector. However outside of agriculture there have been relatively few new employment opportunities for men in their ‘traditional’ occupations which combined with rising expectations in a market economy, is a source of great frustration.

Women are taking on increased responsibility for contributing to household livelihood within their ‘traditional’ occupations, while still remaining responsible for housework and child care. Or they are migrating to seek employment in urban areas where they are highly vulnerable to exploitation. There is a heavy reliance on the garment industry for women’s paid employment – but this is fragile, and the future is uncertain. If the industry fails, any gains made in getting women into the paid employment sector will be lost. At the same time, the garment industry is not providing employment for young men, and employment in the traditionally ‘male’ public service sector has become a much less viable option for most young men. With demobilization, administrative reform, and privatization of services, public sector employment is expected to decrease. As unemployment is a key factor triggering social unrest and instability, the country faces serious problems if young people, particularly young men, are unable to find gainful employment.

#### Employment opportunities in rural areas are limited and unreliable

The majority of the poor live in rural areas, and while the agriculture sector has been the backbone of rural employment, it cannot continue to absorb labor force entrants as it has done, without significant changes. There are few alternatives for these people. Local labor markets are fragile and change rapidly and when local labor opportunities are not available, migration is the only option for many men and women – making them vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Local non-farm employment in rural areas, including opportunities for women, would help reduce rural poverty, mitigate one of the drivers for trafficking, and help to develop secure communities.

#### Emerging opportunities, but women have limited capacity to compete

Although education for women has a high premium in terms of job opportunities and wages, far fewer women than men are literate or have more than a primary school education. Although women with a higher level of education seem to be able to compete well with men with the same level of education, the vast majority of women in the existing labor force simply do not have the education they need in order to avail themselves of new employment opportunities.

#### Recommendations:

- *Improve governance to encourage investment and growth.*
- *Promote decentralized growth and expand efforts to develop employment opportunities in rural areas.*
- *Support the development of small enterprises and the informal sector.*
- *Develop strategies for upgrading the literacy and skill levels of women in the existing labor force.*
- *Address the social protection needs of female migrant workers.*
- *Expand monitoring of compliance with the labor code.*

## **11.2 Rural women do not have the access to resources and services that would help them reduce poverty and ensure food security**

Most of Cambodia’s women farmers do not have access to the resources they need

Formal employment aside, 80 percent of the increase in the employed population between 1993 and 1999 — 1.28 million people, of whom 53 percent were women — were absorbed into the agriculture and fisheries sectors. If this trend continues, then services (advice, markets, technology) and resources (credit, land, inputs) for farmers — most of whom are women — need to be significantly improved and expanded. As it is, women have considerably less access to extension services, land, or other resources, than do men. Women are more likely than men to be involved in agro-food processing, trading, livestock raising and other activities with export potential.

Basic services such as roads and water supply are a priority for poor women as well as poor men. Lack of basic infrastructure has a tremendous impact on society. Collecting water, especially, is not only a burden on women's time, but lack of clean water exacerbates health problems and figures heavily in maternal and child mortality. Better provision of water reduces the opportunity cost of keeping girls in school and better roads will improve access to schools and health care.

#### Recommendations:

- *Develop innovative ways to provide agricultural services, extension and information to women*
- *Provide women with improved, and secure access to land and natural resources.*
- *Continue investment in **locally-planned** rural infrastructure, so that both men's and women's needs are recognized and addressed.*

### 11.3 Gender inequality in access to health and education services is most severe among the poor, and in rural areas

Gender inequalities in education are worst in rural areas, and among poor people who are predominantly concentrated in these areas

At the primary school level there are no significant differences in enrollment rates between urban and rural areas, and girls' enrollment in the poorest quintile has increased faster than for any other group. There is, however, a much higher drop out rate for girls in primary school. Differences between male and female enrollments increase significantly at the secondary school level, and especially in rural areas. Rural girls must be kept in secondary school if they are to compete in the labor market and contribute to improving life for the next generation. A significant number of women over the age of 40 cannot read or write, and many more are functionally illiterate.

Current health services are not reaching rural areas, and especially to rural women and girls

At 437 per 100,000 live births, Cambodia's maternal mortality is one of the highest in the region, and improvements have been slow. Although utilization rates and spending on health care appear to be the same for men and women, when reproductive health is taken into account, women's needs are greater than men's and utilization rates should be higher. Women often cite costs and time for travel as a reason for not accessing health care. Thus, these services may need to be moved closer to where women live. Needed services include contraception, for which there is high unmet demand and without which, a second-generation population bulge will occur.

#### Recommendations:

- *Keep girls in primary school, increase girls' enrollment in secondary school, and provide non-formal education.*
- *Make health services affordable for poor women.*
- *Prioritize outreach using culturally appropriate methods.*
- *Try out new approaches to increasing the number of midwives in rural areas.*

## **11.4 Those that are especially vulnerable have little support and nowhere to turn to**

### *Transmission of HIV/AIDS is declining, but moving into the broader population*

Cambodian women and girls are increasingly at risk of contracting HIV. In a country where access to information, care and support, and treatment are low, and sexual risk taking behaviour of men is high, and gender dynamics in Cambodian culture make it difficult for women to negotiate condom use, women are especially vulnerable to contracting HIV.

The pattern of transmission of the HIV epidemic is shifting: prevalence is decreasing in all groups surveyed, but at the same time, groups such as married women and women in longer-term sexual relationships still remain extremely vulnerable, and the epidemic may still evolve rapidly in these groups. Mother to child transmission, and husband to wife transmission, are becoming increasingly important. Methods for prevention in these populations are limited, but are urgently needed.

Most Cambodians do not have access to ART or even to regular treatment of opportunistic infections such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, and toxoplasmosis. Caring for family members suffering from any of these infections places significant demands on women's time and resources, and results in deepening poverty in already poor households. Women have less access to treatment and are less likely to receive follow-up and counseling to ensure compliance.

Existing institutional arrangements may not be effective in addressing prevention as the epidemic moves from sex workers into the broader population.

### *Violence against women takes many forms and few services are available for victims of violence*

Cambodian women and girls are vulnerable to domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, and are trafficked for labor or commercial sex work. A weak and ineffective legal framework contributes to a culture of impunity, and inadequate support and services for survivors leaves little if any options for recourse.

Cambodian traditions do not condone violence in the home, either by parents towards children or husbands towards wives. Nonetheless, 23 percent of ever-married women over age 15 who were surveyed in the CDHS 2000, reported being physically abused in the home. Abused women have limited options. If they do not own land or other assets, they risk losing financial support for themselves and their children if they leave their husbands. If a husband is imprisoned, the wife loses his income for that period and it is unlikely that he will change his behavior on release. A draft law on domestic violence was still under review early in 2004, but had yet to be passed in the National Assembly.

Rape victims find it difficult to report rape or seek help: societal scorn and family shame resulting from loss of virginity perpetuate the notion that a rape victim is no longer a woman of value. Many victims of rape internalize the negative view that people hold of them and end up in commercial sex work. Although rape is a crime in Cambodia, perpetrators are seldom sentenced. Many families do not wish to involve the authorities due to the stigma associated with rape and prefer to protect their reputation and settle out of court by accepting a compensation payment.

Trafficking takes place both internally and across borders in Cambodia, which is a sending, receiving and transit country for trafficked humans. Conditions of poverty, social upheaval, under-developed legal infrastructure and weak law enforcement have contributed to the growth of the sex industry. Prostitution is not illegal in Cambodia, although it is illegal to facilitate it or profit from it. Unfortunately, those who are breaking the law are not those who are punished.

### Recommendations:

- *Provide care and support for vulnerable groups, including those suffering from HIV/AIDS.*
- *Develop a systematic approach to assist survivors of violence against women.*

## **11.5 Social, legal, and political institutions perpetuate gender discrimination and vulnerability**

Gender-related social norms and behaviors can have negative impacts on both men and women. Social norms, behaviors and cultural factors influence the transmission of HIV, the incidence of gender-based violence (trafficking, domestic violence, rape, sexual exploitation) and men's vulnerability to accidents. Socially prescribed roles and endemic inequalities persist despite an improving economic environment. Positive changes need not necessarily come from outside the culture. In any society, women and men typically have different views about norms and behaviors and finding a balance between those views can help reverse negative trends.

Inequalities based on traditional attitudes towards gender roles are clearly reflected in the jobs allocated to men and women and their status in different industries. Traditionally, boys have been encouraged to go to school so that they can qualify for highly desirable positions in government, hence the dominance of men in the public service and in decision-making positions. Education for girls has been seen as less important in Cambodia's predominately agrarian society where women work in the rice fields, take care of the house and children, and possibly work as a market vendor or produce handicrafts.

### Participation of women in decision-making is essential at all levels in order to bring about improvements

Women's representation is weak at all levels of decision-making: in government, in parliament, in the judiciary and at the commune and village level. Unless this is increased dramatically, social norms and accountability for gender equality are unlikely to change. Government has set ambitious targets for women in decision-making but are unlikely to meet these.

### Judicial systems and law enforcement agencies need to be held accountable through improved monitoring and reporting of their activities

Although a reasonable legal framework to uphold women's rights is now in place, weak law enforcement, impunity of violators to prosecution, and complicity of law enforcers increases the vulnerability of people who are poor and especially of women. In a corrupt environment, women are the least-supported by the legal system, and they have the least resources to bypass it.

### Recommendations:

- *Develop consensus on the meaning of gender equality in the Cambodian context.*
- *Introduce affirmative action policies.*
- *Increase women's participation at village level.*
- *Monitor the functioning of the legal and judicial system.*

## 11.6 Institutions still struggle to mainstream gender effectively

**Weak governance and poor financial management are a major constraint to improving gender equality**

The social and agriculture sectors are under-financed, and budgets that are allocated do not necessarily reach their intended beneficiaries. The irregular distribution of funds to service delivery points, especially in rural areas, reduces the effectiveness of services. This, and the poor compensation paid to civil servants, encourages requests for informal fees. Where services become expensive, or the opportunity costs are too great compared to perceived returns, women will be more affected than men.

**The mechanisms to integrate gender into the budgeting and planning process are limited in their effectiveness**

Targets –especially for gender balance – are inconsistent with planned spending. Realistically, targets may need to be brought into line with both capacity and available financial resources (World Bank 2002a).

**Mechanisms to mainstream gender in line agencies are weak and only partly effective**

There is still a long way to go to mainstream gender in line ministries. In the face of competing priorities and demands, gender is often not high on the list, and much of the gender work tends to be donor-driven. MoEYS is the only ministry to have its own gender mainstreaming strategy, and the skills and capacity in other ministries to develop and implement something similar are limited.

**MoWVA's capacity to sustainably mainstream gender issues in the policy process remains weak.**

MoWVA has taken steps to create networks in the sectoral ministries, but the gender focal points selected are in low level positions and not influential. While they have achieved much in getting a seat at the table in policy discussions, their capacity to effectively influence is limited by lack of capacity to analyze and monitor impacts of policies and laws, and to advocate for changes.

### Recommendations

- *Strongly support efforts to improve management of public expenditure, and increase accountability of service providers.*
- *Improve mechanisms to integrate gender into planning and budgeting processes.*
- *Improve collection and analysis of data to effectively monitor gender targets.*
- *Line Agencies should develop their own gender mainstreaming plans with monitorable indicators.*
- *MoWVA should continue to build its capacity to focus on policy analysis and advocacy to sustainably mainstream gender issues in policy processes.*
- *Donors should continue to work together, and in partnership with MoWVA, to improve coordination and the effectiveness of all their combined efforts.*