

# Gender Equality

## Traditional gender relations assign women a lower status than men

- Idealizes gender roles and behaviors are embodied in the Chbap Srey and Chbap Pros (the traditional codes of conduct for women and men). These codes give men higher status and authority as the head of the household, and exhort women to be faithful, modest and obedient and to accept their husband's behavior no matter what he does.
- Although most women no longer strictly adhere to traditional norms they continue to be very influential. For example, women are still expected to protect their families' reputation and honor, remain close to home and under the supervision of the other family members.
- Traditional norms for men, set out in the Chbap Pros, specify that men should not commit adultery, drink alcohol or gamble, consistent with Buddhist precepts that frown upon sexual activity (outside marriage in the case of laypeople), intoxication, and violence.
- However, these norms appear to be less influential on men's attitudes and behavior. In many men have multiple sexual partners, take second wives or mistresses, and engage in drinking and gambling.

## Traditional gender relations are reflected in contemporary attitudes and practices

### Parents continue to value investment in boys' education over girls

- Despite significant gains in primary education, girls continue to receive fewer years of schooling, and are more likely to be pulled out of school at the secondary level than boys.
- Parental attitudes are a major contributing factor to gender inequality in education. Parents continue to cite safety concerns and risk of girls forming romantic or sexual attachments as the main reasons for keeping girls out of school.
- Investment in boys' education is seen as more worthwhile, as boys are viewed as having a broader range of employment opportunities. Girls' labor is also considered to be important in the household, and older girls are less likely to attend school because they are needed at home.
- In the 2005 Cambodia Demographic and Survey, 45 percent of women said it is better to educate sons than daughters, illustrating the persistence of these attitudes.



### **Men have a greater say in household decision making**

- Although women traditionally exercised control over day to day financial decision making, men are considered to be the head of the family, and have a final say in decision-making, in particular about the and sale of valuable assets such as land vehicles and cattle.
- Most decisions are made jointly: 53 percent of married women decided jointly with their husband whether they should work outside the home, 58 percent of married women decided jointly whether to use contraception, and 65 percent decided jointly about large household purchases.
- Women exercise more independence in decision making about daily household purchases (79 percent decided on their own), their own health care (61 percent decided on their own) and visits to family and friend (29 percent own).
- Women continue to play an important role in accessing credit. 54 percent of women are aware of modern financial institution, while 15 percent have applied for a loan. While it is often women who access loans, they may have no say in how credit is used, and in some cases, may become responsible for their husband's debts.
- Older women, married women, and those with more children have greater financial control. Employed women and those in rural areas also have greater control than urban women and those who are not employed. Exposure to media and knowledge of legal rights is correlated with greater economic autonomy.

### **While women own more assets than in the past, they have less say in how they are used**

- More women own assets than in the past, with the exception of land. 60 percent of women own land alone or jointly, 69 percent own their house alone or jointly, and 50 percent own livestock alone or jointly .Of the 13 percent of women who own land independently, 65 percent can sell it without permission.
- Fewer women who owned assets independently could sell them without consulting other, and the number of women who controlled spending over household items fell between 2000 and 2005
- Communication appears to be limited in many marriages:56 percent of married women did not take often with their spouse about everyday subjects such as thing that happen at work or at home, what to spend money on or community events.

### **Women's domestic role is undervalued and constrains their participation in economic, social and political life**

- Over 90 percent of the time spent on household and family care is provided by women. on all days of the week women aged 18-60 three more hours of household work than men (3.3 hours compared to 0.3 hour)
- Women work longer hours and have less leisure time as a result of their domestic responsibilities. Women have 3.6 leisure hours on weekday and 3.7 hours on weekends compared to 4.2 and 4.4 hours respectively for men.
- Responsibility for domestic work limits where and when women can engage in productive work, and in community decision-making and planning processes. In addition, women are often engaged in productive and household work simultaneously.

### **Gender relations are shifting with new issues emerging**

#### **Greater awareness of women's rights is evident among many Cambodians**

- Greater awareness of gender equality and women's rights is apparent among. Many Cambodians as a result of recent media, government and civil society initiatives to promote women's rights and participation
- More women support the principles of gender equality than in the past. A substantial proportion of women, however, continue to believe that men should make important

decisions, women should not work outside the home, and it is better to educate sons than daughters.

- More younger and urban women support gender equality than older and rural women. Education marital status (being separated/ divorced, never married or widowed) and exposure to mass media are most strongly correlated with support for gender equality.
- 47 percent of men and 51 percent of women agree that men have different rights than women in practice. The main areas where men are thought to have greater rights are business and decision-making, social and sexual freedom, and freedom of movement, including to study and travel (IRL 2007).

**The changing economic base is impacting on gender relations with both positive and negative effects**

- Women's economic role is continuing to broaden, with women increasingly engaged in wage labor both locally and as migrant workers.
- Rural women increasingly perform both male and female tasks, assuming a greater burden when men are away from the household for work, are longer actively contributing to the household economy, or where women are widowed, divorced or separated.
- Migration is associated with increased freedom and mobility, however women who migrate for work experience significant social, and may face difficulties re-integrating into their communities.
- Women's expanding economic role is not always correlated with greater financial access or control, in particular for younger and urban women. The changing economic base appears to have a negative impact on women's control of financial resources and say in household decision-making by undermining women's traditional role in the household economy.



**Traditional social institutions, such as marriage, are changing**

- While many marriages are still arranged, more women are choosing their own partners. The proportion of women who met their husband on their wedding day fell by 25 percentage points from 43 percent of women to 18 percent of married women, with the proportion of those whose families arranged their marriage fell from 51 to 35 percent between 2000 and 2005.

- More young people in both rural and urban areas report that they have greater freedom to choose their own marriage partner. Some of these young people are marrying without parental approval, and many of these marriages are not formally registered.
- Many Cambodian marriages, while held in accordance with Cambodia tradition, do not have formal legal status under Cambodian Law. While underage marriage is illegal for women under the age of 16 (according to the civil code; the Marriage and family Law sets the legal age for marriage at 18 years) it is still common in some ethnic minority communities.
- The traditional practice of Khmer married couples living with the wife's family, which may have offered protection from domestic violence, is in decline. The proportion of women living close to their families dropped from 77 to 54 percent between 2000 and 2005.
- The practice of taking second wives and mistresses is widespread, in particular among men who can afford to support a second family. Although 74 percent of women and 78 percent of men think that men should be faithful, only 40 percent of 54 percent of men say that most men and men they knew only have sex with their wives.

### **Marital breakdown appears to be on the rise in Cambodia**

- Although only 3.1 percent of women and 0.7 percent of men are divorced or separated, family breakdown may be a more common occurrence than is reflected in national statistics,
- Domestic violence and desertion, including desertion due to second "marriages" are common reasons for marital breakdown. Desertion profoundly affects women and children's rights as women may be unable to obtain divorce, secure child support or resolve property title issues.
- Women whose marriage are not formally registered face even greater difficulties and may find it more difficult to get a divorce, exercise their rights and obtain a fair and just outcome in relation to child custody, the division of assets and spousal support.

### **Men's attitudes and behavior continue to reflect gender privilege**

- Gambling, sex outside marriage and use of alcohol and other drugs appear to be increasingly prevalent among men of all ages, economic groups, and in both urban and rural areas.
- While previously confined to urban areas, brothels and karaoke bars are spreading to rural areas. Both young and older men report considerable pressure from friends and other peers to visit sex-workers, especially when away from home. Young, urban and widowed or divorced men are more likely to admit to having multiple sexual partners.
- Women's unequal status makes it very difficult for them to challenge men's infidelity or to protect their sexual health. Most women men think a woman should be able to refuse sex with her husband if she knows his has a sexually transmitted disease or has sex with other partners. However women often say they are unable to negotiate safe sex in their relationship as they cannot deny their husband sex.
- Men are more likely to spend money on personal entertainment than women, including drinking alcohol, gambling and sex workers. Risks associated with these behaviors include increased transmission of HTV/AIDS from husband to, wife, divorce and family breakdown and movement into poverty for some households.

## Young men's attitudes and behavior are an emerging issue of concern

- Young men's involvement in gangs is a cause of concern for families and communities. Gangs are present in urban and increasingly in rural areas, and parents and local authorities are struggling to deal with the problem.
- High levels of tolerance and acceptance of violence and rape, including gang rape, are evident among young men, particularly groups of urban and educated young men.
- Use of violent, hard-core pornography appears to be widespread among young men in both rural and urban areas. Use of pornography is linked to increased incidence of domestic and sexual violence among both young and adult men. Young women are also increasingly exposed to hard-core violent pornography, which impacts on their self-esteem and increases vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

## The legal framework and policy agenda to support changes in attitudes and behavior needs to be strengthened to fully meet international and national policy commitments

- The CEDAW Committee noted with concern that there is no specific definition of the nature and forms of discrimination against women in Cambodian law which prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination.
- The Committee also expressed concern about strong gender-role stereotyping, particularly as reflected in the Chbab Srey, which legitimizes discrimination against women and impedes women's full enjoyment of their human rights and the achievement of equality between men and women in Cambodian society.



## Strategies recommendation

### Strengthen the legal framework to support increased gender equality

- Include in the domestic legal framework a definition of discrimination against women that encompasses indirect and indirect discrimination.
- Include adequate sanctions in the civil and criminal codes for acts of discrimination against women and ensure that effective remedies are available to women whose rights have been violated.

- Amend the new civil code to rise minimum age for women and men to 18 years in accordance with the Marriage and Family Law.
- Further strengthen the review of gender implications in the preparation of all law and policies.

### Mobilize broad-based support for the practice and gender of equality

- Implement a national campaign and work actively towards the elimination of stereotypes associated with men's and women's traditional roles in the family and in society at large.
- Revise educational curricula and textbooks to eliminate gender stereotypes.
- Increase understanding of the formal (legal) and substantive (in practice) equality of men and women.
- Widely disseminate information about the Marriage and Family Law and address the cultural and traditional attitudes and practices that perpetuate discrimination against women.
- Conduct a campaign specifically targeting attitude and behavior change among men, particularly young men.