



UNITED NATIONS
CAMBODIA
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Gender Equality Deep-Dive for Cambodia

Common Country Analysis



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Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The report was written by Chris Hunter with guidance from Luisa Karst, Sophea Khun and Sokroeun Aing and input from the UN Gender Theme Group. The report was greatly enriched by consultation and key informant interviews with civil society organizations and advocates working to advance gender equality and inclusive development.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CEDAW COB	Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women Concluding Observations
CLFS	Cambodia Labour Force Survey
CSO	Civil society organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FDC	Fixed-duration contracts
GBV	Gender-based violence
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer and intersex
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MoWA	Ministry of Women’s Affairs
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprises
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
SDGs	Sustainable development goals
UN	United Nations



Executive Summary

The objective of this “deep-dive” into gender equality is to outline how the UN can support the Royal Government of Cambodia to build back better through integrating a gender equality and women’s empowerment lens in pandemic recovery plans, policies, and programmes. Cambodia is a party to all core international human rights treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. Acting on these commitments, the country has made important advances in gender equality over the past 25 years. The review of recent evidence undertaken for this paper demonstrates, however, that significant gender inequalities continue, creating barriers to women’s equal participation in the cultural, economic, and political life of the country and hindering inclusive and sustainable development.

Social norms and beliefs that restrict what women can do and be, and give higher value and more power to men, are still pervasive. The approved school curriculum was changed to promote more egalitarian gender norms. The Chbab Srei and Chbab Proh, ancient writings that spell out expectations of women and men, are no longer taught and lessons on gender and women’s rights have been added. However other school materials and the approach to teaching continue to promote ideals of the ‘virtuous Khmer woman’. Gender norms are also embedded in government policies, such as the National Childcare Policy which reinforces the idea of women as responsible for care of children and the household. Social expectations of women and men are evident in day-to-day interactions in workplaces and communities and are frequently cited as barriers to women taking leadership roles. Harmful gender norms, such as the idea that men are entitled to sex regardless of consent, directly contribute to gender-based violence. Changing gender norms requires comprehensive and sustained strategies that engage multiple stakeholders at all levels: households, communities, institutions, and governments. Working with conventional and social media can be an opportunity to promote egalitarian gender norms and reduce harmful content. Given pandemic disruptions to education, and the importance of strengthening human capital, there is also an opportunity to work with the education system to eradicate restrictive gender norms through changes in curricula, teacher training, and school operations.

Restrictive gender norms are reflected in the vastly unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work, with women doing, on average, 90% of that work. Substantial

proportions of men and women spent increased time on domestic and care work during the COVID-19 pandemic, although almost 30% of employed women reported that their partners did not provide any additional assistance. Climate change and disasters add to women's unpaid work in affected regions. In the absence of other supports, unpaid work may be transferred to elder women in the family or to girls, often with negative impact on their education. The need to balance livelihoods with unpaid responsibilities keeps many women in vulnerable work, and is a barrier to women expanding businesses, advancing in their careers, or taking leadership roles. Time poverty affects women's health and reduces opportunities for further education, community involvement or leisure. Although the burden of unpaid care and domestic work is one of the biggest obstacles to gender equality in Cambodia it is seldom addressed by public policies or development efforts. The national approach to childcare, for example, provides few services, puts further demands on women, and ignores the obligation of large employers to provide either childcare facilities or funding. Addressing these inequalities requires review and revision of current programmes and policies to recognize and address women unpaid work; redistribution of unpaid care work through public services; and changing policies and services to incentivize men's participation. Up-to-date time use data is needed to inform new developments and monitor progress.

Harmful gender norms are a root cause of gender-based violence (GBV), a human rights violation that negatively affects the mental and physical health of the victim/survivor and contributes to loss of income for women and loss of productivity for workplaces. One in five Cambodian women have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner, and more than one third of men report having perpetrated partner violence. Child marriage, which affects 36% of girls in Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri regions, increases their vulnerability to intimate partner violence and interrupts their education. The stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the isolation created through public health measures contributed to increases in intimate partner violence, increases in violence against women with disabilities from family members, and increased vulnerability to violence for women migrant workers. GBV also affects women and LGBTQI people at work and in public spaces. Female entertainment workers face particularly high levels of violence from clients, partners, family members and owners of entertainment establishments. There is no national data on sexual harassment, but smaller studies suggest that it affects even more women than domestic or partner violence. The National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women outlines critical steps to reduce and

prevent GBV but it needs dedicated human, technical, and financial resources and a robust process for monitoring and accountability. The UN could give priority to strengthening the legal framework and supporting improved implementation of laws; supporting availability, accessibility, and quality of essential services; and addressing violence against children as an issue of child protection and to prevent GBV in future.

The inequalities discussed above directly impact women's labour market engagement. A high proportion of women participate in the labour force (84.1%) and they are slightly more likely than men to be in informal employment. Most precarious is the situation of the 53% of women (compared to 41% of men) who, as own-account workers or unpaid family workers, receive no wages. Women contribute significantly to Cambodia's economy as owners of 62% of micro- and 26% of small- and medium-enterprises, but they continue to face barriers to financing and registration. Unregistered businesses were unable to access support during the pandemic. Surveys also suggest that job losses in informal employment affected more women than men. Overviews of the labour market show structural inequalities, with women over-represented in lower paid, less valued positions and under-represented in more senior and higher paying roles. This pattern is worst in male-dominated sectors, such as construction, and in agriculture where women make up more than 40% of waged workers but are almost entirely absent from managerial or professional roles. The gender wage gap is also biggest in male-dominated industries; in some industries the gap is small at the lowest paid levels but tends to increase at higher salary levels. Differences in education and experience account for very little of the gender wage gap, with discrimination being the main factor. The UN can contribute to equality in the labour market by supporting revisions to the Labour Act; assisting in the development of gender-sensitive strategies for transition to a more formal economy and for social protection; prioritizing microenterprises in MSME programming; and addressing labour inequalities as part of health system strengthening or similar initiatives in other sectors.

The under-representation of women in decision-making is another consequence of underlying gender inequalities. Improving women's influence over the decisions that affect their lives and communities is also a means through which women's interests can be reflected in development outcomes. Women in Cambodia have a moderate say over their own earnings and participate in most decisions in their households, although women with disabilities are subjected to more control by partners and family members. Women's

leadership in land conflicts and forced evictions has been high profile, with benefits to women as well as the communities but also risks. Women land activists and human rights defenders face violence and harassment and their leadership in these struggles has seldom translated into better access to decision-making power in the long term. Women continue to be significantly under-represented in management positions across sectors, trade unions, political parties and at all levels of government. The UN can support the government to implement strategies for equal representation of women, including by providing evidence on effective quota systems and the barriers women face as elected or appointed officials and as citizens. The UN can also incorporate strategies to close gaps in women's leadership in sectoral programming and facilitate women human rights defenders in their immediate struggles and to transition into decision-making roles.

The UN in Cambodia is uniquely positioned to advance gender equality while supporting the socio-economic recovery from the COVID-19 and promoting the achievement of the SDGs. Ways forward, that address these gender inequalities and others, include:

1. UNCT and UN agencies develop, resource, and implement strategies to promote gender equality through their management, operations, and functions. This has a three-fold effect: contributing directly to reducing inequalities (now and for future generations), setting an example, and generating knowledge.
2. Support the RGC to fulfill its obligations under CEDAW and invest in gender-equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development through: evidence, advocacy, and technical assistance to revise policies that have discriminatory effect; strengthening implementation and financing of policies aimed to reduce inequalities in government operations; and working closely with civil society.
3. Work with Cambodian researchers, academics and activists to generate evidence and data that will contribute to advancing gender equality.
4. Support civil society organizations and social movements advocating for gender equality and human rights by providing resources, creating space and opportunities, and providing protection.



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1. Introduction

The objective of this “gender deep-dive” is to outline how the UN can support the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to build back better through integrating a gender equality and women’s empowerment lens in recovery plans, policies, and programmes. To accomplish that, the paper summarizes five key aspects of gender inequality in Cambodia, identifying critical gaps in the response to these issues and highlighting essential considerations for a gender transformative, inclusive, and sustainable pandemic recovery.

Cambodia has committed to respect, protect and promote human rights and to prohibit discrimination through ratification of all core international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Cambodia also made a strong pledge through the National Commitments at the International Conference on Population and Development +25 (ICPD25) in 2019, committing to achieving the three transformative results: Zero unmet need for family planning, Zero preventable maternal deaths, and Zero Gender-Based Violence (GBV)¹.

¹ <https://www.nairobisummiticpd.org/commitments>

Acting on these commitments the country has made important advances in gender equality over the past 25 years and national statistics show reductions in many gender inequalities. Some of these advances are quite recent. For example, although gender gaps in education have been eradicated², women over the age of 30 are still more likely than men of their age to have little or no schooling and limited literacy³. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to slowing or reversing other progress, for example widening gender wage gaps and increasing gender-based violence. In addition, as noted in the gender analysis of the 2019 Census, “the aspects of gender inequality that can be analysed based on census data are not necessarily those that present the greatest challenges”(National Institute of Statistics, forthcoming, p. 142). Indeed, the quantitative and qualitative data reviewed for this paper⁴ demonstrate that significant gender inequalities continue with particular implications for women who face intersecting forms of discrimination, such as indigenous and ethnic minority women, those living with disabilities, LGBTQI people, and for women living in rural areas of Cambodia where gender inequalities tend to be larger (Evans, 2019). Structural gender inequities also constrain the opportunities for young girls as they transition through different periods of adolescence, affecting the next generation of women and the country’s development.

This paper argues that five issues are critical to address to advance gender equality and achieve the SDGs. **Social norms** and beliefs that restrict what women can do and be, and give higher value and more power to men, are still pervasive. These norms are reflected in the vastly unequal distribution of **unpaid domestic and care work**, which in turn constrains women’s opportunities and resources. Harmful gender norms are also a root cause of **gender-based violence** which directly affects a significant proportion of Cambodian women and LGBTQI people and has a ‘chilling effect’ on others, discouraging them from accessing certain spaces or standing up for their rights. The impacts of these core inequalities can be seen in many aspects of Cambodian life, negatively impacting **women’s labour market engagement** and their **representation in decision-making**. These

² By 2019, girls fared slightly better than boys on most education indicators except at tertiary level where women were still disadvantaged (National Institute of Statistics, forthcoming)

³ Assessments of COVID 19 impacts on education suggest it will widen inequalities based on disability and poverty, and that girls are more likely than boys to have either extra household chores or work that may reduce time for learning (The Cambodia COVID-19 Joint Education Needs Assessment Working Group, 2021).

⁴ This paper is based on a desk review of documents published by government, NGOs, development partners, researchers and academic institutions. Priority was given to documents published since 2015 to provide the most up-to-date account of gender (in)equalities. Earlier documents were used when they provided the most recent data (e.g. the 2004 time use survey) or critical insights (such as research into unpaid care published in 2011 and into men’s perpetration of gender-based violence from 2013). Data collected in Cambodia (in sub-national, national or multi-country research) were used whenever possible; global estimates were used when national data were not available or not comparable to other countries or to international targets such as the SDGs.

gender inequalities create vulnerabilities which are reflected in the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (and other shocks, such as disasters) on women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

Reducing these inequalities is the focus of SDG 5 on gender equality, and critical to achieving other SDGs. Promoting just, peaceful, and inclusive societies (SDG 16) is essential to progress on gender equality and other sustainable development goals. Recent analysis found that shrinking space for civil society in Cambodia “has already had negative impacts on development outcomes and is very likely to have negative outcomes for a number of the human development SDGs, including those relating to food security (SDG 2), gender and inequality (SDG 5 and SDG 10), and quality of work and workers’ rights (SDG 8)” (Schröder & Young, 2019, p. 31). Reducing corruption, another target of SDG 16, is related to reducing inequalities overall, including gender inequality. Research has shown that more hierarchical countries, with larger gender gaps, also had higher levels of corruption (Chan et al., 2021). On the other hand, corruption is a barrier to reducing gender inequalities, for example impeding women’s access to justice (Johnson, 2014; Szablewska & Jurasz, 2019) and affecting women entrepreneurs (see for example Soeters et al., 2020). Efforts to advance gender equality therefore need to address governance challenges such as those covered in SDG 16, and initiatives to promote inclusive and just societies need to recognize the gendered impacts of issues such as corruption and limits on civic space.

The next section analyses the five interconnected issues of gender (in)equality, summarizing evidence of the situation pre-pandemic, and highlighting ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has widened inequalities and/or created opportunities for more inclusive and sustainable development. For brevity, topics that relate to two or more issues are addressed in one place.⁵ The third and final section summarizes the UN’s comparative advantage and proposes overall strategies that UN agencies can take to support a gender-sensitive and sustainable recovery.

⁵ For example, sexual harassment, which is a form of gender-based violence, an aspect of labour market inequalities, and a barrier to women’s leadership is addressed in the section on GBV.



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2. Critical issues of gender (in)equality in Cambodia



Restrictive gender norms



Unpaid work



Gender-based violence and harassment



Labour market Inequalities



Representation and decision making

i. Restrictive Gender Norms

Social norms about gender (also called gender norms) are the social rules and expectations about what it means to be a 'good woman' or a 'good man'. Gender norms

uphold inequitable power relations that disadvantage girls and women and LGBTQI people. They are learned in childhood through socialization processes and reinforced (as well as contested) in families, schools, workplaces, communities, and media. Gender norms are embedded in and reproduced through institutions, for example through policies and processes of the state, as well through social interactions (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). This is not to say that gender norms are immutable: there are many ways in which norms are challenged in day-to-day life and through concerted efforts. In fact, this possibility of individual and systemic change is at the heart of gender-transformative approaches that strive to dismantle the foundations of gender inequality and promote equal rights and inclusive development.

In Cambodia gender norms and ideologies are often noted as an underlying cause of gender inequalities, but this recognition is insufficiently reflected in policies and investments. Many of the norms that still shape the lives of Cambodians today are codified in the Chbab Srey and Proh, codes of conduct for women and men that were developed over several centuries. Although the Chbabs are no longer taught in schools, they continue to be disseminated through families and other social institutions. These codes identify women as ‘head of the household’ and advise them “to maintain peace within the home, walk and talk softly, and obey and respect her husband” (Anderson & Grace, 2018, p. 216). In contrast, men are identified as heads of the family, bread winners, responsible for protecting women and making decisions. This creates a hierarchical relationship with men positioned above women (Lamb et al., 2017). Research has found that even women and men who have never heard of Chbab Srey / Proh hold views consistent with those codes, often quoting common proverbs that reflect the same beliefs (Brickell, 2011a). A 2013 study found that over 80% of women and men thought that the advice given in the Chbab Srey and Proh was relevant in Cambodia today, and even more that it was relevant for them personally (Fulu et al., 2013).

In 2007 the government, recognizing the role of Chbab Srey/Proh in maintaining gender inequality, changed the secondary school curriculum, removing the requirement for students to memorize the entire Chbab Srey⁶ (Anderson & Grace, 2018). In 2016 lessons on ‘gender and women’s rights’ were added to the social studies curriculum to promote more egalitarian beliefs and ‘comprehensive sexuality education’ (CSE) has been integrated into the health curriculum with national implementation planned for 2023. A

⁶ Although a shortened form of Chbab Srey is included in textbooks as an example of classical Khmer literature

rights-based approach to CSE aims to promote egalitarian gender norms and empower girls and boys “to achieve safe, consensual, egalitarian, mutually satisfying relationships and gender equality”(Vanwesenbeeck, 2020, p. 5)⁷. The potential of positive new curricula can, however, be undermined by materials, teaching practices or aspects of the school environment that continue to promote discriminatory gender norms. The textbooks that include gender and women’s rights, for example, also have chapters on the Khmer family that promote a subordinate position for women, assigning women to do domestic work and “take care of the husband’s honour” (My, 2021, p. 90). The Teachers’ Code of Conduct embodies the values of Chbab Srey, shaping the work of female teachers and informing approaches used to implement the curriculum (Anderson & Grace, 2018). As a result, even if students today are not explicitly taught to know and follow Chbab Srey / Proh, the expectations of what it means to be a ‘virtuous Khmer woman’ are still communicated affecting how girls are perceived by themselves and by boys and reproducing restrictive norms in the next generation.

The ideals set out in Chbab Srey/Proh also influence public policies which in turn shape the operation of public and private organizations thereby contributing to maintaining women in a subordinate position. The Draft Law on Public Order, as well as violating rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, is a glaring example of a policy aimed to reinforce restrictive gender norms, allowing police to fine anyone they deem to be dressed inappropriately, including women wearing anything ‘too short’ or ‘too see-through’.⁸ Civil Code Article 950, which prevents women (but not men) from marrying for 120 days after divorce, is another example of a policy that explicitly contributes to norms of women as subordinate to men. An example of a policy that indirectly upholds inequitable gender norms is the National Childcare Policy which, instead of redistributing care labour and costs from the family to the public sphere or between genders in the family, reinforces the idea of women as responsible for looking after children and the household (My, 2021).

Expectations of the ideal Khmer woman are also reinforced and negotiated in day-to-day interactions in households, communities and workplaces. Women entrepreneurs face negative judgements by their family (54%), and community (71%) when starting their

⁷ A rights-based approach, supported by effective teacher training, is critical. CSE focused on health risks and based on gendered assumptions reinforced the sexual double standard, undermined girls’ agency, and did not help prevent sexual violence (Vanwesenbeeck, 2020).

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/13/civil-society-organizations-call-draft-law-public-order-be-immediately-discarded>

businesses (UNIDO & UN Women, 2021) and others report limiting their sales because they cannot travel far from home due to reputational and safety concerns (Soeters et al., 2020). Women managers in green industries note that it can be hard to talk to their male colleagues because the “incompatibility between behaviours considered more feminine, such as empathy and kindness, and behaviours associated with leaders, such as self-confidence and assertiveness” affects the view of women leaders and contributes to prejudice in the workplace (UNIDO & UN Women, 2021, p. 11). Biases toward men as more strategic and suitable for leadership roles affect women across sectors. Women managers in the health system, for example, report that their voices are less respected and they have to work extra hard and achieve a higher standard than men in order to gain the trust they need to do their job (Vong et al., 2019). During consultations women leaders in government and civil society repeatedly described the impact of dominant gender norms on women’s self-perceptions and the ways that they are treated by others. For example, women emphasized their need to study issues more deeply before speaking out, so that they would not be judged as ‘silly’ or uninformed⁹ (while acknowledging that men are assumed to have something of value to say). A senior government official concurred that women are hesitant to demonstrate their capacity because they are afraid of being judged, observing that “in a meeting if women are proactive, they are afraid that people will judge them. If they are quiet, they don’t feel like they have value. It is a complex dynamic” (UN Women Cambodia, 2020).

There are other narratives for men that do not derive from the ancient codes but significantly contribute to gender inequalities. Over 96% of women and men surveyed agreed that “to be a man you need to be tough” (Fulu et al., 2013, p. 53). This, combined with many men’s belief “that they have the right to sex regardless of consent,” creates the conditions for sexual and gender-based violence (ibid p. 95). The following sections discuss the impacts of these gender norms in households, workplaces, communities, and governance institutions.

Changing restrictive gender norms is essential to transforming unequal gender relations in social, economic and political spheres of life. It is also a key step in improving mental and physical health for men and boys as well as women and girls and LGBTQI people (Gupta et al., 2019). Evidence on what works to change gender norms (Heymann et al.,

⁹ See Anderson and Grace (2018, p. 299) for the links between these statements and Chbab Srey.

2019; Jewkes et al., 2019; Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez et al., 2021) suggests possible priorities for UNCT support to a gender-transformative and sustainable recovery:

- Develop a comprehensive plan for how the UNCT, as a team and as individual agencies, can contribute to shifting harmful gender norms and include this in the next UN Cooperation Framework. Important steps for inclusion in the plan:
 - Assess how agencies may unintentionally be reinforcing restrictive gender norms in policies, programmes, or practices. Develop strategies to change this and promote egalitarian and inclusive norms within each organization and across programming.
 - Incorporate gender analysis in all planning and review processes (for UN programmes and in support of government or civil society) that includes identifying and revising provisions that directly or indirectly reinforce restrictive gender norms.
 - Identify programmatic opportunities to promote more egalitarian and inclusive gender norms across sectors and the mandates of different agencies, as well as through programming focused on gender equality or empowerment of girls and women.
 - Develop methods to measure and monitor how UN-supported programmes across sectors may be affecting gender norms; include these tools in review and evaluation processes.
- In line with CEDAW COB 23, support the government, in partnership with civil society, to identify how strategies to challenge harmful gender norms and discriminatory stereotypes can be effectively integrated into directly related plans, such as the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women (NAPVAW), and into sectoral plans where removing barriers to girls' and women's full participation is important to achieving development outcomes. UN support could include collating evidence on what works to change gender norms.
- Support relevant government ministries to convene discussions with social media companies and gender equality advocates to discuss strategies and accountability mechanisms that could reduce harmful content and online harassment while avoiding imposing restrictive gender norms or limiting freedom of expression.
- Promote efforts to counter restrictive gender norms in the conventional media, including through support for women journalists at all levels and fostering

opportunities for civil society to challenge harmful depictions of women and LGBTQI people.

- There is a need and opportunity to focus on strengthening the education system given that strengthening human capital is essential to inclusive and sustainable development and the serious disruptions to education during the pandemic, especially affecting poor children and those from marginalized communities. In this context, the UNCT could support:
 - An assessment of the education system to (1) identify ways that it can promote a more positive and inclusive learning environment, and (2) eradicate materials and practices that perpetuate harmful gender norms and gender-based discrimination.
 - Support recommended improvements that address teacher training, curriculum and school operations (including dormitories or other related facilities).
 - Support civil society partnerships and monitoring processes to ensure that CSE is implemented as a rights-based, empowerment-focused curriculum in schools and to reach out-of-school youth



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ii. Unpaid Work

Brickell (2011b) referred to the unequal distribution of unpaid work as a ‘stubborn stain’ on development in Cambodia and indeed the 2004 time use survey shows that Cambodia has one of the most unequal distributions of care work globally. Men’s unpaid domestic work averaged 18 min per day, the lowest contribution recorded in time use surveys from 75 countries. In contrast women averaged 188 minutes. The only country with a larger gender gap was Mali (Charmes, 2019). This fundamental inequality affects the health of Cambodian women and is an obstacle to their equal participation in the economic, cultural, and political life of their communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased domestic work such as cleaning, and care work such as assisting children’s schoolwork and supporting elders. In a rapid assessment, half of the Cambodian men surveyed had increased the time spent on caregiving, and 54% had increased their time on household work. Although women already did 10 times more unpaid work than men, 40% reported increased time caring for other family members, and 61% reported increased housework. Almost twice as many women as men reported increased intensity of work (defined as doing 3 or more activities at the same time). Interestingly, Cambodia was the only country in Asia-Pacific where employed women were less likely than other women (71% compared to 81% of all women) to report that

their partners were helping more with domestic work since the pandemic started (UN Women, 2020b).

Environmental and climatic changes also add to the burden of unpaid domestic work for some women. Droughts, for example, mean that collecting water and food takes more time, and disasters often increase illness in children and elders adding to women's care work (Tanyag & True, 2019). Qualitative research in Ratanakiri demonstrates how commercialisation of land through economic land concessions (ELCs) disrupted livelihoods that had allowed women to combine productive work with childcare, increasing women's overall workload and negatively impacting the next generation. Prior to ELCs, indigenous women supplemented household food supplies from nearby forests, taking their children with them and exchanging labour with other women as needed. With the loss of forests women need cash to buy food. They cannot combine childcare with work as agricultural day labourers so the responsibility for childcare is shifted to other women in the family, often children. "The existing gender gaps visible in education and literacy levels in Ratanakiri are being reproduced through generational transfer of care labour to young girls" which will in turn perpetuate marginalization in the labour market (Joshi, 2020, pp. 23–24).

Care responsibilities are also transferred to older women, contributing to what has been described as a 'triple burden' (General Secretariat for Population and Development, forthcoming). Most women and men over 65 live in households with their children, most often a daughter, and the older woman supports domestic and care work of the household, often as well as contributing to productive work and looking after her elderly husband. Other elders carry full responsibility for raising grandchildren whose mothers have migrated¹⁰ (Green & Estes, 2019; Lawreniuk & Parsons, 2017). As the Cambodian population ages, and life expectancies increase, there will be increased need for elder care which, unless addressed by gender-sensitive policies, will fall primarily on women.

As observed by Diane Elson (2017, p. 54), "to achieve equality in paid work, women also need to achieve equality in unpaid work." The demands of unpaid work prevent some women from participating in the labour force and keep others in vulnerable employment¹¹ because it is easier to balance with childcare and household duties than waged

¹⁰ Green and Etsy (2019) note that in many cases migration is motivated by the need for income to repay micro-finance loans; increased household debt during the pandemic (The Asia Foundation et al., 2021) may exacerbate this trend.

¹¹ Vulnerable employment is work for which no wage is paid and includes unpaid family workers and own-account workers.

employment. The Gender Thematic report from the 2019 census (forthcoming) reports that homemakers are the second largest working-age group that are not economically active and they are more than 5 times as likely to be women (11.76% of women) as men (2.14% of men).¹² Among labour force participants, the gender gap in vulnerable employment opens up after the birth of children (Gavalyugova & Cunningham, 2020). Unpaid family workers are more than twice as likely to be women as men and are in a particularly precarious situation, dependent on others in the household for any income (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

Carrying most of the unpaid care work also impacts women in waged employment. For example, women's wages flatten after having a child, while men's increase (Gavalyugova & Cunningham, 2020). Time poverty is also a significant issue. Women and men in Cambodia tend to work long hours, with more than one third of women and men usually working 48 hours or more per week;¹³ women add unpaid household work on top of these hours. Women entrepreneurs report that the burden of household responsibilities makes it difficult to attend day-long business meetings and reduces their opportunities for the networking needed to expand their business (UNIDO & UN Women, 2021). Similarly, women working as health providers or managers identified the challenge of balancing their domestic responsibilities and work requirements as a barrier to career progression¹⁴(Vong et al., 2019).

Social expectations that women carry most of the unpaid domestic and care work are also a barrier to women taking leadership positions in government, private sector or the community (Mith et al., 2020). This in turn affects the extent to which women's priorities and perspectives are addressed in decisions. For example, women in communities affected by disasters report that they don't have time to participate in the commune committee that makes decisions about how disasters are managed locally, let alone build the experience needed to participate in provincial or national governance (Tanyag & True, 2019).

¹² Students are the largest group of economically inactive people: 9.73% of the male and 8.58% of the female population over age 15 (ref).

¹³ In urban areas women average slightly more hours per week than men: 51.1 hours compared to 50.6.

¹⁴ Male health managers agreed that women – including their peers – are rightly responsible for household chores, demonstrating how that expectation is reinforced in workplaces, and how it advantages men.

Although the burden of unpaid care and domestic work is one of the biggest obstacles to gender equality in Cambodia it is seldom addressed by public policies or development efforts, as shown by the approach to childcare. Childcare services are few in number and inaccessible to most women despite the commitment in the Constitution¹⁵. According to a 2018 report by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) (referenced in My, 2021), only one quarter of children under five were enrolled in any type of preschool, including the home-based childcare program. The home-based programme, which has the widest reach, aims to educate mothers¹⁶ about effective care for children, and therefore adds to women's time commitments rather than redistributing childcare work. A provision under the Labour Law 1997 requires businesses employing 100 or more women to provide day care services or pay childcare costs but it is not enforced and was not even mentioned in the National Childcare Policy Action Plan 2014-2018. As of 2018 there were only two enterprise-funded day care centres in garment factories, and payments for childcare costs were most often 'milk allowances' that would cover only a fraction of the costs of full-time day care (My, 2021).

"The 'cleaning up' of housework injustice" (Brickell, 2011b, p. 30) requires gender-sensitive policies as well as concerted efforts to overturn the dominant belief that housework is women's duty. Implications for UN action to support a gender-sensitive and sustainable recovery, and inclusive development into the future, include:

- Updated time use data is needed to understand the current distribution of unpaid domestic and care work and inform strategies to recognize, reduce and redistribute that work. The evidence provided by a new time use survey (or including time use modules in other surveys such as the agricultural census or socio-economic survey) would help inform the policies and programmes of government, development partners and civil society organizations.
- Gender analysis or review of programmes and policies (of the government and UN) should include assessment of (1) how women's unpaid care and domestic work may be a barrier to their full participation or benefit and how these barriers can be addressed, and (2) the potential impact of the initiative on the distribution of unpaid

¹⁵ Article 73 says 'The state cares for children and mothers. The state organizes nurseries and attends to women without support who have many children under their care.'

¹⁶ The National Childcare Policy Action Plan 2014-2018 refers to educating 'parents and guardians', but it is implemented through village-based 'core mothers' groups, and 85% of participants are mothers (My, 2021 referencing MoEYS 2018).

work and women's time poverty.¹⁷ This is relevant, for example, for social protection programmes, skill development, health and nutrition services, etc.

- Support the government to further develop childcare policy, programming and infrastructure as part of an inclusive economic recovery in line with CEDAW COB 37c. Advocate that the government implement provisions of the Labour Act to ensure that larger workplaces offer childcare and consider incentives to encourage smaller workplaces (i.e. with less than 100 women) to support women's access to childcare services. Include financial support for elders providing childcare in social protection programmes.
- As a standard, and aligned with CEDAW COB 37c, UN programmes aiming to involve women should provide free, near-by childcare to enable women's full participation and set an example. Paid childcare also provides employment, contributing further to the well-being of that community, and recognizes the value of caregiving.
- Research how parental leave (in addition to maternity leave) could be designed to encourage male partners to participate in care of infants and young children, and also benefit women in same-sex partnerships. Support the government to develop and resource a policy based on the evidence.
- Services related to the health and well-being of children that require parental involvement (e.g. immunization, nutrition services, education, etc.) should be designed and communicated with the intent of reaching fathers as well as mothers and encouraging men to take on parenting responsibilities. At the same time, services need to recognize that women currently fulfil most childcare responsibilities and remove barriers to facilitate women's access.

iii. Gender-Based Violence and Harassment

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms, primarily affecting women and girls as well as LGBTQI people. GBV can include sexual, physical, emotional, and economic harm inflicted in public or in private as well as threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. It can take many forms such as intimate partner

¹⁷ This is essential for initiatives relating primarily to women or to women and men equally, but it is also relevant for other programming or policies. For example, some initiatives that aim to reach a population that is primarily male may be assuming that 'others' in their households (meaning women) can pick up the extra work to enable men's participation.

violence (IPV), sexual violence by family members, acquaintances or strangers, child marriage or sexual harassment.

GBV, of any form, is a human rights violation that negatively affects the mental and physical health of the victim/survivor¹⁸, contributes to loss of income for women and loss of productivity for workplaces¹⁹, and is a barrier to equal enjoyment of public spaces for women and LGBTQI people.²⁰ More generally, violence serves to maintain women in a subordinate position in the household, the economy and the community.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most widespread forms of GBV. About one in five working age women in Cambodia (21%) have experienced sexual and/or physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives; for three quarters of these women that included severe violence. IPV is seldom a one-off occurrence; more than 80% of women reported that the acts of violence they experienced happened multiple times (Fulu, 2015). The impacts of emotional abuse may be less visible but equally devastating and almost one third of women (32%) have experienced emotional abuse from a partner. Rural women faced higher rates of IPV than women in urban settings, and women in their late twenties or thirties report higher rates of violence in the last year than older women (Fulu, 2015). Child marriage increases vulnerability to IPV, reduces girls' education and future opportunities, and exposes them to the serious risks inherent in teen pregnancy. While Cambodia has made significant progress in reducing child marriage, there are groups of girls being left behind: as of 2014 more than one third (36%) of girls in Mondul Kiri and Ratanak Kiri regions were married as children (National Institute of Statistics/Cambodia et al., 2015).

Reports from men confirms that IPV is pervasive in Cambodia. More than one in three (36%) of ever-partnered men reported perpetrating physical and/or sexual violence against a female partner during their lifetime, and this was true across different ages, regions, and income levels. Men also reported particularly high rates of economic abuse: approximately half (53%) had perpetrated some type of economic abuse and one quarter

¹⁸ Two thirds of women who had experienced physical or sexual IPV reported that it had considerable negative impact on their physical and/or mental health, ranging from physical injuries to loss of concentration and memory loss, to having suicidal thoughts (Fulu, 2015).

¹⁹ The cost of sexual harassment of garment workers– in turnover, absenteeism and reduced productivity on the job – has been estimated at almost USD 89 million per year (CARE International, 2017).

²⁰ Research into sexual harassment found that 89% of all respondents (not just those who reported harassment) felt unsafe working or studying at night and 24% felt unsafe when using public spaces at any time (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014).

reported having economically abused a female partner in the last 12 months (Fulu et al., 2013).

While IPV appears to be the most common form of violence faced by women in Cambodia, 14% of women had experienced physical violence from a non-partner since the age of 15 and 4% reported sexual violence (Fulu, 2015). Among men aged 18 to 49, almost one in ten (8%) reported having raped someone other than a partner, most often motivated by their sense of sexual entitlement (Fulu et al., 2013).

Financial or other stress is not a cause of GBV, but it can be a trigger. For example, men who worry that they may not be living up to ideas of men as tough and as breadwinners may reassert their masculinity and male power through violence and domination of their partner or children. Increased levels of IPV experienced by women affected by land conflicts is an example. Research by CCHR (2016) found that over half of the 23% of women who identified as victims of domestic abuse had never experienced violence from their partners prior to the land conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic and public health measures to address it have been a significant stress on women and men in Cambodia. Mobility restrictions and school closures kept many families isolated together, potentially increasing women's exposure to IPV. A rapid assessment by UN Women (2020a) found that women's organizations in Asia Pacific had observed increases in many forms of GBV, including violence by family members (reported by 42% of CSOs), employers (35%), community members (33%), officials (25%) and others. At the same time, essential services were less available. Sixty-one percent of CSOs reported that the pandemic had reduced women's access to legal services. The majority of CSOs were also operating at reduced levels and 12% had been forced to close temporarily. Services such as health, policing and social welfare were also disrupted and preoccupied with handling COVID-19 cases (von der Dellen, 2020).

Women migrant workers are vulnerable to violence from employers and strangers as well as family members and their risks were increased by COVID-19. Women who migrate as domestic workers most often live in their employer's home: lockdowns resulted in weeks of social isolation, increased their vulnerability to exploitation and violence, and made it harder than usual for them to leave violent situations (IDS for SSHAP, 2020). Hotlines responding to violence across South East Asia reported significant increases in calls in the first months of the pandemic (ILO & UN Women, 2020). Returnee migrant workers

were vulnerable to violence during the journey home and in quarantine facilities. Fear of the virus being brought in by outsiders may have increased discrimination and harassment of migrant workers in their countries of destination and if they returned home (IDS for SSHAP, 2020).

Women with disabilities also reported that COVID-19 increased their risk. Pre-pandemic, they reported similar levels of IPV as non-disabled women but significantly higher levels of violence from other family members. More than half of women with disabilities reported emotional abuse, one quarter reported physical violence, and 5.7% had experienced sexual violence from family members (Astbury & Walji, 2013). Research by ADD International found that 40% of people living with disabilities had an increased risk of violence during the pandemic, with most of the increase in psychological and economic violence. The increased risk particularly affected people already at risk of violence before the pandemic, demonstrating how the pandemic and resulting public health measures worsened existing situations. While the statistics are not sex-disaggregated, 90% of the respondents were women (Christensen et al., 2020).

LGBTQI people also experience high rates of violence from family members as well as significantly higher rates of IPV (Salas & Sorn, 2013). Research with trans women across Cambodia found that almost 40% had been sexually abused and almost one quarter had been physically abused (Mun et al., 2016). In a survey, almost two thirds of LGBTQI respondents identified exclusion from families as one of the biggest problems facing them, 60% named harassment, 46% forced marriage and 32% physical violence by straight people (RoCK & TNS Cambodia, 2015).

Entertainment workers report very high rates of gendered violence: in 2018, 37.5% of women working in the entertainment industry had experienced GBV in the past six months. The violence included forced substance use (25% of women), forced sex (3%), physical abuse (21%), and emotional abuse (52%). The main perpetrators were clients (52.2%), followed by intimate partners (29.4%) and others (18.4%) including family members and entertainment establishment owners (Wieten et al., 2020).

There is no national prevalence data on sexual harassment, however smaller studies give some indication of the extent of sexual harassment in Cambodia. CARE (2017) found that 28.6 per cent of female garment factory workers had been sexually harassed in the

previous year and that 16.5% of women and 7.6% of men experienced sexual harassment outside the factory in that period. The harassment faced by men was different, primarily aimed at pressuring them to accept or participate in harassment of women. Public spaces and public transport are common sites of sexual harassment. A study by Action Aid (including women garment workers, students, sex workers and beer promoters) found that 22% had been harassed in public spaces, reporting an average of five incidents of abuse each (Cited in Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014). CCHR and partners (2018) found that more than 90% of trans women had experienced some form of harassment in public spaces, in most cases multiple times in the last year. There is currently no clear legal definition of sexual harassment in law, many types of harassment are not covered at all (such as harassment by a co-worker, or outside of a workplace) and the only recourse for victims is through a police report (Leang & Vibol, 2015).

Recognizing GBV as one of the foundations of gender inequality, the RGC has undertaken a number of steps to address it, however critical gaps remain. Several of these gaps are highlighted in the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women (NAPVAW) 2019 – 2023, however the human, technical and financial resources required to implement that plan have not been allocated. UNCT commitment to ending gender-based violence could include:

- Support the RGC, in coordination with civil society and development partners, to: prioritize most essential actions in the NAPVAW; allocate sufficient human, technical and financial resources to implement those strategies; and establish and maintain monitoring and accountability processes that involve all stakeholders. Lessons learned through that process, and a broad-based consultation with civil society including excluded and marginalized groups, should inform the next NAPVAW and implementation strategy.
- Within the priority actions to prevent and address gender-based violence, the UNCT could consider allocating resources and supporting the RGC to:
 - Strengthen the Domestic Violence law, in line with CEDAW COB 25b and the comprehensive recommendations of NGO-CEDAW.
 - Improve implementation of the DV law through adequate resourcing, training of police, prosecutors and judges, prohibition of mediation, and accountability mechanisms within the legal system and to civil society. Provide training to

- local authorities, particularly related to appropriate approaches to alternate dispute resolution.
- Adopt and implement comprehensive legislation to address sexual harassment in the workplace and in public spaces and facilities, in line with CEDAW COB 37d and g.
 - Strengthen availability, accessibility, and quality of essential services for victims and survivors of GBV including expanding access to legal aid, health services, access to psycho-social support and safe shelter, and ensuring the services are accessible to LBT women, women with disabilities and other groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination (in line with CEDAW COB 25c).
 - Develop a comprehensive strategy, adequately resourced and effectively implemented, to prevent violence against children (including through promoting positive parenting and addressing corporal punishment in schools), and to address the impact on children who witness violence against their mothers. These are issues of child protection and rights, and essential to prevent



iv. Labour Market Inequalities

Cambodia has high labour force participation rates for women (84.1%) and men (91%) (National Institute of Statistics, 2020),²¹ and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the country saw consistently high rates of economic growth. Although the gender disparities in the labour force are less than in many other countries, there are inequalities that need to be addressed to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth.

Overall, an enormous proportion of the working population in Cambodia is in informal employment: global reporting for SDG indicator 8.3.1 (proportion of informal employment by sector) show that 96% of women and 94.1% of men do not have employers who contribute to their social security and are not entitled to paid annual leave or sick leave benefits.²² Looking at work outside of agriculture, this drops slightly to 94.2% of women and 87.3% of men.²³ By February 2021, surveys tracking the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal workers found that 22% of women were unemployed compared to 13% of men (UNDP, 2021).²⁴ Most precarious is the situation of the 53% of women and 41% men who (as of 2019) are in vulnerable employment; work for which no wages are paid, including unpaid family workers and own account workers.²⁵ A COVID-19 impact assessment by UNICEF found that by March 2021, more than 30% of self-employed people had lost their job.²⁶

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are significant contributors to Cambodia's economy and to individual and household incomes. In 2014, 97.6% of MSMEs were microenterprises, 62% of which were owned by women as were 26% of SMEs (International Finance Corporation, 2019).²⁷ The Asia Foundation and partners

²¹ These statistics from the 2019 Census are for 15- to 64-year-olds and were selected instead of data from the Cambodia Labour Force Survey (CLFS) which captured labour force participation for everyone 15 and over and are therefore not comparable to other countries.

²² Although all data sources agree that most of the employment in Cambodia is informal, exact statistics vary depending on the methodology of the survey. For example, the 2019 CLFS reports 87.6% of women and 89% of men in informal work.

²³ <https://data.unwomen.org/>

²⁴ Consultations raised that some women garment workers were suspended from jobs covered by employment contracts, then rehired, by the same employer, as informal workers at lower wages and with no protections. If such exploitation has been widespread, and if employers are not held accountable, those losses of formal work may be long-term.

²⁵ Modeled ILO estimate for 2019, retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.EMP.VULN.MA.ZS?locations=KH>

²⁶ Sex disaggregated statistics were not provided.

²⁷ In Cambodia, micro-enterprises are defined as up to 10 employees, small enterprises have 11 to 50 employees and medium enterprises are up to 100 employees.

(2021, p. 20) note that women-owned businesses are concentrated in a small number of categories “including restaurants, street food vendors, beauty salons, souvenir shops, and so on,” many of which were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although women-owned businesses generally perform well, they are less likely to be registered, are under-served by banks, and lack of collateral as well as gender stereotypes create barriers to financing (International Finance Corporation, 2019). Only registered businesses were able to access government assistance during the pandemic (although only a minority were aware that assistance was available). More than 70% of non-registered enterprises had no information about benefits of registration (The Asia Foundation et al., 2021).

Structural inequalities are apparent in the labour market, with women over-represented in lower paid, less valued positions and under-represented in more senior and higher paying roles. As of 2016, women were the minority in every sector except manufacturing; in that sector, due largely to the garment industry, 60% of waged workers are women. Manufacturing and services appear to offer women opportunities to move into more senior and higher paid positions: women’s proportion of management in services is almost equal to their representation in the sector and they are ‘over-represented’ as managers and professionals in manufacturing.²⁸ By comparison, construction, trade and agriculture sectors confine women primarily to clerical, services/sales, and elementary occupations and impose barriers to women’s advancement. The proportion of women professionals in trade or construction is far lower than the (already low) proportion of women in those sectors and although women are more than 40% of waged workers in agriculture, they are almost entirely absent from managerial or professional roles (Gavalyugova & Cunningham, 2020).

Gender wage gaps affect the benefit that women get from paid labour, their access to other resources, and their position in society. The adjusted wage gap – comparing women and men with similar demographic profiles and occupations working in the same sector – demonstrates where women are being paid less than men for similar work, despite being equally qualified. In 2016, women and men earned almost the same in the lowest paid positions, but the adjusted wage gap increased at higher salaries. In the top quintile of salaries men earned 12% more than similarly qualified women. The unadjusted wage gap captures differences in human capital, inequalities in position within the

²⁸ Women hold 65% of these positions, compared to being 60% of employees, however Gavalyugova & Cunningham (2020) note that management positions comprise an almost negligible fraction of the total number of jobs in the sector, meaning that the sector provides few opportunities for career growth.

industry, and the under-valuing of predominantly female occupations compared to those dominated by men. By industry, the 2016 unadjusted hourly gender wage gap was the highest in sectors dominated by men: men earned 29% more than women in construction and 25% more in trade. In agriculture, where women have a higher share of employment the hourly earnings gap was 18% (Gavaluyugova & Cunningham, 2020).

Analysis by UNDP using the 2019 Socio-Economic Survey found that discrimination was the most significant cause of the gender wage gap. It also found (Sothea, 2021):

- Disparities in education contributed 6% of the gender wage gap.
- Differences in experience contributed another 14%. These differences reflect discrimination in the labour force, such as barriers to women's career advancement which limit their experience, as well as the impacts of women's unpaid responsibilities.
- Overrepresentation of women in low skilled occupations explained 4% of the gap (separate from the impact of education); this partly reflects gender norms that stream women into work that does not challenge social expectations.

Losses of jobs and income during COVID-19 have widened gender inequality in wages. A rapid assessment by Action Aid and BBC Media Action (2020) found that women in the informal section earned, on average, 34.9% less than men in April 2020, compared to a gender gap of 26.4% pre-pandemic. The Asia Foundation and partners (2021) also found statistically significant increases in the gender pay gap for waged workers between January and April 2020.

Textile and garment factories have been an important source of employment for women, particularly women with limited education and those from rural communities with few job opportunities.²⁹ Although the work is primarily formal, with benefits such as sick days, vacation and paid maternity leave, the over-reliance on fixed-duration contracts (FDC) undermines the benefits that women can access. There are reports of pregnancy-based discrimination, forced and excessive overtime, failure to pay medically approved sick leave and failure to pay promised bonuses; in all of these cases workers on FDCs have less recourse due to the insecurity of their contracts (Kashyap, 2015). Restrictions in the

²⁹ A recent gender analysis of the Cambodian labour force used provincial data as evidence that the increased availability of employment for low-skilled women in the garment industry may be contributing to girls dropping out of primary school or not continuing to secondary school at higher rates than boys (Gavaluyugova & Cunningham, 2020 Tables 7 and 9).

new Trade Union Act have impacted union support for female garment workers and impeded protest actions (Schröder & Young, 2019). The worst working conditions are in small factories that do not have an export license and therefore are not monitored by international buyers or Better Factories Cambodia.

The garment sector has been heavily impacted by COVID-19. By July 2020 an estimated 400 factories had suspended operations with the result that over 150,000 workers were, at least temporarily, out of work. Even when open, factories operated at reduced capacity due to decreased demand from international buyers, leading to a 17% reduction in workers' wages by October 2020. In April 2021 infection began to spread in workplaces; thousands of workers had to quarantine in makeshift dormitories and there were rumours of some factories cutting wages for workers for these involuntary absence (Lawreniuk, n.d.).

Priorities for UN support to a gender-sensitive recovery could include:

- Support revisions to the Labour Act to extend protections to informal workers including domestic workers and include equal pay for work of equal value, incentives for men to share unpaid care responsibilities, and clear prohibitions on workplace discrimination and harassment based on gender, SOGIE, ethnicity and disability (in line with CEDAW COB37 b, c, d and e). Strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms under labour law.
- Support the development of a comprehensive and gender-sensitive strategy for transition to a more formalized economy building on, and addressing gaps in, the National Employment Policy 2015-2025 which focuses primarily on promoting MSMEs and does not address gender inequalities, a social protection floor, or establishment of an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework (Leung, 2020).
- Programming with MSMEs should give priority to micro-enterprises and include supporting them to mobilize for social security coverage and to remove barriers to financing and registration as well as facilitating their participation in policy dialogues. Ensuring women are proportionately represented as participants and leaders.
- Support the design and implementation of gender-sensitive social protection programmes that support informal workers, including those in vulnerable employment and recognize the contribution of unpaid care and domestic work.

- Use opportunities of health system strengthening, or similar engagement in other sectors, to address labour inequalities in that system / sector (contributing to CEDAW COB 20c).

v. Representation and Decision Making

Women's ability to influence decisions that affect their lives – whether in their household, their community, their workplace or in national governance – is both an indicator of gender equality and a means through which women's interests can be reflected in development outcomes.

Looking at national averages, women in Cambodia have a moderate say over their own earnings and participate in most decisions in their households. For example, three quarters of married women who earn cash make independent decisions about how to spend their earnings and many women also manage their husbands' earnings. More than 9 out of 10 women make decisions about their own health care, either independently or with their husbands. Women have the least control over visiting their family, with less than one quarter able to decide independently.³⁰ There are however regional differences: for example, almost one in five women in Takeo have no say in decisions about their own health care, household purchases or visiting their family (National Institute of Statistics/Cambodia et al., 2015).

Women with disabilities are subjected to more control by partners and other family members. For example, partnered women with disabilities were more than 4 times as likely to have their activities and whereabouts monitored by partners than women without disabilities, and 2.5 times more likely to need their partner's permission to seek health care (Astbury & Walji, 2013). They are also significantly under-represented in civil society organizations: women with disabilities are seldom in leadership roles of women's organizations, and disabled people's organizations are male dominated (ibid).

Women's leadership in land conflicts and forced evictions has been high profile and often held up as an example of women challenging traditional gender norms. Women activists

³⁰ Although the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) looks into decisions about men's, as well as women's, health and income, it does not include a question on who decides about men visiting their families suggesting that men's control over their own mobility is taken for granted.

report that taking part in these struggles makes them feel “enthusiastic, strong, and brave,” and describe the sense of solidarity they experience and “the joy of collective action” (Hennings, 2019, p. 5). In other ways, the strategy of ‘women at the front’ may reinforce gender stereotypes and increase the negative impacts for women. Women are seen as more emotional and are encouraged to demonstrate their pain to build support and embarrass the decision-makers. At the same time, there is an assumption that women are less likely to be met with violence, so they can “shout strongly to the authorities” (Lamb et al., 2017, p. 1229). This may have been the case when women first stepped to the front of protests but it is not accurate now: one study found that up to 95% of women land rights activists had received threats from authorities, more than 70% had been harassed, and a third had been subject to physical violence (Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, 2016). The leadership that women have demonstrated during land struggles has not translated into better access to decision-making power once the conflict is resolved (Hennings, 2019; Lamb et al., 2017).

Women have tended to be more prominent than men as participants managing local resources, such as fisheries or forests, but they are a minority of paid positions (e.g. 42 out of 1200 park rangers³¹) and their representation in decision-making remains weak (Schröder & Young, 2019). In the economy more generally, women’s participation in management of workplaces also lags behind their labour force participation. Twenty-five percent of people with the occupation of managers are women. This matches the proportion of management positions held by women in government, although women are primarily found in deputy positions (such as Deputy Director General, rather than Director General) in central and provincial governments (Mith et al., 2020).³² In Trade Unions, women’s share of leadership is also much less than their share of membership, with women’s under-representation becoming even more pronounced at more senior levels (Nuon et al., 2011).

The health system reflects similar dynamics as the rest of the labour force: data from 2015 shows that women were one half of the health workforce but less than 15% of the leadership (Vong et al., 2019). Women are equally under-represented in key legal professions: in February 2020 women were only 10.2% of police officers, 15% of judges, 22% of lawyers, and 14% of prosecutors (Mith et al., 2020). This not only means that

³¹ <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50903504/guardians-of-nature-bold-and-brave-women-rangers-of-cambodia-stand-tall/>

³² This mirrors the hierarchical relationship established by the Chbab Srey and Proh.

women are largely excluded from roles that significantly affect communities and the country, it is also a barrier to women's access to justice.

Although Mith et al (2020) note that there has been some improvement in women's representation at different levels of governance, much more is needed. Women's representation at the National Assembly has increased to 21 percent, while female senators remained stagnant at 16 percent. Women make up about 16 percent of the senior positions in government, from Under Secretary of State to Deputy Prime Minister. The representation at local levels has also improved but overall representation for women is still very low. For example, only one out of 25 Provincial Governors is a woman, as are 8% of Commune Chiefs. Women hold 17% of seats on provincial, municipality and district/ Khan councils and just 14% of seats at the level of commune/sangkat.

Indigenous women face increased barriers to representation at commune level. Their lack of skill in written Khmer language, and other capacity limits, are common explanations for their exclusion from commune positions. Indigenous women, however, see these capacity gaps as the outcome of gender inequalities: they do not have the time, resources or mobility to develop skills in the Khmer language, and "the lack of literacy in a language that is not their own is often confused with a general lack of education, placing the women in the unenviable position of being considered ignorant, without skills or limited in knowledge" (Maffii & Hong, 2010, p. iv).

In Cambodia's system of proportional representation, political parties are gatekeepers to elected offices. Women's representation will improve when more women are included at higher places on the party lists. There is no quota requiring parties to include a minimum representation of women and while parties have internal policies, 'equality' seems to be interpreted as 25 or 30% representation and those targets are seldom met. The most common reasons given are that there are no 'competent' women who are sufficiently committed (i.e. without domestic responsibilities). As described by indigenous women, the outcomes of inequality become the reasons for excluding women. Changing party policies and strategies is difficult given the significant under-representation of women in decision-making roles within the parties (Kim & Öjendal, 2014).

Steps the UN could take in support of a gender-transformative recovery and inclusive development include:

- Support the RGC to set a positive example by developing a strategy and setting quotas aiming for equal representation of women in police, judiciary, and in civil service management, with women represented in primary positions as well as deputy positions, in line with CEDAW COB 31a.
- Provide evidence on effective quota systems and the resources needed to implement them successfully. Encourage the government to consider designing and implementing quotas to achieve more equal representation of women in local, provincial, and national governance in line with CEDAW COB 31a.
- Support government and civil society to identify and address barriers to women's effective engagement in governance as elected or appointed officials and as citizens, with particular attention to women facing intersecting forms of discrimination in line with CEDAW COB 31b.
- Initiatives to support health-system strengthening should address inequalities in at the decision-making level of health systems, and gender-sensitive measures for accountability to civil society. Similar initiatives could be taken in other sectors, particularly related to natural resource management and addressing climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- Facilitate the work of women human rights defenders; amplify their voices; support strategies to address violence and other negative impacts of their efforts and to build on their leadership skills to move into decision-making roles (in line with CEDAW COB 19).



3. Conclusions

The UN in Cambodia is uniquely positioned to advance gender equality while supporting the socio-economic recovery from the COVID-19 and promoting the achievement of the SDGs. The normative framework on which the UN is based provides tools for advocacy and creates opportunities to support and convene government, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in relation to Cambodia's reporting requirements. Specialized agencies present in the country can give effect to international obligations for gender equality in a range of sectors. The organizational capacity and technical expertise to work across sectors and thematic areas create many opportunities to address issues of gender equality in contextually relevant ways that could contribute to positive change for a wide diversity of Cambodians. The UN's history of working with the RGC gives it privileged access to government that can be used to amplify the voices and interests of groups at risk of being left behind. This also leads to one of the challenges facing the UNCT: striking the right balance between protecting that important relationship and pushing for realization of human rights that are often not in the interest of dominant elites. UN agencies can also work at sub-national and community levels, whether directly or through supporting gender equality advocates.

The main body of this paper proposed specific ways that the UNCT can build on its comparative advantage to address five critical areas of gender inequality in Cambodia. The recommendations below suggest an overall approach that cuts across the five issues discussed in this paper as well as other manifestation of gender inequality:

1. UNCT and UN agencies develop, resource, and implement strategies to promote gender equality through their management, operations and functions. This has a three-fold effect: contributing directly to reducing inequalities, setting an example, and generating knowledge. This could include, for example:
 - Develop strategies and set targets to eliminate gender gaps³³ in all levels of management and operations and ensure effective representation of other marginalized and excluded groups including LGBTQI people, indigenous and ethnic minorities and people living with disabilities.
 - Integrate an intersectional gender equality analysis in all initiatives. Involve gender equality expertise and apply gender-transformative design principles in programme development.
 - Recognizing how structural gender inequalities continue to constrain the life choices for girls, support a dedicated focus to ensure Cambodian girls and young women have equitable access to education and the workforce, and the specific vulnerabilities that jeopardize their protection and well-being are addressed.
 - Analyse UN budgets and expenditures to understand the extent to which resources are invested in gender-transformative, gender-aware or gender-unaware interventions.
 - Continue to invest human and financial resources to specifically benefit groups being left behind and reduce gender and other inequalities, including through support for gender equality advocates and women's organizations.
2. Support the RGC to fulfill its obligations under CEDAW as well as its commitments under ICPD +25 by 2030, and invest in gender-equitable, inclusive and sustainable development, through evidence, advocacy and technical assistance for:

³³ It has proven effective in other settings to target having no less than 40% and no more than 60% of women or men in a specific role or at a certain level. The exception is that programmes addressing issues of marginalized or excluded groups should strive for maximum representation of that population in staff and advisors.

- Revising policies and dismantling practices that actively contribute to gender inequalities
 - Strengthening policies that are not yet successful at reducing gender inequalities through revisions to the policies, investing adequate human and financial resources, building on evidence, and ensuring effective monitoring and accountability.
 - Reducing gender inequalities in the operation of government agencies and programmes.
 - Expanding and strengthening working relationships with civil society organizations working to end discrimination and promote equality. Improve policy drafting, implementation and monitoring through meaningful involvement of civil society.
3. Work with Cambodian researchers, academics, and activists to generate evidence that will contribute to advancing gender equality. This might include collating evidence of what works to create change on difficult issues; research into ‘positive deviance’ and the conditions that enable certain groups to overcome inequalities; studies that demonstrate the costs of specific inequalities; developing resources such as for intersectional gender analysis in specific sectors; or piloting innovative solutions to test and generate knowledge.
4. Support civil society organizations and social movements advocating for gender equality and human rights by providing resources, creating space and opportunities, and providing protection as possible and needed.



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