

ABOUT UN WOMEN

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

SITUATION OF WOMEN – OVERVIEW

With a population of 13.4 million, Cambodia is one of the most populous countries in Southeast Asia, and also one of the poorest. 80% of the population is rural, and an estimated one-third of Cambodians still live below the poverty line.ⁱ After decades of civil war, the country emerged from conflict in the early 1990s, and the reconstruction phase has seen some economic growth, as well as improvements in overall health, education and income standards.ⁱⁱ However, significant challenges remain, and Cambodia is still classified as one of the world's Least Developed Countries. Women, who make up more than half the population, constitute the majority of the poor. High rates of illiteracy and gender-based violence, and a lack of economic opportunities continue to represent serious obstacles to women's advancement.

Legal Frameworks for Gender Equality – In the last decade, efforts to improve the situation for women have made progress, particularly in the legislative and political arenas. International agreements, such as the Millennium Development Goals and CEDAW, have received a boost in political commitment.ⁱⁱⁱ Since 2001, gender equality efforts, including CEDAW implementation, have gained momentum, furthered by the strengthening of the national

women's machinery—the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) and the Cambodia National Council for Women (CNCW)—and the engendering of national plans, such as the *National Strategic Development Plan (2006-2013)*. MOWA's third plan of action, *Neary Rattanak III (2009-2013)*, is underway, outlining the mainstreaming of gender throughout national policies and programmes, and focusing on increasing women's political participation and economic empowerment, and on removing discrimination against women in the areas of education, legislation, and health including HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

The reform of the *Criminal Code* is ongoing, including amendments to punish acts of discrimination against women. Revisions to the *1996 Law on Suppression of Kidnapping, Trafficking/Sale and Exploitation of Human Persons* now include sanctions against offenders and protection measures for victims. The *2001 Land Law* states that women and men have the right to co-sign land titles, and the amended *Marriage and Family Law* now allows divorce on grounds of “cruelty and beatings”, and allows for married men and women to jointly own property. In October 2005, the *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims* came into force.

Poverty and employment — High oil and food prices in 2008, and the global economic crisis that followed, have worsened the situation of the poor. Almost 92% of the nation's poor live in rural areas dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. Food insecurity and absent livelihood options are pushing women to urban areas in search of work in the garment industry, or abroad as migrant workers. Many are engaged in informal employment where they are subject to low or irregular income and unstable conditions, or at risk of trafficking and exploitation.^{iv} In the 2009 global downturn, an estimated 30,000 mostly female garment industry jobs were lost, with employers reportedly pressuring women to waive their benefits and severance knowing that they may not understand their rights or have the means to protect them.^v

Migration — The feminization of out-migration is increasing with many women going across the border to Thailand as domestic workers. Sex-disaggregated data on migration is lacking, made more difficult by the burgeoning numbers of migrants who leave Cambodia via undocumented, irregular channels to avoid the onerous

process and excessive fees charged by recruitment agencies. While there is a Labour Migration Policy (2007) in place, and MOUs have been signed with Thailand, Korea and Malaysia, actual implementation and policy coherence remains weak.^{vi}

Legislative framework — The challenge of legislation in Cambodia lies in its implementation and enforcement. Many laws that purport to protect women and uphold their rights have little *de facto* effect because of weak enforcement, the absence of sanctions for non-compliance, or the lack of effective monitoring mechanisms. Despite amendments to the *Land Law*, which give rights to women to register and own land, discrimination continues because women may not understand the legal process, may be excluded from land distribution decision-making, or are losing out to private companies who are confiscating land with impunity. Similarly, the amended *Marriage and Family Law* offers poor protections, as long as cultural norms that obstruct women's right to freely enter into marriage or seek divorce continue to be socially accepted.

Violence Against Women — Cambodian women are vulnerable to trafficking and exploitative prostitution. As a receiving and sending country, Cambodia is a major focal point in the regional sex trade. Domestic violence is widespread. According to a 2009 survey by MOWA, despite the 2005 law, 22.5% of married women experienced violence at home, and up to 89% did not report it. Women continue to face barriers to accessing justice.

UN WOMEN IN CAMBODIA

UN Women's work is driven by an emphasis on increasing women's participation—in politics, in decision-making processes, and in economic and livelihood opportunities—and empowering them to know and claim their rights. Efforts have included:

Expanding democratic governance through increased participation of women in both formal and informal decision-making processes — UN Women supports NGOs to promote women's participation in the electoral process. A partnership with women's NGOs in the lead-up to commune elections in 2007 providing training for female candidates on governance and election campaigning, alongside training to raise voter's awareness about the importance of women's representation in politics. Post election data showed that in 2007 female candidates rose to 21% from 15% in 2002 and number of women elected increased to 15% from 8.5%.

Engendering national planning and policy-making — UN Women provides technical support to government institutions such as MOWA and other ministries to integrate gender principles into the development, implementation, and monitoring of national development

strategies, budgets and other sectoral plans. Support is also going towards monitoring commitments to CEDAW, the MDGs, *Neary Rattanak III*, and UNSC Resolution 1325.

Promoting the economic empowerment of the most excluded women who are ethnic minority women, HIV-positive women, and women with disabilities — UN Women supports the use of gender-responsive budgeting among government and civil society to monitor resource allocation to improve women's economic situation. UN Women addresses rights violations of women migrant workers, and builds their awareness of 'safe migration' issues. UN Women is developing a standardized pre-departure training module and is also working with the government to ensure gender-sensitive implementation of sub-decrees to protect the rights of migrant workers.

Promoting the leadership and participation of HIV-positive women's organizations and women affected by HIV/AIDS — In engendering of Cambodia's third National Strategic Plan for a Comprehensive and Multi-sectoral National Response to HIV and AIDS (NSP III), UN Women works with the government in shaping the policies, programmes, and resource allocations that address the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Mapping the situation of women with disabilities in Cambodia using the framework of CEDAW — UN Women supports the National Policy for Gender Equality - *Neary Rattanak III*, the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals and the National Action Plan for People with Disabilities.

Addressing violence against women — UN Women supports government partners to collect and analyze data, develop policies and institutionalize services required to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. A partnership with MOWA has helped to strengthen inter-ministerial coordination to implement and monitor the National Plan to Prevent VAW. Ongoing support will be provided to public awareness-raising campaigns organized by gender advocates including the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign initiatives.

ⁱ [UNDP Cambodia](#).

ⁱⁱ The Human Development Report 2010 ranks Cambodia 124 out of 169 countries. The poverty rate fell from 47% in 1993 to 30% in 2007 (UNDP Cambodia).

ⁱⁱⁱ Cambodia ratified CEDAW in 1992, but attention to implementation has only surfaced recently with the submission of Cambodia's initial, second and third periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee in 2006. Civil society groups also submitted their very first shadow report to the Committee.

^{iv} [Achieving Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals: Update 2010](#), Ministry of Planning, Royal Government of Cambodia.

^v See [Asia-Pacific Human Development Report: Power, Voice and Rights](#), UNDP, 2010.

^{vi} See [Situation Report of International Migration in ESEA](#), Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration Including Human Trafficking, 2008.