

# Gender and Women Politics in Cambodia

Scoping study  
for the work of the Southeast Asia Program  
of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Cambodia

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October 2007

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## Acronyms

3SPN	3 S-Rivers Protection Network
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADHOC	Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association
BPFA	Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action
CCD	Cambodian Community Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEPA	Culture and Environment Preservation Association
CFI	Community Forestry International
CNCW	Cambodian National Council for Women
CPWP	Committee to Promote Women in Politics
CSD	Center for Social Development
CTN	Cambodian Television Network
CWCC	Cambodian Women's Crisis Center
DPA	Development and Partnership in Action
GAD	Gender and Development
GDCC	Government-Donor Consultative Committee
GMAG	Gender mainstreaming Action Group
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HBF	Heinrich-Boell-Foundation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KAFDOC	Kratie Khmer Association for Development of Country
KWVC	Khmer Women's Voice Center
KWWA	Women's Welfare Association
KYA	Khmer Youth Association
LICADHO	Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MoP	Ministry of Planning
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
PLG	Partnership for Local Governance Project

## **Gender and women's politics in Cambodia**

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SEILA	Programme for decentralisation, socio-economic improvement and local administration
Sodeco	Solidarity and Community Development Association
SSC	Social Services of Cambodia
TVK	National Television of Kampuchia
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAC	Womyn's Agenda for Change
WFP	Women for Prosperity
WMC	Women's Media Center

## **Background**

### **Women in Cambodia**

Cambodia has had several outstanding women leaders throughout its history. Queen Indradevi for example, the wife of King Jayavarman VII, is famous for her promotion of women's education in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. A famous scholar herself, she also acted as director of three universities thus supporting many female students (Inscription du Cambodge).

Despite of role models like her, the Cambodian society is a largely patriarchal and hierarchical system with strong traditional norms that assign higher status to men (USAID 2006). Traditional roles dictate that women are responsible for household management and family care, on top of the income work they are doing just like men. Although women widely manage the funds for household expenditures, men set priorities and decide when and how the money is allocated.

Female literacy rates have increased in the last years, but particularly rural girls and women over 15 years old still lag behind men (64% compared to 87%, NIS/MoP. 2004.) There is also a significant gender gap in terms of girls' schooling, which is greater in rural than in urban areas. Recent reforms have resulted in equality in primary school enrolment, but rates for secondary education have dropped drastically over the last six years to 17% for boys and 8% for girls in upper secondary grades. This is the lowest in the Southeast Asian Region (ADB 2007).

Women compose the majority of the economically active population in Cambodia with 83% over 15 years old and 68% of girls in the age group 15-19 working. Female workers are often employed in unwaged or low skilled family employment. The number of rural women engaged in agriculture increased from 35.0% in 1998 to 52.5% in 2004. They face a continuing threat of economic dislocation due to weak or non-implementation of the land distribution policy under the land law (JICA 2007). About 17% of Cambodian women, particularly aged 20-24 are most likely to migrate to work in the garment industry, as domestic workers, in the sex industry or in the tourism industry (ibid).

Almost a quarter of married Cambodian women have experienced violence in their families (MoWA 2005). At the same time, increasing numbers of women have been victims of human trafficking since the early 1990s (Licadho 2006).

Cambodia has a reasonable framework of national legislation and international conventions upholding human rights and women's rights, but implementation and enforcement are weak. Lack of awareness as well as women's relative lack of power increase their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Further, a culture of impunity tends to protect perpetrators rather than victims of violence and abuse (USAID 2006).

Women still remain largely marginalised in the political sphere in terms of influencing and implementing state policies. 19% of the representatives in the national assembly and 15% in the senate are women (MOWA).. Female representation on the local level has been successfully increased: 15% of the commune councillors elected in 2007 are women. Compared to the last elections in 2002, the number of female local representatives has nearly doubled (World Bank 2007).

#### **Cambodia Country Profile**

Cambodia continues to be one of the poorest countries in the world, in spite of an average economic growth of about 7% per annum over the past ten years. More than one third of the population lives below the poverty line. Eighty percent live in rural areas, about half of the population is under the age of 20. Social infrastructure is underdeveloped and only one third of the population has access to clean water. Women make up approximately 52% of the Cambodian population of 13.8 million. Maternal and infant mortality rates are amongst the least satisfactory in Southeast Asia (NIPH/ NIS, 2006).

## **Objective**

The survey has been conducted as a first scoping study for future decisions on HBF's activities in the field of gender issues and women's politics. The study describes different approaches and strategies employed by organisations working in the field of gender and women politics. It lists the major challenges the organizations face in their every day work and provides best practice examples in the field of women's empowerment, gender justice and change of gender perception. The survey also identifies potential cooperation partners and allies as well as needs and gaps that could potentially be addressed by the HBF Cambodia Programme.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative approach based on individual in-depth interviews. The research-team conducted 28 interviews with organisations and key individuals. The interviewees were selected through desk study of relevant organisations and their material. Eighteen interviews were conducted in Phnom Penh and 10 organisations were interviewed in the three north-eastern provinces Kratie, Stung Treng and Rattanakiri where HBF has put a regional focus for its Cambodia Program.

## **The Interview Partners**

Five different kinds of organisations and key individuals were interviewed:

- Organisations with a clear focus on women's rights and/or gender issues
- Organisations with a focus on human rights and social development and a cross-cutting approach towards gender issues
- Organisations with a focus on indigenous communities
- International donors with local gender related projects
- Individual resource persons

Two thirds of the interviewees were women, one third were men. Most of the interviewees were the executive directors of the organizations. In Stung Treng and Rattanakiri it was difficult to find female interviewees as most of the leading positions in the organizations were held by men.

## Goals and Strategies

### The National Level

Cambodia has signed several international agreements upholding women's rights. In 1992, it ratified the United Nation's "Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW). Cambodia's constitution of 1993 also includes an emphasis on protection of women's rights. Article 31 covers the right to equality before the law, Article 46 prohibits all forms of discrimination against women. In October 2005, the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims was adopted.

At the same time there are several laws in force, which clearly violate these provisions. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW criticizes that both the Law on Marriage and Family and the Labour Law include discriminatory provisions that directly contradict the constitution (JICA 2007).

In 1996, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) was established and mandated to guide the line ministries and lower-level administration units to mainstream gender.

Inspired by the Beijing declaration and the Platform for Action (BPFA), the ministry developed its first five year strategic plan *Neary Ratana* (2003 – 2005), which focused on "building women's capacity and the integration of gender perspectives into national poverty reduction planning". The second plan (2005 – 2009) states gender mainstreaming and participation in decision making amongst the major priority areas.

A Technical Working Group on Gender (TWGG) was set up in 2005 to pursue the strategic goals. Different to other technical groups, each ministry was represented.

The Minister of Women's Affairs formally requested her colleagues to establish Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups (GMAGs) in each ministry. The GMAGs should include both men and women from each department and should be chaired by the Secretaries of State. The task of the GMAGs was to prepare Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (GMAPs), including objectives and indicators both for policy and human resource management in the ministry (UNIFEM. 2006). Between 2005 and 2007, 21 out of 26 line ministries have established Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups. Nine ministries have developed Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (Eyben, 2007).

Until December 2006, gender mainstreaming on the provincial, district and commune level has been implemented through SEILA, the government program for decentralized planning (JICA, 2007).

Activities incorporated in the program include:

- cooperation with line ministries to mainstream gender into guidelines and local development policies
- cooperation and advocacy with municipal/provincial, district and commune levels to mainstream gender in policies and guidelines
- strengthening the capacity of all provincial departments to implement, monitor and evaluate mainstreaming of gender
- establishment of gender network with implementing institutions at local level
- advocacy with political parties and the Ministry of Interior to increase the number of women governors, deputy governors, district, and village chiefs
- preparation of prospective women candidates for 2007 commune election
- cooperation in training programs of new women members (Brereton, 2005).

Despite of these developments, several interviewees connected to the national activities criticized that there is “a lot of paper but little implementation” of gender mainstreaming and gender equality.

“Cambodia has made remarkable progress in establishing the institutional arrangements for mainstreaming gender equality objectives through the government and donor consultative machinery (...) but actual impact on sector policies and budget is still weak and a broader based constituency for changes needs to be developed, within government, among donors and with civil society” (Eyben, 2007).

Interviewees stressed they experience a growing understanding of gender issues in the ministries. But until now, gender knowledge would only reach sub-ordinate staff with little decision making power. Higher ranking officials would be busy with international cooperation partners and would not join trainings conducted by local NGOs. Some added that at least the level of 1. secretary staff is now involved and mentioned the efforts to involve all provincial levels. The staff that actively participates in the trainings has a positive influence in regards to gender awareness within the ministries.

The interviewees also mentioned that gender related laws have recently been drafted and adopted without thorough preparation. The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims for example doesn't include any penalties but only the option of civil action (e.g. interim orders to protect the victims).

The draft version of the trafficking law includes penalties from 3 years down to 4.000.000 Riel (1000\$) for the perpetrator, but 7–15 years for a motodup driver who guides the perpetrator. The education law introduces compulsory enrolment for the 1<sup>st</sup> class but no compulsory school system. Misjudgements like these are made by both foreign and Cambodian staff, the stakeholders stressed.

30% of all national civil servants are women; only very few are in decision making positions. 7% of the secretaries and 8% of the under secretaries of state are women (Brereton, 2007)

## **Goals of NGOs**

The goals of the interviewed organisations reflect their main areas of work. Stakeholders who target primarily women (Women for Prosperity, Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre, UNIFEM, WMC and Womyn's Agenda for Change), include gender as a main category within their objectives. They explicitly address the disparity of male and female status, participation, livelihood and employment opportunities. They focus on gender specific opportunities and restrictions in their activities both with men and women, perpetrators and victims of domestic violence, with young people or commune councillors.

Other organizations, which are mainly involved in the field of natural resource management, health and human rights, consider gender categories to very different extents. Interviewees working in rural areas, especially in Rattanakiri, stressed the serious threats the indigenous communities are facing in regard to land grabbing and loss of property. When asked for their (gender specific) goals, they would mention the survival of indigenous people and the securing of livelihood. "Being faced with the desperate situation of indigenous people, gender issues sometimes appear to be a luxury", a stakeholder expressed.

Gender specific approaches were mentioned particularly in connection with health issues, domestic violence, participation and education.

The following objectives were listed by interviewees in the rural areas:

- Free and fair access to resources for women
- Full participation of women (especially women from the highlands)
- Equality of men and women
- Equal participation in all fields of society
- Crack down on domestic violence
- Placing women candidates on top of the election lists
- Encouragement for women to do what they want to do

- Shared housework
- Enabling young indigenous women to apply for jobs
- Increase of number of female commune councillors
- Equal access to education

Both in rural areas and in Phnom Penh, women's participation in leadership, politics and decision making was often cited as the main goal. Changing gender roles and the stereotyped perception of men and women was also widely mentioned. And one female interviewee said, she wants to see women as decision-makers in their families, as village chiefs and as president and vice president of her own organization.

Also the need for more respect for women - including garment workers and prostitutes – was emphasized. Equal access to education was another widely mentioned goal. And one organization highlighted that it is important to achieve a power share in politics in order to enable women to question decisions and handle finances with accountability and transparency. Stakeholders also stated poverty reduction and women's economic independence as major goals with a decisive impact on gender relations.

### **Strategies of NGOs**

Most of the interviewees used the term strategy in a wider sense, talking about the approach they take to achieve their goals.

Women's empowerment is still considered as an important strategy in order to improve unjust gender relations. Encouraging women and providing capacity building as well as improving the access to education was seen as a precondition for any fundamental change. Especially stakeholders in the remote areas stressed the importance of a holistic approach and long-term commitment. Reaching out for women, encouraging them to join meetings, supporting them to speak out, providing training, encouraging them to take over leadership – all these steps take time but are essential in order to achieve real participation.

NTFP and Sodeco gave practical examples for the urgent need of (informal) education and capacity building in order to improve economic independence: NTFP described the situation of indigenous market vendors in Rattanakiri who are not able to estimate the value of their goods. The consequence: They sell their products completely under price, thus losing part of their urgently needed monthly salary. Sodeco talked about young female garment migrants, who would only know at what time they start and stop working, but who could not say how many hours they work per day or week. Thus, they cannot negotiate with the factory owner in order to improve working conditions and overall economic situation.

Many organizations treat gender as a crosscutting issue. "We are not really just working in the field of gender, but things are crosscutting and interrelated. We cannot differentiate between gender and domestic violence, gender and environment or gender and poverty" (WAC)." Some of the organizations apply the whole program of gender mainstreaming in their organization. The planning process takes the impact on men and women into consideration, they evaluate their projects, beneficiaries and staff matters with regard to gender balanced conditions.

One interviewee pointed out the challenges they sometimes face when theory (gender mainstreaming) is to be put into practice.

Today, only 20% of the staff is female, but the management aims for an equal share and tries to address gender issues within the team. Being confronted with a lot of pregnancies, maternity leaves and mothers trying to combine child care and income work, male and female staff discussed ways how to improve the situation. The men suggested, mothers should have a longer lunch break and should share an office, where the children could join. No word on the responsibility of fathers to do their share. At present, the organization checks the option of setting up a joined nursery together with other organizations.

Most of the stakeholders are convinced that men have to be actively involved into the process of democratizing the gender relations. Especially the organizations working on domestic violence and women's participation in politics try to reach men. Only a few interviewees emphasized that women should not wait for men but "do it" on their own. The organizations try to involve men by convincing them that "they do wrong and must do better". Promoting positive future prospects for both men and women seems to be an uncommon approach. However, some interviewees target men pointing out that gender equality will finally also affect them in a positive way.

There were different assessments regarding the impact of legal conditions, value change and economic independence of women in Cambodia.

One organization for example didn't assess the economic independence of women that important, although they themselves run micro credit programmes for women. They explained that women, who run a little business and still do all the housework, are often extremely burdened. They don't join public events and are too busy to participate in politics. Instead of economic independence, they focus on attitude change with regard to the perception of women and men. They also stressed law implementation and gender

mainstreaming on the commune level as important strategies to improve the gender relations. Another organization, however, considered the influence of tradition and stereotypes insignificant in comparison to hard economical facts. They were convinced, that only financial independence constitutes a position that enables women to choose what they want to do.

One interviewee stated that economic independence is not that important, as a lot of women are working and contributing to the family income. She also assessed law an insignificant role, because law isn't implemented and thus people cannot use it. Instead she considered value change as the most important goal. At least in the context of gender based violence, real value change only worked in small systems (all stakeholders need to be involved and trained; commune chiefs, commune councillors, people and police should have the same level of information), she stated.

These frankly expressed doubts all refer to the lacks of sufficient implementation. Without legal implementation, a law is practically useless. And law implementation is obviously assessed as a lengthier process than value change in a "closed system".

But in contrast there were also voices emphasizing the substantial significance of a reasonable legal basis. In spite of the tremendous problems within the legal system, legal provisions were considered as a fundamentally needed tool to shape the future of gender relations.

Many organisations have strengthened their connections to the authorities from the local level up to the national level. Especially rural organisations stressed their efforts and improvements regarding the cooperation with commune councillors. They mentioned the importance of advocacy work, direct contact and mutual exchange of information to reach their goals on the local level. One interviewee described how his organization set up a local network with focal points within the commune. Thus they get important information e.g. for intervention in case of domestic violence.

Some organisations explained how they use very different strategies in different fields of their work. In order to stop violence against women and girls within the private sphere, they favour and use dialog between all people who are involved. But in the field of trafficking (and e.g. illegal logging) they use a more confrontational approach. According to the stakeholders, trafficking and illegal logging is often supported by local authorities who actively prevent intervention and prosecution in these fields. From the point of view of the stakeholders, dialog has no effect while confrontation definitely works. In this context, the organisations also use announcements on the national level to reinforce their influence and put pressure on local authorities who are directly involved or who conceal illegal action. For example,

directly contacting the government and referring to announcements of the prime minister was described as very successful in certain cases<sup>1</sup>.

Several organizations referred to Hun Sen's speech, in which he demanded the political parties to include more top female candidates for the commune elections. Although the organizations assess these statements as basically tactic, they use them in order to convince the people.

One interviewee mentioned a further constrain:

"If you talk with politicians about statistics it doesn't make 'click'. They only function on emotion and what they believe in. (...). Right now you have to use animism, superstition. Don't talk with them about statistics or indicators, it is irrelevant to them – it gives them headaches. That's not the way how they function, that is not the way they make decisions."

Different backgrounds and circumstances shape different goals of stakeholders in rural and urban areas. Concerning the strategies it seems to be more complex. Within the scope of this survey, strategic differences between rural and urban stakeholders could not be clearly identified.

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<sup>1</sup> This strategy has consequences. Intimidation and several serious threats against the NGO-staff were mentioned.

## Challenges and Obstacles

Talking about gender relations in Cambodia means talking about at least three different realities. Working with the emerging urban middle class needs a very different approach than working with rural farmers or indigenous people in remote villages. Being engaged in the large NGO community makes up for still another Cambodian “reality”. However, the interviewees’ assessment of challenges and obstacles they are facing in their every day work was mainly unanimous: Female illiteracy and lack of education is perceived as one of the most important indicators for the imbalance of gender relations in Cambodia. However, stakeholders both in Phnom Penh and in rural areas see signs of improvement: For example, more families currently want their girls to attend school. But the high drop-out rate of girls in secondary school is still considered a big challenge. Particularly NGOs in rural / indigenous areas face wide-spread illiteracy. The wide spread lack of Khmer language skills also demands specific methods in order to address the gender issue.

Lack of economic independence of women is also assessed as one of the fundamental hindrances to developing equality and fair relations between men and women. At the same time interviewees stressed the point that many women contribute considerably to the family income. Often it is also the women who control and manage the family money. Still, without their husbands’ permission they are not able to do so.

Hierarchic structures are deep-rooted and omnipresent in Cambodian society. In spite of several very active female role models in Cambodian history, the general perception of women still refers to their passive role. According to the traditional culture code Chbab Srey, women are not allowed to argue with their husbands. In their latest concluding comments CEDAW urges the government to refrain from teaching the stereotyping elements of Chbab Srey (CEDAW, 2006).

Lack of democracy and lack of law enforcement make it difficult to encourage women to speak out for their rights. There are not enough protection measures implemented in favour of women (e.g. in case of violence against women).

Gender-specific labour division is another reason that keeps girls away from school education and women away from participating in public life. The strenuous and time consuming work of women, especially in the rural areas, makes it very difficult to target them and persuade them to join activities (training courses etc.). Families do not support women to

participate in public affairs or even politics. Husbands don't want to share and don't want to take responsibility for housework.

Lack of women's participation in politics and decision making is also attributed to other reasons. Women lack sufficient education and experience – or just don't feel confident enough to do the job (e.g. as commune councillor). Men try to exclude women in order to maintain their own claims of power. Women's acclaimed honesty makes them a "problem" for the highly corruptive political establishment. Surveys show that elected female commune councillors often feel "completely lost" within the political system (CPWP). They are often excluded from basic information and do not get any support by politicians from higher levels.

Many organizations are confronted with the high rate of domestic violence. They have started to work in this field although it is not their original issue and many of them are not well equipped and trained for this job. Most of them see their work on domestic violence as a starting point for the further promotion of gender issues and human rights. However, working on domestic violence and women trafficking includes the risk of bringing more violence to the surface. Victims and their supporters are not sufficiently protected. The law on "Prevention of Domestic Violence and Prevention of Victims", adopted in 2005, does not specify which authorities must intervene in case of domestic violence. Due to this lack, the stakeholders expressed the need to promote intervention and to clarify public responsibilities.

## Activities and Achievements

### Women's Participation and Leadership

Most of the interviewed organisations promote women's leadership and participation in politics and decision-making. The following activities were described as especially successful.

In the run-up to the commune elections in 2002, Women for Prosperity (WFP) started to provide training to support women to stand for candidate. In 2005, WFP and six other organizations (i.a. GAD, SILAKA) founded the Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP). The committee facilitates women's entrance into politics by training of trainers, public forums and training for women candidates. They use movies like "Good husband" (a comedy about the change of gender roles) to facilitate questions and answers in the forums and report very good feedbacks of the participants. According to the interviewees, the public forums provide a space for social gathering, speak out and political action (particularly in the field of land conflicts) and thus help to build up women's confidence and participation. Other activities include the production of daily radio spots on provincial and national level and round table discussions about women's participation in politics. CPWP also conducted a media project to introduce and honour historical women leaders as role models for Cambodian society. So far, CPWP has trained more than 5000 women in 13 provinces.

"Political Parties don't accept women, they want to win!"  
"Sometimes we cry with the women candidates, when they don't manage to come on the list". (WfP)

OXFAM GB also works on women's participation (and men's acceptance). The organization runs two pilot projects to promote gender issues and gender mainstreaming on the commune level. Oxfam plans to set up round tables on the base of the new sub decree 22 that aims to establish action committees on the commune level. The organization wants to use the decree to initiate intervention planning in case of domestic violence.

## **Gender Based Violence**

Gender based violence is considered as one of the major obstacles to achieve gender equality and was mentioned in all interviews. More than one third of the interviewees work directly in the field of domestic violence. They cover the following range of activities:

CWCC is a shelter for women affected by gender based violence. The organization has a monitoring program and works on prevention, reintegration and anti-trafficking. CWCC provides anger management for men and counselling with perpetrators, who often ask for advice, when their partner has escaped from the violent sphere.

ADHOC Kratie has a women's section and conducts trainings on domestic violence and trafficking for community leaders. ADHOC Rattanakiri is monitoring human rights violations with a special focus on women's rights. They have set up a community team in order to improve cooperation in case of gender based violence. They have also established women groups and try to convince violent men to accept the fact, that their wives speak out and join women groups and other activities in the community.

KWWA provides intervention and encourages women to stand up and speak out. They also conduct case studies on domestic violence. KYA has included the topic in all trainings and activities of their youth units. WMC covers the topic in their regular shows and has identified positive effects while closely monitoring three families. WAC works on trafficking and prostitution. SSC run a women's shelter. Care is working on violence against women (focus: sex workers) and girls and gang rape. Oxfam tries to improve intervention in case of domestic violence (also see Women's Participation).

## **Education and Capacity Building**

The activities of the interviewed organizations include literacy trainings and informal education projects for indigenous communities as well as specific gender trainings, management skills courses and the provision of scholarships.

DPA builds separate facilities and dormitories for boys and girls in school, thus contributing to the increase of parents allowing their daughters go to school. (In rural areas pupils often need to cover far distances to reach school. A number of parents refuse to send their daughters to school because of safety reasons and the lack of separated toilets.)

ADHOC Kratie has just started a new project with school children on the topic of gender roles and basic rights.

KYA provides training and capacity building with young people between 16 and 35. The organization is divided into six units who organize long-term training courses on peace, health, youth policy, gender politics and civics. All trainings specifically address gender issues. KYA covers nine provinces, 60% of the participants are women. Two members out of each group get further training in order to transfer knowledge and discussion onto the community level. KYA especially targets young women who work in the household.

SILAKA conducts training courses in the field of administration, accounting and management. They target civil society as well as private and government institutions. Their aim is to promote transparent, accountable and cooperative organizational structures.

NTFP runs an indigenous youth development project in Rattanakiri with 25 participants per year. 40% are women. The participants get a one-year-training on community development and self-management. They also learn how to conduct research (e.g. on local languages). After the end of course, some of them get scholarships at the University in Phnom Penh. The project especially aims at increasing the number of well trained female staff for local organizations. NTFP also provides TOT with female trainers for indigenous local teachers. They have set up indigenous women groups and plan to establish a youth information centre on the site next to their office.

## **Economic Development**

Oxfam GB, WAC, Sodeco, KAFDOC and KWWK support women with micro credit programmes, CEPA conducts business plans to improve their economic situation. Sodeco works on a new bio diesel project. The project is currently tested in eight different locations and will be finally conducted in nine provinces. According to Sodeco the whole production process from growing the crops to selling the diesel is processed and controlled by women.

## **Health**

Health is a key issue, especially for many rural organizations. Rattanakiri is the province with the highest maternal and child mortality in Cambodia. Health Unlimited, CCD, KAFDOC and Sodeco provide training on hygiene, disease prevention and basic (women's) health care in the rural area. The lack of adequate health services increases the economic pressure on the poor. Indigenous people often sell their land in order to pay for urgently needed medicine. Several stakeholders also work on HIV/AIDS.

Together with SSC and KYA, Care runs a youth centre in Kampong Speu, which provides trainings on health, sexuality, relationship and gender in order to prevent HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. Care complained about a serious lack of gender sensitivity in high ranking working groups on health. During a recent national meeting on “women and health” with just two female participants present, male participants refused to talk about sexual relationships and domestic violence, arguing that these topics were “just women’s points of view”.

## **Media**

WMC produces audio and audio visual programmes on issues as human rights, women’s rights, family, gender based violence, community development, health and education. They have their own radio station (FM 102) and broadcast video programs on CTN, TVK and TV 3. They also do mobile “broadcasting” by moving from village to village to show their productions in remote areas.

KWVC uses media and live shows to promote a range of social issues with an emphasis on women’s and family information. Their latest product is a “gender mainstreaming” show including music, comedy and question-answer-sessions on women’s rights.

Several stakeholders stressed: Drama always works.

Many interviewees conduct activities on a wide range of issues. Sometimes it was difficult to find out, whether the different topics are well-linked and developed in close cooperation with the target groups – or whether some of them were mainly chosen because of the availability of funding. A quality check on training standards, training materials, qualification of staff etc. would be useful. But despite of these limitations, the interviews were a good opportunity to get a basic overview of who is doing what.

## Needs and Conclusions

Both urban- and rural-based stakeholders expressed the need to broaden their knowledge about gender issues and suitable ways to transmit them into every day work. Many interviewees said they try to avoid the gender term as there is no Khmer equivalent. Others used it as a short term for “supporting women”, “women’s empowerment”, “women’s participation”, “working on domestic violence” or “working with men to change their behaviour”. The majority had difficulties in using the term “gender” and said it would need urgent clarification. Better communication and a better knowledge of different gender concepts were considered as very helpful in order to try and improve gender relations in Cambodia.

Many interviewees stressed the need for a change of funding policies. Basically, they emphasized the importance of long term funding. Changing fundamental gender values would need long-term commitment (“10 years-projects”). Short-term projects would raise high expectations that could not be fulfilled. Especially stakeholders in Rattanakiri complained about external donor-driven structure implementation which would not fit to the needs of indigenous communities. They strongly stressed the need for a holistic approach. Projects could only be successful if key people can be found, who can do the work in both systems - the indigenous and the NGO–culture.

“Go slow!” was the central message. And: “Don’t press donor structures on indigenous reality.”

Stakeholders who focus on the support of female commune councillors and their self-organization expressed a very practical need: The salaries would need to be increased, taking into account the work-load and the amount of time the councillors need to invest. Higher salaries would also increase the husbands’ willingness to accept their wives’ engagement in local politics.

On top of that, the government would need to send clear signs of political willingness to implement women’s participation in leadership and decision making. Quota in political and administrative institutions could be suitable steps to improve women’s representation. Implementation of gender policy would need a gender qualified and well informed staff which does not yet exist. At the moment, only subordinate staff with no decision-making power is involved and informed. This counteracts the efforts and curbs the progress of gender

development. Either sub-ordinate staff must be authorized to make decisions or the high ranking officials in charge must be convinced to take over action and responsibility.

Female commune councillors need to get funding in order to improve their political influence. Actually, the communes should get some funding from the national level, but very often the money comes late or not at all. It has been especially difficult to apply for money for gender related activities. Instead, money is used for general infrastructural projects. Gender mainstreaming should be implemented on the communal level to ensure fair decisions and a gender-equal approach.

**How to involve men will be an important question in the future. During the interviews no promising concepts were available that referred how to involve men in general – for example on the ground of any of men's very own interests.** Nevertheless, some fresh attempts have been taken in order to convince men of the advantages of democratized gender relations that benefit both men and women.

Girls' (and boys') high drop out rate especially after primary school indicates that a compulsory school system is needed to ensure better education. However, the new education law only introduces compulsory enrolment for grade 1 and must thus be considered a missed chance to improve the insufficient overall situation of education.

Several NGOs also mentioned the need to change the school curricula. The gender issue should be included into the curriculum, covering all institutions from high school to University. Some demanded to have the traditional Cambodian gender codes, Chbab Srey and Chbab Proh, taken out of the curriculum completely. Others want to delete just the parts of the document, that teaches girls and women to be passive and obedient servants of their husbands.

The government needs to take action in order to implement the law against violence against women. Legal personnel need to be informed about the law and its implications. The government has to clarify who is responsible for the support and protection of victims and other involved people. The ministry of interior has recently developed a sub degree guideline for the law on domestic violence, which might be a first step to implement the law on the commune level. **The communes have been requested to set up action committees in order to plan intervention and protection in case of gender based violence. Unfortunately this tool is almost unknown and seems to be still unused.**

## **Recommendations**

### **Ideas for Cooperation**

The following activities should be considered for future cooperation projects of HBF:

#### **Conducting non-formal education projects with indigenous girls and women**

Stakeholders in the North-Eastern provinces consider the field of non-formal education to be the most promising sector in order to achieve long-term improvements for indigenous women and girls. **HBF should engage in non-formal training courses, that provide urgently needed skills and capacity.** Trainers must speak local languages, as many indigenous women don't speak Khmer. Trainings should use media that don't demand any reading and writing skills.

#### **Supporting Women's Participation in Local Politics – Networking and Training in the North–Eastern Provinces**

Many interviewees stressed the importance of capacity building for female leaders, especially on the local level. HBF should **support self-organisation and networking activities of female commune councillors.**

#### **Capacity Building on Gender Issues (training courses, working group)**

##### **Introducing Gender Democracy**

Several organisations both in Phnom Penh and the North-East expressed an urgent need to **improve their own knowledge about gender issues and how to promote them in their everyday work.** HBF should provide both trainings and coaching and monitoring activities in the field of gender concepts and gender democracy.

#### **Working on Gender Prospects (Future Workshop) - Improving the Gender Relations**

So far there is little exchange amongst stakeholders who work in the different fields of gender issues (value change, political participation, economic independence, legal matters, domestic violence). An **annual “future workshop” could initiate and promote creative thinking on gender issues.** As a side effect, analytical skills and solidarity amongst stakeholders could also be strengthened.

The activity should concentrate on an inspiring, innovative input in combination with parts focusing on creative thinking and working together. Participants should extensively use and shape the activity to work out future prospects regarding the gender relations.

A One-Day-Workshop with different inputs (e.g. lecture, film) would be an option. Second part could be an “Open Space” workshop that inspires participants to discuss in different groups. HBF could plan and organize these regular workshops in cooperation with organizations that are already involved on the national and/or international level.

### **Challenging Stereotypes – Conducting Research on Traditional Gender Codes**

Many of the interviewees expressed ambivalent positions in regard to the traditional gender codes “Chbab Srey” and “Chbab Proh”, which are part of the school curriculum. Although they stressed the negative impact of Chbab Srey for women, they did not approve of abolishing the rules. Without the codes, they said, there would be no counterbalance to the increasing “Western influence” in Cambodia.

**HBF should conduct further research on Cambodia's gender codes and their impact on the democratization of gender relations.** (Is there a specific way to achieve gender democracy in Cambodia?)

### **Developing concepts how to reach and include men**

Many organizations try to involve men by telling them that “they do wrong and must do better”. Promoting positive future outlooks for both women and men seems to be an uncommon approach. HBF should **develop concepts on how to address and include men in order to gradually change gender relations.** Cooperation with the Men's Network should be checked.

### **Targeting young people**

HBF should target young people in order to disseminate the idea of gender democracy. Many current youth activities focus on the prevention of violence and HIV/AIDS. Aspects of relationship, love and sexuality are only targeted within the context of prevention. **HBF could focus on gender and life planning, including aspects of relationships, family, work as well as perceptions of a desirable society. A photo or video competition would be another good opportunity to disseminate gender issues to young people.**

### **Challenging gender based violence**

The interviews proved that gender based violence (GBV) is omnipresent. More than half of the interviewees mentioned GBV as a major challenge. A third of them work on domestic violence, gang rapes or trafficking although this hasn't been necessarily their original field of activities. With violence still significantly characterizing gender relations and hindering the

improvement of equal gender relations, it **must be recognized and considered in strategy planning.**

## Annex

### Interview Guideline

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Introduction (incl. HBF-2-components-and-gender-oriented-objective... gender democracy...)

#### General Opinions, Appraisals and Attitudes

- How would you describe the situation of women and man in Cambodia?
- What are the main problems / challenges?
- Are there signs of positive change? If so, what signs?
- What are the obstacles?
- In how far do you see a connection between gender relations and democracy?
- What do you consider classical stereotypes concerning women and men?
- In how far do they hinder the participation of women and men in society?

#### Work

- What kind of work do you do?
- Do you work on an international, national, provincial, or grass-roots level?
- What is your target group: Women? Women and men? Men?
- What does gender mean to your work?
- How did you first get in touch with gender issues?
- Where did you get further information, how did you improve your knowledge about it?
- What is your goal in regard to gender issues?
- What strategy do you take to achieve this goal?
- Which of the following terms fit best with your work (You can choose more than one)?  
Empowerment, gender equality, gender democracy, feminist politics, gender justice, women's rights, equal opportunities approach....?
- What do you think makes gender issues interesting also for men and boys?
- What do you consider specific Cambodian approaches to involve men and boys?
- Please tell us more about "best practices" in your work. What works really well?

#### Organization

- How many people are working in your organization?
- How many of them are men and how many are women?
- Who works on what topics (women/men)?
- Who works in which position (women/men)?

- Who is involved in decision making (w/m) - e.g. about finances, contents of work?

### **Public relations – Networking**

- How do you communicate your aims and activities in public?
- Do you participate in networks discussing gender issues?
- If no, would you join such a network?

### **Visions - Future prospects**

- What is your future outlook?  
How will things change within the next 15 years with regard to gender relation?

### **Material**

- Do you use any material in the field of women's and gender issues – What Material?

## **Interview Partner**

- Ms. Thida Khus, Executive Director of SILAKA
- Ms. Khim Nary, Provincial Coordinator ADHOC Kratie
- Mr. Hom Sakunth, Executive Director and Mr. Sum Kimhoeun Program Coordinator of Cambodian Community Development (CCD), Kratie
- Ms. Ngoun Sophany, Executive Director of Khmer Association for Development of Country (KAFDOC), Kratie
- Mr. Yen Run, Provincial Coordinator, Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA), Steung Treng
- Mr. Poa Narith, Fishery Community Project Coordinator Development and Partner in Action (DPA), Steung Treng
- Mr. Kat Bun Heng, Executive Director, Alexander Lindsey, Management Advisor, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP), Rattanakiri
- Mr. Pen Bunna, Provincial Coordinator, ADHOC, Rattanakiri
- Ms. Joanna Seczkowski, Health Unlimited, Rattanakiri
- Mr. Kim Sangha, provincial coordinator, 3 River Protection Network (3SRN), Rattanakiri
- UK Yuth, Executive Director + Team, Kratie Women's Welfare Association (KWWA)
- Ms. Ros Sopheap, Executive Director of Gender and Development (GAD)
- Ms. Pok Nanda, Executive Director of Women for Prosperity (WFP)
- Ms. Prok Vanny, National Coordinator of CEDAW South East Asia Program, UNIFEM
- Ms. Nop Sarin Srey Roth Cambodian Women's Crisis Center
- Ms. Yim Nimola, Executive Director of Khmer Women's Voice Center (KWVC)
- Ms. Choun Sambou, Chief of Women Unit, Khmer Youth Association (KYA)
- Mr. Graeme Brown, Rattanakiri Coordinator, Community Forestry International (CFI)
- Ms. Susanne Müller, Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)
- Ms. Tioulong Saumura, Mr. Yim Sopheap, Association Solidarité et Développement Communautaire (Sodeco)
- Ms. Tive Sarayeth, Executive Director, Women's Media Center (WMC)
- Mr. Sam Vuthy, Program Coordinator, Womyn's Agenda For Change (WAC)
- Ms. Ellen Minotti, Social Services of Cambodia (SSC)
- Ms. Seng Theary, Executive Director, and Ms. Chek Sotha, Head of Research, Center for Social Development (CSD)
- Ms. Ky Nimol, Gender Project Officer, NGO Forum
- Ms. Doris Nuekel, Legal Advisor, Ms Savady Sakhoeurn MoWA
- Ms. Socheat Chi, Partnership Coordinator, CARE Cambodia
- Ms. Menh Navy, Programme Officer, Oxfam GB

## **List of Collected Material**

1. Domestic Violence Training Document prepare by KAFDOC, ADHOC, KWVC, MoWA and GTZ (Khmer)
2. Gender Training Document by KAFDOC, ADHOC, KWVC, DPA (Khmer)
3. Good Governance Workshop KAFDOC (Khmer)
4. Decentralization Training by KAFDOC (Khmer)
5. Leadership Training by KAFDOC (Khmer)
6. Question and answer on Domestic Violence Law by CWCC (Khmer)
7. Brochure of awareness on Domestic Violence by ADHOC, KWVC (Khmer)
8. Brochure of different organisation, ADHOC, WFP, WMC, CWCC (English / Khmer)
9. Hand Book The way of file complains by ADHOC (Khmer)
10. CEDAW Convention by UNIFEM (English / Khmer)
11. Magazine of Khmer women Voice Center (Khmer)
12. Report on health status of women workers in the Garment Industry by Womyn's Agenda For Change (English)
13. Impact of the end of MFA on workers in Cambodia by Womyn's Agenda For Change (English)
14. Human Rights Training Document by ADHOC (Khmer)
15. Semester Activity Report of KAFDOC (Khmer)
16. Gender and Decentralization by GAD (English)
17. 3 S Newsletter by 3SPN (English)
18. Workshop report on Popular Education by NTFP (Khmer)
19. Text Book Human Rights and Law by ADHOC (Khmer)
20. Gender Training (Module A and B) by KWVC (Khmer)
21. Gender Terminology by Ministry of Women's Affairs (English / Khmer)
22. Domestic Violence Law by MoWA (Khmer)
23. Report on Gender and Trade Workshop by Womyn's Agenda For Change (Khmer)
24. HBF Position Paper Gender Politics make a difference and Gender Hand Book by HBF SEA (Draft, English)
25. Text Book Non Formal Education Lessons for Hill Tribes of North East Cambodia by NTFP (Khmer)
26. A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks by Oxfam GB (English / Khmer)

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