

State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Cambodia

Photo: Rokas Skelewis

Policy context and key challenges

Compared with men, women in Cambodia, and in the wider world, are more significantly affected by climate change because of their dual productive and reproductive responsibilities. The existing gender-based inequalities in Cambodia are rooted in the gender norms and gender stereotypes that persist in the economic, social, and cultural perspectives and practices in the country. These have led to gender inequality and gender gaps, that have been exacerbated by climate change and its negative impacts; Considering that inequalities and climate change are not gender-neutral phenomena, the work to combat the root causes of inequality must continue. Over the past decade, Cambodia has been committed to addressing the impacts of global climate change on women and men, and to promoting a national response to support gender equality. It has witnessed the establishment of a national mechanism and national strategies to address climate change adaptation - along with mitigation measures - and gender inequality. To ensure economic, environmental and social equality in climate action, gender mainstreaming has been recognised as one of the core strategies in key national policies, strategies and programs. The Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency Phase IV, Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goals Framework 2016-2030, the National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 and the National Environment Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2023 have integrated gender into policy commitments and implementation processes. Although the Royal Government of Cambodia has made great progress in mainstreaming gender commitment and climate actions into the key policy, strategy and plans listed above, the implementation of gender equality in climate change action remains inadequate. Implementation efforts are hampered by many challenges including limited coordination and facilitation, a low understanding of gender concepts, persistent discriminatory social norms and traditional gender roles, limited sex, age and diversity disaggregated data¹ and a big gap between planning and budgeting for climate change and gender mainstreaming implementation at both national and subnational levels^{2,3}.

¹ Reggers and Lim. 2019. Review of policy commitments for integrating gender issues into climate change action and disaster risk reduction in Cambodia

² GSSD. 2017. National Adaptation Plan Process in Cambodia. General Secretariat of National Council for Sustainable Development/Ministry of Environment, Kingdom of Cambodia, Phnom Penh.

³ MoWA. 2020. Gender and Climate Change Action Plan (GCCAP) 2019-2023. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Key findings

The key findings from the assessment report on the State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Cambodia suggest that gender-responsive measures in climate change policies, strategies and programs are key to reducing gender inequalities in climate action. Despite the recognition and acknowledgement of gender in climate change adaptation policy, the major challenge remains at the project implementation stage due to a lack of specialised staff and practical supporting activities, as well as, a lack of gender indicators and resources for translating gender policy objectives into practical action. The gender action aspirations of some sectoral climate change action plans have been unattainable because of the budget shortage and a lack of human resources. The understanding, knowledge and skills relating to gender analysis for gender integration are also still limited. Furthermore, there are no indicators or milestones relating to gender and hence any gender-related outcomes are not captured by the National Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework for Climate Change Tracking Adaptation and Measuring Development. The monitoring system to measure gender assessments is not detailed enough for gender-related issues. The indicators developed to monitor climate-related gender-specific vulnerabilities are also not sufficiently user-friendly for line ministries and subnational agencies⁴. This assessment report found, through a sectoral analysis, that the Master Plan on Agriculture aspires to modernise the agricultural sector to be the most competitive, inclusive and resilient to climate change and environmental sustainability with proposed gender-sensitive actions. The Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Rural Development was officially approved, while gender mainstreaming into strategic development plans in the energy and forestry sectors are under development. The effort to improve the implementation of policy commitments on gender-responsive climate action is underway, but more work will be required to achieve the country's goals for gender equality in climate action.

⁴ Garcia, J., Tech, C., and Gurung, D. 2019. Mid term review of Cambodia climate change strategic plan 2014-2023. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Photo: UN Women/Pornvit Visitoran

Energy

The energy sector plays a key role in delivering national commitments to lower the emission of greenhouse gases and to reduce the impact of climate change. In Cambodia's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 2020, seven mitigation actions and two adaptation measures related to energy were introduced. Gender-inclusive, cleaner technology development, energy efficiency and renewable energy are the core strategies in energy policy development. Cambodia has reached the target that *"all the villages in the Kingdom of Cambodia have access to electricity of any type in 2020 and at least 90 per cent of all households in the Kingdom have access to grid quality electricity by 2023"*^{5,6}. However, access to electricity is not yet equal between the rich and the poor, men and women and the most vulnerable groups. Notably, fewer female- than male-headed households have access to on-grid electricity. Firewood and charcoal account for the highest percentages as the primary sources of fuel for both male and female-headed households in rural areas. Further, women and girls, whose primary job is to cook for a family, are more prone to health problems due to their exposure to pollutants and emissions, and inadequate ventilation structures.

However, the specific impacts on women and girls in the energy sector have not been mentioned in relevant strategy and planning documents such as the Climate Change Strategic Plan (CCSP) for Mines and Energy Sectors 2014-2023; the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) for Energy Sector 2021-2023; the National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023; and a draft of the National Energy Efficiency Policy 2018-2035. Gender is addressed in the strategic objectives and cross-cutting issues section of the CCAP for the Energy Sector 2021-2023 of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, but there is neither a detailed action plan - the program for gender mainstreaming - nor a specific budget allocation to carry out the commitment, which is *"to reduce the vulnerability of women and risks to human health impacted by climate change by region and sector"*⁷. There is no gender analysis section detailing whether or not women will benefit from those provisions. Gender-responsive policy in the energy sector could contribute to achieving the government's policy towards inclusive growth and sustainable development, green growth and reducing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. Thus, there should be greater gender promotion and specific gender indicators in those policy provisions.

5 MME. 2020."Climate Change Action Plan for the Energy Sector 2021 – 2023."

6 RGC. 2018."National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023."

7 MME. 2020."Climate Change Action Plan for the Energy Sector 2021 – 2023,"pp.24.

Agriculture

The agriculture sector is a main player in Cambodia's economy and employs more than half of the total female labour force. Climate change poses a significant threat to agricultural production and adversely impacts men and women in different ways. This includes a shift in employment (from mostly male to mostly female-dominated) and natural disaster-induced out-migration. Further, existing persistent discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes, socio-economic opportunities, and women's lack of control over resources and assets, or access to new technology, can amplify the climate change impacts felt by women in agriculture.

The General Population Census Cambodia 2019 recorded that female-headed households possess a very small proportion of the total shared farmland and that this makes it difficult to diversify crops once new agriculture technology is introduced⁸. As a result, the impact of a change in the weather becomes more severe and harmful to women farmers who suffer greater losses in terms of livelihood options and food security. Simultaneously, persistent social norms and gender stereotypes burden women with the responsibility to care for their families and to provide domestic support. This hampers their access to productive work. The gendered impacts of climate change on local farmers include a gap in the adoption of new technologies in agriculture, the decline in rice yields due to the impacts of flooding, droughts and insect outbreaks, and losses of investment in agriculture, which lead to out-migration to cities.

Some agricultural policy and strategy documents note the important role of women in agriculture and include explicit gender equality references in detailed action plans for implementation, including associated budget allocations. However, the Agricultural Sector Master Plan 2030 of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries does not include a gender analysis section and it consequently does not identify the differential impacts of climate change on women and men in terms of the needs, priorities, capacities and critical roles of women as agents of lasting change in agriculture. The crucial role of women in responding to climate change in environmental conservation and production processes in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, must be reflected in gender-sensitive and responsive action and subsequently implemented in a gender-inclusive way.

8 NIS. 2020. "General Population Census Cambodia 2019." Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Photo: UN Women/Piyavith Thongsa-Ard



Photo: UN Women/Stefanie Simcox

Rural development

Increased climate variability has adverse impacts on rural infrastructure, the water supply, sanitation and hygiene, access to rural public services, family incomes and household economics. Notably, due to the different roles of rural women and men, the gendered impacts of climate change are not equal. Given the unbalanced access to basic physical assets, and social, economic and environmental resources, women and men do not enjoy equal access to public and private services, including financial resources, health services, education and economic opportunities. Furthermore, women's participation in decision-making processes in rural development is very limited. A higher proportion of rural women than men are involved in vulnerable employment, working as own-account workers or conducting unpaid work for the family.

The low adaptive capacity of local women can be attributed to the high risks associated with climate change⁹ and consequently low climate resilience. In 2019, ActionAid Cambodia found that women had a lower resilience index of 0.56 compared with the 0.59 scored by their male counterparts. This was the result of low accessibility to structural buildings for protection from extreme weather, safe places, early warning systems, and resilient housing. At the same time, women exhibited only a moderate ability to acquire energy for household consumption and had limited access to safe water and sanitation¹⁰.

Yet, there is a lack of sex-disaggregated data in climate change action plans in the rural development sector. Only a few projects promoting water, sanitation and hygiene and reducing discrimination against women, specifically the violation of

indigenous women's rights, implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development in partnership with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, included gender concerns in project implementation plans. Coverage of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change in the rural development sector is mostly absent.

Forestry

Women and men are often confronted with the different effects of climate change and forest-related activities, and thus their responses and corresponding interventions and implementation practices are also differently designed. Notably, women in Cambodia are more reliant than men on natural resources. However, women have fewer opportunities to participate in natural resource management and associated information and knowledge or capacity development. Therefore, the impacts of deforestation and forest degradation are relatively worse for women than they are for men. In Cambodia, this increases the time women spend collecting firewood or forest products and presents further challenges, if and when forests are destroyed.

Gender mainstreaming in forestry and forest-related environmental policies remains scant while the impacts of climate change on women in the sector are worsening. More effort is needed to acknowledge the important role of women in forestry and natural resource management and to promote gender inclusion in policy, strategy, planning and program development. There is a need to develop specific action plans with sound gender indicators, sex-disaggregated data and budget allocation to achieve target policies and set objectives.

9 Nong, M., M. Chhaing, and P. Sorn. 2018. "Women's Adaptive Capacity in Climate in Cambodia's Four Agroecological Zones." Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

10 ActionAid Cambodia. 2019. "Cambodia Women's Resilience Index." Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Policy recommendations

Women and girls play a crucial role in climate change response. Recognising gender roles in climate change and the introduction of more gender-responsive climate change objectives would add significant value to the current gender mainstreaming commitments that aim to tackle the gendered impacts of climate change. The State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Cambodia assessment report brings forward recommendations on how to implement gender-responsive activities and mainstream climate change and gender considerations - in both the adaptation and mitigation sectors - while also recognising that all of these recommendations require the allocation of sufficient domestic and international resources. The overall recommendations, and sectoral recommendations, are as follows:

Enhancing coordination and facilitation

- Enhance a coordination mechanism between the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Environment to improve capacity in mainstreaming gender within climate change policies, sectoral plans and programs;
- Integrate analysis of gender sensitivity at all levels of public consultations and decision-making processes for a more effective adaptation and mitigation response to climate change;
- Improve the institutional capacity of national women's machinery to ensure that gender equality is adequately included in climate change planning, budgeting, implementation and M&E frameworks, and that it is supported by sound coordination arrangements among donors and other funding agencies for both technical and financial support.

Research and capacity development

- Increase gender-focused research on climate change mitigation and adaptation and expand the use and dissemination of existing gender research findings, lessons learned and best practices conducted and compiled by research institutes, academia, civil society organisations and community-based organisations;
- Promote gender parity and increase the number of women experts and researchers equipped with the capacity and skills in the areas of climate change mitigation related agronomy, economics and so on;
- Acquire a deeper understanding of how to integrate gender equality considerations within climate change investments and finance, including mainstreaming gender into the roles and responsibilities of officials at national and sub-national levels;
- Document indicators or milestones relating to gender and gender-related outcomes from previous and ongoing studies

and research and the implementation of projects, linked to knowledge and database management so that they are widely shared with the public.

Sex-disaggregated data on climate change

- Strengthen the coordination among key government institutions, such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Mines and Energy, the Forestry Administration, the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Planning, to produce and use sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics in the sectoral ministries to implement climate change mitigation actions;
- Improve existing national statistical information and datasets by inserting sex-disaggregated indicators into existing climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction platforms, namely, a vulnerability assessment and indicator tool produced by the National Council for Sustainable Development of the Ministry of Environment, and the Cambodia Disaster Damage and Loss Information System (CamDi) of the National Committee for Disaster Management.

M&E framework

- Mainstream gender into sectoral climate change policies and strategies in line with a sound M&E framework on gender equality by including sex and age indicators and gender-inclusive data collection methods;
- Strengthen the gender and climate change planning and M&E framework by revising and updating indicators and data collection methods to ensure consistency among the national gender indicators. This would support the reliability of the data and values of indicators, and ensure that more gender statistics and data are used to support policymaking.

Policy recommendations by sector:

Energy

- Support more clean energy solutions such as biogas installations, medium-scale biodigester plants, or improved cooking stoves that address women's needs, reduce their time burden, and create more economic and business opportunities for local women;
- Strengthen coordination and collaboration with development partners, NGOs and the private sector to support an increase in gender equality in renewable energy projects;
- Establish gender mainstreaming within energy policy, strategic plans and programs and climate change action plans for the energy sector. This includes renewable energy to ensure that gender responsiveness is aligned with the strategic objectives, specific action plans and the available budget allocation in respect of climate change mitigation and green growth policies.

Agriculture

- Produce a gender-responsive climate change action plan and integrate it within the current Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategic Framework in Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries by ensuring sufficient budget allocation for implementation and appropriate capacity development for targeted government officials;
- Simplify the process and integrate gender-based indicators into the Vulnerability Reduction Assessment tools for better in-depth gendered impact assessment of climate change on men and women in the agriculture sector; and
- Integrate gender and climate change analysis within key policy, strategy and action plan to ensure that the differential impacts of climate change on women and men are reflected in terms of their needs, priorities and capacities, and that the critical roles of women as agents of lasting change are recognised.

Rural development

- As in the energy sector, the Ministry of Rural Development should work with the Ministry of Mines and Energy to support more clean energy solutions that address women's needs, reduce their time burden, and create more economic and business opportunities and jobs that would generate diversified income for local women;
- Improve local women's adaptive capacity to cope with the high risk of climate change. This could be enacted through more accessible weather broadcasting, early warning systems and physical infrastructures such as resilient housing, the provision of safe places, accessibility to energy for household consumption, and safe water and better sanitation;
- Establish a data platform at the Ministry of Rural Development demonstrating sex disaggregation in current key policy, strategy and programs relating to climate change for in-depth analysis in respect of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change.

Forestry

- Enhance gender-responsiveness by integrating gender equality issues, including gender-related targets, into law and policy related to forestry and natural resource and environmental management. Ensure that these are equipped with action plans and budget allocation to achieve these gender targets;
- Build gender data into the current statistics relating to community forestry so that the Forestry Administration can conduct gendered impact assessments and analysis;
- Develop specific strategy and action plans for the Forestry Administration to combat climate change with an explicit focus on gender equality in forestry, developed and implemented with sound technical and financial support, by upgrading the current Climate Change Strategic Plan and the Climate Change Priorities Action Plan in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors;
- Enhance the coordination and facilitation of three national governing bodies (the Forestry Administration and the Fisheries Administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and the General Department of Administration of Nature Conservation and Protection of the Ministry of Environment) towards the coordinated promotion of gender considerations within policy, strategy, planning and programs in the forestry and natural resources management sector.

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