



## The Role of Gender in Decision-Making in Investing and Managing the Household Livelihood in Stung Chinit Irrigation Common Area, Kampong Thom Province

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Received 20 December 2010      Accepted 27 January 2011

**Abstract** Cambodian populations had 52% of women and 48% of men, where around 80% are farmers living in rural areas. Women are basically influential in generating family income. However women's role on decision-making in household livelihood is commonly ignored. So, the study aimed to assess the social class in every household livelihood, to assess the status of decision-making about household livelihood, and analyze the constraints and opportunities of women in decision-making. The result showed that 10% of households were rich, 50% were medium, 30% were poor and 10% were underpoor. In main jobs, 84% of households planted rainy season rice, 11% were business owners, 3% sell labour, 3% was Government officials, 2% planted dry season rice, 2% did chamka and 1% did other jobs. In sub-jobs, 79% of households raised animals, 37% did chamka, 21% was business owner, 16% sell labour, 6% collected forest product, 1% planted rainy season rice, 1% planted dry season rice, 1% was fisher, 1% was motor taxi-driver and 1% did other jobs. The heads of families were mostly men except for widows and single women, who play very important roles as heads of their families as decision-makers. The constraints of women in decision-making in household livelihood were due to: poor education, poor technical skill, busy on doing house work, weak health, poor self belief, poor self confidence in decision-making, no participation in society, traditional culture, and poor recognition on the income received from husband work. In construct, the opportunities were: patient, hardwork, fullfiling works, saving money, joining on decision-making in family and supported by government and NGOs. In conclusion, female participation in decision-making is very necessary for household livelihoods. So, the Government, NGOs, society and women themselves should participate to bring empowerment to women in decision-making, investing, managing and improving household livelihoods.

**Keywords** gender, decision-making, household livelihood, female empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

In regards to its early history, Cambodia is amongst the oldest countries in Asia to have developed a well-known civilization and economy. But since the recent civil war which lasted about 2 decades, Cambodia has suffered losses in almost all sectors, especially in the source of human resources and in the wealth that has the power to move, build and develop the country. Now Cambodia is trying

to rebuild every sector including the agricultural, the economy and especially the human resource sector, which are necessary for Cambodia to be better.

In 2004, the estimated population of Cambodia was 13.1 million. 48.3% were male and 51.7% female “(MP, 2005, CCoC, 2008)”. Moreover, the population’s annual growth rate between 1998 and 2004 was 1.81%. 85% of Cambodians lived in rural areas and the average household size was 5.1 people “(MP, 2005, CCoC, 2008)”. Results given from the March 2008 Census estimate that the country’s population was 13,389,000, of whom 48.5% were male and 51.5% female. 80.6% of Cambodians live in rural areas. The average household size is 4.7 people “(Sar Kheng, 2008, CCoC, 2008)”. About 42% of Cambodian women and 21% of men above the age of 15 have never attended school. According to NGO reports, women make up 52% of the population, 60% of agricultural workers, 85% of the business work force, 70% of the industrial work force, and 60% of all service sector workers. On average, Cambodian women receive one third less pay than men with similar education and experience for comparable work, 26% of households are headed by women; and only 20% of Cambodian women have access to reproductive health services and products “(PPP, 2004, CCoC, 2008)”.

Livelihoods have an important role for developing family and national economies. Farmers have tried hard to work to support themselves even while they are facing the cycle of development. Their system of livelihood will be improved because the Cambodian Government, NGOs and local authorities have encouraged and strongly supported them “(MAFF, 2006)”. Around 80% of people living in rural areas are farmers and do works involving agriculture. Thus agriculture has a main role for household livelihoods in rural areas. Cambodian farmers could get good incomes by growing and selling vegetables. However, many farmers cannot exploit this opportunity because they lack the knowledge, good quality inputs, credit, and market information (IDE, 2009). Similarly, most farmers have low incomes because their livelihoods depend strongly on low-yielding rice production. They lack a reliable source of irrigation that would enable them to diversify into fruits and vegetables which are more nutritious and marketable “(IDE, 2009)”. In addition, even though women participate in this household livelihood development, the division of roles and levels of participation of genders are not clear. Therefore, to gain knowledge about these unclear points, the researchers conducted a research titled ‘The Role of Gender in Decision-Making in Investing and Managing the Household Livelihood’.

This research contains the overall objective of the study, which was to find out the factors influencing the gender participation on decision-making in investment and management of household livelihoods.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Kampong Tom province was chosen as the study site of this study due to the interest of the project donors in the subject; Constraints for Farmers in Realizing the Potentials of Stung Chinit Irrigation Infrastructure. The research was conducted around the common areas of the Stung Chinit irrigation in Kampong Thom province. The researchers selected 144 households, including 72 men, 72 women; and 10 village chiefs in 10 villages, 3 communes and 1 district in Stung Chinit irrigation common areas. To make a good sampling justification, the researcher chose people living in the Stung Chinit Irrigation common area and then selected samples by stratified random sampling. The data was collected from both secondary and primary sources (direct observation, group discussion, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and case study). The questionnaire was designed to conduct a baseline survey on the current roles of gender in decision-making on investing and managing household livelihood and was divided into 6 sections as follows: general information, household livelihood, gender’s form of job analyzing, decision-making of gender in household livelihood, form of managing resources and gaining benefits, and constraints and opportunities in decision-making of women, which were created from the status of household livelihoods and decision-making processes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Head of household

The headship of a household is a very important role. The head is responsible of all the household livelihood and is the one that all the members in the family depend on, respect and love extremely. The research indicated that male head of households had 85% and female head of households had 15%. This showed that the head of households are mostly men except for widows and single woman.

### The career of gender in household livelihood

Household's careers can be divided into two parts: main jobs and sub-jobs. Main jobs are the important or very necessary jobs which households thought could provide high incomes to fulfill the demands of the family. Sub-jobs are the jobs that provide incomes to households less than main jobs, but they are important also because all people need both, main and sub-jobs. In this regard, the result in Table 1 showed that planting rainy season rice was the main job of households which had the highest percentage (84%), where women were (44%) and men (40%). In the other hand, in sub-jobs, it indicated that most households breed animals as family standard (79%), where 41% were women and 38% were men. This means that household's livelihood mostly depended on farming. Generally, Cambodian farmers always plant rice during the rainy season so their rice field yield depends only on natural rain. They do so because they have lots of rice fields, rainy rice yields are higher than dry season rice fields, and because it is the tradition for them. Meanwhile, according to the World Food Program (WFP), in 2010, households living in rural areas in Cambodia depended on multiple sources of income for their livelihoods, but they differed due to agro-climatic conditions. Most rural residents still live in traditional ways, primarily cultivating rice and collecting natural resources from water bodies and forests, thus, agriculture, here, includes: crop and livestock production, forestry and fishing activities. This remains the primary occupation for 72 percent of households, yet accounts for only 31 percent of gross domestic product. Thus the crucial importance of off-farm incomes, like remittances, wage labor and non-agricultural self-employment, that are growing rapidly.

**Table 1 Main and sub-job of households**

Description	Main Job (%)			Description	Sub Job (%)		
	Women	Men	Total		Women	Men	Total
Planting Rainy Season Rice	44	40	84	Raising Animal	41	38	79
Business Owner	8	3	11	Doing Chamka	16	21	37
Selling Labor	1	2	3	Business Owner	16	5	21
Govn't Official	1	2	3	Selling Labor	6	10	16
Planting Dry Season Rice	2	0	2	Collecting Forest Product	1	5	6
Doing Chamka	2	0	2	Planting Rainy Season Rice	1	0	1
Others	1	1	2	Planting Dry Season Rice	0	1	1
				Fishing	0	1	1
				Motor Taxi-Driver	0	1	1
				Others	0	1	1