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Helping Accelerate Poverty Reduction in Asia and the Pacific

SUPPORTING GENDER EQUALITY IN CAMBODIA

A technical assistance implemented by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) provided advocacy support to ensure effective gender mainstreaming in national planning processes; capacity building in mainstreaming gender issues at the sectoral and project levels; and assistance to MOWA identify and develop an effective approach and tools for expanding women's employment opportunities.

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. Women, while forming the majority of the population and contributing substantially to the economy through their labor, face many obstacles in accessing basic services and are politically underrepresented.

The long-running conflict in Cambodia, including the Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 to early 1979 and the protracted civil violence that continued into the mid-1990s, has left a long-term legacy on the population of the country and has had particular effects on women.

Women head over one quarter of households in Cambodia, and these households are often considered the most vulnerable to poverty in rural areas. The incidence of poverty in Cambodia is high, with 36.1% of households living below the poverty line in 2000, estimated to have fallen to 34.7% in 2004.

With 73.5% of women over the age of 15 years working, Cambodia has one of the highest female labor force participation rates in the region. Women comprise 54% of skilled workers in agriculture, 75% of the primary labor force in wholesale and retail, and 67% of the labor force in manufacturing.

However, in education, only 12% of women over 25 years of age have more than a primary school level of education. However, the ratio of girls to boys in primary schools has increased from 87% in 2001 to 89.5% in 2005. Total fertility rate has declined from 4.1 in 1998 to 3.3 in 2005. Maternal mortality ratio, stagnant at 473 per 100,000 live births (2005), is the highest in the region and is an issue of great concern.

In the 1998 elections, 11.5% of the members elected at the national level were women, while in 2003 there was a slight increase to 12.2% of the elected candidates, figures that are lower than average for the region.

Taking the Lead in Gender Equality

The Government of Cambodia is mindful of the inequalities existing between men and women. The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), established in 1996, has strongly led in addressing gender priorities in the country. It coordinates across government institutions to ensure that gender perspectives are addressed in all government policies and programs. The MOWA identified five areas from the Beijing Platform for Action as priorities for Cambodia: education, both formal and informal; health, particularly maternal and reproductive health; economic empowerment and women's access to employment opportunities; legal protection, particularly related to violence against women; and women in decision making. MOWA's aim is to ensure that women in Cambodia are able to equally access available services and opportunities and play a full role, alongside their male counterparts, in the development of the country.

Donors have played an important supporting role in MOWA's efforts. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), in particular, has long supported the MOWA so the ministry can play a strategic role at the national, provincial, and local levels. ADB's support has included:

- Technical assistance to help formulate the national Policy for Women (issued in 1996) and establish the MOWA,
- Capacity-building support to enable the ministry to influence and guide the line ministries and lower level administration units to mainstream gender concerns, and
- Support focused specifically on one of MOWA's key priority areas—sustainable employment for poor women.

While MOWA gained capacity over time, continuing and upgraded support from ADB was considered necessary. In 2002, ADB approved a technical assistance (TA No. 3947) on

Sustainable Employment Promotion for Poor Women in Cambodia' through its Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund, financed by the Department for International Development of the Government of the United Kingdom.

The TA started in 2003 and was implemented by the MOWA, supported by an international and a national gender consultant, both with long experience of working in this area in Cambodia.

Influencing National Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Processes

The first component of TA 3947 has been advocacy support to ensure effective gender mainstreaming in national planning processes. The support has been highly effective in ensuring the inclusion of gender issues in national development plans and in influencing the processes to monitor and evaluate their implementation, such as including specific gender equity indicators in Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A major accomplishment here was the project's assistance to the MOWA in harmonizing donor inputs during the preparation of the Cambodia Country Gender Assessment.² The World Bank, ADB, United Nations Development Programme, and United Nations Development Fund for Women jointly worked on this initiative. This marked a shift away from donors working independently. The resulting report drew together information from a wide range of sources and perspectives and strongly influenced the National Strategic Development Plan 2006–2011, which has a good coverage of gender issues and a clear baseline against which to monitor progress in gender equality and women empowerment.

TA 3947 consultants also supported the MOWA in:

- Developing a series of policy briefs, based on the findings of the gender assessment and focused on specific MDGs;
- Localizing the MDGs, which includes incorporating additional indicators and targets set to achieve gender equity. Cambodia's MDGs have been used for reporting on progress;³ and
- Comments on the Cambodia socioeconomic survey and participatory poverty assessments to ensure the coverage of gender issues.

Policy and Networking – Working with Sectoral Ministries

The second component of the TA was to continue to support building capacity of the MOWA in mainstreaming gender issues at the sectoral and project levels. Previous TAs from ADB helped the ministry staff work strategically with other line ministries. TA 3947 has taken this strategic approach further and applied an idea of gender mainstreaming action groups (GMAGs), an innovation of international significance.

The concept of GMAG came out of the MOWA to replace the well-established concept of gender focal points. Previously, each

line ministry at the national level appointed gender focal points. However, the gender focal point approach has been recognized to be ineffective because of the junior level and little power and resources allocated to these focal points. GMAGs pick up on these concerns. GMAGs are senior-level representatives in each line ministry, such as secretaries of state supported by directors general. They have knowledge and decision-making power in their own technical areas. GMAGs are mainly responsible for developing a sectoral gender action plan, backed by needed resources.

Another main area of assistance provided by TA 3947 was the development of an agriculture gender strategy, a tranche condition of an ADB-financed program loan to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF).⁴ The MOWA and MAFF worked together for this purpose, assisted by consultants from TA 3947. TA support included facilitating initial work to identify key gender issues in the sector, training for ministry staff at their own request, and developing and implementing a consultation process to develop a gender policy. The policy was launched in March 2006 at the Annual Conference on Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, chaired by the Prime Minister.

Strengthening Women's Employment Opportunities – Approaches and Materials

The third component of the TA was to help the MOWA and their provincial and district counterparts identify and develop an effective approach and tools for expanding women's employment opportunities. The MOWA paid special attention to the micro- and small enterprises sector where a large number of women find income opportunities yet most of their operations remain informal because of the limited skills and marketing know-how. The TA picked up on two key elements:

- The development of learning and teaching materials on entrepreneurship, working with department staff at the provincial and district levels, and collaborating with the International Labour Organization (ILO); and
- The development of the Women's Development Center (WDC) program, transforming existing women in development centers.

An initial assessment of existing materials found little in Cambodia, but identified the ILO training manual *Gender and Entrepreneurship Together: GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise*.⁵ This built on training modules developed and tested in a variety of settings. The consultants worked with the ILO in translating, adapting, and disseminating the GET Ahead manual in Cambodia. This involved:

- An initial workshop to assess the appropriateness of the materials;
- The preparation of a simplified version of the manual to be used at the community level; and
- The adoption by the WID centers and a number of ILO's nongovernment organization partners of the training manual for use in rural areas.

In the 1990s, WID centers were built in seven provinces, supported by Japan and other donors. These provided skills training for poor and disadvantaged women in the traditional skills of sewing, weaving, and hairdressing. After a review by the ILO in 2001, the MOWA proposed that WID centers become WDC, providing an integrated package of services to advance the socioeconomic empowerment of women. These services included human resource development, microenterprise development training and support services, training and support for sociocultural empowerment, and common facility/business incubator units.

This TA provided funds to prepare site plans and preliminary design concepts for a new WDC in Siem Reap and for the expansion of an existing center in Kampong Chhnang in anticipation of future support from ADB's Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction. UNDP is planning to develop the WDC at Kampong Speu and provide capacity-building support for the staff of this center. Negotiations are also under way with the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) to develop the WDCs at Pursat and Battambang.

What Does It All Add Up To?

The jointly implemented government and donor gender assessment provided a model for collaboration and coordination among development partners. This ensures that MOWA is not overburdened with competing demands from donors and helps simplify communication channels. Consultants, employed by the MOWA through donor support including those through TA 3947, have worked closely together in a number of ways, including:

- Sharing and trying ideas and approaches to gender mainstreaming such as the development of a new approach to gender mainstreaming through GMAGs in the sectoral ministries, with support from other consultants.
- Pooling resources for capacity building, so that work with the Ministry of Agriculture was able to draw on the experience of donor-funded work both nationally and regionally, while developing training materials in entrepreneurship in close collaboration with the ILO; and
- Working together to ensure the continuation of institutional memory on what has worked and what areas require further efforts. The very active Technical Working Group on Gender, under the strong leadership of the MOWA, has provided the ideal forum for government, donors, and consultants to discuss approaches, share experience, and decide on future priorities.

Concerted effort is required to develop priorities and approaches to take gender issues forward. There is also a need to work together to ensure that these efforts are mainstreamed and do not evaporate. Three sets of lessons can be drawn from the experiences in TA 3947:

- The importance of leadership from the ownership of the MOWA in setting priorities, coordinating the efforts of a

number of donors, and ensuring influence at the highest political level;

- Continuity of support from ADB over a number of years is needed to develop and build on capacity, working with the same consultants and developing and deepening understanding of the issues through this continuity; and
- Collaboration between donors, both formal and informal, is greatly important in trying, developing, and scaling up ideas to pool knowledge and resources, try out new approaches, and ensure that work is complementary.

Endnotes

- ¹ TA 3947 Sustainable Employment Promotion for Poor Women. Executing Agency Ministry of Women's Affairs. TA Amount \$400,000. TA Approval Date: October 2002. TA Completion Date: November 2005.
- ² UNIFEM, WB, ADB, and DFID/UK. 2004. *A Fair Share for Women: Cambodia Gender Assessment*. Phnom Penh.
- ³ Ministry of Planning. 2005. *Achieving the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals: 2005 Update*. October. Cambodia.
- ⁴ Loans No 2022 and 2023. Cambodia: Agriculture Sector Development Program. October 2003.
- ⁵ ADB. Cambodia. *Supporting Policies and Institutional Reforms in the Agriculture Sector Gender and Entrepreneurship Together*. Manila (TA 4228).

This case study was written by Social Development Direct (RETA Consultant) under the Regional TA 6270: Facilitating Knowledge Management for Pro-Poor Policies and Projects with inputs from Januar Hakim, Project Officer of TA 3947, Cheryl Urashima, TA Consultant (TA 3947), and Sonomi Tanaka, Senior Social Development Specialist, ADB. The views and assessments contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of ADB or its Board of Directors or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data and accepts no responsibility for any consequences of their use.

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