

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN CAMBODIA:
Analysis of gender mainstreaming in the National Strategic De-
velopment Plan (2019-2023)

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>After its disastrous history, Cambodia has managed to accelerate its growth. With economic growth even breaking records, poverty and inequality continue to overshadow development. Cambodian women in particular still have to experience violence and discrimination based on socio-cultural reasons against them, and they have no opportunities to participate in the development of their economic well-being. The purpose of this study is to understand how Cambodia responds to these challenges at a strategic level.</p> <p>The selected research material The Cambodian National Strategic Development Plan (2019-2023), has been examined by applying gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach, especially in political planning and implementation, with the aim of promoting equality and empowering women and men both socially and economically. This study delves into economic empowerment in improving women's status and escaping poverty.</p> <p>The results indicate that the process of mainstreaming at the strategic level is still in progress. The political goals aimed at women are focused on one actor and they are not transformative enough, since they do not look at women's (economic) well-being in a sufficiently comprehensive manner. The goals also fail to tackle core problems, such as discriminatory cultural norms.</p> <p>At the end, the research aims to give recommendations for political planning in understanding the impact of inequality on social stability.</p>	

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Tiivistelmä

Tuhoisan historiansa jälkeen Kambodža on onnistunut kiihdyttämään kasvuaan. Talouskasvulukemien ollessa jopa ennätyksiä rikkovia, köyhyys ja epätasa-arvoisuus jatkavat kehityksen varjostamista. Erityisesti kambodžalaiset naiset joutuvat yhä kokemaan heihin kohdistuvaa sosio-kulttuurisiin syihin perustuvaa väkivaltaa ja syrjintää, eikä heillä ole mahdollisuuksia osallistua taloudellisen hyvinvointinsa kehittämiseen. Tämä tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on ymmärtää miten Kambodža vastaa näihin haasteisiin strategisella tasolla.

Tutkimusaineistoksi valittua Kambodžan kansallista strategista kehityssuunnitelmaa (2019-2023) on tarkasteltu sukupuolinäkökulman valtavirtaistamista soveltaen. Sukupuolinäkökulman valtavirtaistaminen on strateginen lähestymistapa erityisesti poliittisessa suunnittelussa ja toimeenpanossa, tavoitteenaan edistää tasa-arvoa sekä voimaannuttaa naisia ja miehiä niin sosiaalisesti kuin taloudellisesti. Tämä tutkimus syventyy erityisesti taloudellisen voimaantumiseen naisten aseman parantumisessa ja köyhyydestä pakenemisessa.

Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että strategisella tasolla valtavirtaistamisen prosessi on yhä kesken. Naisiin kohdistuvat poliittiset tavoitteet ovat keskitetty yhdelle toimijalle ja ne eivät ole riittävän transformatiivisia, siellä ne eivät yllä tarkastelemaan naisten (taloudellista) hyvinvointia riittävän kokonaisvaltaisesti. Tavoitteet eivät myöskään onnistu pureutumaan ydinongelmiin, kuten syrjiviin kulttuurisiin normeihin.

Lopussa tutkimus pyrkii antamaan suosituksia poliittiseen suunnitteluun epätasa-arvon vaikutuksen ymmärtämisessä yhteiskunnalliseen vakauteen.

Avainsanat

naiset, taloudellinen voimaantuminen, sukupuolinkäkulman valtavirtaistaminen, Kambodža

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MSME	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprise
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan (2019-2023)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1 INTRODUCTION

Cambodia is a home of 17 million people in Southeast Asia. The country is known for its large religious monuments, rivers, exceptional cuisine and the devastating past. While the country has recently gained lower-middle income country status, it remains one of the poorest in the region. Cambodia bears a long history of political and economic instability that unpacks disastrous consequences that hunts Cambodia even to this day. Ever since the destruction of dreadful Khmer Rouge regime the nation has worked hard to rebuild the country. (Kitamura et. al, 2016) Although a lot of talent and infrastructure was lost in the war and genocide during the Khmer era, boosting of the post-conflict economy has been quite successful, especially from the late 1990s to time before COVID19 outbreak, with an average of real growth rate of 7.7 (World Bank, 2021), which has made Cambodia as one of the fastest growing countries in the entire world. Cambodia's GDP per capita was 4,421.5 USD in 2020 (World Bank data, n.d.1). On the other hand, according to 2021 national statistics, over 75% of population lives in rural area where are still faced struggles with the basic infrastructure, for example toilet facilities and sources of drinking water. (National Institute of Statistics, N.d) WaterAid (2018) summarizes that 4.8 million Cambodian don't have clean water, 5.2 million lack a decent toilet and almost 200 children under five dies yearly from diarrhea caused by dirty water. Furthermore, the country faces many shortages in technology, educating and skilling people and offering them decent employment opportunities. In terms of labour market Cambodia faces struggles with a lack of diversification, focusing on few sectors. Cambodia's HDI is presented to be 0.594 in 2019, with life expectancy at birth 69.8 years and mean years of schooling 5.0 (UNDP, 2020).

There are also many challenges in terms of equality. Traditionally in Cambodia, dominance and privilege have been primarily with men. And the perfect Cambodian woman is described to be smiley but restrained. Dominant Khmer culture and literature have had their influence on the emergence of such a perspective. *Chbab Srey* that is an ancient poem has served as a code of conduct for Cambodian women for centuries. Until 2007, this poem was part of the secondary school curriculum that has greatly influenced on the gender equity. The poem outlines that wives need to

maintain restrained manners and to obey and respect their husbands. (Andresson & Grace, 2018) Because of deep rootedness, the poem is still disseminated in among some families and social institutions. Only in 2016, gender and women rights were added into the secondary school curriculum. (UN, 2022) In meanwhile many international organizations and civil society have worked already decades towards women's rights, and many interventions have taken place to change the gender relations. In today's Cambodia, women are more involved and are on the runway of change. Yet, lot of work is still ahead.

The adult literacy rate has increased significantly within the past two decades, most current rate being 87,7 %, however there is widening gap between men and women especially in rural areas (Khmer Times, 2021). As reported by Cambodia Labour Force Survey 2019, outside the labour force (economically inactive) there are 1,234.179 males and 2,299.711 females. The same data outlines that 36.7 % of women participated primary education, 22.3 % to lower education and 14.6% to upper secondary education and 5,5% to university education. 17 % of had women never attended to school, while for men the percentage was 9.6%. Furthermore, the data reveals that labour market participation rates for rural women are lower than for rural men, yet around or little less than 80% of women between ages 20 – 44 are in participating to labour market. In total 87.6% of women are working in informal employment and 12.4% in formal employment. (National Institute for Statistics Cambodia, 2021, p. 22 – 36.) Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament is 22 % in 2021 (World Bank data, n.d)

1.1 Mainstreaming gender

Although, the world that has recognized the long-oppressed status of women and has expanded the means to tackle gender inequality, yet many gaps and barriers remain. Women incessantly continue to face injustice, exclusion and discrimination, to a larger extend in low-income countries. Gaining gender equality often requires changes in different areas of society and life. Already for decades women's empowerment (self-worth, right to make choices and influence) have been the topic in international development agendas (World Vision, n.d.) More recently, there has been an interest in looking at the life situation and circumstances of women with the help of the concept of economic empowerment (OECD, 2011). In which equality is promoted in terms of women's economic well-being. For women, economic empowerment means that

women can. Through financial capability and inclusion women have opportunity to reach their full potential. Nowadays, it is widely understood that investing in women's economic empowerment will be the key for poverty reduction and greater economic growth.

The global rise of women has begun from the advocacy of women in development (WID) approach that was adopted to international development work already in the 70s (Koczberski, 1998). From this spark many other approaches began to emerge. Gender mainstreaming concept was originally invented in the 80s for better integration of gender issues in the programming, legislation and policies but in the mid 90s it became international strategy because of the Beijing Declaration. (Council of Europe, n.d.). The idea of the strategy is to effect within the processes of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Making sure that important social indicators on conditions of women and men are considered.

1.2 Cambodia as a context for examining gender mainstreaming

Cambodia creates an interesting ground for research. Being a country torn by the history and risen from the ashes, it has shown strong development in recent decades. Even though, Cambodia is a global success story of rapidly accelerated economic growth, the marginalized groups like women have not been able to benefit of its fruits. Which makes the country a good example of how success does not directly translate to equality in society. Noticeably, harmful social norms and stereotypes are restricting women's abilities and the amount of unpaid domestic and care work are limiting their opportunities and resources. Furthermore, these impacts then lead other concerns such as gender-based violence, discrimination, weak labour market engagement and low representation in decision-making. (UN, 2022). Therefore, mainstreaming women into better economical involvement, development strategies and policies are essential starting point for making revolutionary impacts.

When disparities become an obstacle for growth, inequalities must be effectively confronted. In this light, the Royal Government of Cambodia outlines one of the strategic goals to be: "strengthen gender equity and social protection to enhance social-economic situation and strengthen women's role in the society who are the backbone of the economy and society" (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2019). This goal among other goals set in the government's policy framework of Rectangular Strategy Phase IV are

implemented through National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018), which identifies more detailed sectoral measures and highlights responsibilities of ministries, for example in promoting gender equality.

At the same time while the status of women is still limited the wheel has started to turn when women are more actively challenging the gender stereotypes through increased participation in community and decision-making (ADB, 2022). This is also why it is fascinating to investigate how the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) is supporting women's way on the top. The realization of government's gender equity goal and the consideration of women in the National Strategic Development plan is evaluated by this research with special focus on women's role in economy.

1.3 Research question and objectives

The emphasis of this study is on gender mainstreaming especially around the theme of women's economic empowerment. Drawing attention to policy instruments that have the ability to create changes and enabling environment. Breaking gendered norms starts from policies that recognize women's bigger role in society, not just as care givers but independent agents and promote access to same opportunities as their peers. This research analyses Cambodia's National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2019-2023 to examine the visibility of women-related policy actions in the document from the perspective of women's needs in (economic) empowerment.

Although the labour market participation of women is at a high level in Cambodia, many issues remain to overshadow the livelihood of women; the insecure nature of work and economy, low wages, lack of savings, unpaid care work and other family bindings. Therefore, this research argues that under the prevailing circumstances of women, "giving a piece of land" or "having a job" is not enough itself but there is a need equipping women with improved access to other resources such as; skills training (financial and business management), credit, technology and markets, in order to pursue and maintain sustainable livelihood. Women need to be respected in working life and they need to be considered essential players in the total economic growth.

The chosen research topic is not by any means a new concept in the field of social sciences since gender equality and women's rights has been promoted through various interventions and research globally for centuries. However, this research will still

belong to the few gender-focused analyses on latest policy measures in promotion of women's economic empowerment in the Cambodian context. It will provide important insights on opportunities and gaps within the chosen policy document.

This thesis attempts to answer the following main research questions:

1. How does the gender mainstreaming appear around the theme of women's economic empowerment in the National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 of Cambodia?

For guiding sub-question is selected to be the following:

- a. How are women and gender addressed in the plan?
- b. How are women's needs in economic empowerment addressed in the plan?

2 BUILDING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to present literature and evidence and build a the theoretical and analytical framework for this study. It first discusses two main approaches in development policies: women in development and gender mainstreaming. Then, it discusses the particular focus on women's economic empowerment. After that, the chapter proceeds to the particular context of Cambodia, and reviews the literature in order to establish issues relevant to women's economic empowerment to be used as a framework to analyze the policy document.

2.1 Women in development

A greater representation of women in development has been emphasized since the 1970s, when it was argued by feminists and female practitioners, that women were not sufficiently considered in the agendas and programs of donor organizations. (Koczberski, 1998) Which was not at all a wrong observation about development aids which were heavily based on Western ideologies of needs of societies and roles of women with broad aims in eliminating poverty and increasing productivity. Ester Boserup was one of the first scholars in 1970 to criticize development saying that women were only passive beneficiaries, not directly targeted in education, technology and finance (Aguinaga et. al, 2013). Her publication *Women's Role in Economic Development* marked a new era for launching ideology on women in development (WID). (Moghadam, 1998) The UN stepped in by declaring 1975 as International Women's Year to emphasize the need to involve women in issues related to development efforts of major donors. Ever since then, International Women's Day has been celebrated annually.

Debates of women and their manifestation in development has led to three distinguishable models: WID, WAD and GAD. Women in Development (WID) was the first of the approaches with main goal to increase visibility and integration of women into development policies and agendas. Especially by empathizing women's participation into labour market and their role in production and economic growth. After receiving criticism the second approach Women and Development (WAD) came to clarify that women are part of development and the main concentration should be put on the perspective of global inequalities. According to WAD patriarchy and capitalism limited women's options (Moghadam, 1998). Later the third approach Gender and Development (GAD) emerged to combine aspects from both WID and WAD, by focusing on impact of development equally on women and men. By examining the social and structural changes, and eliminating constraints related to legal and economic environments (Muyoyeta, 2004) Over the years, some other practical approaches to development emerged such as Welfare Approach that focused on women's reproductive role, Equity Approach that was based on elimination of discrimination and revaluing women's contribution, Efficiency Approach that emphasized the full use of human resources in economic growth (both women and men), and Empowerment Approach focusing on self-reliance of women as becoming change agents and bases its foundation on awareness-raising. (Muyoyeta, 2004)

2.2 Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming became the global headline after Beijing declaration was produced in UN conference in 1995 in Beijing (UN Women, n.d.). Shifting from the WID concept and becoming the new paradigm. Nowadays, gender mainstreaming is widely integrated strategy with main goal in achieving gender equality. The strategy is associated with poverty and inequality reduction as well as different sectors all the way from food security (Lessa&Rocha, 2012; Jenderedijian&Bellows, 2021) to education (Hsingchen, 2016; Kitta&Cardona-Moltó, 2022) and everything between.

Drawing on Daly (2005), Eveline & Bacchi (2006) and Lombardo (2017), in this study gender mainstreaming is understood as a policy approach allowing to examine whether gender sensitive and women-specific perspectives have been embedded into the selected policy document used as research data. It is highlighted that

mainstreaming requires evaluation of measures and strategies from the point of view of different genders and equality planning (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Finland, n.d.) which confirms the need for studies like this, which examine the fulfillment of the promise of equality.

2.2.1 Gender mainstreaming in policy

There are many debates on the controversiality of gender as a concept, the biological sex and constructed gender and everything in between. While debates go from social construction theories to deeply rooted feminist theories, Bacchi & Joan argues that gender is not a fixed structure but a contextual social process (2010). Even if, the ways in which policies present problems have the power to produce and strengthen the social construction of groups of people, the theoretical frameworks and debates over conceptualizing of gender take place in a parallel universe to policy development (Bacchi & Joan, 2010).

Policies are discursive practices that are designed in reaction to pre-existing problems. In policy making, 'gender mainstreaming' is approach that integrates gender perspective, including both women's and men's concerns and experiences, into planned actions and programmes and promoting equality between women and men. (EIGE, n.d.) From this should be noted that gender mainstreaming and gender-responsiveness of policies is not tied to women only as we would most likely make the interlinkage. Since in many development efforts women have evidently become the 'gender' while men have stayed as 'sex' (Bacchi & Joan, 2010). Bacchi & Joan think that this is simply born from the frustration of women-specific efforts being centralized in separate institutional units and the need for mainstreaming (2010). Originally, gender mainstreaming springs from feminists' efforts to further address gender dynamics but has been brought to whole world's attention by many non-governmental organizations since 1980's (Bacchi & Joan, 2010 p. 22) Thanks to its global attention, the concept has quickly spread and become used tool in policy making around the world.

The most current trend has been the "decentralization" of gender from specific policy arena to shared responsibility and goal of different departments and units of a country. Yet, as usual the context matters and there can be witnessed many models in the world from antidiscrimination legislation towards more systematic use of gender analysis in the policy formulation. By using specific country examples, Daly (2005) says she can identify at least three varieties of a gender mainstreaming approach 1) "integrated

approach” where responsibility is shared and embedded across institutions in society 2) “limited transversality” where mainstreaming is at an early stage of development and typically does not span the entire policy spectrum or hierarchy 3) “highly fragmented endeavor” where confined either to a small number of policy domains or to a specific program within a domain and disconnected from general governmental policy on gender.

2.2.2 Critical aspects of gender mainstreaming

Like many concepts and ideologies, gender mainstreaming has its downsides. Although the main message seems to be commonly understood, the mainstreaming strategy has been described narrow (Subrahmanian, 2004) and lacking of conceptual clarity (Caglar, 2013; Lombardo 2017), leaving question on how and what kind of equality should be achieved. In researching appearance of gender equality in European policies, Crespi (2009) argues that gender mainstreaming is demanding strategy that requires significant interest and political will from the implmenters in order to succeed. The truth being that not all implementing organizations understand gender issues or are directly interested in them. Also Caglar (2013) brings out institutional dimensions that define the effectiveness of the triggering process. Outlining that gender mainstreaming policies tend to face strong administrative and institutional resistance (2013). Additionally, gender mainstreaming has been accused being a functional exercise (Magar, et al. 2019) or participation-based accountability action (Subrahmanian, 2004) without meaningful engagement. Most scholars seem to agree that gender mainstreaming approach is exclusively focused on women while resolving inequalities should require more contributions from men. Crespi (2009) is suggesting to emphasize more work–family balance and attention to relationship between women and men especially in division of labour, access and control over resources and in decision making.

2.3 Conceptualising economic empowerment

The concept of economic empowerment of women seems to be highly researched subject that is placed in many past and recent development agendas and policies across the globe. Although, given the long history and worldwide concern it is curious why

the progress has failed to be productive and sustainable. Still today for women in low-income countries it is hard to gain equal opportunities let alone capability to thrive.

One could argue that “empowerment” is already well-worn term in the mainstream development where international organizations tenaciously use the word as a “buzzword” in their policies and actions. As a counterargument to this perspective should be considered the long history and the battles for equality, rights and social justice which this concept cherishes within. While women’ right movements kicked off already in 19th century and various theories have been accommodated along the way, in the international development the turning point was in the 1980s to 1990s when feminists radically put into motion the idea of women's empowerment (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). In favor of greater equality in power relations became a narrative of empowerment. After the first applications of empowerment feminists illuminated the limitations of uncovered socially constructed problems and women’s awareness in questioning norms and understanding their capabilities. (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015)

Empowerment is an ongoing process where is no terminus. Kebeer (1999) hints that you first need to be disempowered with limited opportunities in order to experience the process of social change and to become empowered. Kebeer builds her vision of empowerment to ability to exercise choices incorporation with three inter-related dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. *Resources* (material, human, social) as precondition to enhance the ability to make choices, *agency* as a process referring to people’s capacity of defining own life-choices and capacity of actor or group of actors to overrule the agency of others, *achievements* as well-being outcomes of doing and being in accordance with one’s set values (Keeber, 1999). In other words, the starting point for choice and the possibility to have chosen differently largely determine the emergence of quality of life.

Empowerment can be evaluated through different dimensions in life (economic, socio-cultural, environmental, political). It is generally understood that improving economic empowerment leads to improvements in other dimensions as well. In defining economic empowerment, OECD manifests it accordingly:

“Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth.”

“Women's economic empowerment takes sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment from all development actors. “

(OECD, 2011)

Above all, empowerment is a process of gaining command over one's affairs. But no one can do it alone if the society poses gendered social norms. As stated by OECD a holistic approach should be considered, starting from public policies all the way to microlevel touching interventions. With improved access, resources and decision-making power women can succeed and advance economically. Besides creating an enabling environment it also should mean reducing risks and vulnerabilities that women face in households, communities and in employment. (UNICEF et. al, 2021)

Critical to women's economic empowerment is breaking constraints and creating enabling environments. However, there is no single solution to the matter, efforts and cooperation are needed in multiple fronts. The enabling environment should be free from structural barriers and discriminatory norms. For closing the gender gaps, UN Women (2017) represents seven (7) drivers for transformation:

Seven primary drivers of women's economic empowerment



Figure 1. Drivers for economic empowerment

These drivers encompass changes that need to take place in addressing key issues in women's economic empowerment; such as discrimination against women in work places, gender-segregated laws, the burden of unpaid domestic work for women, women do not have access to internet, women are not part of public procurements and only small portion of women in companies across 40 countries are chief executive officers (UN Women, 2017). Furthermore, UN Women stresses that policymakers must understand the different ways women are economically engaged and the different barriers they face (2017). Although women have same gender, they differ in their needs and aspirations. They have different socioeconomic status, life situation, ethnicity and area of residence (urban or rural) and so forth. For women to reach their full economic potential governments and policy makers need to take action. This will also support progress towards achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

2.4 Cambodian landscape of gender relations and challenges

Advancing women's rights and access to education, property, health and financial services in low-income countries has been in the development agenda already for a long time. Heaps of studies, working papers and reports have been published on the subject. However, women continue to encounter multifaced challenges in gaining autonomy, work and livelihood. In many countries structural barriers, discriminatory laws and other barriers continue to limit women's rights and access to funding, land education and employment. Women also are more prone to risks than men for example in land owning, such as loosing land/property ownership in case of divorce or death of spouse.

In Cambodia, gender mainstreaming goes back to almost 30 years ago, when in 1993 monarchy was restored and the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia took place (Kingdom of Cambodia, 1993). In the same year Ministry of Women's Affairs was established (MOWA, n.d.) to promote women's status throughout the country. The first ever strategic plan for gender equality and the empowerment of women was published in 1999 (MOWA, n.d.), which was right after initiation of regional ADB's gender and development policy in 1998 (ADB, 2012). Since then, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has launched five (5) five-year gender strategies for gender equality and empowerment of women Neary Rattanak I 1999 – 2003, Neary Rattanak II 2004 – 2008, Neary Rattanak III 2009 – 2013, Neary Rattanak IV 2014 – 2018 and the latest one being Neary Rattank V 2019 – 2023 (MOWA, n.d.) Additionally, the ministry has established the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2014 – 2018 and 2019 – 2023 in order to provide a clear approach to prevention, legal protection, formulation and implementation of laws and policies and M&E (MOWA, n.d.).

Global Gender Gap Report of 2022 lists 146 sample countries based on their gender gap index and in this list Cambodia holds 98th place with 69% index rate which seems to be an average in similar countries, while the highest rates are exceeding 90% (World Economic Forum, 2022, p.124). According to the report the lowest score and the biggest disparity in Cambodia is seen in women's economic participation and especially in leader roles (legislators, senior officers and managers) as well as women's political empowerment meaning women in parliament, women in ministerial positions and females as a head of state. (World Economic Forum, 2022) The absence of women's voice in business management and in the political field signals strong inequality. However, the problems bite even deeper into culture and social structures.

Social norms and gender-based violence

Heavily rooted social norms keep overshadowing Cambodia's development in gender equality. The society still identifies men as heads of household and women as obedient housewives. And many families still prioritize women's role as mothers and caregivers rather than employees (Weimann-Sandig, 2021). These unbalanced roles position men above women and limit women's activities, participation and decision-making power. The dominant role of men is seen not only on home but in communities and on employment/workplaces where women's voices are less respected (UN, 2022) and they are at risk of being subjected to violence. In 2018 one of five women between ages 15 – 49 reported to been subject to physical violence within the past 12 months (UN Women, n.d.). The statistics from Cambodia identify domestic violence and sexual assaults to be most common types of violence against women (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2020, 2).

Unpaid work and gendered roles

Unpaid domestic and care work of women largely constrains participation on education and paid work. Unpaid domestic work can be characterized as cleaning, cooking, shopping, fetching water, taking care of pet(s) and minor household repairs, while unpaid care work includes taking care of children and elderly and managing their matters (Papa et. al., 2021). According to ILO's survey data from 64 countries, more than 16 billion hours are spent every day in unpaid care work, which is equivalent to 2.0 billion people working 8 hours per day with no remuneration (ILO, 2018). Moreover, most of these people are women. Women that dedicate their time for work that is not valued and limits them to stay home without secured economic opportunities. A study conducted in Asia & Pacific, shows that while men (enforced by Covid19 pandemic) have stepped up in taking more responsibilities in the household women are still taking a larger share of the all the work (Papa et. al, 2021). In Asia & Pacific women have reported the unpaid care work as the most common reason among women for being outside of the labour force (Mathew, 2019). In Cambodia, one of the most common and time-consuming duties of women are related to water and sanitation. Women might use hours to fetch clear water for their family's disposal (ADB, 2022).

Additionally, especially in rural areas agriculture is dominative and highly gendered sector with uneven division of labor. For example, in rice production in Cambodia,

women usually are responsible for preparatory activities, transplanting and weeding while as men are in control of land, water usage and technological aspects (ADB, 2015). Lower literacy and education levels of women and gendered occupations are clear obstacles for sustainable livelihood. Not to mention that climate change and rising temperatures are increases the threat to already existing vulnerability of rural areas (OECD, 2017).

Education attainment

While 94% of girls between age 6-14 are attending school, out of all 15-24 years old women in Cambodia only 32% are currently attending school based on 2019/20 Socio-Economic Survey (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2020, p.61). The rates for school attendance are almost equal for women and men. Attendance rate to primary education for women is 90%, to lower secondary education 52% lower secondary, to upper secondary school only 35% and 16% had never attended to school (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2020, p.62-63). Most typical reason for not attending school was reported the necessity to contribute to household income (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2020, p.66). The biggest educational disparity in whole Southeast Asia between women and men is in Cambodian STEM disciplines where there is only 14% women compared to 86% of men (Kampuchea Action to Promote Education, n.d.)

Labour market

The report of Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2019/20 reveals that among working age population (15-64) women's labour market participation is 84%, which is a good figure but still 7% lower than men (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2020 p.77) While the participation is relatively high it does not mean that women would be able to fully utilize the opportunities and benefits of the economy. Job possibilities for low-skilled workers are limited which is why especially most women are working in garment factories. (Weimann-Sandig, 2021). The informal garment and textile industry offers low-paid jobs without social protection. Which then often leads to accumulated debts that households have taken for household renovations and daily groceries (UNDP, 2021).

Finance and skills for future

Women need up to date skillset and knowledge to pursue better livelihoods. While many Cambodian women have bravely stepped into the entrepreneurial life by

coming SME owners, due to lack of general business management knowledge they struggle running their day-to-day businesses operations (Seavmey, 2022). Obstacles women face as entrepreneurs is related to market demands and competition as well as business and financial skills. Furthermore, women-owned businesses tend to be less profitable and more vulnerable to economic shocks.

Financing awareness gap is massive in women-owned micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises in Cambodia. A survey made by Woomentum and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in 2022 reveals that 85% of Cambodian survey participants were unaware of different financial models. The business informality and structural constraints (political, economic and cultural that limit decision making ability of individuals) were identified most crucial factors affecting businesses growth appetite in Cambodia (Womeentum & KAS, 2022).

Decision-making and politics

Because of the fragility of state institutions Cambodia started to emerge into decentralization reform in 2002 (ADB, 2011). Aiming to deepened democracy, a higher degree of gender equality, improved service delivery and infrastructure improvements (Sedara & Chhoun, 2014). While women's engagement in political space decision-making has been an uphill battle in Cambodia, the reform has opened a forum where women are allowed and encouraged to participate in local governance. The reform has been rearranging social norms that have earlier prevented women to participate. (Sedara & Chhoun, 2014) Since 2002 there has been clear increasement in percentage of seats held by women in national parliament and especially after 2006 a huge leap from 10 to 20 percent, indicated one of the most recent research reports of ASEAN region (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). However, the change has not been continuous. In Cambodia 2021, women made up 21 per cent of the National Assembly and 16 per cent of the Senate (The Phnom Penh Post, 2022) This indicates a levelling off in the number of women in top political positions. The most substantial barriers that women face in political field in ASEAN region are; lack of financial resources, sexism and state repression (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). Further, the research report lines that "out of the 45 women leaders interviewed, 88% reported having experienced violence and harassment because of their political role" (2022). This is shown for example in forms of hate speech, trolling and state surveillance (Sinpeng & Savirani 2022). Also putting up campaigns and running for office require financial resources that women most often have less than men.

2.5 The impact of landscape on economic empowerment

All the above-mentioned challenges in different parts of women's life advocate that Cambodia needs more responsive policies and programs to tackle the inequalities. The unfavorable circumstances marginalize women. They prevent women to leave from home and participate on economic activities.

The challenges that women face relate to economic empowerment in many ways. In overall they cause physical, psychological and financial harm to women. In more specifically they effect on women's attendance, mobility and access to public spaces and access to assets which leads to less-rewarding work. Women might fear of travelling and participating to work due to negative attitudes, harassment and violence. (Golla et. al, 2011)

Others believe on changes on individual freedom while others underpin structural changes. Overseas Development Institute (ODI) categorizes factors that are enabling and constraining women's economic empowerment:

Direct factors:

- education, skills development and training
- access to quality, decent paid work
- unpaid care and work burdens
- access to property, assets and financial services
- collective action and leadership
- social protection

Underlying factors:

- Labour market characteristics
- Fiscal policy
- Legal, regulatory and policy framework
- Gender norms and discriminatory social norms (ODI, 2016)

2.6 Approach used in this thesis

The analysis of the selected research data in this study is based on the challenges and needs that women face in their economic empowerment found in the literature review. These key take outs from the literature are refined in the methodology chapter to present a framework for the analysis. The analysis and findings are then reflected to theories and studies of women in development and gender mainstreaming approach. In overall, the used approach is holistic where both direct and underlying factors to women's economic empowerment are considered.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological approach

This study is using qualitative document analysis (Altheide et. al., 2008) to address the research questions. Through the analysis the research reviews and interprets the most current policy documents to develop wider understanding of the phenomenon of social protection in relation to rural women's economic empowerment. Although this re-search is policy focused, its purpose is not to study the process of policy formation, but it focuses on the documents formed as a result of this process, which serve as strategies for development. The document analysis allows systematic procedures for finding answers for specific questions. In this research, document analysis is used as stand-alone method.

Reason for choosing document analysis is that it is cost-effective and has broad coverage. Due to researcher's own responsibilities and the prevailing world situation (Covid19 pandemic & war in Ukraine) it was easiest to carry out the research by using secondary data, when travelling to chosen context country was unachievable. The method made it possible for researcher to work remotely and to comprehensively utilize online materials.

Even the chosen document analysis is very straightforward and serves well the purposes of this research, as any other methodology, it has its limitations. The researcher has to be careful when searching and choosing the documents to avoid biased selectivity. While the upside is that this type of methodology provides broad insights, its

downside often is the lack of detail. Therefore, the researcher has to have good investigation and interpretation skills in order to avoid too wide or in the other hand too narrow perspectives.

3.2 Method of analysis

3.2.1 Document analysis

The systematic review and evaluation of the chosen document, either printed or electronic, is called document analysis. Generally, document analysis involves extensive forms of examination and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). Often the method is used in alliance with other research techniques, but it can also be used as a stand-alone method. Instead of copying the mentioned themes into the research paper, the idea of the method is for the author to understand the deeper meaning of the document and its contribution to solving the research problem. In the document analysis the quality of the document(s) is more important than the number of the documents. The process requires a lot of precision so that all necessary aspects are considered. (Bowen, 2009).

What makes the study qualitative is the thematic or discursive emphasis instead of concentration to statistics and frequency which is more typical to quantitative study. The main idea in qualitative document analysis (QDA) is to systematic and analytic without being too stiff (Altheide et. al., 2008). Eventhough chosen categories initially guide the study, in this method it is allowed and expected for others to emerge (2008). Because of this QDA should be understood as interactive exploring process rather than fixed staircase following certain steps (2008).

Flick (2018) names four aspects to consider in a document: 1) Authenticity 2) Credibility 3) Representativeness and 4) Meaning. *Authenticity* means that research should make sure that the document is not forged. Also, researcher should always look for a primary source to make sure that data is as comprehensive as it was at the time of publication (not edited nor nothing is left out). *Credibility* involves understanding the source reliability and originality of the documents. When considering *Representativeness*, researcher needs to first detect possible biases and secondly to make sure that the selected documents represent the real situation and dynamics in the chosen field of research. In *Meaning*, the data needs to be understandable and clear. (Morgan, 2022)

While the method is easy to use and presents usually less ethical concerns, most researchers tend to value more a participation on active field research. While the researcher would not go into the field, it does not mean that this approach would be any less worthy in the world of research. As equally in document analysis, the researcher must seek, collect and decide on the use of the data appropriate to his or her study. (Morgan, 2022)

3.2.2 Inclusion / exclusion criteria

The inclusion-exclusion criteria was applied to the study for reviewing documents online and deciding which data to include for the research. Criteria included type of research which in this case was ready-existing, secondary data. The type of data meaning only most recent reports and national policies published within past 5 years were considered. Depending on length and interlinkage on the study topic there was consideration on how many to choose. In the search only documents with English language were considered.

3.2.3 Conducting the analysis

The document analysis in this study was conducted through deductive coding. The deductive coding starts with identification of key aspects that directly relate to the research question with the aim of capturing the phenomenon of the research. Sub-questions can be used to help in the formulation of initial coding framework. (Azungah, 2018).

The purpose of the analysis was to examine how are women addressed in the selected document. The manifestation and incidence of women in the data are examined against the background of challenges and needs in women's economic empowerment detected in literature (chapter 3). The literature suggests that Cambodian women continue to face barriers in multiple fronts in full participation to society as equals. The barriers in safety, education and economic participation and well-being are all considered while making the coding framework. Both ODI (2016) categorization of factors that enable and constrain women's economic empowerment and drivers for economic empowerment presented by UNWomen (2017) are in line with findings and supporting the creation of the coding framework.

All relative words and sentences were collected from the data (the policy document). Data was thematically organized. From that began to formulate a start list, in other

words initial deductive coding framework. After creating the initial coding, rationales were considered for each code which then allowed to complete the final coding framework. The final coding framework was refined into categories to advance the analysis. This framework was then applied to addressing the opportunities and gaps in the selected policy document.

Table 1. Coding framework

Codes	Categories
Women, female, girls, maternity	Gender
Negative stereotypes and attitudes against women	Non-violence and security
Violence and discrimination against women	
Burden of household duties and unpaid care work	Unpaid work, social norms and inclusion
Gendered roles and occupations	
Limited representation and voice in public decision-making processes and politics	
Low education levels of women	Human capital
Limited skills and capacity of women, especially in business world	
Limited resources and access	
Limited participation to education and training	
Working in informal economy	Labour market
Low wages and protection	
Limited employment opportunities	

The categories of the coding framework are used as sub-headings in the Findings-chapter. Under each sub-heading is introduced the findings related to that category.

3.3 Data collection

As a result of technological advances, utilizing of secondary data in research has become very easy. Secondary data is pre-existing data that has been usually collected from the primary sources to serve a purpose assigned to it and then made available to others. The pre-existing data has no influence of a researcher.

The first step in data collection was determining the purpose of data collection. In this case the wish was to analyse data that is in written form either policy, strategy or other type of official publication suitable for the thematical purposes of the research.

The second step was to identify the sources of information and what kind of information relevant to the research is available. During this period the researcher went through a great number of different databases and websites. Quickly came apparent that there were lots of literature and different kinds of documents available in English language. As usually in the case of developing countries there can be found a substantial amount of research and reports funded and produced by donors such as WB, ADB, ILO and OECD. In these documents there were many references to the national strategies and policies which got the attention of the researcher as potential research data.

The next step was to understand which of the many different types of policy documents were connected to each other, so that appropriate document or documents could be included in the research data. This process simply took much of reading, thinking and reflecting to the research objectives. The selected document was easily found by using Google search engine, it was published in many sources. The policy document was published both in local (Khmer) and English language. This research uses the one that is translated and published in English language. The length of the chosen document is 255 pages.

3.4 Description of data

The data used for this research consist of selected document, a National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2019-2023 produced by Royal Government of Cambodia and published in 2019. Attention is put on representation of women and their economic empowerment needs in this plan.

Cambodia's vision is to achieve upper-middle income country by 2030 and high-income country by 2050. Towards realizing the vision, the Royal Government of Cambodia has launched in 2018 the *Rectangular Strategy Phase IV for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency* that sets main strategies in all priority areas. The strategy is implemented through refined, sectoral approaches. The *National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023* is a detailed road map for implementation of the Rectangular Strategy Phase IV.



Figure 2. Cambodia's development framework

The NSDP 2019-2023 is 255 pages long plan that is divided into seven (7) chapters: 1) Introduction 2) Major achievements and challenges in the implementation of NSDP 2014-2018 3) Macroeconomic framework for NSDP 2019-2023 4) Key policy priorities and actions 2019-2023 5) Costs, resources and programming 6) Monitoring and evaluation 7) Conclusions.

3.5 Ethical considerations and positionality

Generally, using pre-existing documents raises fewer ethical concerns than other research techniques (Morgan, 2022). In this case the documents (data) are public, freely available and anonymous. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the ownership of the documents. Furthermore, it should be noted that the data has not originally been collected to the purposes of this research thus the data is evaluated through set criteria

that is based on the conceptual starting points presented within the literature/theory chapter.

Considering positionality, the researcher has never visited in the research context (Cambodia) which may seem odd at first, but it actually gives a less biased perspective when considering the research. It positions researcher as neutral in relation to the social and political context of the research and there will be no fixed aspects overshadowing the process. The context of Cambodia was chosen out of researcher's own interest during the study time in university. The research process has involved a lot of background research and previous academic papers and projects before conducting this master's thesis, which has made the researcher well-familiar with the context of a developing country and specifically the circumstances in Cambodia. The political opinions and any personal attitudes were set a side when conducting the data collection, analysis and representing of the finding.

3.6 Limitations of the research

The research is based on secondary data, no empirical evidence was gathered. Secondary data is always trickier when it is not collected or written to the purpose of you research. The written data and short sentences appeared more difficult to interpret than the researcher originally thought.

The research is reviewing only one policy (the main national policy) and not considering the sectoral strategies or interventions around the theme. For example the separate strategy for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. Additionally, the research is not considering the history in sense of comparing previous similar NDPS and their main policy goals. Since policy targets vary in different policy plans and what might have been left out in the most current policy, might have been already well-addressed in the previous one. Although since then a lot have changed.

The chosen strategy was implemented in 2019 before Covid-19 pandemic and does not take stand on accelerated inequality, increased household burden and loss of income of women. We can only hope that the planning for the next strategy has understood the harsh consequences of Covid for women and will showcase effective policy actions to reduce gaps and get back to the way of accelerated development. By the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 most recent literature, news and publications are

considering Covid-19 impacts and remedial actions – finding most recent secondary data that does not talk about Covid turned out to be quite hard. Covid is overbearing theme in the most recent data. The intention was to leave the pandemic issues aside for being able to understand the situation for which this policy paper had been created. To understand the challenges and the needs of women that existed already long before Covid and have only since been worsened.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter is presenting the findings of the conducted document analysis. With document analysis the National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 (NSDP) was examined. The aim was to seek answers for the main research question on *How are women and their needs in economic empowerment addressed in the National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023?* The findings are presented as based on performed categorization in the coding phase (see Table 1).

4.1 Overview

NSDP 2019-2023 is implementing the Rectangular Strategy Phase IV of the Sixth Legislature of Royal Government of Cambodia. The purpose of NSDP is to identify priorities, indicators and timeframe for the implementation with aim to set responsibility for the ministries, agencies and institutions in gaining of inclusive, sustainable development.

During the implementation of previous strategic plan, NSDP 2014-2018, Cambodia has experienced significant developments in economic and social aspects. These achievements are presented in the second chapter of NSDP 2019-2023 under six thematic sub-headings. Since, it is too early to evaluate the level of implementation and achievements of NSDP 2019-2023 the conducted document analysis within this thesis focused on assessing the gender mainstreaming in the document itself. In which ways women are addressed and how their needs in economic empowerment appear in the document. Further, it is good to keep in mind that NSDP 2019-2023 was implemented

before Covid19 pandemic which in turn has accelerated the appearance of inequality and complicated the development situation.

The NSDP 2019-2023 is divided into seven (7) chapters, the largest chapter and most meaningful in terms of implementation is *Key Policy Priorities and Action 2019-2023*. In this chapter prioritized policies for each specific sector (governance, environment for implementation, human resource development, economic diversification, private sector & job development and inclusive & sustainable development) are introduced and followed by planned actions to implement the policies with responsible ministries and institutions. A further elaboration of the approach of NSDP from policy to action:

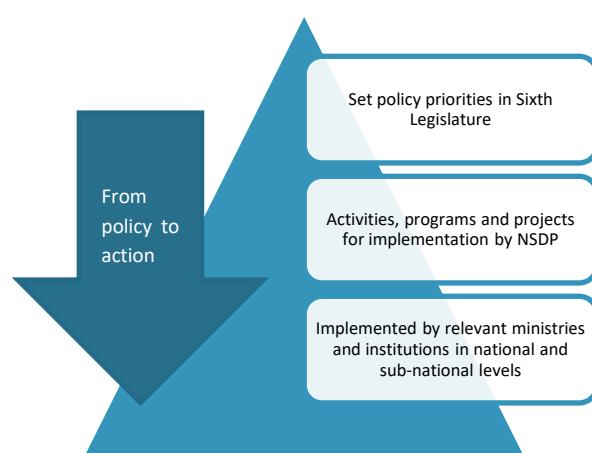


Figure 3. Approach of NSDP

4.2 Gender mainstreaming and representation of women in NSDP

Women’s economic empowerment is central to accomplishing gender equality. Women have an equal right to participate and benefit from markets and economic growth, to obtain skills, knowledge and resources for meaningful life and more prosperous future. Achieving women’s economic empowerment is not a “quick fix”, it will take solid public policies and long-term dedication from all parties in the development sector (OECD, 2011).

The overall findings suggest that there is a large degree of engagement with women and gender equality across the whole document. The NSDP 2019-2023 is not only a

gender aware but a gender responsive road map for policy implementation. The document mentions women 179 times in different areas of development. In the chapter of *Major Achievements and Challenges in the Implementation of NSDP 2014-2018*, gender equity is addressed from the perspectives of economic empowerment, legal protection, representation in politics, health considerations and social morality and values. The *Macroeconomic framework for NSDP 2019-2023* chapter shows trends in labour force contributions for both women and men. In particular, the over-all participation level and participation in different sectors of women. In the *Key Policy priorities and Actions 2019-2023* chapter, the document defines actions for six areas from which one of them is Human Resource Development with sub-heading of Improving Gender Equity and Social Protection. In this paragraph priority activities are listed as follows: 1) Women in Education and Economic Development 2) Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls 3) Women in Public Sector and Politics 4) Gender and Health 5) Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming Mechanism at Sectoral and National Programs, including Climate Change. These priority activities are monitored through key indicators, and separate intervention programmes are carried out under these policy priorities by different ministries and agencies.

Even though gender mainstreaming can be witnessed within the NSDP it can be argued that while being more than gender aware, the document is still not fully “gender mainstreaming integrated” due to being heavily focused on Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA) responsibility on promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment (and especially integrating gender mainstreaming into programs and education). Failing to present comprehensive cross-sectoral approach with all line ministries. Referring to Daly’s (2005) approaches to gender mainstreaming, Cambodia seems to fall into the second categorization which is called “limited transversality”. In the “limited transversality” gender mainstreaming in realized and responsibilities are largely shared but the involvement between ministries vary, which applies well to Cambodia that has a big desire to promote gender equality and to get all public bodies involved, however not all ministries are assigned or obligated to advance the message on women’s participation, empowerment and rights. The NSDP fails to assign policy actions to many ministries, such as, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, Ministry of Environment and National Council for Sustainable Development and Ministry of Cults and Religions – to mention few.

Moreover, the findings show quite mixed messages when considering the precision of detail. On the other hand, policy actions are presented in very general level as mainly

focused on awareness raising by promoting women and gender issues, and on the other hand some policy actions manage to be more direct and binding.

Here presenting some examples of policy actions that are taking that “general” approach by using quotes from the document:

Ensuring quality education with equity and inclusiveness and promoting the opportunities for a life-time study for all. (Ministry of Education, Youths and Sports, p. 143)

Promote gender equity in the field of trade as well as public service (Ministry of Commerce, p.193)

As a part of administration improvement and human resources development; increasing the awareness of gender and gender analysis to gender network officials at all levels (Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, p. 203)

Truth to be told, these sentences are leaving much room for interpretation regarding the level of effectiveness. When using the frame "for all" usually includes various vulnerable groups such as the disabled, school dropout, migrant workers, the elderly, indigenous people and so forth. “For all” strategy seems to be making sure that no one is excluded, yet it is questionable how deep biting the benefit can be if the policy activity is not adequately targeted. Especially with this thesis research in mind, the desired situation would have been to witness special mentions of women.

Next presenting some examples of policy actions that are taking more engaging and direct approach by using again quotes from the document:

Strengthening and enhancing the dissemination law and legislations related to women and children. Enhancing efficiency of litigation solution; training on fundamental laws, legislation related to woman and children and other skills to law enforcement officials, officials and Legal professionals. Promoting of gender in the justice sector. (Ministry of Justice, p. 127)

Improve reproductive health, and reduce maternal, newborn and child mortality and malnutrition among women and young children. (Ministry of Health, p. 150)

Empowering women, children and persons with disabilities in the culture sector. (Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, p. 179)

These example policy priorities swear to believe in improving conditions for women. And they showcase the set responsibilities of other ministries rather just than MOWA's input.

Nonetheless, if the specific task of MOWA's in gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are left out of consideration, the women's needs-specific policy targets and actions are only few in the NSDP document. Since women are mostly seen as indirect beneficiaries through promotion of gender equality in several sectors, development of social security for informal workers (since women mostly work in informal industry), efforts for rural development and rural poverty alleviation and efforts on agricultural development (since women do most labour; fetching water, planting, watering et cetera, which could be eliminated with proper technological solutions). It is disappointing that responsibilities for other ministries are not able to present more specific needs of women as related to skills development, entrepreneurship and access to technology and finance (and financial services).

4.3 Women's economic empowerment

The part 4.3. of analysis is representing findings based on the predetermined coding framework (Table 2.). By following the same sub-heading order as in which order the codes are presented in the table.

4.3.1 Non-violence and security

In overall, the NSDP aims to reinforce equality and social morality in creation of an overarching environment for strategy implementation. NSDP refers to The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) as a formulating and implementing body of versatile plans in the prevention of violence against women:

- Neary Rattanak V 2019-2023 for Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Empowerment
- The third National Action Plan on the Prevention of Violence against Women
- Action Plan on Promotion of Social Morality, Value of Cambodia Women and Families
- Third National Plan of Action against Sexual Violence in 2019-2023

It is emphasized that the implementation of these plans happens at national and sub-national levels through promoting public awareness of the culture of nonviolence and social morality with strengthening of related laws (p.158). Furthermore the NSDP highlights creating and improving social services, health services and legal services, especially, creating a mixed service center for women and girls suffering from all forms of violence (p.158). Since violence and discrimination are the most toxic causes for exclusion, the listed action are absolutely crucial towards gender equality and better security of women.

It should be highlighted that eradicating the harmful cultural roots stemming from the history is only part of the work but as important is to look into the future and educate the young Cambodians to understand the discrimination from the point of respect for human dignity:

Developing the youths fully and educating them to live together in peace and harmony with a spirit of patriotism, love the people, believe in and value themselves, have leadership and social awareness. (p.145)

The fact that young people are taught harmonial social morality has far-reaching positive consequences for eliminating gender-based violence and discrimination.

4.3.2 Unpaid work, social norms and inclusion

While the grand ideology of the ideal family (one should do all the work) is still prevailing in Cambodia (Andresson & Grace, 2018), the NSDP fails to mention women's overwhelming burden at home and its affects to women's ability to get involved. This has been a fundamental issue even before Covid19 when the NSDP was implemented, even though due to the pandemic the amount of domestic work and care have notably increased (EmPower & UN, 2020). In the absence of direct references to household duties or unpaid care work, the Royal Government of Cambodia showcases a great desire to invest in strengthening gender equity to enhance social-economic situation and strengthen women's role in society, as women really are and should be the essential core of the economy. MOWA continues by committing to pay special attention to economic empowerment of women and women's decision-making in the public sector and politics. A necessary condition for effective gender mainstreaming strategy is the participation of women into public decision-making bodies. However, in Cambodia in 2018 there were only 20 % female parliamentarians and 10% female ministers

(NSDP, p.92). This becomes issue in addressing women's concerns and lays a threat for gender mainstreaming.

The programs under policy priorities in NSDP outlines one of the objectives to be expanding community-based child care services. (p.160) Although, this is presented from child welfare and rights perspective, not from the perspective of reducing domestic work burden of women, it will certainly be most helpful way to enhance women's labour market participation and economic activity when women are not as strictly tied their caregiver role. NSDP acknowledges the coverage of national social assistance program and social security scheme to be limited and their management to be fragmented (p.157), which has lead to the situation where the stated measures are found to be insufficient in eliminating discrimination and family burden of women. Yet, in the document social security system is mainly associated with veterans, former civil servants, migrants and people with disability.

NSDP manages to include access to clear water as one of the key notes under the urban and rural development policy priorities. As it is known that in developing countries women might use hours in a day to fetch clean water, Cambodia being no exception (ADB, 2022), the investments in clean water supplies are a step forward. NSDP states that by 2023 90% of population will have access to piped clean water supply (p.156). However, it might still be that the nearest water supply is far away from certain areas. NSDP puts most value to actions in water management and resources, and we can only hope that this will benefit all different communities and groups.

4.3.3 Human capital

According to NSDP, one of the achievements of former national plans and policies is gender equality in education and literacy. Evidently this is true and a great accomplishment towards inclusive society. However, when looking at the evidence from literature and research it is necessary to point out that gaps in women's literature rate between urban and rural areas still exist (Khmer Times, 2021). And whilst women have increased access to education their educational paths remain short, when only partial of them reach to secondary schools and even fewer to upper secondary schools. (National Institute for Statistics Cambodia, 2021)

As an implementing body of several gender mainstreaming plans, MOWA's aims in relation to women's economic empowerment are identified as followed:

increasing the opportunity, the friendly environment, the peace and the possibility of women getting the suitable jobs, the development of technical and vocational skills, including digital technology following the women's needs and market demand, in particular the standard techniques. (p.158)

Since COVID-19 pandemic the digital business sector developed fast and it seems that only those who can capture the opportunities that it brings, will be the ones to benefit the most. Which is why women's participation to the digital advancements really is the key. Like Seavmey (2022) concluded that women are facing hard time to keep their business operations running and responding to market demands due to lacking skills, especially in technology and business knowledge. The ongoing digitalization era creates lot of potential for all entrepreneurs, women included. In this regard, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication aims to deliver the following action:

Mainstreaming the awareness and promotion of the use of ICT in rural areas, especially for vulnerable people such as disabled persons, women and children, to reduce threats to women and children on the internet, and to provide short training courses on ICT to ministries and agencies, capital/provinces and other relevant entities. (p.183)

Which can be seen as an act towards enabling environment for learning and business opportunities for women. Awareness-raising and building skills fits to the Empowerment approach described by Muyoyeta (2004) as a development strategy. We can only hope that this is just the beginning for the change, followed by trainings for not only officials but to the communities and especially to women entrepreneurs. And as part of the empowerment for women to understand their capability (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015) to use and benefit from the technology.

4.3.4 Labour market

As typical for a developing country, most of the labour force work in formal economy and Cambodia is no different. This is one of the biggest challenges according to NSDP, among the issue of promoting entrepreneurship, leadership and strengthening the voice of women entrepreneurs in the economy. UNDP has estimated that as many as 93% of employed people in Cambodia are working in the informal economy (2021).

One of the goals of Royal Government of Cambodia is to develop the job market. Yet not many policy priorities are planned to change things over. Most visible target is social protection reform and especially strengthening of social security fund in the informal economy. This will obviously benefit all workers, also women that are working in the sector. Social protection has a great potential to support inclusive and equitable growth by offering medical services, supporting consumption and saving patterns, encouraging to better education outcomes and work opportunities as well as fostering innovation and investments. There is plenty of evidence of positive impacts especially on poorer households from which many are engaged with informal sector. Social protection can have positive impact on spending throughout liquidity and credit constrains, which will motivate households to invest in education or assets and adopt new technologies, which in turn can eventually increase their income and make them leave the informal sector. (OECD, 2019)

In its planned policy actions NSDP assures to promote entrepreneurship of small and medium enterprises in doing business and investment by providing incentives, capital and technical consulting (p.127). The role of SMEs are highlighted in job creation, poverty reduction and economic growth. The finalization of SMEs Development Policy and establishment of supportive structures will be the key outcomes. Why would this affect women in particular, the reason is that 61% of Cambodian MSMEs are owned by women (UNDP, 2023). Yet, unfortunately most of the MSMEs are operating in informal economy due to low-tech characterizations (UNDP, 2023). After COVID-19 changing the landscape, these women entrepreneurs have struggled to survive without proper digital skills. (UNDP, 2023) In preparing for digital economy NSDP advocates developing entrepreneurship and digital ecosystems by promoting the use of digital system in business (p.181).

4.4 Gender mainstreaming supporting M&E and budgeting in NSDP

NSDP does not present any analytical instruments to assess the impact of MOWA's separate gender policy Neary Rattanak IV (for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment). This would be especially important when there is separate policy that should be cross-cutting in all sectors. Followed by insufficient budget presentation. The total public investment for gender mainstreaming in the NSDP 2019-2023 is allocated to be 400 000 USD which is the second lowest rate in the table (p. 229) together

with culture sector. Budget in separate gender policy might be larger but will the outcomes be cross-cutting.

Surprisingly core indicators for monitoring and evaluation of the NSDP policies are many and their responsibilities are shared to several ministries (such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Civil Services). The indicators cover women in management positions, education, well-being and employment. Additionally, indicators like minimum monthly salary value in textile industry are benefitting women too.

5 CONCLUSION

The unfortunate truth is that Cambodian women live in a society that still privileges people with a male identity. These cultural frameworks limit the full realization of equality and, at worst, the construction of a dignity and decent life. Even so, Cambodia has come a long way in development if you look at the country's history. The economic growth has been frenzied and the country has set for itself high goals to achieve the status of an upper-middle income country by 2030. For this reason, it was interesting to learn about the country's national development plan, to see how inequality and the position of women have been dealt with in this approach. In what ways can the male dominance mentioned above would be translated into a non-discriminatory future view of women.

This research analyzed Cambodia's National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 (NSDP) and its ability to address women and the challenges that prevale around women. Aiming to answer the main research question on "How are women and their needs in economic empowerment addressed in the National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023?". The literature review managed to create a deeper picture of the situation of Cambodian women, on which the data analysis method (coding table) was then heavily based on. The literature was supported by theoretical approaches on gender in development and gender mainstreaming that were used as proven basis for centrain arguments.

The study revealed that despite the successes Cambodia has achieved as a country, gender inequality has not been eradicated. The differences between women and men in education, work and skills are still significant. Discrimination and violence against women are also emerging as major problems in the society. This is why it is important

to create strong policy actions that force the country towards a better tomorrow. Although studies show that women have nominally participated in development for more than 50 years (Koczberski, 1998), the truth about their representation is very different. The theoretical approach gender mainstreaming shows that true consideration of equality means multi-centered and cross-sectoral thinking. (Daly, 2005)

Based on the researched data, it is positive to see that gender equality and mainstreaming concepts are recognized and used in the NSDP. Regrettably the described policy priorities and implementation measures leave room for hope. Naturally the national policy has a wide scope; having affects on economic, social, cultural, and environmental sectors. And it goes without saying that there are indirect benefits to many societal groups through developments and investments in infrastructure, education, health system and public services. However, this thesis research particularly tried to understand what kind of indications there are for improving the economic status of women. The analysis and following conclusions were based on this perspective. From this perspective NDSF positively included policy priorities in women's education and economic development, prevention of violence against women, women in public sector and politics, women's health related issues and strengthening of gender mainstreaming at sectoral and national programmes. Although, before getting too excited, all these policy priorities are listed under the responsibility of single actor; the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA). This implies unbalance and that the full gender mainstreaming integration is still under the process. A positive note is that MOWA holds responsibility in the evaluation of gender mainstreaming. To complement the women-specific policy priorities under MOWA, gender equality goal has been successfully incorporated into many policy actions under several other actors. Yet, there is one problematic that can be witnessed since the gender equality policy goals remain very superficial without more detailed regulations or division of responsibilities. It is important to note that gender equality is not the same for everyone (UN Women, 2017). Usually the needs, like in this case the needs of Cambodian women, are complex and deeply rooted. Gender equality should be deepened into concrete provisions on how harmful gender norms should be dealt with. Like stated by the literature; critical to women's economic empowerment is breaking constraints and creating enabling environments (UN Women, 2017), that should free from structural barriers and discriminatory norms.

In overall, the policy document does not bring out structural reasons behind gender inequality. There is no reference to the history or deep-rooted socio-cultural factors

that majorly influence gender equality in today's Cambodia. Some individual challenges are acknowledged such as women's family burden as barrier for participating on education, but not adequately tackled in the set policy priorities. Additionally, it is not enough for women to be indirectly involved (e.g. social protection reform and infrastructural changes like water supply management), making them passive beneficiaries which was the starting point for establishment of WID (Aguinaga et. al, 2013). But women should be direct targets of certain policy actions. While it is understandable that this type of document's main aim is not to resolve needs of every single women and that it is designed to represent the bigger picture on operating models for ministries in eliminating poverty and developing country's economy, yet it is reflecting the identification of necessary improvements that eventually have direct impacts on community and individual level. Therefore it should be seen alarming that women are left with so little of attention.

6 RECOMMEDATIONS

The findings of analysis of NSDP suggest number of key recommodations for decision makers in policy planning and formulation:

1. Better cohesion and integration between national policies and governing bodies in gender mainstreaming.
2. Accommodative but transformative policy actions in understanding the comprehensive perspective in women's wellbeing. Not only income wise but in terms of work-life balance and life satisfaction.
3. Interviewing women when constructing policies for understanding their varying needs in different departments of life.
4. More precision and commitment on policy targets. Not only guiding governing bodies to promote gender equality but to set concrete tasks in reducing gender based discrimination, accepting women as equals on work places and politics.
5. Foreseeing influence of inequalities on social stability and development outcomes. Inequalities must be confronted, not because of moral reasons, but because widening disparities become a serious obstacle for growth.

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