



## Gender Analysis of Cambodia’s Young and Older Generation Survey on Family, Community, Political Knowledge and Attitudes, and Future Expectations

### Introduction

The Royal Government of Cambodia, government institutions, the international community and civil society have long been working together to address gender issues, with positive effects for thousands of women and children in Cambodia. Gender equality, for instance, was made central to achieving the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals. The National Strategic Development Plan sets out specific gender-related targets and indicators, including for reducing domestic violence against women, improving maternal mortality rates, enhancing girls’ education, and promoting women’s employment and participation in government, especially in high-level positions. Although gender equality in Cambodia has improved significantly, there is still far to go, as encapsulated in the following: “Gender equality has never been part of Cambodian society and women are still often regarded as subordinate and dependent on their male family” (Baudinet 2018, 6); “Cambodia has a strong tradition of enforcing cultural norms pertaining to women – how they should look, act or think” (Thon 2017, 32).

### The study

This policy brief summarises a gendered analysis (Un, Saphon and Sok 2019) of the results from the nationally representative survey conducted by CDRI for the research study

“Cambodia’s Young and Older Generation: Views on Generational Relations and Key Social and Political Issues” (Eng et al. 2019). The survey was conducted from October 2017 to January 2018 and was administered to 1,610 Cambodian citizens (aged 16 to 65 years) in 101 (72 rural, 29 urban) villages in five provinces and Phnom Penh. It collected information on demographics, identity and values, trust and respect, outlook, political participation, and media.

What makes this gender analysis unique is that instead of treating women as a homogenous group, it attempts to explore women’s perceptions, attitudes and beliefs across different attributes, namely age, educational attainment, marital status, rural/urban residence, employment type, mobility, and internet access. The study draws on the survey responses as sole primary data, classifying them into four broad themes: family, attitudes towards community, political knowledge and attitudes, and future expectations. It then examines the -interactions and relations and the specific factors explaining differences among women with different attributes, as well as between men and women, on contemporary socio-political issues.

The results indicate that these attributes, especially age, place of residence, level of education and internet use engender women into different types of person, and have an

important influence on women's social and political participation and perceptions. This finding has critical implications for gender policy and practice, and indeed future research, in that any attempt to empower women and promote gender equality and equity that treats women as a homogeneous group will fall short of expectations.

## **Key findings**

### **Family**

#### *Generation gap and decision making in the family*

The majority of respondents recognise that their generation is different from other generations, with over half of them agreeing that it is acceptable for young people to disagree with their parents. Among female respondents, the higher percentages of perceptual differences were found among Phnom Penh residents, those with higher than basic education and internet users.

The generation gap not only affects who should make certain decisions, but also what and why such decisions must be made. Although parents still take responsibility for decision making, young people are increasingly perceived to be responsible for making their own life decisions about education, employment and marriage. Again, among female respondents, the higher percentages of perceived authority were found among Phnom Penh residents, those with higher than basic education and internet users.

#### *Marriage*

Marriage is highly valued and desired in Cambodian society as it represents the only acceptable and respectable step towards forming a family or entering parenthood. Given that forming a family is basically done through marriage, living together beforehand is not widely valued or considered acceptable. Even so, this traditional way is being challenged, especially among young educated women and women living in Phnom Penh who seem more accepting of the idea of a couple cohabiting before marriage.

### **Attitudes towards community**

#### *Trust*

The high level of distrust among Cambodians is largely the legacy of almost three decades of war and genocide, and corrupt services delivery after the Khmer Rouge years (Baker and Milne 2019). Although there has been no independent study of social trust in Cambodia, the survey results indicate a moderately high to high level of trust in social institutions such as schools and hospitals, the media, local institutions, the police and courts, and politicians, though to different degrees.

An unexpected finding is that only a small proportion of respondents, especially women who live in Phnom Penh and have higher than basic education, reported they strongly trust development workers in their community. Notably, a high proportion of women across all attributes stated they "somewhat trust/somewhat distrust" development workers. This is a serious concern given that Cambodia has the second highest number of active NGOs per capita in the world.

#### *Caring about country and participation in community*

About half of the respondents said they care about their community and country. The higher percentages were found among female respondents aged below 30 and Phnom Penh residents. Care does not necessarily translate into high community and social participation, however, especially among female respondents residing in Phnom Penh, those with higher than basic education and non-internet users. The remarkable finding here is that the majority of women who participated in local events did not ask questions, even though most of them claimed they were not afraid to do so.

### **Political knowledge and attitudes**

#### *Gender perspectives on leadership and social and political participation*

Traditionally, masculinity is strongly embedded in Cambodian society and is respected by both male and female respondents as the privileged gender norm and behaviour. The

main challenge that is difficult to address is not social discrimination against women per se, but women's acceptance of being socially objectified and stereotyped. More female than male respondents generally accepted that men make better political leaders than women. Similarly, more female than male respondents, especially those aged above 30 and those with basic education or lower, admitted feeling afraid to discuss political views offline.

A very high proportion of male and female respondents voted in the national election, especially those who use the internet. More female (25.0 percent) than male respondents (16.7 percent), and more older (81.6 percent) than younger female respondents (23.7 percent), were likely to always vote for the same political party in national elections. This intention is consistent with the answers given by the majority of respondents who vote based on political party rather than the political candidate's credentials or other people's influence. The high number of people who turn out to vote in national elections suggests the perception that their vote will have a positive impact on the country's future.

#### Concern over social issues and services

Among 13 different national social issues and services (infrastructure, education, health, economy and jobs, environment, poverty, landlessness and debt, crime and security, corruption, political party conflict, injustice, border issues, widening wealth inequality between the poor and the rich, and migration), both male and female respondents ranked infrastructure, education, health, economy and jobs, and environment as the most important issues requiring attention from the government.

#### Future expectations

Despite the challenges facing Cambodia, the majority of respondents felt that the country is on the right track. This does not mean they perceive men and women will benefit equally, however. A significantly higher percentage of female than male respondents were concerned that their gender is an obstacle to their success.

Specifically, among female respondents, older women, non-Phnom Penh residents and those with basic education or lower consider their gender to be more of an obstacle to their success than younger women, Phnom Penh residents and those with higher than basic education.

#### Conclusion

Of the seven attributes selected for study, we can conclude that age, place of residence, level of education and internet access significantly shape women's perceptions and socio-political participation. The following summarises highlights from the findings and arising issues that warrant further attention from agencies whose mission is to empower women and promote gender equality and equity.

- Family:
  - Young people are increasingly allowed to take responsibility for making their own life decisions. *Young women who have higher than basic education, live in Phnom Penh and use the internet are more likely to challenge the traditional hierarchy in Cambodian society and conservative way of living and thinking than those who have basic education or lower, live outside Phnom Penh and do not use the internet.*
- Attitudes towards communities:
  - Whether citizens' trust in national institutions and public servants can recover to that of the pre-war period remains to be seen, but the survey results suggest some positive signs. Hospitals/schools are perceived to be the most trustworthy institutions, though local institutions, the media, police/court and politicians are also seen as fairly trustworthy. *Importantly, very few respondents expressed having no confidence in any of these institutions and people.*
  - There is a large grey area around the perceived trustworthiness of development workers, reported by almost half of female respondents. *This is cause for concern given that Cambodia has the second highest number of active NGOs per capita in the world.*

- o The majority of female respondents either care or somewhat care about the country, though these sentiments apply more to older women and non-Phnom Penh residents than to younger women and Phnom Penh residents. *This issue deserves attention given that youth constitute about 60 percent of the population and the rapid pace of urbanisation in Cambodia.*
- o Care about the country does not translate into high levels of community participation. Even among those who participated in local meetings and claimed they were not afraid to speak up, the majority did not ask any questions. *Further study to explore people's reluctance to speak at public meetings would help improve the quality of civic participation.*
- Political knowledge and attitudes:
  - o Despite efforts to empower women and promote gender equality, the widespread perception that men make better leaders than women persists even among women, especially older women, those with basic education or lower, and non-internet users. More women than men find that gender is an obstacle to their success, particularly older women, non-Phnom Penh residents and those with basic education or below. *Addressing gender equality is not just a matter of dealing with men's preconceived notions about women's place, but also women's self-perceptions about their worth and role in society. Women are not only oppressed by men, but also by their internalised oppression as a subordinate group; it is the latter that remains at the heart of Cambodian society.*
  - o Most respondents exercise their right to vote and are aware of the significance of their vote for the country's future. *They believe government can address their concerns about various national social issues and services, the most important to them being infrastructure, education, health, economy and jobs, and environment.*
- Future expectations:
  - o The majority of respondents believe the country is on the right track, though markedly few women without internet access hold this view. *This points to the need to improve internet literacy and raise awareness and share information about certain social issues and services.*
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