

Section 3. Gender

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1. Gender equality in Cambodia

1-1 Gender equality and women's empowerment

1-1-1 Enshrined women's rights

In this section, women's rights as enshrined in the Constitution will be reviewed. Of the 14 chapters, basic human rights are mainly stipulated in Chapter 3. Article 31, stipulating the equality of Cambodian citizens, reads, 'every Cambodian citizen is equal before the law, regardless of race, sex, language, color, religious beliefs, political allegiance, or wealth.'¹

According to Articles 24 and 25 of Chapter 3, which stipulate political rights, both women and men older than 18 have the right to vote, and to stand as candidates for elections.² The right of women and men to participate in the labour force is also guaranteed in Article 35. Taking into account women's life cycle, the following two points are specifically stipulated: i) women can take paid maternity leave and; ii) women cannot be demoted in terms of their work position due to pregnancy or childbirth. It is also stipulated that workers have the right to form and organize in order to improve their working conditions, and the right of access to various forms of social security in order to maintain decent living standards.³

Article 44 and 45 define women's right to ownership, the abolition of discrimination against women, and the rights of women and men in the family.⁴ Article 46 prohibits trafficking in women and children and soliciting prostitution for third parties.⁵ The article also laid the foundation for the Law against the Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Persons, which was promulgated in 1996.⁶

Article 46 refers to special support for women in ru-

ral areas, emphasizing that the disadvantageous situation of women in rural areas should be improved by expanding social services.⁷

As reviewed, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia strongly advocates gender equality, stipulating the advancement of the status of women and promotion of their rights in various areas.

Despite its good intentions, the status of Cambodian women lags behind that of men, as will be reviewed in the following sections. Broadly speaking, there are four reasons for the large gender gap:

- (i) insufficient development of legislation and capacity of legal enforcement agents (e.g. jurists and the police);
- (ii) insufficient level of awareness about their own rights on the part of women and men due to the limited degree of legal literacy education;
- (iii) socio-cultural trends to regard the protection and promotion of human rights as less urgent issue and;
- (iv) unchecked expansion of power and widening economic disparities, which lead to the worsening of human rights conditions.

1-1-2 Family and social structure from the gender perspective

Gender, or the socially constructed differences between women and men, is one of many features found in Khmer society. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to canvass the structural features of Khmer society, which have ramifications for gender rather than to debate gender as a gradient to dichotomize masculinity and femininity.

Khmer society has often been described as 'hierarchical'.⁸ Slight qualifications will be required, however, in order to contextualize this term, 'hierarchy,' which was originally used to describe the features of modern Euro-

¹ The Cambodian Legal Resources Development Centre (1998) p.9.

² *Ibid.* p.7.

³ *Ibid.* p.10.

⁴ *Ibid.* p.14.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.15.

⁶ *Ibid.* p.153.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.15.

⁸ Ovesen, J., Trankell *et al* (1996) p.34.

pean society. 'Hierarchy' here connotes a society consisting of a vertical chain of relationships between patron and client. In such a society, even if the subordinates belong to the same patron, they rarely share a sense of group identity or function as a community. Rather, rivalry intensifies among them in pursuing the patron's favour.⁹

Because Khmer society is hierarchical, Khmers tend to perceive their social location in relation to the others, a feature that is reflected on Khmer language. The most important stratifying factor is age. Terms of address such as *baang* and *paong* (literally meaning senior and junior respectively) are frequently used to address each other in conversation. Other stratifying factors include gender, wealth, knowledge, family background, political and economic status, religiosity and morality, to name just a few.¹⁰

The most important stratifying factor is Theravada Buddhism, and *Karma* more specifically: i.e. one is born as a destined being. In other words, one's status and being, whether one is a human or animal, are already determined by the degree of merit that has been accumulated in its/her/his previous life.¹¹ In Ledgerwood's words, this is an "extremely unequal society to begin with."¹² In her doctoral dissertation, Ledgerwood contended that gender and women's status in Khmer society should be understood within the historical framework of Buddhism as above. There is a clear gender division of labour in public and private roles for men and women in Buddhism. As men can accumulate merits directly by entering into monkhood, often Khmers regard men more highly than women, who cannot be ordained.¹³ Socio-cultural and religious factors also regulate gender roles in religion. For example, men tend to be regarded more highly than women as they traditionally received education at the temple and played the socially important role of organizers (called *achar*) for fund-raising for the temples and festivals. Women, on the other hand, traditionally did not have opportunities for education and lacked social experience as their mobility and residence were limited by parental control.

Under such a tradition, Cambodian children are brought up conservatively so that they do not break the order of "the hierarchical society". Girls are strictly trained by mothers to display the appropriate manner, behavior, and heterosexual relations as per the didactic women's code (*chbap srey*). *Chbap srey* stipulates that an ideal woman (*srey krab lakkana*) is shy and reserved, does not go out alone and moves quietly without making a noise with her silk skirt, but can identify the merits of her husband and provide him with tactful advice. *Chbap srey* also stipulates ideal female sexuality: that is women should remain chaste until marriage, and, once married, should be faithful to their husbands.¹⁴

Like their contemporaries in other parts of South East Asia, Cambodian women traditionally have much higher social status than women in China or India. There are some reasons for this. Firstly, inheritance is bilinear, given equally to male and female children. Secondly, at the time of engagement, bride wealth (*tlay tuk doh*) is given to the bride's mother by the groom's mother. Lastly, young couples tended to reside within the bride's compound (uxorilocality).¹⁵ Under the trinity of marriage, residence and inheritance, parents, especially mothers, consider daughters as important 'economic assets,' bringing into the family a male worker for rice cultivation and bride wealth. Parents, especially mothers who receive the bride wealth, are assumed to have played influential roles in selecting and endorsing the person whom their daughters should marry. The size of rice farms in the central plain region where Cambodia's population is concentrated, have shrunk due to population pressure and repeated inheritance. It is not so difficult to imagine that the shortage of arable land will continue to alter the meaning of family, intergenerational relationships between parents and children, and especially between mothers and daughters, in the context of marriage.

Cambodian women have decision-making power not only in housework and child rearing but also in a broad range of issues for resource allocation in reproductive activities. But their relative strength in reproductive spheres contributes to the formation of a gender bias:

⁹ Chandler (1993) p.105.

¹⁰ Ledgerwood (1991) p.4, Ovesen *et al.*, (1996) p.34, p.58.

¹¹ Ledgerwood (1994) p.21.

¹² Ledgerwood (1996) p.16.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.26.

¹⁵ Reid (1998) pp.146-148.

that is, that women should stay in the family. Generally speaking, there are no social or cultural restrictions on women's mobility in Cambodia. Women participate in economic activities as small traders, agriculturalists and industrial labour at a considerable rate. However, as the latter section illustrates, their labour is mostly unpaid, and hence invisible. In addition, women's participation in economic activities has hardly led to their representation in public decision making. Very few women could provide alternative women models other than as mothers.

1-2 Education

1-2-1 Compulsory education

In 1996, a 9-year (5 years and 4 years) compulsory education system was replaced by a new 9-year (6 years and 3 years) system. As Part II Chapter 2 Section 5. "Human Resource Development" illustrates, the higher the grade of the school, the lower the enrollment rate of females tends to be. In particular, secondary schools tend to be farther from home than primary schools, and hence the secondary school enrollment rate of females is clearly much lower. This is a nationwide tendency, especially in areas other than Phnom Penh. But in general, it is more difficult to receive education in rural districts. Among the multi-faceted factors, the following factors requires consideration towards gender equality for the low enrollment rate of females from the end of primary to secondary education.

The primary factors are social and cultural. Many parents believe that women do not need education, or they are afraid that once their daughters are educated, they become autonomous in their choice of partners. Hence, parents prefer to keep adolescent girls 14 years old or over (when their menstruation begins around that age) at home in order to avoid social and public places, including schools.¹⁶

The second factor is the difficulty of access to schools. As Wakabayashi and Kato point out in Part II Chapter 2 Section 5. "Human Resource Development," the number of secondary schools is less than that of primary schools, and therefore fewer students can gain access to secondary education. Even if they are lucky

enough to access secondary education, students have to travel longer distances. It is culturally feasible for boys to live with relatives or in 'dormitories' attached to the temple for secondary education. However, socio-cultural factors constrain girls to do so.

The third factor is that school facilities are not friendly to girls. In Cambodia, especially in rural districts, obtaining sanitary napkins is difficult, and some schools are not equipped with water sanitation facilities. As a result, the mobility of girls is constrained.

The fourth factor is the high cost required for education. Parents in Cambodia must pay for textbooks, school uniforms, and tuition to receive even compulsory education. If daughters drop out of school, the family will be able to benefit at least in the short term. One of such benefits is the direct savings they make from the daughters not pursuing their education. They can also provide the family with labour for wage and reproducing tasks, releasing mothers to allow them extra time or to engage in income earning opportunities. There are some other factors that influence the enrollment rate for girls, such as the scarcity of female teachers,¹⁷ and discrimination against girls by male teachers.

1-2-2 Higher education

The enrollment rate of females in higher education is much lower than that of compulsory education. The proportion of females among the students enrolled at the eleventh grade, the final grade before entering university, is 28.4% nationwide, 36.6% in Phnom Penh, and 22.8% in the other provinces.¹⁸

At the university level this declines to 15.8% of the total enrollment rate. The enrollment of females in teacher training courses accounts for 22.7%, and clearly, some areas have higher female enrollment rates, for example, in pharmaceutical studies (one area of medicine), with 40.9%.¹⁹

As a result, there are extremely few women who manage to gain higher education after going through so many difficulties. However, even women with professional qualifications face socio-cultural obstacles in advancing themselves as professionals. For example, a woman who has a degree in agriculture works just as a clerk in the Ministry of Agriculture, and she has never

¹⁶ Fiske (1995).

¹⁷ Japan International Cooperation Agency (1995).

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (1996).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.32-32.

been on mission to rural districts in her work. Another woman who graduated from technical college and is qualified as an engineer also works as a clerk. On the other hand, most men of the same age and the same educational background as these women work as experts in agricultural extension work or as agricultural engineers. As the society has changed from a planned to a liberalized economy, the official ideology of gender equality promoted under the communist government was removed. In the absence of alternative values, the indigenous gender values have surfaced as an obstacle to gender equality.

1-2-3 Vocational and technical training

Vocational training centers, technical training centers, and teacher training centers (for primary schools and nursery schools) are designated as the schools to provide vocational training in Cambodia. Some of them are run by NGOs such as the Don Basco Foundation of Cambodia and the Japan International Volunteer Centre. The duration of training is as short as one to two years. In vocational training and technical training centers, training regarding radio repairs, car repairs, welding, and woodworking is given. Skills in such training courses are traditionally considered to be masculine, and they do not attract women.

No enrollment of females occurs in training courses other than the teacher training centers. The enrollment rate of females in the primary school teacher training centers is 26.3%, and that in the nursery school teacher training centers is 64.4%.²⁰

1-2-4 Literacy and complementary education

We now turn to briefly review the literacy rate of adults aged 15 years and over. According to the 1998 National Census, the word "literacy" is defined as being able to read and write easy sentences. It is noteworthy that the actual literacy rate is probably much lower than that reported by the census, since many neo-literates who have just started learning were also counted in the census. The census shows that the gender gap in literacy rates is larger than the geographical gap.

Among the younger generation, the literacy rate is reported to be quite high because of increasing opportu-

nities for education. The gender gap among young adults is not so substantial, although there are some differences in age groups. This implies that very well targeted literacy education by age, sex, geography, time of the class, and contents of the class will be likely to bring about significant outcomes.

Next, let us review complementary education, which is a safety-net measure to provide education for adults who dropped out of education in the past. There are 6 such schools in Cambodia although they offer different course arrangements, such as full-time, partial full-time courses, and after-work courses. There are no females among the 1,124 students enrolled in these schools. The reasons for this have not been fully investigated yet. However, judging from the locations of these schools (provincial capitals: Kompong Chhnang, Kandal, Phnom Penh, Battambang, Kampot, Svay Rieng), it might be difficult for women to gain access to this type of education due to distance and time. Having reviewed the socio-cultural constraints in compulsory education, other than literacy and non-formal technical training courses, there are fewer opportunities for women once they drop out of formal education. Consequently, the limited educational opportunities narrow life options for women.

The low attainment of education by females will likely have mid- and long-term negative effects on the Cambodian society and economy as follows: i) The fertility rate will likely remain higher than is sustainable. ii) Accordingly, women will continue to shoulder heavy productive and reproductive burdens, be they paid or unpaid. iii) The low level of labour rates will delay take-off and constrain the development of industries that can otherwise enhance economic growth. This, in turn, will make it difficult to allocate resources for poverty reduction.

1-3 Healthcare and reproductive health

The health indicators of Cambodian women are one of the worst in the world. This section looks at the current situation regarding childbirth, family planning, AIDS, and malnutrition. At the same time, the health problems facing Cambodian women and their determinants will be discussed.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

1-3-1 Mother and child healthcare and family planning

The maternal mortality rate in Cambodia is reported to be about 500/100,000. Most child-deliveries (about 90%) are carried out at home assisted by traditional birth attendants who have not received formal training. The total fertility rate is reported to be 4.11, but usually it is much higher in rural districts.²¹ Family planning services are spreading gradually with the support of donors. People are not very much aware of family planning methods. Although the coverage of family planning services is expanding, the proportion of the population adopting family planning is still as low as 22%. Most Cambodian women (91%) do not want additional children, or they want to limit the number of children and to space the births. However, it is reported that this demand cannot be met because family planning services are not available (84%).²² As a result many women experience unplanned pregnancy. In many cases an abortion is the last resort for family planning, though no statistics on this aspect are available. Abortions are sometimes carried out by using unsafe procedures by those who are not qualified medical professionals, such as by massaging, vaginal injection of various substances, excessive alcohol intake, falling down the stairs, and manual suction. There is great concern about the negative effects of these methods on women's bodies.

1-3-2 AIDS

(1) The spread of AIDS epidemics

The spread of AIDS is one of the problems of most concern in Cambodian society. The Ministry of Health carries out quarterly sentinel surveillance on the prevalence and incidence rates of AIDS among risk groups. According to the survey, 39.3% of female sex workers, 7.1% of male military personnel, 6.0% of male policemen, 5.2% of tuberculosis patients, and 3.2% of women of reproductive age are estimated to be infected with the

AIDS virus in 1998.²³

(2) Determinants of the AIDS epidemic

It is generally believed that HIV infection started spreading when the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia began operations. This is because the number of foreign UN peace keepers, UN civilian personnel, NGO staff, tourists, and business people rapidly increased, and the organized sex industries started to expand. There are other determinants as follows.

The first reason is that engaging in extra-marital relations and frequenting sex establishments by men are culturally tolerated.²⁴

The second reason is that the sex industry is expanding even though it is constitutionally illegal to organize sex work on behalf of second parties for third parties. A survey by Population Service International, an American NGO, shows that there are about 10,000 brothel-based sex workers in Phnom Penh.²⁵ Although most of them are Khmers, some are Vietnamese, Thai, or Chinese, and there are some who came from Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union.²⁶ Women who work as beer sales promoters, *karaoke* singers, and hostesses at night clubs also earn income by offering discreet sexual services to the clients whom they meet through their work. If they are to be included, the scale of the sex industry is thought to be larger than normally assumed. It is easy to conclude that AIDS will spread further through sexual relations with multiple partners. Poverty in rural districts is one of the reasons for the expansion of the sex industry. In order to support the education of younger siblings and parents, or to meet the needs of unexpected illnesses in the family, women in rural districts want to earn some cash income, even though sex work is highly stigmatized. These structural factors suggest that the AIDS epidemic can be halted by simply promoting health policies and programs.²⁷

The third reason is that, as Akashi points out in Part II Chapter 2 Section 4. "Improvement of Healthcare," the infection rates of sexually transmitted diseases

²¹ Japan International Cooperation Agency Department of Planning (2000).

²² Long, *et al* (1995).

²³ National Centre for HIV/AIDS (1998).

²⁴ Brown (1997).

²⁵ Population Service International (1998).

²⁶ UNICEF (1995), Derks (1997), Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (1997), International Labor Office - IPEC Programme (1998).

(STDs) other than AIDS are already high, which increases the risk of HIV infection for women by five times.²⁸

The fourth reason is that the use of condoms is not popular enough among those who frequent sex establishments or those who engage in sex with multiple partners. At present, the “100% condom programme” is being implemented in brothels in Sihanoukville. In other provinces, the National AIDS Program gives information to female sex workers on how to negotiate condom use and provides sex workers with condoms. It is reported, however, that condoms are not always used in the sex industry due to ‘structural violence’: physical violence by clients or brothel owners, alcohol and drug abuse, and wage exploitation.²⁹

The fifth reason is that the transition to a market economy has stimulated the urbanization processes. The unequal development skewed towards Phnom Penh is inter-linked with rural poverty and urban migration for work. The younger age group, the majority being unmarried women, migrate to look for a job in the apparel, construction, and service industries.

Women and girls are traditionally under strong control by their parents, especially under their mothers, regarding sexuality. However, once they migrate and live in Phnom Penh alone, their social and sexual behavior become suddenly liberated. The determinants include: i) they are under increasing peer pressure, ii) the media and culture promotes the commodification of women’s sexuality, iii) there are many opportunities and jobs in which they can earn cash income in direct or discreet sex work.³⁰

Other factors that expand the spread of AIDS virus infections include the porous national borders with Thailand and Vietnam, unequal development skewed towards Phnom Penh, insufficient knowledge of the disease and protection measures against it, insufficient availability of condoms, and women’s reluctance to talk about sexuality.³¹ HIV infection is common in Indochinese countries, which form an economic sub-region. Therefore, a region-specific approach is required.³²

²⁷ Ministry of Women and Veterans Affairs (1999).

²⁸ Klement (1995).

²⁹ Asian Harm Reduction Network (1998).

³⁰ Chou Meng Tarr (1995).

³¹ Janssen (1996).

³² UNDP Bangkok (2000).

Table 3-1 Child Nutrition Problem in Cambodia

Districts	The rate among children aged 5 and under			
	Underweight children		Underdeveloped children in height	
	Moderate	Severe	Moderate	Severe
Boys				
Rural	0.523	0.189	0.597	0.364
Urban	0.426	0.141	0.497	0.280
Girls				
Rural	0.483	0.152	0.545	0.312
Urban	0.425	0.134	0.484	0.276

Source: Deolalikar (1997), p.16-17.

1-3-3 Nutrition

(1) Child nutrition issues

According to the Cambodia Socio-Economic survey, the rate of malnutrition among children under five years old is very high. For example, 34% of the wealthiest 20% of children aged from birth to five in urban areas weigh below the average. 21% of them are severely undernourished. Extreme weight loss is not caused by short-term starvation. Children in Cambodia are chronically undernourished due to socio-cultural customs. In Cambodia, there is no correlation between the sex of children and malnutrition, while girls are more undernourished than boys in South Asia.

Furthermore, about half of the undernourished children in Cambodia are concentrated in 4 provinces (Kompong Cham, Kandal, Takaev, Prey Veang) among the 21 provinces of Cambodia. These four provinces are closed to Vietnam, and the area of rice fields per household is not so large due to population pressure.

(2) Women’s nutrition issues

Women’s nutritional problems include anemia, vitamin deficiency, and calcium deficiency. Many women develop goiter due to iodine deficiency. It seems that Cambodian women do not have accurate knowledge about their diet so that they do not consume food efficiently, even though many nutritious food materials are

Table 3-2 Sex Ratio of the Employed Population by Employment Type and Industry

Industry codes	Employees	Wage Workers	Employment Style		Total Employed Population
			Self-Employed Workers	Unpaid Workers (Family-Based)	
1	105.14	162.42	220.04	29.05	3,668,566
2	1377.78	694.05	698.27	64.28	71,079
3	388.24	170.45	198.81	45.02	5,672
4	249.13	74.42	133.36	44.84	150,209
5	750.00	972.77	2071.43	1266.67	3,211
6	1593.75	610.38	1187.46	293.01	45,281
7	134.71	188.00	50.63	24.48	334,237
8	209.38	68.98	67.93	30.34	14,560
9	896.55	491.98	1895.22	218.29	113,576
10	520.00	173.95	201.67	28.57	1,406
11	466.67	211.11	484.05	244.44	2,927
12	N/A	1081.46	501.73	N/A	219,788
13	241.36	191.78	337.70	N/A	80,580
14	210.42	134.89	182.67	21.43	25,979
15	265.41	189.06	188.43	43.97	66,459
16	122.73	63.24	75.93	51.25	10,073
17	285.00	239.62	177.36	275.00	9,585

Source: Compiled by the author based on Priority Tables by the National Institute of Statistics (1998)³³

available. There are taboos regarding diet in Cambodia. Some of them can have negative effects on not only women's health but also on their children's. For example, breast milk after birth, which includes cholesterol, is discarded. Babies tend to be fed on breast milk or bottled milk for too long, delaying the intake of sufficient nutritional requirements from solid foods.

(3) Distribution of basic foods

Rice is a basic food in Cambodia, and rice production has been increasing at an annual rate of 11% since 1979. It is reported that Cambodia has attained self-sufficiency in rice with a 225,000 ton surplus. However, due to the logistical constraints against equal distribution of the surplus rice, poverty alleviation or ending undernourishment are unresolved. The obstacles include the following: there are no rice mills nearby; it is expensive to access the rice mills; people do not have enough cash to buy polished rice; there is no public transportation to the market; the market is not properly functioning; people cannot purchase inputs that would increase rice production.

Table 3-3 Labour Participation Rate by Region (Age Disaggregated)

(Unit: %)

District	Total	Male	Female
Cambodia	65.8	66.2	65.4
Phnom Penh	49.2	56.5	42.6
Other cities	60.8	65.4	56.9
Rural districts	68.7	67.7	69.7

Source: Ministry of Planning (1997) p.23

1-4 Economic participation

The Cambodian labour population, both male and female, is about 4,000,000 persons in total, of which 48% are men and 52% are women. Primary industry accounts for 75%, while business service and trade, 20%. Table 3-2 shows the sex ratio across industries and categories of employment. The shaded columns suggest that women tend to represent low-paid or unpaid workers in specific industries such as agriculture, retailing, and service industries. As Table 3-3 illustrates, there seems to be no gender gap in the labour force participation rates in Cambodia. According to the Socio-Economic Survey of Cambodia (1997), which compared the

³³ The industry codes according to the National Census are as follows:

1. agriculture, hunting, forestry 2. fishery 3. mining and manufacturing industry 4. manufacturing 5. electricity, gas, water supply 6. construction 7. wholesale trade and retailing 8. hotels, restaurants 9. transportation, communications 10. financing 11. real estate and related services 12. public services, defense, and related services 13. education 14. health, social services 15. other community services, social services 16. paid household workers, and related workers 17. foreign organizations such as embassies

Table 3-4 Labour Participation Rate by Age Group

(Unit: %)

Age groups	City of Phnom Penh		Other cities		Rural districts	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
10-14	4.0	4.2	8.2	12.8	12.5	15.0
15-19	17.6	28.9	38.4	58.5	48.1	69.2
20-24	62.4	60.5	83.6	78.7	93.9	90.4
25-29	82.6	59.0	94.7	69.2	96.9	90.6
30-34	91.3	55.1	96.6	70.6	97.0	90.0
35-39	97.0	66.9	97.3	80.5	96.4	89.9
40-44	96.5	64.4	96.9	76.1	98.5	90.8
45-49	97.8	60.3	94.0	75.1	97.6	88.4
50-54	89.3	52.8	96.4	72.1	98.5	86.7
55-59	76.3	41.9	84.5	62.2	94.0	77.6
60-64	59.2	35.5	76.2	47.1	83.9	67.2
65-	31.3	9.8	49.2	23.5	49.2	33.2

Source: Ministry of Planning (1997) p.24

labour force participation rates by sex and age (aged 10 years old or over), the proportion of men in the labour force is slightly higher than that of women in Phnom Penh and other cities, while there is almost no difference between the proportion of men (58.8%) and that of women (58%) in rural districts.

Further, the labour participation rate by age in the labour force of the above survey shows (Table 3-4) that the gender disparity is more acute in the young age group (between 15-19 years old), especially in rural districts, than in other age groups. This is because women drop out of school earlier than men when they become adolescents. The survey also shows that the labour participation rate in Phnom Penh and other cities is consistently lower than in the rural areas within the same age group. This is because opportunities for education are expanding mainly in urban centers.

Now, agriculture, retailing and wage labour will be reviewed, since female workers are highly represented in these fields. Subsistence level rice-farming is the main mode of production in agriculture in Cambodia. The supply of inputs (farm tools, draught cattle, stock feed, and pesticides) and the funds to purchase them is very limited. Microcredit services cover only 3% of the Cambodian population. The interest rate is reported to be extremely high, and the monthly average loan interest for US dollars is 20%. Further, agricultural extension services are nearly defunct and so it is very difficult to improve productivity.

Due to the transition to a market economy, wage

labour is increasing in rice production. On the other hand, the traditional gender division of labour is still prevailing, especially among nuclear families. For example, men's work tends to require more knowledge and physical strength, while women's work tends to involve repetitive tasks. However, the actual division of labor is not so strict and men and women have to carry out various tasks regardless of sex when they are busy. Women do more than half of the work in agriculture due to the fact that many men were killed during the civil war. However, male labor is regarded to have high market value, remuneration for female labor is only one-third to half of male labor. Gender disparity in wages worsens the economic status of women in rural districts, which imposes further constraints upon female-headed households which lack male labour.³⁴

Traditionally, men and women have equal rights to own and occupy land. They also have equal rights to inherit land. However, in the land division in the late 1980s, male names were registered on the land title documents, resulting in the refusal by husbands to divide the land with wives at the time of divorce. The land was also allocated according to the number of adults in a household, so the size of land allocated to female-headed households is quite small. As a result, their productivity remains low. The cases of farmers who have had to give up their ownership of land due to debt or family health problems are described in the section on rural development. If this happens to the female-headed households that have no social support,

³⁴ Ministry of Women's Affairs (1995).

much harder economic hardship can be expected.

Women are not recognized as the main targets of technical training or technical extension services, despite their active participation in agricultural production. The Ministry of Agriculture has traditionally overlooked women who engaged in agriculture. The proportion of female extension workers in agriculture extension services is also extremely low. This is due to the fact that female enrollment in agricultural skills training schools is low, and the female enrollment rate even in compulsory education is low. There is also a widely shared belief that this work, which requires visits to many places, is culturally inappropriate for unmarried women and is impossible for married women with children due to their lack of mobility.³⁵

Freshwater fish accounts for up to about 60% of the protein intake of Cambodian people. Most freshwater fish are caught in inland waters, such as Tonle Sap Lake, the Mekong River, and rice fields. Around November, when the direction of the wind changes, the large scale net fishing starts in Tonle Sap Lake. Bidding for fishing rights is required for this fishing. At the same time, small scale fishing is also carried out in the lake by families. In most cases, the fishers are men who handle the boats, cast the fishnets, and gather the fish. Women process the fish and act as brokers or retailers. The freshwater fish is processed into *prahok*, which is salted and fermented fish, or into *tlay giat*, which is marinated and dried under the sun. These processed fish, as well as fresh fish, are marketed domestically and also exported to ASEAN countries.

Women represent the major labour force not only primary industries but also in retail sales, especially of food and clothing. These industries are mostly family-owned, small-scale industries that cater to the needs of customers in Cambodia, and make a profit by trading imported goods or domestic primary products. There are many traders promoting similar products at similar locations. Hence, they cannot make much profit due to oversupply. When they are compared with the Chinese or Sino-Khmers, who have established associations based on their place of origin and language and Chams (a minority following Sunni Islam), that have a manage-

ment style and mutual aid system, the Khmer business style requires substantial improvement to survive the current economic environment. Very few Khmer entrepreneurs, male or female, can start up a business after careful appraisal of the consumer market in Cambodia and in the region.

Khmer women entrepreneurs face a broad range of problems. They not only lack confidence and knowledge of management, business know-how, or market development, but also have limited access to capital. Compared to the Chinese or Sino-Khmers who have mutual aid systems for raising funds among themselves, most Khmer women do not have such community networks. Accordingly, they have few opportunities to expand their business. Especially when they are raising small children, they cannot travel far from home freely or cannot afford any time to improve their skills and knowledge. These constraints limit their choices for making profit to only a few trading opportunities, including selling cheap products that have a short life cycle.³⁶

Cambodian women also participate in the wage labour force. While a system for gathering statistics on labour needs further improvement in Cambodia, the statistics available from the Ministry of Labour in 1998 show that employment opportunities for about 135,000 persons have been created so far just in the apparel industry.³⁷ According to the Labour Code of 1996, the minimum wage is set at US\$40.³⁸ However, about 30% of female workers in the apparel industry receive less than the legal minimum wage. Since about half of the workers receive only 40 dollars or less, life in Phnom Penh immediately after migration is difficult. It is estimated about 9% of the female garment factory workers also engage in paid sex work.³⁹ The proportion of the workforce organized for collective bargaining (trade unions) is as low as 30% among the women in garment factories, and most of them are rank-and-file members, while men tend to occupy managerial posts in the unions.

These workers share an increasing level of dissatisfaction, that the current level of wages cannot even satisfy basic needs. However, the four trade unions do not

³⁵ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Ibid.*

³⁶ Aafjes and Athreya (1996).

³⁷ Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour (1998).

³⁸ Cambodian Legal Resources Development Centre (1996).

³⁹ Results of a survey conducted by the author.

resonate each other and actions are not synchronized. The tripartite Labour Advisory Committee, which consists of the Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia (GMAC), the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation, and the Trade Unions, requires greater efforts for better functioning. There is no training course for apparel workers other than that by the GMAC-Garment Centre, which is supported by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (renamed the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), Government of Japan. This results in low morale among workers and slow improvement in their skills. The items and the amount of production are largely determined by the import quota, bilaterally given, under the Generalized System of Preferences and its associated conditions required by importing countries (mainly the US). These conditions include the protection and improvement of the basic human rights of workers and tightening the control of drug trafficking. In addition to the above import quota, the level of factory production is also influenced by allocation of the import quotas through tenders organized by the Ministry of Commerce and subsequent arrangement of sub-contracts by factories. All these factors constrain employment in factories, and makes it unstable. As in other Asian countries, in the past women were employed as low-paid workers clustered mainly around sewing work, where little technological innovation can be expected. Accordingly, negative effects such as unstable employment and low wages are evident.⁴⁰

Women are also employed at a higher rate than men as sales promoters of beer or tobacco. However, their working conditions are more or less the same as in the apparel industry. Overtime work, violence by male customers or restaurant owners, forced prostitution, and sexual harassment are frequently reported. The Labour Code of 1996 guarantees gender equality in employment and wages. However, women's wages are considerably lower than men's, with the exception of a few workplaces such as the government and military. Both men and women tend to think that male labour has a higher market value with regard to its quantitative and qualitative value than female labour. This 'justifies' the low level of women's wages leading to a vicious circle.⁴¹

Under the previous regime, it was easier for women to participate in economic activities because childcare was provided in both urban and rural workplaces. Since the economic liberalization started, however, social services that were previously provided by the government have been abolished as part of the Structural Adjustment Programme. At present, the labour participation rate among women who are rearing children is extremely low.⁴²

Although the Cambodian economy has grown considerably since the rapid transition to a market economy, it is highly dependent on low-paid or unpaid work by women. The figures in this section focus only on women's productive activities, and reproductive activities are not taken into consideration. The actual dependency rate by sex is estimated to be higher among women than men.

1-5 Participation in decision-making in the public domain

1-5-1 Parliament

Female members account for about 12% of all the seats in the Parliament. This rate is about the same as that for female members among all the seats of both the House of Councilors and House of Representatives in Japan.

1-5-2 The Council of ministers

There are two female ministers in the Council of Ministers.

1-5-3 Regional governments

Most of the women in regional governments are low-ranking officers in the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs, Department of Education, Department of Health. There are few women in such important posts as governors or vice-governors.

1-5-4 Development Committees

At present, the Ministry of Rural Development is pro-

⁴⁰ Gorman (1997). Hall (1999). Nishigaya (1999).

⁴¹ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Ibid.*

⁴² Gorman, *ibid.*, pp.16-25.

moting the formation of development committees in order to reflect public opinion at the grassroots level. These committees are being established at all levels of regional government, such as provinces, districts, communes, and villages. According to a report by the Ministry of Rural Development, so far about 1,500 committees have been established, most of which include female members. Almost all of the female committee members actively engage in the gender equality component of development projects as executors or as their counterparts. They are making efforts to promote women's participation and to explore the potential contribution of Cambodian women.

2. Gender equality promotion

– governmental approach and future needs

2-1 Efforts by the Cambodian government

2-1-1 Internal structure for enhancing the status of women

(1) Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs

In the Royal Government of Cambodia, the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs (MWVA) is responsible for enhancing the status of women. The Ministry was restructured from the former Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) after the general election in 1998. The Women's Association of Cambodia, which was an organization for female mobilization under the socialist regime, was also incorporated into the MWA. The current officials of the Ministry are mainly from the Women's Association of Cambodia, but some are returnees from site 2 refugee camp. The ministry is composed of officials from various political parties. At present, the Minister is H. E. Mo Sok Huor of Funcinpec, the Secretaries of State are T. E. Ing Kanthaphavy of Funcinpec, and H. E. You Aye of the Cambodian People's Party, and there are eight Under Secretaries of State.

The objectives of this Ministry are as follows:

- To undertake advocacy towards the promotion of women's rights
- To increase access to social services such as those in economic development, healthcare, education and other fields in order to improve the living environment of women
- To improve the level of the techniques and skills

of women through education and training.

- To protect the roles and participation of women at all levels of national planning, reconstruction, and development
- To construct networks among women in order to prevent them from becoming isolated and to protect women's rights and benefits
- To appoint focal points and to plan measures and activities to attain gender equality

(2) Establishment of focal points in Ministries and the activities of Ministries

In order to accomplish the objectives of the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs, it has appointed gender equality focal point officers in each Ministry. The establishment of focal point aims to improve the status of women and promote gender equality within each Ministry's jurisdiction. The improvement of gender equality in a Ministry depends on whether or not its focal point officer is functioning well. However, the Ministries, including that of Women's and Veteran's Affairs, have not received sufficient budgets for their focal points. This implies that gender equality and women's empowerment have not received sufficient attention by the mainstream of government organizations, such as the Council of Ministers, which is the center of the decision-making process, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and other administrative organizations that should promote economic development.

An outline for promoting gender equality in the key ministries is described below:

In the Ministry of Education there is a committee that is in charge of women's education. Under the leadership of this committee, gender equality is being incorporated into all areas of the ministry such as compulsory education, higher education, and vocational and technical training. As part of measures to close the gap between men and women, the committee is planning to build women's dormitories and to introduce a school lunch program.

The National Maternal and Child Health Center of Cambodia, which belongs to the Ministry of Health is implementing a reproductive health project, in conjunction with the Women's Health Department in the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs (donated by United Nations Population Fund). This project is designed to have two functions: 1) the National Maternal

and Child Health Center of Cambodia, as part of the Ministry of Health, is in charge of standardizing family planning programmes and IEC materials and 2) the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs is in charge of disseminating information for women on family planning methods, motivating them, offering counseling, and implementing advocacy efforts. The National Maternal and Child Health Center also promotes maternity checkups and plans to establish mother and child health services that will cover all administrative units. The National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STDs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs and NGOs, is developing the "Women and AIDS" policy. Under this policy, the center is intending to improve women's knowledge about AIDS infection, and to strengthen activities to support care interventions.

The Ministry of Rural Development is promoting the establishment of Village Development Committees (VDC), as described above. The provinces, supported by donors, are being recommended to ensure that 40% of VDC members are women. In order to make sure that the environment is conducive to enabling female members to voice the opinions of women, gender training targeted at the female members of these Committees is being offered. It is also recommended that the head of each VDC also ensure that the opinions of women are respected. In addition, there will be enhanced means of participation in the decision-making process concerning rural development for the women and minority group members, who are usually excluded.

(3) Coordination of donor support

The Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs not only has the role of promoting female support projects in each Ministry, but also the role of coordinating the donor support. Before project formulation, the main donor missions are encouraged to visit the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs to receive guidance regarding the status of Cambodian women and its background. In order to coordinate effectively, the Ministry has frequent contacts with the National Institute of Statistics in the Ministry of Planning to obtain statistical data on the current status of women. It also conducts social research with provincial departments in order to disseminate qualitative data.

2-2 Policy and projects

2-2-1 Policy

The Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs designed a five-year plan for the Ministry after the new government was established. The Khmer version has already been approved by the Council of Ministers. There are three objectives in this policy:

- (i) To protect female participation in all stages of development in all sectors in order to improve the quality of life, alleviate poverty and eradicate illiteracy
- (ii) To share resources, information, opportunities and economic development equally between men and women
- (iii) To provide various measures and frameworks to overcome the constraints currently facing women

This five-year plan does not refer to strategies on how to achieve these objectives. In order to design the strategies in each sector, an inter-ministerial committee has been established, which is composed of the Prime Minister as Director, the Minister of Women's and Veteran's Affairs as Deputy Director, and the other Ministers as members. The 5-year-plan states that the detailed plan and promotion activities in each Ministry will be decided by the focal point of each ministry.

2-2-2 Projects carried out by the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs

Some projects of the Ministry are implemented through donor support, while others are functioning independently of such support. The following are the projects implemented by the Ministry:

- (i) Reproductive health information education-with the cooperation of the National Maternal and Child Health Center of Cambodia and the department of women's health (donated by the UN Population Fund)
- (ii) Microcredit services-managing a portfolio of US\$700,000 worth of microcredit services for women in rural districts provided by the department of economic development.
- (iii) Legal literacy education-promotion of legal literacy targeting officials of each Provincial Department of Women's Affairs, partly supported by the Canada Fund

- (iv) Literacy education and childcare-Thirty-two organizations are promoting literacy education in liaison with the Ministry of Education at present. Female core trainers from the Ministry of Women's Affairs are giving guidance to grassroots literacy trainers. Next year, the Ministry of Education is going to undertake the whole project.
- (v) Technical training-Through the women's centers, skills training and awareness raising are offered to women in rural districts. The training subjects include handicrafts making (silk, cotton, and woven mats), hair-dressing, wedding outfit, office skills, English, computer skills, Khmer literacy, information on family planning, information on AIDS prevention, the Labor Law, gender awareness, and so on. Some training programs are supported by the training exchange arrangements with the private sector, such as the apparel industry. Under this agreement the trainees are employed at the conclusion of their training. Other training programs are supported by private donors (Queen N. Monineath, Mrs. Bun Rany Hun Sen, and HRH Marie Ranariddh), NGOs, development banks, and other donors (APHEDA, Asian Development Bank, Church World Service, European Union, Australian Quaker Service and so on).

3. Donor support to enhance gender equality provided by donors, UN organizations, and International NGOs

There are many organizations promoting the status of Cambodian women, who shoulder the heavy burden of dependency at the familial level due to the long period of civil wars and the rapid expansion of the market economy. There was a strong sense of awareness among the donors that the national budget alone would not be sufficient to achieve gender equality.

3-1 Local NGOs that support Cambodian women

Most local NGOs that support Cambodian women evolved out of the former Women's Association. Under the auspices of UNTAC, the right to organize began to be recognized. Since then, these organizations started activities as local NGOs with direct support provided by donors. There are many local NGOs registered in the Co-

operation Committee for Cambodia. Among them, the groups that focus on gender equality are described below.

Most of them count on donors for their funds. Therefore, they function as implementing agencies. Most of them are in regular contact with the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs or implement projects in cooperation with the Ministry.

4. Direction of future support towards gender equality

4-1 Support strategy and future aid provided by the government of Japan

So far, the following three points have been outlined:

1. the present status of Cambodian women and the background factors, 2. policies and projects of the Cambodian government regarding gender equality, 3. Efforts by donors, UN support organizations, and NGOs regarding gender equality. In this section, Japanese aid activities are summarized, including suggestions for the future direction.

4-1-1 An overview of Japan's ODA in enhancing gender equality

There was strong recognition that support for women and gender equality are strongly needed in Cambodia due to the negative impacts of civil wars and the economic transition. Grant assistance for grassroots projects by the Embassy of Japan was provided during 1996-1997 in order to offer literacy education, health education, and skills training to women in rural districts. For example, four women's centers were constructed in the provinces of Kompong Cham, Kompong Chhnang, Kandal, and Kompong Speu, equipment was provided, and instructors were dispatched. These centers have offered opportunities for skills training to about 1,500 women through financial assistance from NGOs.

By dispatching various experts, the Government of Japan has assisted research activities on the status of women, human resources development, and the formulation of projects such as for the economic empowerment of women and health education. In 1995, project formulation advisors (for development and women) were dispatched. Individual experts (one with long-term appointment during 1996-1999, another with long-term appointment since 1999), other experts with short-

term appointments, and experts of developing countries were also sent to the Ministry of Women's Affairs. In addition, in cooperation with the Gender Equality Bureau of the Prime Minister's Cabinet, the Ministry of Education (renamed to Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) and the women's center of a local government (City of Kitakyushu), a human resources development project has been implemented for public servants. This year, a course aiming at the economic empowerment of women will start with the cooperation of the Yokohama Women's Association for Communication and Networking.

The Government of Japan is also financially supporting a community empowerment program, the "Project to improve the reproductive health of women in rural districts." This project offers opportunities for technical cooperation at the grassroots level through financial support to NGOs, offering legal literacy education, information on family planning, as well as gender awareness and leadership training for about 2,000 women in the province of Kompong Cham.

4-1-2 Issues in gender-responsive aid

JICA tries to take the recipient country's social and cultural background into consideration when it assists projects towards gender equality. In the previous section, the situation of Cambodian women was summarized and analysed. Based on this analysis, required approaches will be discussed here.

(1) Empowerment and the mainstreaming approach

Based on the overview of poverty and the status of women in Cambodia in the previous section, it is vital to increase the life-improving opportunities for women at the grassroots level as a poverty alleviation strategy in Cambodia. In short, the empowerment approach is required. On the other hand, it is necessary to appeal to the key decision-makers so that the Cambodian government and aid agencies can appropriately tailor their assistance to enhance gender equality. This implies that the mainstreaming approach will be required as well.

(2) Economic empowerment

Up to now, economic development has been achieved

in two ways. One is to invite foreign direct investment in order to attract labor-intensive industries. The other is to export Cambodian primary products. As a result, urbanization has accelerated, poverty in rural districts has been aggravated, and local industries have declined. More than half of the Cambodian population live in rural areas and it is vital to improve their situation. In order to increase income and job opportunities for both men and women in rural areas, it is necessary to promote local industries. To this end, it is also important to carefully look at the trends of regional and international markets and give strategic advice.

(3) Incorporating gender equality comprehensively

As discussed above, there are various aspects to poverty. If the participation of women is constrained, poverty will deepen in future. When short-term assistance to alleviate poverty is being considered, the following points will be required: 1) region-specific pilot projects will be implemented, and 2) gender equality should be an integral part of the policy discussions, especially with a focus on poverty alleviation and other sectoral activities as well.

(4) Consciously closing the gender gap

In order to prevent future poverty, it is necessary to intentionally close the gender gap between men and women in human development. More concretely, in the promotion of healthcare, education, labour, and industry, policies and projects that clearly advance gender equality should receive the highest priority.

(5) Human resources development

MWVA was the prime beneficiary of various JICA training projects for gender equality. Ideally, the current quota will continue and be expanded by incorporating the focal points of the other ministries in the future to assist in human resource development.

(6) Need for the establishment of a framework of cooperation among the stakeholders

As mentioned in the previous Section 2.2, NGOs that

support women and the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs were derived from the former Women's Association, which was a mass organization. Issues such as promotion of the status of women and gender equality are still regarded as being less important than other issues in the mainstream. In order to give high priority to these issues, it is necessary for all the following stakeholders in gender equality to build a close collaborative relationship. The stakeholders include, but are not limited to, the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs and local NGOs, the women's development centers, and each Provincial Department of Women's Affairs. It is also necessary to upgrade the decision-making level to the higher echelons of the government.

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