
ASPIRE Livelihoods Program

Gender Analysis



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1. Executive Summary

CUFA's Livelihoods program engages entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs through collaboration with local OPDs (Organisations of Persons with Disabilities). As well as bolstering Community Social Enterprises (CSEs).

This report draws on quantitative and qualitative data collected in support of the recent ASPIRE -project evaluation, consisting of 27 Micro-entrepreneur interviews and 4 CSE focus group discussion. Importantly ASPIRE has developed a good level of GEDSI understanding within project staff and this knowledge is beginning to be transmitted to participants.

ASPIRE has a key GE objective: 80% of the CSE members are female who are supported to actively participate in specialist roles such as CSE leader, marketing, branding, sales and business operations in the CSEs.

Key Recommendation	It is vital that GE considerations shape the next iteration of program design, the views and experiences of women are sought throughout project implementation and reflections on the success of these activities shape future activities. Further, women's experiences need to be better understood at individual level, moving beyond uniform group expectations.
R1	Continue to Advance and Develop GE Activities. The ASPIRE CSE model needs to recognise the challenges for women, but also understand that these challenges are different from individual to individual.
R2	Keep giving leadership and networking opportunities to Women. Engaging with positive role models will help overcome feelings of low self-efficacy and help challenge social stigma.
R3	Review market access barriers for CSEs. Women report that due to cultural expectations they are less able to travel, restricting market access for some CSEs.

2. Background and Purpose

CUFA's Livelihoods program engages entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs through collaboration with local OPDs (Organizations of Persons with Disabilities). As well as bolstering Community Social Enterprises (CSEs). The initiative includes providing seed funding to support these enterprises, formalising partnerships through Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), which incorporate critical provisions related to Child Protection (CP), Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH), and Complaints Handling. The project employs a community-centric approach, adopting the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) methodology during community consultations. This strategy aims to foster dialogue, identify potential participants, and facilitate the development of business plans for these ventures.

Subsequently, training is provided, encompassing a range of skills necessary for sustainable growth. Additional support is extended in the form of equipment and resources to kickstart these businesses, followed by ongoing dialogue and monitoring to ensure their continued success. In collaboration with the community, business plans are developed for these social enterprises, aligning with their unique goals and potential. The project also encompasses the sourcing and purchasing of raw materials and equipment vital for CSEs to thrive.

Program objective is to increase technical and entrepreneurial skills for Community Social Enterprise members. Importantly a key program output regarding empowerment has been that all female CSE members hold specialist roles including CSE Leaders, Deputy Leaders, Accounts and significantly contribute to increasing distribution channels and access to new markets.

The program is seeking to build on the success of the existing 10 CSE, with 3 new CSE formed and increasing participation of PWD. Consultation with targeted participants will adopt Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to identify the product they would like to produce and sell.

The purpose of this Gender Analysis is to check how well GEDSI principles have been entrenched in the program in line with CUFA's mainstreaming strategy. As well as seeking to understand whether the program improves gender equality. The project carries an inherent risk should Cufa staff fail to ensure the project includes cross-cutting considerations regarding women and people with disabilities, and progress towards project outcomes and project sustainability. Meaning it is vital that training is also provided

on how to monitor, capture and report on GE principles ensuring inclusion and course correction as required.

3. Methods

This Gender Analysis draws on primary data collection undertaken as part of the recent livelihood program evaluation. 27 Participants were engaged in a structured interview process utilizing kobo for data collection. Further, 4 CSE's were engaged in focus group discussions which were transcribed and analyzed.

The primary data was analyzed using historical demographic and income data collected over the whole project period.

Finally, the 3 project field officers were asked for feedback, utilizing CUFA's new GEDSI tool, available as an annex.

Research was guided by the International Women's Development Agency principles (IWDA 2022)

- neither our research participants nor our researchers are harmed by the research
- that the benefits of building knowledge for transformative gender equality impact outweigh any risks
- that we carefully and rigorously manage any perceived risks of the research

4. Cultural Context

In Cambodia there remains a perception that men make better leaders than women persists, even among women (CDRI 2019). Promoting women's empowerment and gender equality is not just a matter of inviting men to change, but also about changing women's self-perceptions of their worth and role in society (CDRI 2019). Chbab Srey, Cambodia's traditional Code of Women "encourages women to be submissive and obedient to the wishes of their husbands (UNESCO 2013). While Chbab Proh exhorts men to be organised leaders (UNESCO 2013). These codes remain highly influential in rural communities. Continuing to reinforce negative and disempowering stereotypes about women and women's subordination to men (Cambodian Centre for Human Rights 2013).

Disparities between men and women in resources, decision-making power, and basic social well-being, are amplified by widespread poverty. Culture thus enacts a significant barrier to sustainable economic and social development. Data shows that males have greater educational opportunities than females in Cambodia, this gender gap has also been found to increase in size at later stages of education (Cambodian Centre for Human Rights 2013). While women face further barriers in regard to transportation, security, and household responsibilities. Poverty is more acute among Cambodian women than among men, with women having fewer resources, decreased access to healthcare, education, financial services and less food security (OHCHR 2015). Women are also less likely to be involved in decision making positions throughout the country including in politics, the public sector and the judiciary (UNDP 2014).

5. Project GE Considerations

The following project objectives focus on gender equality:

- 80% of the CSE members are female who are supported to actively participate in specialist roles such as CSE leader, marketing, branding, sales and business operations in the CSEs.

Specific GE Activities:

Community consultation to ensure full and active participation of women in the CSEs was carried out as part of the overall community consultation in 2020.

In the first year of the program, women represented 79% of the total community members consulted. Women's preference regarding what time of the day was best to attend the training was captured in discussions at the CSE level. CSE leaders are encouraged by Cufa to undertake constructive dialogue with all the members of the CSE.

To ensure high attendance rate for the Financial Literacy training, Cufa works with the Village Chiefs and Community Leaders as they are the key figures within the Cambodian context and highly effective in mobilizing their communities. Cufa asks the Village Chiefs and Community Leaders to encourage and support female members of the community to attend the training. To date, monitoring data confirms the majority of community members attending the training are women. However, it must be noted that attendance may also be driven by the fact that women are less likely to be employed in rural communities.

Over the project duration, the number of female participants has increased, rising from 63% in 2019 to just under the 80% updated project target in 2023.

In August, 2023, Livelihoods project team lead by GEDSI lead Sang Sey, conducted training utilising GEDSI Toolkits in 13 rural community Social Enterprises with involved participants from members of community social enterprises, commune council, village chief, district officer of Social Veteran and Youth Rehabilitation (DoSVY), and Local OPD organisation. 57 people participated, 31 women and 7 people with disability. The CUFA GEDSI Toolkit was utilised in the training providing an overview of key concepts such as gender equality and disability inclusion. The toolkit was given to the 13 CSEs to further gender equality and disability inclusion in their communities as well as advocate with local authorities for a continuing effort for inclusive gender equality response.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality remains an area in which the program needs to develop its understanding. With interviews suggesting that men living with disability are doing better than women living with disability.

While, even with improved GEDSI understanding the experiences of women and people living with disability are still largely understood as an aggregated group. More should be done to understand the experiences of women and how they differ through the influence of cross cutting themes.

6. Economic Empowerment

Table 1 Empowerment

	More control	Unchanged	Total
Low-income	5	5	10
Middle-Income	5	3	8
High-Income	6	3	9
Female	14	7	21
Male	2	4	6
Non-Disabled	8	6	14
Disability	8	5	13
	16	11	27

Table 1 Speaks directly to empowerment in regards to household financial decision making and financial literacy. Importantly, the program is shown to have a positive effect on women's control of household finances. With two thirds of women feeling more empowered in regard to household finances. Noteworthy is the higher percentage of women who experience increased empowerment and job creation, indicating a positive shift in their social standing.

Data also showed that family size also affected empowerment, with women with less children feeling more empowered and those having more children less empowered. This is

reflective of trends in other countries, and demonstrates the Influence of culture and expected caring role of women. While other studies also report that a woman's husband's level of education is also shown to influence female empowerment, with a higher education resulting in better outcomes, current data collection does not allow such investigation of the program.

7. Decision-Making and Governance

CSE leadership

Importantly women hold 9 of 13 CSE leadership positions. While at management level, there are 58 women and 8 men. However, during FDG discussions it was clear that men spoke first and set the tone for discussions. So while the numbers of women in leadership are promising the program must be careful about claiming empowerment as the women in CSEs are still learning how to wield power and negotiating continued male cultural primacy.

CSEs operate as collaboratives, employing a hybrid organisational structure. Trust and commitments pose significant challenges for CSEs sustainability. With many participants reluctant to be engaged in leadership capacity. While some CSEs lack regular meetings and have low engagement levels which may undermine the unity and the commitment of the group. Further one group was observed with a number of family members participating, against program guidelines. Therefore current governance structures should be strengthened.

In tailoring models, some of the group leaders voice concerns about the low skill levels from the participants, unequal sharing of roles and responsibilities, the group leaders bear the brunt of responsibility and being held accountable for the success and failures of the group. Inherent group conflicts concerning financial matters, present a key challenge. The power distribution is still centralised among the CSE leaders. We believe it is necessary to better establish clear protocols on payment scheme, procured cost, labour division, to mitigate future conflict. CSEs thrive when there is trust, exhibited confidence, clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, clear consensus on financial matters

Group dynamics are a major factor in CSE outcomes. In ensuring the group's success, start-up understanding and ongoing commitment to governance practices are vital. Governance supported by clear expectations and equitable participation sustain CSEs. Further, CSE leaders should transparently outline all costs and profits, especially when CSE work links with personal businesses, to build trust and commitment among members. Members should reach a consensus about procurement procedures and financial contributions at the project's outset and have in place processes to change and adapt.

8. Cultural Safety

Cambodia has a National Plan to end violence against women (CMW 2020). However, Cambodian women continue to suffer physical, sexual, economic, and emotional violence, in the home, community or workplace cutting across income, culture and class (CMW 2020). Most frequently violence against women is domestic violence or sexual abuse, with 20% of women reporting suffering at the hand of their partner (CMW 2020).

Gay men and gender diverse people were identified as vulnerable by project officers however the program is yet to conduct real engagement to understand and identify their needs.

The program has improved GE through program activities and provision of GEDSI training and materials to CSE and broader communities. However, there is still a tendency to avoid speaking about marital or family conflict.

Importantly there were two concerning unintended negative program consequences. With many respondents reporting a degree of health degradation or stress resulting from juggling family and work commitments.

Further, 2 MEs reported a degree of family conflict as a result of their increased commitment to work. While in the CSE FGD this theme was one that participants quickly avoided and were unwilling to be drawn on.

Both of these represent important risks for the livelihood program and more must be done to understand and avoid or mitigate in the future.

9. Recommendations

Key Recommendation: While the following three recommendations offer guidance for the next iteration of the project, it is important that these actions become links in a chain of learning. As such it is vital that GE considerations shape the next iteration of program design, the views and experiences of women are sought throughout project implementation and reflections on the success of these activities shape future activities.

R1. Continue to Advance and Develop GE Activities. The ASPIRE CSE model needs to recognise the challenges for women, but also understand that these challenges are different from individual to individual. While the program has made important strides on GE there is still an underlying assumption that women in the program have similar experiences. This is not the case and more can be done to understand the different experiences and needs of women in different contexts, guided by intersectional thinking. This also means developing a better understanding of the impact of men in the CSEs, as even if the majority of the members and leaders are women, men continue to be influential. It is vital that the livelihood program moves beyond superficial understanding of GE. Further, how to safely include gay and gender diverse people should be considered.

R2: Keep promoting leadership and networking opportunities to Women. Engaging with positive role models will help overcome feelings of low self-efficacy and help challenge social stigma. Importantly, ASPIRE should seek to engage female village chiefs and CSE leaders to conduct leadership training with project officers assisting and facilitating. Adaptation needs to be made; additional resources need to be embedded for women.

R3: Review market access barriers for CSEs. Women report that due to cultural expectations they are less able to travel, restricting market access for some CSEs. Program should seek to help connect CSEs to new markets and consider actions to facilitate sustainable market expansion in the future.

10. Conclusion:

Political and socio-economic conditions present a multitude of challenges for women in the livelihood program, who also must navigate inhibiting social conventions. Women's empowerment faces persistent hurdles due to deeply rooted beliefs regarding gender equality, imbalanced power dynamics in marital commitment. Domestic violence or abuse has not been disclosed among the ASPIRE participants, yet there have been mentions of conflict over finances. Tellingly, in focus group discussions any mention of conflict was quickly avoided or steered away from by participants.

For most female participants taking care of family takes priority over work. Most of the effect on empowerment, centres on soft skills and community connection - not doing much to empower women, lack of leaders and difficulties for women to exercise control if they do achieve a leadership position. role models and leadership training. complex group dynamics, mens inherent power influencing decision making. Interestingly, data shows a correlation between income level and increased control over household financial decision making.

An interview with a female village chief, gave important insight into how women can wield power, emphasising that it is vital to continue involving men in decision making. Thus program activities targeting female empowerment also should consider men and involve them. Further, having a strong or outgoing personality, and confidence is vital, to engage people and ensure female voices are heard, this presents an obvious barrier as Khmer cultural traditions assert male primacy. Further, women who are used to wielding power appear to get better results. While, shy, submissive people or those who have suffered stigma such as those living with disability have worse outcomes.

The key recommendation calls for entrenching GE considerations throughout the project cycle. While this report acknowledges the good work that has been done in regard to GEDSI actions in ASPIRE to date. Implementing the three recommendations must be seen as the

next steps rather than solutions and continue to be built upon. With continued need for listening, reflection and learning.

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Annexes

Annex A

GEDSI Tool: [CUFA GEDSI Tool](#)