

Cambodia Progress Report

Agreed Conclusion on Women's Economic Empowerment in Changing World of Work

1. Strengthening normative and legal frameworks

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) Rectangular Strategy Phase IV 2019-2023 continues promote women's entrepreneurship through the expansion of vocational education and training programs. Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) has been recognized in the national policy framework for social protection, a National Policy on Technical Vocational Education and Training, a National Employment Policy, a National Framework on Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), and national programs addressing agriculture, rural development and land management reform.

National policy framework on digital Economy and Society 2021-2035, which outlines a long-term vision to build a vibrant digital economy and society through promoting digital adoption and transformation in all sectors of society, and with a special focus on enhancing women's participation in the digital sector.

National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2018-2025 has been developed by the National Bank of Cambodia, which includes the aim to increase the formal financial inclusion level from 59% to 70% and reduce women financial exclusion by half.

Within this agenda, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) in partnership with the private sector and relevant stakeholders promotes gender responsiveness and inclusion in the national policy frameworks, strategic plans and national programs related to the economic sector and the development of entrepreneurship and women's potential in the economic sector¹ through the 5-Year Strategic Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2019-2023.

2. Strengthening education, training, and skill development

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has been implemented the Strategic Plan on Gender Mainstreaming in Education Sector, 2016-2020 in order to achieve gender equality in education sector, increasing of women participation in delivering education service, and establishment of social positive attitude in response to the Millennium Development Goal-3 on promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, with target 1 stipulated "reducing much more gender disparities in secondary and higher education"; the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); Rectangular Strategy, Phase III and Phase IV; Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan, Phase IV; and Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018 to contribute to the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has initiated a number of key policies and interventions for 2019-2023. Key gender related actions include 1) systematically increasing coverage of early childcare and education to reach 82 percent, primary school completion to 91.1 percent, lower secondary school completion to 61.1 percent, Upper secondary school completion to 45 percent, GER to 35 percent and Tertiary Education GER to 25 percent by 2030, 2) systematically implementing teacher reforms addressing the issues of recruitment, training, deployment, continuous professional development, mentoring/on-site support and career pathways 3)

¹ <https://www.mowa.gov.kh/en/neary-rattanak-v-2019-2023-en>

strengthening implementation and monitoring of inclusive education policies, including the provision of targeted scholarships for learners from all disadvantaged groups to ensure equity and no-one is left behind, and 4) encouraging learners to enroll in STEM education in tertiary and higher education.²

Higher Education: There were 124 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country, an increase of 6 compared to 2016, of which 48 public higher education institutions (an increase of 2) and 76 private HEIs in 20 capital/provinces. HEIs under the supervision of 16 ministries/institutions. 222,879 students, 106,952 or 48% female, were pursuing higher education. There were 19,575 Associate Degree students, including 52.57% female, of which 2,374 including 55.69% female, are scholarship students. There were 179,258 pursuing Bachelor Degrees, including 50.7% female, 27,338 (51.8% female) are scholarship students. There were 28.3% Bachelor Degree students are studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Subjects (40.1% for male and 16.9% for female). 23,256 Master students, 24.4% female were pursuing post-graduate studies and 790 PhD students, 7.3% female. The gross enrollment ratio at higher education is 12.0% (12.2% male, 11.8% female) in SY 2019-2020. Currently, there are a total of 23 dormitories with 1,480 female students, of which 7 are owned by private higher education institutions with 275 female students. Hosted 802 Khmer and foreign scholarship students in dormitory, including 606 or 75.56% female.

3. Implementing economic women and social policies for women's economic empowerment

Cambodia has undertaken both gender mainstreaming and gender-specific strategies to promote gender equality. Gender mainstreaming action groups were established and operating in all sectoral ministries, and many ministries have developed Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans (GMAP) similar to the ones for agriculture, labor, commerce, education and tourism. Several ministries offer examples of gender-specific strategies. For instance, the Ministry of Commerce indicates that it will undertake women-specific initiatives such as promoting the participation of businesswomen in domestic and international exhibitions, support businesswomen's associations, and document success stories of women's businesses. The GMAP for the Ministry of Agriculture indicates that the ministry will implement study tours for women farmers and support the creation of women farmers' groups

The Ministry of Women's Affairs now is working to conduct the COVID-19 Gender Impact Assessment to identify policies and policy improvements to support women entrepreneurship development in and post-Covid-19 environment. MoWA has established and operated the Women's Entrepreneurship Development Centre (WEDC) in 2020 aim to provide capacity-building support to WEs by adopting a partnership model with the private sector, 2. increase the market for WEs by facilitating networking/linkages and showcasing WE products and 3. create systemic knowledge management platforms to develop a more nuanced understanding of WEs in Cambodia that will aid in defining relevant policy and initiatives supporting gender equality.

Care Economy and Unpaid care work for women becomes one of our key priorities for the inclusive economic growth agenda and gender responsive social protection framework. MoWA is conducting the care economy and unpaid care work for women survey and identify evidences in

² Draft VNR May 2019, page 17

order support our policy interventions formulations and for the development of advocacy and communication programmes.

Ministry of Commerce (MoC) implemented the 1st step of Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF Tier 1) and Cambodia Export Diversification and Expansion Programme 1 (CEDEP 1), which has made it possible to manage and implement trade support program, develop Diagnostic Trade Integration Study (DTIS), mainstream trade sector, prepare policies as well as strategies on trade, enhance recognition of quality rice production, promote the participation of women in the trade sector, and promote silk products and create jobs in this sector.

Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MoLVT) provided guidelines to the owners of the factories, enterprises, and other institutions to allow pregnant women to leave the work place early at least 15 minutes and allow Cambodian Muslim workers to use traditional Islamic clothing, and promoted factories to prepare feeding rooms for women having children aging under 12 months and to have a nursery for women having children aging over 18 months. A joint UN program on jobs and employment for the youths in Cambodia to develop more youths and young women with a better and more productive job opportunity.

Besides that, in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia has prudently and firmly implemented the following measures: (1). Affordability-based cash support mechanism for workers/employees in garment and tourism sector, of which the majority is women, (2). Special financing scheme to increase liquidity and provision of concessional loans to rehabilitate and promote businesses in the agricultural sector and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, which are mostly owned and run by women, and (3). Cash transfer program for the poor and the vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which many of the household have women as breadwinners.

4. Addressing the growing informality of work and mobility of women worker

Non-Formal Education: The adult literacy rate for adults aged 15 and over increased from 80.5% (75% female) to 87.7% (84.8% female) in 2019. The literacy rate in rural areas is 83.8% and in urban areas it is 93.3%. Male and female literacy rates vary widely by age group and geographical location, but the rates of women are slightly higher than those of men in the 15-19 age group and the rates of women are significantly lower than those of men 60 and older. There were 19,101 students in the professional literacy program, 65.4% of whom were female. There were 6,760 non-formal education equivalent students, 45.9% female, and 374 non-formal secondary equivalents, 42.5% female.

The MoWA through Women Development Centers (WDCs) in 14 provinces and the Provincial Development of Women's Affairs (PDoWA) have provided vocational training to a total of 3,740 women annually starting from 2018-2020. In addition, the ministry has organized 211 manufacturing and saving groups (with 5,080 families) in non-agricultural industries, including handicrafts, poultry production, food production, other business management skill development areas, life skills, and the production chain in 5 target provinces (Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Takeo, Kampot and Kandal).

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The National Social Protection Policy Framework 2016–2025 comprises two main pillars of Social Assistance and Social Security and has been developed using a life cycle approach of the social protection system. The Social Assistance foresees interventions for the poor and most vulnerable and includes four components (1) emergency response, 2) human capital development 3) vocational training and 4) welfare for vulnerable people. The Social Assistance focuses on assisting poor and vulnerable people, including people living close to the poverty line, infants, children, pregnant women, families with food insecurity, people with disabilities and the elderly.

The national budget has increased by 22 percent from 2012 to 2015, and this includes the government contributions to the Health Equity Funds (HEF) as part of the countrywide expansion of HEFs for the poor.³ In 2016, all public hospitals provided free treatment and counseling as well as special care to the poor through the country-wide expansion of HEFs and by issuing ID Poor cards, a government program for identifying households in need of assistance. A total of 3.8 million people utilized these services, and women are the direct beneficiaries. HEF covers poor women, women with disabilities and older women. The ID Poor program has achieved full coverage in rural areas and the pilot urban ID Poor mechanism incorporates vulnerability criteria for health, disability, education and debt.⁴

Under the project on Women Worker’s Rights through Stronger Trade Unions⁵, which aims to increase women workers access to labour rights and protections. The project work with three unions that represent large numbers of urban women workers: 1. The Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation (representing hotel and restaurant service staff and the large number of women involved in food processing), 2. The Building and Woodworkers Trade Unions of Cambodia (representing the large number of women employed in unskilled, low waged labouring jobs in Cambodia’s booming construction industry) and 3. The Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (representing informal economy workers, such as street vendors, waste collectors, domestic workers and tuk-tuk drivers). The project has developed a gender training tool kit, training of staff and organisers, reviews of labour laws for gender equity, commitments to increase the proportion of women in union leadership, and allocations of funding for advancement of women within their unions and to provide a platform for sharing information and women workers voices to decision makers in government through a series of dialogue workshops.

At the same time, the MOWA contributed to the development of literacy classes for 1,926 home-stay workers (1,559 workers) and mobilize communities to organize the functions of community kindergartens for 12 target provinces.

5. Managing technological and digital change for women’s economic empowerment

In preparation for the digital economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) as well as for the Covid-19 response, the government developed the entrepreneurship and a digital ecosystem that is conducive to the creation of new businesses, by promoting the use of digital systems in

³ CEDAW/C/KHM/6, paragraphs 156-157

⁴ NSDP 2014–2018 MTR 2016, page 72.

⁵ <https://www.apheda.org.au/women-workers-rights-cambodia/>

business, and establishing an entrepreneur cooperation mechanism with the RGC or some forms of partnership with the private sector.

National policy framework on digital Economy and Society 2021-2035, which outlines a long-term vision to build a vibrant digital economy and society through promoting digital adoption and transformation in all sectors of society, and with a special focus on enhancing women's participation in the digital sector.

The establishment of Women's Entrepreneurship Development will serve MoWA to lead the coordination and partnership role to formulate and operate the national program on women's participation in the digital sector.

Annually, Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MoPTC) conducted the Outstanding Women's Award in technology in 3 topics: (1) Best Women Entrepreneurs in Technology, (2) Female Engineers Success in ICT Skill, (3) Women Participating in Promoting Use of Technologies for social or community development. MoPTC mainstreamed awareness and promoting the use of ICT for the development of rural communities, especially for vulnerable people such as disabled persons, women, children, elderly, etc.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) in coordination with MoWA work to increase equal access for girls and women to higher education and to skills development, especially in STEAM fields. This also increases equal access for girls and women to higher education and to skills development, especially in STEAM fields. MoEYS promoted and increased student access to education in STEM at higher education level through the creation of a new training programme and new higher educational institutions focusing on STEM to respond the needs of the labor market and reduce the skills gap. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has focused on improving the quality of education at all education levels and ensuring equitable and inclusive access to education, especially women, through various means, such as providing scholarships that focus on outstanding students, general, poor students, students from remote areas, students with disabilities and female students, construction of dormitories for female students and the organization of HEIs in the provinces. In addition, the Ministry provides opportunities and encourages female students to pursue higher education through the promotion of women in society, education on morality and gender, education on equal rights between men and women in the family and society within the foundation year program.

6. Strengthening women's collective voice, leadership and decision making

In the public service sector, the number of women increased steadily from 35% in 2012 to 41% in 2021. This result is based on the implementation of the MCS's guidance to recruit new civil servants (20% to 50% women) and the Royal Decree on the extension of the retirement age of female civil servants to the age of 60 and based on volunteering. Women as the provincial governors was 8%, as the deputy capital/provincial governors: 17.33%, 7 municipal, district/Khan governors, equal to 3.55%, 185 deputy municipal, district/Khan governors, equal to 26%, female commune chiefs increased from 42 in 2002 to 130 in 2018, and 235 commune clerks.

There is a growing number of associations and non-governmental organizations, as well as of social enterprises that exclusively engage as women's entrepreneurship advocates and focus on women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship development needs, as well as private sector actors that contribute and commit through e.g. specific initiatives, programs or corporate

policies. The most prominent women's business advocates are the Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA) and the Cambodian Women Business Federation (CWBF). The Youth Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia (YEAC) and the Federation of Small and Medium Enterprises in Cambodia, although not women's-only business organizations, are influential stakeholders. CEWA and CWBF, for example, not only tap into the power of networking and mentoring, but provide an important platform for women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-to-be for support, exchange, learning, skills training, dialogue, market access, information dissemination etc. for business development and growth.

MoWA was instrumental in their establishments and since their launchings, both organizations have engaged in various and extensive collaborations, not only with MoWA, but also other relevant ministries, to foster exchange, dialogue, capacity building, networking etc., but also to bring women entrepreneur's needs and priorities to the policy making tables and into the Government-Private Sector Forum discussions – a key dialogue mechanism for consultation between the government and the private sector in Cambodia.

MoWA initiated in 2020 the development of the first National Cambodian Women Entrepreneurs' Network (CamWEN) that aims at bringing together relevant Women Entrepreneurship Advocates in Cambodia, namely women entrepreneurs' association, federations and organizations. Still in the pipeline, the vision of CamWEN is to have a strong voice for bringing women entrepreneurs' needs and interests to the decision-making tables. Their representatives have been included in the government and private sector forums and dialogues.

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7. Strengthening the role of the private sector in women's economic empowerment

MoWA launched and implemented the *Unlocking Women's Leadership Program*, its first-ever Private-Social-Public-Partnerships for Women's Socio-Economic Empowerment in 2019 in service of women's leadership development.

A rising example among social enterprises is SHE Investments (which is also an umbrella of 3 separate entities that work together to fill different gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem), that designs and delivers the only business incubators and accelerators for women in Cambodia. Partnering with local and international organizations, businesses and the government, they provide business training, mentoring, consulting, financing and networking opportunities and

⁶ <https://www.apheda.org.au/women-workers-rights-cambodia/>

services in support of women with micro, small and growing businesses to scale to sustainable and impactful SMEs.⁷

⁷ <https://www.sheinvestments.com/#home>