



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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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 |
| Gov'n'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 |

Averaged income of household per year

Income of households, whether it increases or decreases, is the necessary factor to improve livelihood. Households can gain income by doing many jobs involved with both agriculture and non-agriculture. In this way, as seen in Fig. 1, the highest income of households is from running their own business and women's income was more than men from this job as well.

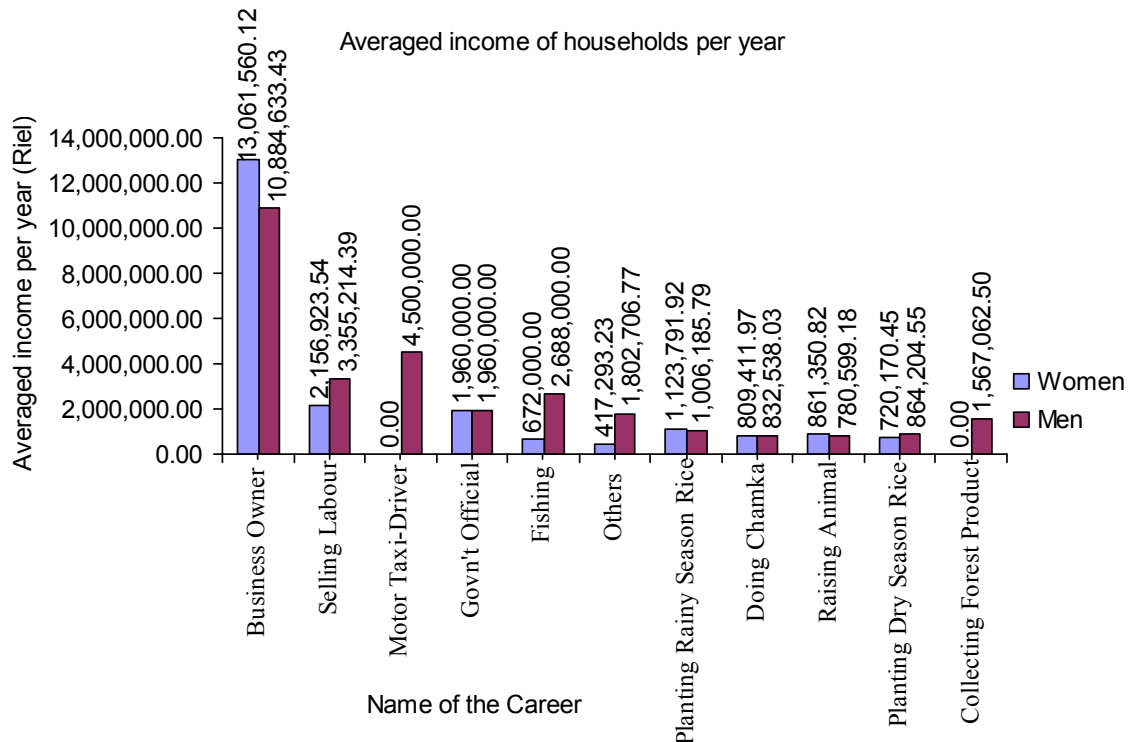


Fig. 1 Averaged income of gender per year

The data in research showed that the income of men was higher than that of women. It clarified that the men in the study area did many jobs involved with agriculture and non-agriculture activities in both rainy and dry season, such as collecting forest products, selling labour, motor taxi-driving, fishing, doing own business and doing other jobs. Income of men was more than that of women, even though; women participated in agricultural activities more than men did. In contrast, women usually could not do extra activities in the dry season like the men did because women were busy doing housework, taking care of the children and managing the house. In addition, women's education was poor and the women could not do the work which was located far from their home, so women could only do small business at home. In the same way, women provided more agricultural labour, especially in rice planting and harvesting, than men. Women have a substantially greater capacity for group work in these tasks, since as many as twelve or fifteen women work together in each other's fields. The important point in this differential work load is that of taking care of the children, preparing food and cleaning the house, none of which is done by men, except for child care during the wife's absence (RGC, IMRC, MWRM, ADB, 2006).

Status of gender's decision-making in household livelihood

Decision-making of gender in livelihood in this study had two parts: primary and continuing decision-making. Primary decision-making refers to initial decision-making in choosing the jobs. Continuing decision-making focused on decision-making on doing the jobs which are being carried on. Table 2 shows that in planting rainy and dry rice, doing chamka, breeding animal, selling labour and doing own business, both women and men made smoothly primary and continuing

decision-making. The reason was that these activities were the traditional ones that all farmers wanted to do. In contrast, in fishing, collecting forest products, motor-taxi driving, government official, selling labour and doing other jobs, the percentage of men in primary and continuing decision making was higher than women because these activities were difficult, demanded full-time labour and were located far away from home too. As a result, women could not participate as men did. But in doing own business, women had higher decision-making than men. To sum up, the initial idea of women in decision-making in family income generation was very important for the improvement of household livelihood because women had indispensable roles in the family. According to Keasa Khun (2006), women’s roles in power and decision making are not nationally recognized. Women have to keep silent in every type of circumstance, they are not allowed to make any decision or even take control of power. In the family, men gain all the power and decision making privileges while women just can wait for the arrangement from them. In society, since women have low education, they are discouraged from getting involved in the communities’ activities or contributing to the information. In the political aspect, women’s participation remains in a slow progress towards real power.

Table 2 Primary and continuing of gender’s decision-making in household livelihood

| Description | Primary Decision-Making (%) | | | Continuing Decision-Making (%) | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|--------------------------------|------|------|
| | Women | Men | Both | Women | Men | Both |
| Planting Rainy Season Rice | 9.3 | 1.2 | 89.5 | 8.1 | 1.2 | 90.7 |
| Planting Dry Season Rice | 25.0 | 0.0 | 75.0 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 75.0 |
| Doing Chamka | 9.8 | 2.4 | 87.8 | 9.8 | 2.4 | 87.8 |
| Raising Animal | 12.5 | 3.1 | 84.4 | 12.5 | 3.1 | 84.4 |
| Fishing | 0.0 | 75.0 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 75.0 | 25.0 |
| Collecting Forest Product | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 80.0 | 20.0 |
| Selling Labor | 3.3 | 46.7 | 50.0 | 3.3 | 40.0 | 56.7 |
| Motor Taxi-Driver | 0.0 | 75.0 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| Govn’t-Official | 20.0 | 80.0 | 0.0 | 20.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 |
| Business Owner | 40.5 | 8.1 | 51.4 | 37.8 | 8.1 | 54.1 |
| Others | 25.0 | 50.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 50.0 | 25.0 |

Form of resource management

Some resources in the family are: education of family members, money, works, equipment and land; and getting benefit such as outside income, outside property, main demands, and right in working and political but all these resource were varied in each household and the gender managing these resource was different due to the situation in every family. In Fig. 2 it is showed that women managing the resource in the house are more than men. However, in Fig. 3, men got more benefits than women, except in main demand.

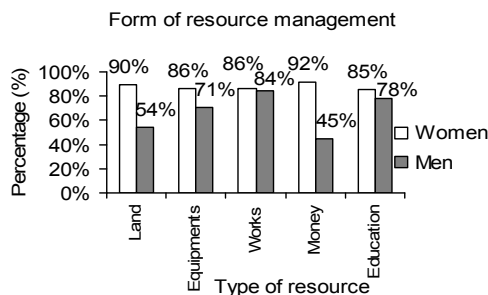


Fig. 2 Managing resources

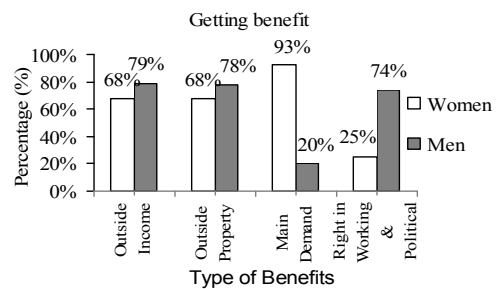


Fig. 3 Getting benefits

Table 3 SWOT analysis of women in decision-making process that were created from such status of household livelihood and decision-making process

| Strength | Weakness |
|---|---|
| Patient, hard work, fulfilling work, keep money, much joining decision-making in family | Poor education, poor technical skill, busy to do house work, weak health, poor self belief, poor confidence in decision making, no participation in society |
| Opportunity | Threaten |
| Supporting from government and NGOs such as CEDAC, GRET, Women Organization, etc. | Traditional culture, and lack valuing on the income activities from husband |

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there were two parts of household livelihoods: farming and non-farming. In regards to the farming part, there were wet and dry season crops, raising animals, collecting forest products, fishing and selling labour. In regards to the non-farming part, the jobs were owning businesses, selling labour, motor-taxi driving, Government officials, and others jobs. Women participated in all activities in livelihoods, both income and non-income works. Thus, female participation in decision-making is very necessary for household livelihoods. Most heads of the family are men except for widows and single woman, who play very important roles as the heads of their families and as decision-makers in the family; eventhough, women participated actively in income generation. As such, the government, NGOs, society and women themselves should help to empower women in decision-making, investing and managing and improving household livelihoods.

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