

COUNTRY GENDER PROFILE

CAMBODIA

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COUNTRY GENDER PROFILE: CAMBODIA

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PREFACE

A proper assessment of the gender situation in Cambodia should be based on reliable data. Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive data base of social indicators in the country. Reliable gender-disaggregated data are particularly hard to find. The data presented here are mainly from the Asian Development Bank, the Ministry of Health, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. The data, in some cases contradictory, should be examined with some caution, focusing on trends and patterns over time, rather than on detailed data analysis. It should also be borne in mind that average figures disguise many important disparities - between urban and rural areas, between rich and poor, between male and female, as well as between different ethnic groups and different regions.

After the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, there is an international consensus that gender equality - equality between women and men - is essential for sustainable economic and democratic development. Gender equality is both a goal for sustainable human development and a pre-requisite for pursuing it effectively. A gender perspective is necessary if we are to understand the underlying causes of and find adequate solutions for critical issues such as poverty, population growth and violations of human rights.

The empowerment of women is a crucial factor in poverty alleviation. Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself, but also the best way to contribute to economic growth and overall development. A continued discrimination of women in Cambodia would be a major obstacle to economic and social development.

The Swedish Government played an active role in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, as well as in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. My task has been to analyse the gender situation in Cambodia in the light of the Beijing Platform for Action. References will also be made to the Programme of Action adopted in Cairo. Both documents have been signed by Cambodia and Sweden.

In 1996, an additional goal for Swedish development cooperation was approved by the Swedish Parliament: equality between women and men.

"This new goal will mean that the perspective of equality between women and men should be applied to all development cooperation. Development cooperation shall support the efforts of developing countries to create equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men." (Government Bill 1995/96:153)

Hopefully, this paper will contribute to making women's empowerment and women's rights an integral part of the Swedish-Cambodian development cooperation.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"In most societies, women are still considered less valuable than men. Their many contributions in the home, the workplace and in society are ignored or undervalued. They generally have little or no say in decision-making within or outside the home, starting with the crucial decision on the size and spacing of their families. They have less access to education than men, fewer occupational choices and lower earnings.

Too many women are poor, are unskilled workers and thus have little opportunity for advancement. Too many women are victims of abuse and violence. Too few women are represented in decision-making bodies such as parliaments and ministries.

The origin of human rights abuses against women and girls is often found in their families, where they first learn that women are second to men. This bias is reinforced by custom, religious doctrine and tradition, and is rarely addressed in public or even in international meetings.

The freedom to make reproductive choices is a cornerstone of women's empowerment. It is the first of women's freedoms and the one from which all others flow. An essential part of women's empowerment is better reproductive health, including access to modern, safe, affordable and effective family planning.

Increasing numbers of women today are working towards their own empowerment. But they cannot do it alone. Men's support is essential: Efforts to increase women's status are unlikely to succeed without it. Because men hold the power to influence societal thinking in most parts of the world, they have a key role to play in eliminating inequalities between themselves and women.

From livingroom to legislature, from bedroom to boardroom, men dominate positions of power. Men must come to recognize that women's empowerment is not a threat but rather a way to improve families and societies. Societal progress can only be achieved if men promote women's empowerment in all spheres: in the home, in reproductive decision-making, in education, in the workplace, and in the political, legislative and public policy arenas. Power that has been hoarded in the past as privilege can be shared in the future for the betterment of society."

Excerpt from "A New Role for Men: Partners for Women's Empowerment", UNFPA, 1996

1. Women and poverty

Cambodia's social indicators are among the poorest in the world, with a ranking of 156 out of 174 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) for 1996. In 1994, the HDI rank was 147 out of 173 countries.

In the UNDP Human Development Report 1995, the gender-related development index (GDI) and the gender empowerment measure (GEM) were introduced. For lack of gender-disaggregated data, Cambodia was not included in the ranking (of 130 countries), but it is evident that Cambodia would be among the countries at the bottom. The UNDP Human Development Report 1996 still has no GDI or GEM data for Cambodia.

The Socio-Economic Survey in Cambodia (SESC, 1994) showed that the average household income was USD 75 per month, or USD 900 per year. Since the average household has 5.5 members, this would mean a per capita income of USD 164. However, there are major variations between, and also within, urban and rural areas. According to the Survey, the average monthly household income in Phnom Penh was USD 198 and USD 57 in rural areas. The Survey also found that 20.8 percent of the Cambodian households were female-headed, ranging from 29.4 percent in Phnom Penh to 20.1 percent in rural areas.

In Cambodia, there is a feminization of poverty. The number of vulnerable individuals is increasing. Most of them are women and children. Many are outside the family and village structure. Rapid political and economic changes have led to separation of family members, increased poverty and migration to urban areas. Armed conflict in some areas, emergencies and environmental disasters continue to displace families. Thousands of parents and children are killed or disabled by landmines every year, with severe social and economic consequences.

The most vulnerable groups in Cambodia include (not necessarily in order of size):

- Widows, divorcees and abandoned women without access to male labour and with children and elderly relatives to support (In Cambodia, the term 'widow' often refers also to divorcees and abandoned women.)
- Sexually exploited women and children, mostly girls, but also boys; this group is growing rapidly and so is the percentage of HIV infected persons within the group
- Child labourers; this group is growing under the transition from socialism to a market economy
- Orphans and abandoned children; Cambodia is said to have some 5,500 orphans living in orphanages and some 200,000 living with relatives or guardians; girls in this group are especially at risk from sexual exploitation
- Street children and street families, including homeless beggars and aged without support; this group is increasing with urban migration
- Disabled children and women; disabled heads of households with children are among the most disadvantaged
- Victims of domestic violence: women and children
- Victims of landmines/amputees; some 30,000 amputees who have been injured by landmines or other acts of war; 300 to 500 new victims of landmines monthly, about half of whom die more or less immediately, the remainder are disabled

- Families suffering from prolonged chronic illness, including mental illness
- Families with many small children to support; family planning services are almost non-existent; abortions are illegal; maternal mortality due to unsafe abortions is extremely high
- The frail aged/elderly without support; statistics on this group are not available, but certainly elderly people without children or relatives lack social security
- Families displaced by armed conflict and environmental disaster
- Inhabitants of very insecure areas

Many vulnerable persons belong to several of the above groups.

2. Demographic imbalance - more women than men

Cambodia has not had a census since 1962, when the population was reported to be 5.7 million. There are plans for a National Census to take place in March 1998. The following demographic data were presented in the document "Cambodia: Demographic Profile", published by UNFPA and the Ministry of Planning in July 1995:

- The total population for 1995 was estimated at 10.2 million. (Earlier the official population estimate was 9.3 million.)
- The population density was 56 persons per square kilometre compared to Thailand 116 and Vietnam 225.
- Women constitute 56 percent of the adult population (20 years and above).
- The proportion of male population is around 70 men per 100 women among those aged 30 years and above.
- One household out of five is under the responsibility of a woman, most of them widows.
- The proportion of widows is high among females aged 40 years and above.
- Cambodian women play an increasingly important role in the economy since 90 percent of them are economically active as against 84 percent among men.
- The number of people aged 15-25 years is relatively low, mostly due to low fertility and high mortality during the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

The demographic data provide a glaring reflection of the civil and political turmoil of the last 25 years in Cambodia. Overall, there is an imbalance between women and men.

The Profile also shows that the crude birth rate (CBR) has been very high in the past 15 years, and remained at 43 per 1,000 in 1993. This means more than 350,000 births a year or about 1,000 births a day. Because of this, the present population is young: 47 percent are under the age of 15 years, thereby contributing to a very high dependency ratio.

The reproductive potential is also very high with 44 percent of the female population in the age group 15-49 years. It is estimated that the population of Cambodia has increased

by 47 percent between 1981 and 1990. Added to this is the return to Cambodia of some 350,000 displaced persons in 1993.

The level of mortality has decreased by half since 1980, but it is still the highest in the region. The crude death rate (CDR) in 1993 is officially estimated at 15 per 1,000. The group most affected are children under five years of age. About one child out of five dies before his or her fifth birthday.

The annual population growth rate is estimated at 2.8 percent by the National Institute of Statistics, and 3.0 percent by the United Nations. The Asian Development Bank estimates that the annual population growth rate is more than 3 percent. With a growth rate of 2.8 percent, the population would reach 15 million in the year 2010, and double in 25 years.

Even if economic development and an active birth spacing policy would result in fertility reduction, population growth in Cambodia is likely to remain high for many years to come. Firstly, as a result of its very young age structure, the population has a strong inherent potential for growth. Half of the country's female population have not yet reached fertile age and the number of women of fertile age will increase significantly within the coming 10 to 15 years. Hence, not even a drastic reduction in fertility would have any great effect on natural growth for at least a decade. Secondly, improved socio-economic conditions are likely to lead to a considerable reduction in child mortality.

The population of Cambodia is relatively homogeneous, more than 90 percent being Khmer. It is estimated that 95 percent of the population speak the Khmer language. The major ethnic communities are the Chams (Muslims), the Vietnamese, the Chinese and the hill tribes called Khmer Loeu. According to the Demographic Profile, these mountain and high plateau tribes consist of more than 30 ethnic groups speaking different languages. Gender-disaggregated data on the ethnic minorities are not presented in the Profile.

The KAP Survey on Fertility and Contraception in Cambodia (Ministry of Health, 1995) provided earlier unknown information on fertility:

- The total fertility rate (TFR) for the five-year period prior to the survey is estimated to be 4.9, i.e. a woman would have an average of 4.9 live births during her lifetime, if she were to pass through all her child-bearing ages conforming to the age-specific fertility rates during the five years prior to the survey.
- The total marital fertility rate (TMFR) is 6.7, i.e. the average number of births (6.7) a married woman would have during her reproductive life subject to the conditions as specified for the TFR.
- The TMFR for the five years preceding the survey for women with no schooling is 7.2, which is much higher than the TMFR observed for women with secondary and higher education (5.3).
- The difference between the TFR and the TMFR is due to marital-age composition which influences the denominator of the rates. For example, among women under 20 years of age, 93 percent are single and among women aged 20 to 24 nearly 40 percent still remain single.
- The survey reveals that marriage is universal in Cambodia. Among women aged 40 to 44 only 4 percent remain single and 17 percent have been widowed, reflecting the high male mortality in the years of war and the Khmer Rouge regime.

- The proportion of widows among women below 44 years of age is expected to decrease in the next decade and unless birth spacing programmes become effective, a further rise in fertility can be expected.

3. Gender inequality in health

The health situation in Cambodia remains one of the worst in the developing world. It is characterized by extremely high mortality, morbidity and population growth rates.

In spite of some progress in recent years, the infant mortality rate (IMR), a clear indicator of the quality of life for children, is estimated at 115 per 1,000 live births. The East Asia and Pacific regional IMR average is 42, compared to Vietnam 36 and Thailand 27. The Swedish IMR is 5.

Cambodia's under-five mortality rate is 181 per 1,000 in contrast to the regional average of 56 per 1,000. The under-five mortality rate in Vietnam is 48, in Thailand 33 and in Sweden 6.

Life expectancy in Cambodia is thought to be around 51 years, compared to 62 years in the average low-income country and 78 in Sweden.

The maternal mortality rate, a reliable reflection of the quality of life for women, may exceed 900 per 100,000 births, one of the highest rates in the world. (Different sources vary between 500 and 1,500 per 100,000 births.) The regional maternal mortality average rate is 160 and the Swedish rate is 5. This means that a Cambodian woman is 180 times more likely to die from pregnancy complications than a Swedish woman.

Every year a large number of children are left motherless due to maternal mortality.

Complications arising from induced abortions are a leading cause of maternal mortality. Abortions in Cambodia are illegal, unsafe, expensive and common.

Malnutrition, anaemia, malaria and other infections, including tuberculosis, as well as a large number of frequent births negatively affect the health status of the mother. Unhealthy delivery practices and very low tetanus immunization coverage aggravate the situation. For every woman who dies, several more survive with injuries, diseases, and disabilities which are often painful, embarrassing and untreated. Gynecological infections are widespread.

Reproductive health services are extremely limited, especially in rural areas where some 80 percent of the population live. The fact that the majority of nurses are males does not help women to overcome their culturally-based reticence to talk about reproductive matters. Few deliveries are supervised by trained health workers. More than 90 percent of the deliveries take place at home.

Maternal disability and pregnancy-related complications are the sharpest indications of women's unequal access to health care.

Premature delivery and delivery complications are reported to cause about two thirds of the IMR in Cambodia.

The KAP Survey on Fertility and Contraception in Cambodia (Ministry of Health, 1995) also provides data on the proportion of currently married women who are using contraceptive methods or contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR). The CPR shows that 13 percent of the married women are currently using some form of contraception. However, only 7 percent of all respondents reported current use of a modern method.

Injectables constitute the most popular modern method, except for the city of Phnom Penh where the IUD is the most popular modern method. Overall, the pill is the second most popular method. Abstinence is practised by 4 percent of currently married women. Of these only one third were able to correctly identify their fertile period in the menstrual cycle.

Among women who are currently not pregnant, the total demand for contraception is 91 percent: 53 percent want to stop having children (demand for limiting family size) and 38 percent prefer to delay the next birth by at least 2 years (demand for spacing children). At present, only 16 percent who want to space or stop having children are currently using a method. The enormity of the unmet need underscores the urgency for effective contraceptive services. Policy makers need to be aware and recognize the fact that women not only wish to space their children but to limit the size of their families. With 84 percent of unmet need for contraception, the vast majority of women need access to affordable contraceptive methods.

The Beijing Declaration adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 states:

"The explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment."

The Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 has 22 detailed paragraphs (91 through 112) on women and health. Of particular relevance for the Cambodian situation are the following excerpts:

"The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences." (paragraph 97)

"... Unsafe abortions threaten the lives of a large number of women, representing a grave public health problem as it is primarily the poorest and youngest who take the highest risk. Most of these deaths, health problems and injuries are preventable through improved access to adequate health-care services, including safe and effective family planning methods and emergency obstetric care, recognizing the right of women and men to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant... The ability of women to control their own fertility forms an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights..." (excerpts from paragraph 98)

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Lack of adequate food and the near non-existence of a basic infrastructure for safe water supply and waste disposal have a negative impact upon the health of the population, especially mothers and children. Malnourished women often give birth prematurely to under-weight babies. Ill-fed mothers often cannot provide adequate breast-milk. Children need enough food to allow their brains and bodies to grow normally.

There is still a tendency to breastfeed boys somewhat longer than girls. Traditionally, it was thought that girls became stubborn or very passionate if they were breastfed too long. Boys, on the other hand, might become too pale if not breastfed long enough. Furthermore, it was thought that boys needed more strength than girls in their future life. (Klaassen, 1995)

Disease is both a cause and an effect of malnutrition. The impact of disease is made much worse by malnutrition; and disease causes loss of appetite and saps energy. Child malnutrition is responsible for a large number of deaths in diseases like diarrhoea, respiratory infections and measles. The use of unsafe water almost certainly correlates with the prevalence of disease in the area: fever, diarrhoea, cough, vomiting, eye infections, skin diseases and gynaecological infections. Excreta-related and water-borne diseases are among the main causes of child morbidity and mortality. The increasing proportion of low birth-weight children reflects the increasing rates of malnutrition of pregnant women. Unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions are leading causes of the extremely high maternal mortality rate. Improved nutrition and birth spacing/family planning could save the lives of many children and mothers every year.

Most of the health problems faced by women in rural areas are linked to lack of basic knowledge in health and hygiene. This lack of knowledge leads to counterproductive attitudes and behaviour, including expensive and often harmful self-medication. The provision of comprehensive health information and education to mothers would be the cornerstone to reducing the immense toll on health and life of diarrhoeal and other diseases.

Real improvements in the health situation of children and their mothers presuppose the addressing of these basic social and environmental needs. Without improved nutrition and forceful interventions for safe water supply, environmental sanitation, reproductive health services and improved education, including massive health and hygiene education, sustainable progress will hardly be made.

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After twenty-five years of war, revolution and social devastation, many women are suffering from depression and post traumatic syndrome (PTSD).

Disability caused by mines and other sources is a serious problem. In Cambodia, there is a strong social prejudice against disability. To be disabled and a woman is to face a double discrimination. Disabled women are less visible than disabled men and therefore less known. For unmarried, disabled women the chances of marriage are remote. A married woman who gets disabled risks being abandoned by her husband.

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A new tragedy of enormous dimensions for Cambodia is the rapid expansion of HIV/AIDS, which in all probability will become a major cause of devastating disease and death within a decade. Cambodia has the fastest growing HIV epidemic in the region, with the doubling time now occurring every sixth month. Commercial sex workers in Battambang tested 48 percent sero-prevalent in August 1995. Prevalence in the armed forces and police was estimated to be about 12 percent in 1995.

A high proportion of Cambodian men of all ages and socio-economic status regularly use prostitutes, before and after marriage. Among pregnant women tested in September 1995, an alarming four percent were HIV positive. These figures indicate that the epidemic has already spread into the general population, and is no longer contained to high risk groups.

As the AIDS epidemic grows, it is becoming clear that women are more vulnerable than men. The reasons are both biological and social. Women, especially young women and adolescents, are physically more vulnerable than men to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Poverty and power relations can also force women into situations of sexual exploitation, including unprotected sex.

The following quotation is taken from the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women:

"... Counselling and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for adolescents are still inadequate or lacking completely, and a young woman's right to privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent is often not considered. Adolescent girls are both biologically and psychosocially more vulnerable than boys to sexual abuse, violence and prostitution, and to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations. The trend towards early sexual experience, combined with a lack of information and services, increases the risk of unwanted and too early pregnancy, HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as unsafe abortions." (excerpt from paragraph 95)

4. The gender gap in education

The returns from educating girls in developing countries have few parallels in any other type of social investment. Education increases a woman's ability to participate in society and to improve her quality of life and standard of living. The World Bank (1995) claims that data from around the world show that the private returns to investments in education are not only equal but in fact slightly higher for girls than for boys. This means that an extra year of schooling for a girl will result in a greater rate of increase in wages than for boys. As stated in the Beijing Platform for Action, literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. (paragraph 71)

According to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo, 1994) Programme of Action "education, together with reproductive health, is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process." (paragraph 4.2, excerpt)

Edward Fiske, a consultant for the Asian Development Bank (Using Both Hands: Women and Education in Cambodia, 1995) estimates that the adult literacy rate in Cambodia is 35 percent; 22 percent for adult women compared to 48 percent for adult men. The rates are much lower in rural areas than in Phnom Penh. According to the Bank, the average adult male in Cambodia has 2.3 years of schooling and the average adult female 1.7 years. It is estimated that some one million men and two to three million women cannot read or write. A recent survey of vulnerable female heads of households showed that some 75 percent were illiterate and without skills.

The Cambodian Constitution guarantees free primary and secondary education, but the reality is different. The gross primary school enrollment in Cambodia is reported to be about 83 percent, ranging from 90 to 95 percent in Phnom Penh to 30 percent in isolated rural areas. Of all girls, 40 percent never even start school. The gender gap widens with each successive level of schooling. During the school year 1993-94, the percentage of girl students in primary school was 45 percent, in lower secondary school 39 percent and in upper secondary school 34 percent.

There is a vast contradiction between the official goal of universal education and the persistence of female subordination within the Cambodian family unit. The major causes of the gender gap in education in Cambodia are as follows, according to Fiske:

- Education of boys seen as more important
- Need for girls to work at home and in the fields
- Direct cost of fees, uniforms, supplies, etc.
- Distance to schools
- Corruption
- Lack of latrines and sanitary facilities
- Lack of female teachers and role models

Parents often worry about sending girls far from home to school as the girls' reputation for 'honour' and 'proper behaviour' then might be questioned.

The percentage of female students in higher education is decreasing, e.g. from 25 percent in 1989-90 to 15 percent in 1993-94 at the Phnom Penh University and from 16 percent in 1989-90 to 12.6 percent in 1993-94 at the School of Medicine in Phnom Penh. In 1994, only 4.6 percent of the graduates from the School of Agriculture were women. This was less than half the percentage in the 1980's. Female agricultural extension workers are extremely rare. The lack of female decision makers in agricultural policy planning and administration is almost total, in spite of the fact that the agricultural workforce consists mainly of women.

In the most prestigious faculties, law and economics, the underrepresentation of female students is particularly glaring: females account for less than one percent of the total number of students.

During the school year 1993-94, 32.5 percent of the primary teachers were women (increasing trend), but only 25 percent of the lower secondary teachers (decreasing trend) and 25.5 percent of the upper secondary teachers (also decreasing trend). The lack of female teachers deprives girls of valuable role models. Many international studies have shown that girls tend to perform better when taught by women teachers.

The Beijing Platform for Action points out that the prevailing high rate of illiteracy in most developing countries remains a severe impediment to the advancement of women and to development. (paragraph 71) The Platform states that curricula and teaching materials remain gender-biased, thereby reinforcing traditional female and male roles and denying women opportunities for full and equal partnership in society. Lack of gender awareness by educators at all levels reinforce discriminatory tendencies and undermine girls' self-esteem. The lack of sexual and reproductive health education has a profound impact on women and men. (paragraph 76)

Among the strategic objectives (paragraphs 82 through 90) adopted in Beijing to ensure equal access to education are the following paragraphs:

"... By the year 2000, universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 percent of primary school-age children; closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005; universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015;

Eliminate gender disparities in access to all areas of tertiary education by ensuring that women have equal access to career development, training, scholarship and fellowship, and by adopting positive action when appropriate;

Create a gender-sensitive educational system in order to ensure equal educational and training opportunities and full and equal participation of women in educational administration and policy- and decision-making; ..." (paragraph 82)

"Take actions to ensure that female teachers and professors have the same opportunities as and equal status with male teachers and professors, in view of the importance of having female teachers at all levels and in order to attract girls to school and retain them in school." (paragraph 85 d)

5. Social status of women

Khmer society is strictly hierarchical. Equality does not come easily. It may well be that most men high up in the hierarchy find Food for thought, page 3, a bit hard to digest. Other factors being equal, old age carries more status than youth and a man has higher status than a woman. Social status is also related to many other factors, including wealth, family reputation, employment, political or religious position, and moral character as judged by others in the community. In the hierarchical system, women are found in all social strata. One strong determinant of a woman's status is the status of her husband. Another is the fulfilment of the Khmer moral code of conduct, the Chbap, or didactic codes:

"The woman is to be silent, and walk so softly that one cannot hear the sound of her silk skirt rustling. She is shy and naive and must be protected. Before her marriage she has ideally never left the company of her family members. At the same time women are expected to be strong and capable of running a household, including handling all of the family finance. These cultural ideals contain inherent contradictions. In part this reflects the cultural expectations at different times in a woman's life. It is as a young woman that she must be shy and protected. It is as a married woman with children that she controls the household and sells goods in the local market. But in some senses the contradiction is not resolved, and the woman is ideally many things, the pushy matron bargaining in the market and the silent wife who defers publicly to her husband." (Ledgerwood, 1996)

The rules of behaviour explain how the husband should be treated:

"A woman has to play four roles in the life of her husband; she should be his mother, his older sister, his friend and his servant. She should always honour her husband and care for him. If he is angry, she has to be patient and not talk back. If he beats her, she should not defend herself by beating back. A woman always has to be polite towards older persons and she should invite neighbours to come in her house whenever she sees them. When there are any problems in the family or when she has personal problems, she should refrain from letting others know about them or discussing them with someone outside the house." (Klaassen, 1995)

In Theravada Buddhism, the dominant religion in Cambodia, women are placed lower than men. A person's position in society is a consequence of his or her activities over several lifetimes. Only men can become Buddhist monks and thus have a chance to be released from the cycle of rebirth:

"Women can gain merit by offering food to the monks or by offering their sons to be monks, but in general Buddhism tends to devalue women who are associated with attachment in this world, through their love of their families and through their economic activities. Men are associated with the more highly valued notion of detachment and withdrawal from the world, which is personified in the person of the monk. Women are respected and honoured in story and proverb primarily through their role as mothers." (Ledgerwood, 1996)

Norrlind (1996) asked men and women in a village about typical characteristics of men and women. The majority said that men in general were wise, physically strong, intelligent, knowledgeable and hard working. In addition, men had plenty of time. A few women, however, felt that the most typical characteristics of men were hard drinking, impoliteness and unkindness. The opinions about women were unanimous: shy, honest, modest, gentle, active, hard-working, humble, economical and ignorant.

The 'surplus' of women has decreased their status in recent years. Lower bride prices are being offered in marriage arrangements. It is becoming more common that men marry women and then abandon them. Some women become second or third wives rather than staying unmarried. Some women are forced into prostitution to survive. (Ledgerwood, 1996)

Every chapter of this paper deals with women's status in one way or another.

6. Domestic violence against women increasing

The Beijing Platform for Action devotes a chapter to violence against women. The following quotations are taken from that chapter:

"... The fear of violence, including harassment, is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. High social, health and economic costs to the individual and society are associated with violence against women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. In many cases, violence against women and girls occurs in the family or within the home, where violence is often tolerated. The neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and rape of girl children and women by family members and other members of the household, as well as incidences of spousal and non-spousal abuse, often go unreported and are thus difficult to detect. Even when such violence is reported, there is often a failure to protect victims or punish perpetrators." (paragraph 118)

"... Violence against women is exacerbated by social pressures, notably the shame of denouncing certain acts that have been perpetrated against women; women's lack of access to legal information, aid or protection; the lack of laws that effectively prohibit violence against women; failure to reform existing laws; inadequate efforts on the part of public authorities to promote awareness of and to enforce existing laws; and the absence of educational and other means to address the causes and consequences of violence." (paragraph 119)

The Cambodian experience seems to verify the above statements. In 1994, the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs and UNICEF hosted a regional conference on intra-familial violence. The Phnom Penh Declaration Against Intra-Familial Violence and a Regional Plan of Action were adopted, and later presented at the Beijing Conference. The following quotations are taken from "Plates in a basket will rattle: Domestic violence in Cambodia", a summary report prepared by Kathy Zimmerman for the Beijing conference on the situation in Cambodia :

"The intensity of violence perpetrated against many women is breathtaking. Most respondents were victims of extremely violent abuse. They suffered severe and unrelenting beatings, including punches, kicks, hair-pulling, whippings with ropes, bamboo canes, metal rods and cords, immolation, rapes, stabbings and gunshot wounds.

The Khmer Rouge experience, decades of war, pervasive violence, the

availability of weapons and inadequate dispute resolution mechanisms appear to greatly increase the severity of the violence.

Victims often understate the frequency, tenor and scope of the violence. Victims are ashamed of being in abusive relationships. In many instances women related a low level of abuse or denied it completely, but others – neighbours, relatives, local officials – contradicted them, firmly stating that the beatings were regular and cruel.

Wife-battering is considered an internal family matter by the courts, police and local authorities. Women are counselled to be patient while abusers go unpunished.

Alcohol, poverty, gambling, family squabbles, lack of education and political and social unrest contribute to domestic violence, but it is clear that sexism, culture, social mores and traditional public attitudes cause and perpetuate domestic violence.

Traditional, sexist notions of the role of women allow for and encourage domestic violence. Gender equality is not yet an integral part of Cambodian culture. Both men and women perpetuate sexist ideals. Women are told by men, parents, officials and other women to cook good food, clean the home, speak sweetly and obey their husbands to avoid being beaten.

Without significant penalties or official disapproval, batterers feel free to batter and cannot learn other ways to express their aggression. Ignoring the problem perpetuates the problem.

... Women fear the shame of 'widowhood' or acquiring the socially unacceptable title of divorcee.

... Police almost never respond to assaults. Reported assaults are not treated as criminal matters. Domestic violence is viewed as an internal family matter.

... Some judges have only a superficial and abstract knowledge of the law. Many apply it incorrectly. Most local officials do not even have a written copy of the law. The law is less important than social pressures and traditions."

More widely, violence against women is also a tragedy for development efforts.

See also Chapter 11, Human rights of women.

7. Prostitution becoming a major social, medical and human rights problem

A traditional Cambodian proverb compares boys and men to diamonds and girls and women to cotton. When dirty diamonds are washed their sparkle is recovered. White cotton, however, loses its purity once stained. A sexual double standard approves of men regularly and frequently using prostitutes and scorns unmarried women who are not virgins. Fear of scorn from the family and community are particularly acute for girls who have been raped. Once raped, prostitution may be the only career for a vulnerable girl. Social contempt and a sense of being dirty and degraded are powerful factors keeping women and girls in brothels.

It is obvious that prostitution – including rapidly increasing sexual exploitation of children, mainly young girls, but also young boys – is becoming a major social and human rights problem. It is also one of the important causes of the epidemic spread of

HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. A high proportion of Cambodian men of all ages and socio-economic status regularly use prostitutes. Foreigners, including paedophiles, are also entering the market. Many of the women and children have been kidnapped and literally sold into sexual slavery. They live under appalling conditions, including mental, physical and sexual abuse by pimps, brothel owners and clients.

According to an article in the Nation (27 October 1995), the Cambodian Women's Development Association (CWDA) claims that the number of prostitutes has grown to over 25,000 in 1995 from around 6,000 in 1992. Nearly half of the commercial sex workers interviewed in a recent survey by CWDA said they had been sold into brothels, the majority of them unaware that their work would involve prostitution. Few had any education and most no knowledge about the danger of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. According to the article, approximately 65 percent of Cambodia's prostitutes are young Khmer women, the rest come from Vietnam, Thailand, China, the Philippines and, reportedly, even from Russia and Eastern Europe. Many of the women become part of a revolving bonded labour brothel network which links the country's major cities. It is claimed in the Nation article that Cambodian government and military officials are cooperating in the trafficking of Khmer women to Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

In 1996, the AIDS Commission of the Ministry of Health estimates that there are some 50,000 prostitutes in Cambodia, about half of whom are HIV-infected. This indicates an alarming increase in relation to the data quoted above.

See also Chapter 3, Gender inequality in health, and Chapter 13, The girl child.

8. Women and armed conflict

The armed conflict in Cambodia has created a mass flow of refugees and internally displaced persons, the majority of whom are women, adolescent girls and children. The proportion of widows and abandoned women in Cambodia is exceptionally high.

The presence of land mines and unexploded war ordinance is a constant threat. The mines continue to claim 300 to 500 victims per month, and for each survivor at a mine explosion one person dies. Cambodia has one of the highest proportions of people with amputations in the world: one in every 236 persons has lost at least one limb, or part of a limb. Support systems for the disabled are very limited. See also page 9. According to World Bank reports six to nine million mines remain to be cleared.

Women and armed conflict is the subject of paragraphs 132 through 151 of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The following excerpts are of particular relevance regarding Cambodia:

"While entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex. Parties to conflict often rape women with impunity, sometimes using systematic rape as a tactic of war and terrorism. The impact of violence against women and violation of the human rights of women in such situations is experienced by women of all ages, who suffer displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, and who are victims of acts of murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy in situations of armed conflict ... This is compounded by the life-long social, economic and psychological traumatic consequences of armed conflict and foreign occupation and alien domination." (paragraph 136)

"... The negative impact on development of excessive military expenditures, the arms trade, and investment for arms production and acquisition must be addressed. At the same time, maintenance of national security and peace is essential for economic growth and development and the empowerment of women." (paragraph 139)

"Take into account gender-sensitive concerns in developing training programmes for all relevant personnel on international humanitarian law and human rights awareness and recommend such training for those involved in United Nations peace-keeping and humanitarian aid, with a view to preventing violence against women, in particular." (paragraph 147i)

9. Women in the economy

Cambodian women play a major role in the economy, since 90 percent of them are economically active as against 84 percent among men (Cambodia: Demographic Profile, Ministry of Planning, July 1995). Women's share of the adult labour force (age 15 and above, 1990) in Cambodia is estimated at 54 percent, according to the UNDP Human Development Report 1996. This figure is unique. No other country in the world has such a high share of women in the labour force. However, as more and more young men, born after 1979, enter the paid workforce, women tend to be pushed out. There is also the influx of demobilized soldiers competing for employment. Cambodian statistics on unemployment and underemployment are not available.

Women workers are in the majority in agriculture, petty trade and low-skilled labour in industry and services. Other sectors, including teaching and nursing, are dominated by men.

Over 65 percent of the agricultural producers are women. Their contribution to food security in Cambodia is substantive. Rural households without an adult male face the risk of high labour costs for heavy agricultural work such as ploughing. Such labour costs may lead to indebtedness, loss of land, and, in the end, migration to urban areas, where many women lack the necessary skills for survival. There are recent signs that the rural agricultural labour shortage is being partially eased, as young men born after 1979 are reaching the age when they can plough and do other heavy work. There are also the returnees from the refugee camps and demobilized military men entering the workforce. (Ledgerwood, 1996)

Traditionally, Cambodian women handle money and the household economy. Most small and medium scale traders in rural markets and in the cities are women. In the service sector, women constitute 58.9 percent of the workforce. Some two-thirds of the civil servants are female. Most of them occupy lower positions.

The transition from socialism to a market economy has included privatization of land, the selling of state-owned factories, the lifting of state subsidies in the areas of health care, education and agriculture and the opening up to foreign investments. The economic reform programmes now going on have increased the pace of national economic growth and benefited sections of the population, but it has also excluded many people, most of them women. The transformations have often led to a reduction in women's income or to women being deprived of income. Tens of thousands of state employees are being fired. For example, one of the first casualties in the reduction of the number of civil servants was the Women's Association of Cambodia. There seems to be consensus that the move from socialism to capitalism has had a disproportionately negative impact on women's employment. There has been an increase in women's

unemployment, destitution, landlessness, urban migration, domestic violence, child labour, prostitution and incidence of HIV/AIDS.

With the emergence of new industrial opportunities in the private sector, women with skills are often able to find work in the new factories. Their conditions of employment, however, are usually less favourable than those of their male counterparts.

With diminishing employment in the state industrial sector due to privatization, women are fast moving into the informal sector, where they are in the majority. Access to financial resources by low-income women is a key factor in human development. Most of Cambodia's people are poor, and most of Cambodia's poor people are women. For poor people in rural areas, village usurers have long been the main lending source. Interest rates are as high as 150 percent per year or even more. In recent years, ILO, UNICEF, UNDP and other international organizations, including NGOs, have provided loans for women at low interest rates. The overall repayment rate has been very high. These activities are still in small scale and much more is needed.

Regarding the issue of limited access to credit, the following quotations from two World Bank reports are worth consideration:

"While investing in girls' education results in the highest social gains, lack of access to financial services, to land, and to information and technology compounds the unequal treatment of women. Requirements for collateral, high transaction costs, and limited mobility and education contribute to women's inability to obtain credit. When women do have access to credit, the effect on household and individual well-being is striking. Borrowing by women is linked to increased holdings of nonland assets, to improvements in the health of female children, and to an increased probability that girls will enrol in school. (World Bank. 1995a. "Toward Gender Equality: The Role of Public Policy")

"Making it easier for women to gain access to financial services is an effective way of reducing poverty. Such access enables women to contribute to family welfare and to help their families grow out of poverty. Extending such services to women also makes sense for financial intermediaries because it leads to greater savings mobilization and because women have greater repayment rates than men." (World Bank. 1995b. "Advancing Gender Equality: From Concept to Action")

10. Gender inequality in power and decision-making

The Beijing Declaration adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 makes some very definite statements on power and decision-making:

"Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace." (paragraph 13)

"It is essential to design, implement, and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes, at all levels that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women." (paragraph 19)

In the 1993 elections in Cambodia, women comprised 54 percent of the registered voters, and 58 percent of the actual voters. Of the candidates, only five percent were women. Of the 120 members elected to the National Assembly only five were women,

i.e. 4 percent. At present, there are seven women in the National Assembly, i.e. a 5.8 percent representation.

After passing the Constitution in September 1993, the elected members of Parliament formed a government which had no woman minister and no woman secretary of state. Even the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs, established in 1993, was headed by a man, Mr Keat Sukun. After the Beijing Conference, in 1996, the Secretariat was upgraded into the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Mr Keat Sukun remained in charge. (There is no Ministry of Men's Affairs.)

There are no longer any women provincial governors.

This almost total male dominance is a clear deterioration from the situation in the 1980s. But it is precisely the participation of women at the highest decision-making levels in political and economic life which can drive the change for greater equality between men and women.

The Beijing Platform for Action devotes several paragraphs to the issue of women in power and decision-making, for example:

"... Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved." (paragraph 183)

"... Women in politics and decision-making positions in Governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues." (paragraph 184)

"The equitable distribution of power and decision-making at all levels is dependent on Governments and other actors undertaking statistical gender analysis and mainstreaming a gender perspective in policy development and the implementation of programmes. Equality in decision-making is essential to the empowerment of women. In some countries, affirmative action has led to 33.3 percent or larger representation in local and national Governments." (paragraph 189)

Some of the strategic objectives adopted by the Beijing Conference in 1995 to increase women's participation in the political process, are as follows:

"Monitor and evaluate progress on the representation of women through the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data on women and men at all levels in various decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, and disseminate data on the number of women and men employed at various levels in Government on a yearly basis; ensure that women and men have equal access to the full range of public appointments and set up mechanisms within governmental structures for monitoring progress in this field." (paragraph 192.e)

"Develop communication strategies to promote public debate on the new roles of men and women in society and in the family." (paragraph 193.e)

"Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist women and girls, particularly those with special needs, women with disabilities and women

belonging to racial and ethnic minorities, to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage them to take decision-making positions." (paragraph 197.a)

"Create a system of mentoring for inexperienced women and, in particular, offer training, including training in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion, as well as in political campaigning." (paragraph 197.c)

"Provide gender-sensitive training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and respect for diversity in work and management styles." (paragraph 197.d)

11. Human rights of women

The Beijing Platform for Action devotes a chapter to human rights of women (paragraphs 213 through 233). The following quotations are taken from that chapter:

"... lack of awareness within the judicial process and inadequate monitoring of the violation of the human rights of all women, coupled with the under-representation of women in justice systems, insufficient information on existing rights and persistent attitudes and practices perpetuate women's de facto inequality. De facto inequality is also perpetuated by the lack of enforcement of, inter alia, family, civil, penal, labour and commercial laws or codes, or administrative rules and regulations intended to ensure women's full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms." (paragraph 219)

"While women are increasingly using the legal system to exercise their rights, in many countries lack of awareness of the existence of these rights is an obstacle that prevents women from fully enjoying their human rights and attaining equality. Experience in many countries has shown that women can be empowered and motivated to assert their rights, regardless of their level of education and socio-economic status. Legal literacy programmes and media strategies have been effective in helping women to understand the link between their rights and other aspects of their lives and in demonstrating that cost-effective initiatives can be undertaken to help women obtain those rights. Provision of human rights education is essential for promoting an understanding of the human rights of women, including knowledge of resource mechanisms to redress violations of their rights. It is necessary for all individuals, especially women in vulnerable circumstances, to have full knowledge of their rights and access to legal recourse against violations of their rights." (paragraph 227)

The Cambodian Constitution (1993) states that both sexes shall enjoy the right of active participation in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation; that men and women are equal in all fields, especially in marriage and the family; that both sexes have the right to receive the same wages for the same job; and that housework is equal in value to paid work. The Constitution also states that all forms of discrimination against women shall be abolished, and exploitation of women's work shall be prohibited. Article 46 states: "The commerce of human beings, exploitation by prostitution and obscenity, which affect the reputation of women shall be prohibited."

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified by Cambodia in 1992. Thereby Cambodia declared its intention to work towards equal rights in all fields and its opposition to any discrimination, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex. However, no step has yet been taken by the government to implement CEDAW. A new Women's Code was drafted by the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs, but it remains to be passed. Bills dealing with rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, prostitution and trafficking of women are

still to be passed. Moreover, passing legislation is one matter, ensuring enforcement is another.

Men dominate the judicial branch in Cambodia. They pass, interpret and enforce laws. The legal system is extremely weak. There are few trained lawyers in the country. Only two percent of the police force are women. (Ledgerwood, 1996)

See also Chapter 6, Domestic violence against women increasing.

Among the strategic objectives adopted in Beijing to ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice is the one stated in the following excerpt:

"Provide gender-sensitive human rights education and training to public officials, including, inter alia, police and military personnel, corrections officers, health and medical personnel, and social workers, including people who deal with migration and refugee issues, and teachers at all levels of the educational system, and make available such education and training also to the judiciary and members of parliament in order to enable them to better exercise their public responsibilities." (paragraph 232.i)

12. Gender inequality in the media

The Beijing Platform for Action states that everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. As an educational tool the mass media can be an instrument for educators and governmental and non-governmental institutions for the advancement of women and for development:

"More women are involved in careers in the communications sector, but few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private local, national and international media organizations." (paragraph 235)

"The continued projection of negative and degrading images of women in media communications – electronic, print, visual and audio – must be changed. Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions in a changing world. In addition, violent and degrading or pornographic media products are also negatively affecting women and their participation in society. Programming that reinforces women's traditional roles can be equally limiting..." (paragraph 236)

"In addressing the issue of the mobilization of the media, Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes." (paragraph 238)

Although women constitute 56 percent of the adult population in Cambodia, only about ten percent of the journalists are women. Less than one percent of the decision-making editorial positions are held by women. Of 60 editorial offices in Cambodia, 49 have no women employees.

A recent report ("Gender and development: Resource booklet" by Catie Lott/CCC, October 1995) notes that the image of women across the media spectrum continues to suffer. The space devoted to women's issues is a small percentage of the overall total, and this coverage is generally negative. Television and newspapers perpetuate negative images of women and continue to reinforce the traditional stereotypical roles

Cambodian society defines for men and women. The report recommends that further efforts to utilize television, radio, and newspapers to change current images of men and women – and support of those few groups trying to do so – should be a priority, since the media can play an important role in forming public opinion over a relatively short time period.

The Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMC) is a fairly new local NGO producing five-minute spots for television about women's issues, including health, education, human rights and domestic violence. The Khmer Women's Voice Centre (KWVC), another local NGO, is involved in gender research and advocacy. The KWVC specializes in print media.

Some of the strategic objectives (paragraphs 234 through 245) adopted in Beijing to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies, and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media, are as follows:

"Support women's education, training and employment to promote and ensure women's equal access to all areas and levels of the media." (paragraph 239.a)

"Encourage, to the extent consistent with freedom of expression, these bodies to increase the number of programmes for and by women to see to it that women's needs and concerns are properly addressed." (paragraph 239.e)

"Facilitate the compilation of a directory of women media experts." (paragraph 241.c)

"Encourage the establishment of media watch groups that can monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women's needs and concerns are properly reflected." (paragraph 242.a)

"Encourage the media and advertizing agencies to develop specific programmes to raise awareness of the Platform for Action." (paragraph 243.b)

"Encourage the media to refrain from presenting women as inferior beings and exploiting them as sexual objects and commodities, rather than presenting them as creative human beings, key actors and contributors to and beneficiaries of development." (paragraph 243.d)

"Produce and/or disseminate media materials on women leaders, inter alia, as leaders who bring to their positions of leadership many different life experiences, including but not limited to their experiences in balancing work and family responsibilities as mothers, as professionals, as managers and as entrepreneurs, to provide role models, particularly to young women." (paragraph 245.b)

13. The girl child

The girl child as a category, defined as females under the age of eighteen, comprises around one quarter of the Cambodian population.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was signed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk as President of the Supreme National Council in 1992. Gender discrimination is not in accordance with the CRC. Article 48 of the Cambodian Constitution of 1993 recognizes the CRC. Vickery (1996), however, points out that some of the provisions of the CRC are radically contrary to Cambodian mores. He quotes a UNICEF source:

"The concept that children have rights is not self-evident in traditional Khmer society, which tends to see children as the property of their parents, who have every right to make decisions regarding the lives of their offspring."

The Platform for Action adopted in Beijing devotes a separate chapter to the girl child. (paragraphs 259 through 285) The following quotations of relevance to Cambodia are taken from that chapter:

"Girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. Discrimination and neglect in childhood can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream. Initiatives should be taken to prepare girls to participate actively, effectively and equally with boys at all levels of social, economic, political and cultural leadership." (paragraph 260)

"Gender-biased educational processes, including curricula, educational materials and practices, teachers' attitudes and classroom interaction, reinforce existing gender inequalities... In many cases, girls start to undertake heavy domestic chores at a very early age and are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and an early drop-out from schooling. (excerpts from paragraphs 261 and 263)

Persistent discrimination against the girl child in Cambodia is documented in Chapter 3, Gender inequality in health, and Chapter 4, The gender gap in education, of this paper. References are made in other chapters as well.

Sexual exploitation of children is outlawed by the Constitution, but there are limited legal instruments to implement it. According to the 'Friends' project document (1995), illegal trafficking of mainly girls, but also boys, for the flourishing commercial sex industry, is increasing. Pimps and brothel owners know that some customers have a fear of AIDS and that most prefer not to use condoms. They provide ever younger and apparently healthy children as sex partners to give the impression that they are free of STDs. In fact, sexual intercourse with a child has a greater risk for transmitting STDs including HIV/AIDS due to the fragility of the mucus membranes of a young girl's vagina or a young boy's anus. An international newsletter for paedophiles recently described Cambodia as a new territory, with weak laws and little enforcement. Children are sold to brothels out of economic desperation and because the business is lucrative. Often the very young girls are told they are being brought to Phnom Penh or other places for household work. They then end up in brothels. Sex workers aged 13 and 14 are reported to be quite common. Also girls as young as ten years old, and even younger, are forced into sex work. Many of them live under slave-like conditions, including mental, physical and sexual abuse by pimps, brothel owners and clients and denial of access to medical services. Ten years from now most of these girls will probably have died or will be dying in AIDS.

Social scorn and a sense of being dirty and degraded are powerful factors keeping women and girls in brothels. Fear of scorn from the family and community are especially acute for a girl who has been raped. There is a feeling that once she has been raped, the only profession she is fit for is prostitution. Several sources claim that there is an alarming decrease in the age of sex workers. Sex with young girls, especially virgins, is thought to rejuvenate adults. Boys often seek their customers openly in the streets, but young girls are usually locked up in brothels or in special 'safe houses'. Young girls without education or family support are extremely vulnerable. They live under constant stress.

The following quotation is taken from the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing:

"Sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, have a devastating effect on children's health, and girls are more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations. Girls often face pressures to engage in sexual activity. Due to such factors as their youth, social pressures, lack of protective laws, or failure to enforce laws, girls are more vulnerable to all kinds of violence, particularly sexual violence, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, possibly the sale of their organs and tissues, and forced labour." (paragraph 269)

Among the strategic objectives adopted in Beijing to counteract discrimination of the girl child are those formulated in the following paragraphs:

"In addressing issues concerning children and youth, Governments should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on girls and boys respectively." (paragraph 273)

"Disaggregate information and data on children by sex and age, undertake research on the situation of girls and integrate, as appropriate, the results in the formulation of policies, programmes and decision-making for the advancement of the girl child." (paragraph 275.a)

"Encourage educational institutions and the media to adopt and project balanced and non-stereotyped images of girls and boys, and work to eliminate child pornography and degrading and violent portrayals of the girl child." (paragraph 277.e)

"Increase enrolment and improve retention rates of girls by allocating appropriate budgetary resources and by enlisting the support of the community and parents through campaigns and flexible school schedules, incentives, scholarships, access programmes for out-of-school girls and other measures." (paragraph 279.d)

"Develop training programmes and materials for teachers and educators, raising awareness about their own role in the educational process, with a view to providing them with effective strategies for gender-sensitive teaching." (paragraph 279.e)

"Ensure education and dissemination of information to girls, especially adolescent girls, regarding the physiology of reproduction, reproductive and sexual health, as agreed to in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and as established in the report of the present Conference, responsible family planning practice, family life, reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection and AIDS prevention, recognizing the parental roles... " (paragraph 281.e)

14. National machinery for the advancement of women

The Beijing Platform for Action states as follows regarding national machineries for the advancement of women:

"In order for the Platform for Action to be implemented, it will be necessary for Governments to establish or improve the effectiveness of national machineries for the advancement of women at the highest political level, appropriate intra- and inter-ministerial procedures and staffing, and other institutions with the mandate and capacity to broaden women's participation and integrate gender

analysis into policies and programmes. The first step in this process for all institutions should be to review their objectives, programmes and operational procedures in terms of the actions called for in the Platform. A key activity should be to promote public awareness and support for the goals of the Platform for Action, inter alia, through the mass media and public education." (paragraph 296)

"As soon as possible, preferably by the end of 1995, Governments, in consultation with relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations, should begin to develop implementation strategies for the Platform and, preferably by the end of 1996, should have developed their strategies or plans of action. This planning process should draw upon persons at the highest level of authority in Government and relevant actors in civil society. These implementation strategies should be comprehensive, have time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring, and include proposals for allocating or reallocating resources for implementation. Where necessary, the support of the international community could be enlisted, including resources. (paragraph 297)

According to the Beijing Platform for Action, national machineries for the advancement of women have often been marginalized within national government structures. These machineries are often hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, data and sufficient resources, and insufficient support from national political leaders. The Beijing Platform for Action states (paragraph 203):

"A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. The necessary conditions for an effective functioning of such national machineries include:

- (a) Location at the highest possible level in the government, falling under under the responsibility of a Cabinet minister;
- (b) Institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organizations and community organizations from the grass-roots upwards;
- (c) Sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity;
- (d) Opportunity to influence development of all government policies."

The Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs (SSWA) was set up in November 1993 to protect women's rights at home and in the work place, and to improve their living conditions in the areas of economy, health, education, protection, social services, etc. In 1994, the Secretariat received 0.12 percent of the national budget, the smallest amount of any government department. (As mentioned above, women constitute 56 percent of the Cambodian adult population.) The head of the Secretariat was a man. Budget constraints and political infighting were targets of criticism within the SSWA. Another common criticism of the SSWA was that it should not be expending valuable and limited financial resources and staff on the implementation of small economic projects. Rather, the thrust should be on advocacy and mainstreaming gender issues throughout the entire governmental structure.

For the Beijing Conference, the SSWA Technical Adviser Ms. Chantou Boua prepared an excellent country report on the situation of women in Cambodia. The name of the report is 'Women: Key to National Reconstruction'.

In connection with the Beijing Conference, the two co-Prime Ministers announced that the Secretariat would be promoted to a full Ministry in 1996, with a woman as Minister. In 1996, the Secretariat was upgraded into the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Mr Keat Sukun, Secretary of State of the former SSWA, is in charge of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. He is a returnee from Australia and a member of the minority Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), an opposition political party. There have been attempts to appoint a woman minister, Ms Sochua Mu Leiper, but this appointment has not been approved by the National Assembly. The budget allocation for the new Ministry has not yet been determined.

The SSWA and the Ministry have been receiving assistance from a great many donors, including ADB, JICA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM, and several international NGOs. With technical and financial support from ADB, the Secretariat is in the process of drafting a comprehensive National Policy for Women, to be followed by a Plan of Action. As of late 1996, a National Plan of Action for Women has not yet been presented. The Beijing Platform for Action has not yet been translated into the Khmer language.

The Beijing document stresses the role of NGOs in the advancement of women. The first Cambodian NGO working with women's issues in particular was established in 1991. There are now some 30 local NGOs working with gender issues, including leadership, human rights, HIV/AIDS, health, education and the advancement of women in general. Some of these organizations have made remarkable progress in short time. Most of the NGOs are based in Phnom Penh. Their activities include research, documentation, media production, credit and training. Some are focusing on domestic violence and prostitution. A network of international and local women's NGOs and UNICEF are meeting monthly under the auspices of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC).

Amara Women's Network, an organization of local women's NGOs, was established in 1995 to mobilize women from the provincial level down to the villages. Amara tries to identify potential women activists and train them as women's leaders in the provinces.

The Beijing Platform for Action also stresses the need for gender training and gender sensitization within government and donor organizations. A report on gender training ('Gender and development in Cambodia', by Catie Lott/CCC, 1995) summarizes the situation in Cambodia in the following way: Only one-third of the international organizations and donors have a gender and development policy, despite an acknowledgement of the importance of having such a policy. Less than one-third of the international organizations use formal methods or tools for integrating gender into their activities and policies. Only twelve percent of the international organizations are involved in gender training. The monitoring of the after effects of the training appear to be very weak or non-existent. A lack of qualified trainers was perceived as being greater than financial needs.

The Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) has been working with government officials to raise their level of awareness about gender issues and clarify why it is not just a 'women's affair'. (There is no Ministry of Men's Affairs.) The CDRI Director concludes that the gender training so far has not been effective: the right people have not participated, there is a fixation that gender is feminism (which, in their view, is bad), there is a lack of interest and a failure to see the relevance to the Cambodian development context. CDRI is now developing a new approach focusing on economics rather than gender.

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This report has made extensive use of the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly through quotations on key issues. The reason for doing so has been twofold. Firstly, it serves as a reminder of the consensus arrived at among the international community with regard to improvements in the situation of women all over the world. Secondly, it illustrates the huge gap which exists between the ambitious goals and high principles of the Beijing document on the one hand, and the stark realities of today's impoverished Cambodia on the other.

Clearly, time for action has come in Cambodia, for the Government as well as for those countries, like Sweden, who have committed themselves to uphold and support the Beijing Platform for Action and, through collaborative efforts, make it a reality.

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