



EMPOWERING CAMBODIAN WOMEN'S FULL PARTICIPATION IN DEFENSE AND SECURITY SECTORS

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Executive Summary

The foundation of Cambodian society is matriarchal. However, from pre-history to present day, very few Cambodian women hold high-ranking positions in the public or private sectors. This is despite the fact that women represent more than half of Cambodia's population. Like women in many other countries, Cambodian women make significant contributions to their nation's social, political, and economic stability and development. They also play a very important role in its national and international security development and cooperation. Like men, women also desire to make their contributions to and benefit from today's rapidly advancing society.

Despite this, female participation in decision-making on national policy, defense policy, and security development is remarkably low. Women still face countless barriers and challenges in family, school, and society; especially in the male-dominated defense and security sectors. Women continue to face prejudice and remain ignored, unacknowledged, and discouraged by a population that continues to give more value or priority to men. Cambodian perceptions, traditions, and culture contribute to the fact that a number of jobs – such as national policy-making, national security, and national defense – remain jobs for men, not for women. This leads to passive female participation and a lack of empowerment in these sectors.

This analytical paper covers four key challenges to Cambodian women's full participation in defense and security: 1) tradition and culture; 2) education and media; 3) poverty and women's basic needs; and 4) security and support. This paper seeks to broaden public awareness and acknowledgment of the importance of women's national contributions, particularly in defense and security sectors. Furthermore, it will enable the Cambodian people, especially women, to change their mindset, cultural stereotypes, and perceptions toward gender equality.

This article will be a helpful and effective resource in illustrating the opportunities for women's involvement in defense and security, and the challenges Cambodia faces due to lack of female participation.

With effective recommendations to deal with these challenges, this document will play an important role in influencing policy makers and practitioners in development of policies and strategic planning for the defense and security sectors. The goal is to encourage women to be actively involved and included in such sectors. Most importantly, this paper will seek to encourage or inspire women to contribute more to developing their own country at all levels of society.

I. Introduction

In its early history, Cambodia – also known as Khmer – was originally a matriarchal society. At the Khmer Empire's zenith, between the 10th and 13th centuries, the country extended over much of Southeast Asia. After the empire's decline following many wars, the country became weaker and smaller. In 1863, the king decided to place the country under French protection, and in 1887, it became part of French Indochina. Following Japanese occupation in World War II, Cambodia gained full independence from France in 1953.

After a five-year struggle, communist Khmer Rouge forces captured Phnom Penh in April 1975 and evacuated all cities and towns. During the Khmer Rouge regime, also known as Pol Pot regime or genocide regime, at least 1.5 million Cambodians died from execution, forced hardships, or starvation.

After this regime's collapse, Cambodia was still without peace as a civil war raged for several years. The 1991 Paris Peace Accord mandated democratic elections and a ceasefire. In 1993, the United Nations sponsored the first national election and helped restore some semblance of normalcy under a coalition government.¹ Since the Paris Peace Accord, Cambodia has progressively re-established peace and stability. The country's first national election organized by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) took place in 1993, with subsequent elections held in 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013.

¹ The World Factbook, East and Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Retrieved October 9, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>

After Cambodia's civil war ended and the first general election was held, Cambodia passed many laws or conventions relating to women rights and gender equality. These included The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993, The Marriage and Family Law in 1989, and the International Human, Women's and Children's Rights Conventions. These conventions and laws provided a policy framework of gender equality.

However, women still face serious challenges, which include cultural factors, particularly male attitudes and behaviors. These remain major barriers to women's political participation, access to education, health status, and employment opportunities. Gender disparities are more serious for women in rural and remote areas.²

The Royal Government of Cambodia has prioritized and integrated gender equality and the necessity of gender mainstreaming into key strategies and policies, including the Rectangular Strategy, the National Population Policy and the National Strategic Development Plan, and related sectoral strategies.

Over the last twenty years, the percentage of women in the National Assembly has steadily increased. According to The Cambodian Center for Human Rights' booklet, the proportion of women elected to the assembly increased from 6 percent in the first national election in 1993 to 11.5 percent 1998, 19 percent in 2003, and 22 percent in 2008. The figure in 2013 was 20.33 percent, a slight decrease.³ Likewise, the proportion of women elected to commune councils has increased from 8 percent in the first election in 2002 to 15 percent in 2007,⁴ and to 17.79 percent in 2012.⁵ However, this increased trend shows only the percentages of their representation and does not necessarily address their active participation in policy making or decision making, especially in defense and security sectors.

For example, there is no female representation in the working group of Cambodia's 2006 National Defense White Paper and the 2013 Defense Strategic Review document;⁶ these are the prime strategic guidelines or policies for the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), and other elements of

2 Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2011-2015 (2011), Retrieved October 15, <https://data.unfpa.org/downloadDoc.unfpa?docId=15>

3 Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) (2013): Politics in the Kingdom (Increasing Female Representation, 2013 National Assembly Elections), Retrieved October 13, 2014, [http://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/CCHR_BOOKLET_National% 20Election% 20Assembly% 202013_FINAL% 20ENG.pdf](http://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/CCHR_BOOKLET_National%20Election%20Assembly%202013_FINAL%20ENG.pdf)

4 Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2011-2015 (2011), Retrieved October 15, <https://data.unfpa.org/downloadDoc.unfpa?docId=15>

5 Joint Press Release on Result of the Commune Council Election 2012 (2012), Retrieved October 16, 2014, <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/2012/07/joint-press-release-result-commune-council-election-2012-further-effortss-required-achieve>

6 This information is based on the working group lists of the Cambodia's 2006 National Defense White Paper and the 2013 Defense Strategic Review document

these defense and security sectors. Due to male domination and gender-bias, women's voices are probably taken for granted or regarded as unimportant or useless. More importantly, the share of women who hold high-level positions is noticeably still low compared to that of men.

According to the booklet "Women and Men in Cambodia," produced by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) of the Ministry of Planning, there were fewer women than men in decision-making positions regardless of whether they were elected or appointed. In none of the 24 provinces were women appointed as provincial governors. Women held about 13 percent of the nation's senate positions in 2003, which slightly increased to about 15 percent in 2007. The share of women in managerial positions at sub-national level is very low as compared to the share of men. This is expected to impact the promotion of women in the future.⁷

There are approximately 124,300 active personnel in the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF);⁸ the unofficial estimate of female military personnel is only 7 percent of that number.⁹ The highest-ranked military female is a lieutenant general. The highest position of a Cambodian female in the defense sector is secretary of state of the Ministry of National Defense, but she is a civilian, politically appointed by the ruling party after the Cambodian National Election in 2013 and has no rank. Furthermore, an article of Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2011-2015 stated: "Cambodia's Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which reflects women's political participation, remains low compared to other countries in the region. Women remain particularly under-represented in the executive branch of government and in the judiciary."¹⁰

There has been national encouragement and international urging of women's engagement. This is seen in United Nations Resolution 1325, "urging member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict."¹¹

This research paper will address four key challenges to Cambodian women's full participation in security cooperation, namely 1) tradition and culture; 2) education and media; 3)

7 National Institute of Statistic (NIS) (2014): Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2013, Retrieved October 16, 2014, <http://www.nis.gov.kh/index.php/en/find-statistic/publications/reports/cses-reports.html>

8 Vannarith Chheang (2014): Contributor Profile: Cambodia, Retrieved October 19, 2014, <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Cambodia-Chheang-24-Jan-2014-Final.pdf>

9 Unofficially estimated data by Department of Personnel of Ministry of National Defense (MoND), Cambodia, received from Major General LACH Chhoeun's email on Wednesday, October 15, 2014 11:11 PM

10 Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2011-2015 (2011), Retrieved October 15, 2014, <https://data.unfpa.org/downloadDoc.unfpa?docId=15>

11 United Nations, Security Council : Resolution 1325, (2000), Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325percent 282000percent 29

poverty and women's basic needs; and 4) security and support. This paper offers realistic and practical recommendations for enhanced women's engagement.

II. Main Challenges to Cambodian women's active participation

Empowering women to fully participate in defense and security sectors is very important because women play significant roles in conflict and post-conflict society. According to a U.N. Women brief, "Conflicts are gendered. In most conflict and post-conflict societies, women make up more than 50 percent of the population. Women are often actively engaged as principal agents in conflict settings and key players in peace building. They play these roles simultaneously to their household duties and meeting the needs of their families and communities."¹² Moreover, the defense and security sectors should be free of gender discrimination or bias, as stated in the 1993 Cambodian Constitution: "All forms of discrimination against women shall be abolished... Men and women are equal in all fields (Article 45) ... All Khmer citizens shall have the duty to take part in the national reconstruction and to defend the homeland (Article 49)."¹³

There are four key challenges to cease Cambodian Women to engage fully in defense and security sectors, addressed below:

1) Tradition and Culture

In Cambodia, women play very important roles in all aspects of society. The most serious obstacle to Cambodian women's full societal participation at all levels are cultural social perspectives on gender roles and responsibilities between men and women. Men are widely viewed as superior, decisive, intelligent, and brave. As a result, they are expected to play dominant roles as high-level policy makers, ministers, military leaders or peace negotiators. Women are often perceived as passive, inferior, submissive, physically weak, or emotional, and their common role is to be housewives, staying at home and looking after children.¹⁴

One of the most influential traditional Khmer sayings "Sar-Trey Bang-Vil Cheung-Kran Min-Chum" suggests that women are unable do anything aside from moving around the kitchen. This concept has seriously impacted Cambodian women's lives and societal contributions.

12 UN Women Issue Briefs on Women's Human Rights In The ASEAN Region, Retrieved October 16, 2014 http://unwomen-asiapacific.org/docs/cedaw/archive/issue_brief/Issue_Brief_Womenpercent20Peacepercent20andpercent20Security.pdf

13 The Constitution Of The Kingdom Of Cambodia, Retrieved October 16, 2014 http://cambodia.ohchr.org/klc_pages/KLC_files/section_001/section_01_01_ENG.pdf

14 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014 http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

Although this saying seems no longer very popular or valid in contemporary Cambodia, it still influences and remains embedded in the views of both the populace and leadership. According to the Cambodian Cultural Profile, for example, women typically take care of things within the home: cooking, cleaning, laundry, and care of the children while men typically work outside the home and bring home income.¹⁵ Moreover, most Cambodian people, especially parents, believe that women should not or cannot become military officers, armed forces members, police officers, or political decision-makers since these roles or social statuses have been perceived as belonging to men.

This gender-bias can be seen in the “Chbab Srey” – the code of conduct of Cambodian women. This “law” is strong in the Cambodian culture; it was taught in school until recently and transmitted from generation to generation for centuries. Its influence on the current state of women’s rights and gender inequality in Cambodia is unfortunately very high. It is, in my mind, one of the major obstacles in the fight against gender-based violence in the country.”¹⁶

Remarkably, the male patronage/patriarchal system is a traditional and cultural root cause of lack of female active participation in defense and security sectors, and their attaining high-level or decision making positions in society. One research article stated that “in the patriarchal structure of Cambodian society, its tradition, cultural stereotypes, and social attitudes consider women to be inferior, subordinate, or of lower status, and thus justify social and political exclusion and discriminatory treatment against women in the community and society at large.”¹⁷ An example of low women’s representation is seen in results of June 3, 2012, Commune/Sangkat Elections in which women were elected to 2,038 seats, just 17.79 percent of 11,459 total seats. A July 11, 2012, joint press release in Phnom Penh stated that the “low level of female representation in politics can be attributed to several interrelated causes, but mainly related to the nature of male patronage system of the Cambodian politics, as all political gates are kept by men.”¹⁸

2) Education and Media

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) provides free education for all, both male and

15 Cambodian Cultural Profile, Retrieved October 15, <https://ethnomed.org/culture/cambodian/cambodian-cultural-profile>

16 Chbab Srey, code of conduct of Cambodian women, edited by Dr Mai, translation by PADV Cambodia Retrieved October 16, 2014, <http://carpediemilia.over-blog.com/article-21656482.html>

17 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

18 CSO Report on Cambodian Gender Issues (2009), Retrieved October 15, 2014, http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/KH/JS4_KHM_UPR_S06_2009_JointSubmission4.pdf

female students, from primary school level (grade 1) to lower secondary school (level grade 9). Cambodia's constitution states: "The State shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools. Citizens shall receive education for at least 9 years (Article 68)."¹⁹ Promotion of literacy in the whole society is one of the government's greatest policies. Women's and girls' education is a key determinant of social development and women's empowerment. However, there are many challenges for children, especially female students, to access education fully and successfully. These challenges cause higher illiteracy rates among Cambodian women compared to men. Women's illiteracy hovers around 80 percent, while men's is estimated about 40 percent.²⁰

At the primary level, girls comprised 47 percent of students enrolled in 2007. However, dropout rates are higher for girls, so female students account for only 45 percent at lower secondary level, 39 percent at upper secondary, and 35 percent at tertiary level. For adult women, there are significant gender differences in literacy levels, with 85.1 percent of males over 15 defined as literate compared to only 70.9 percent of their female counterparts.²¹

Several factors have kept many Cambodian girls from education. "One factor is that they are needed at home to take care of younger siblings, perform household duties, and support the head of the home. A report on Cambodian gender issues indicated that young girls made up 89 percent of the total domestic workers. Their working conditions were found to be harsh, working for an average 13.5 hour per day."²² Other factors include extreme poverty, the prohibitive distance of schools from many rural houses, and sometimes even fears for their safety when traveling alone from home to school."²³

Another obstacle to females' access to education is their parents' illiteracy and lack of information. Many parents care little about their children's education. When they undertake farming or work from place to place, they bring their children along them, sometime putting their children to work with them. Or, they keep them at home with the elders and withhold education. In contrast, if parents are well educated, their children will probably receive a strong education

19 The Constitution Of The Kingdom Of Cambodia, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/klc_pages/KLC_files/section_001/section_01_01_ENG.pdf

20 UN Women (2005): Cambodia, , Retrieved October 15, 2014, http://www.unwomen-eseasia.org/projects/Cedaw/countryprogramme_cambodia.html

21 Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2011-2015 (2011), Retrieved October 15, 2014, <https://data.unfpa.org/downloadDoc.unfpa?docId=15>

22 CSO Report on Cambodian Gender Issues (2009), Retrieved October 15, 2014, http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/KH/JS4_KHM_UPR_S06_2009_JointSubmission4.pdf

23 Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2014): Women in Cambodia, Education, Retrieved October 15, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Cambodia#Education

too. “An educated mother is more than twice as likely to send her children to school.”²⁴ More importantly, “education also empowers women to overcome discrimination. Girls and young women who are educated have greater awareness of their rights, and greater confidence and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives, improve their health, and boost their work prospects.”²⁵

Female or girl’s high dropout rate are mainly caused by limited family financial resources and high cost or expenses of study materials and other daily expenses. One report shows that “... the unexpectedly high dropout rate of Cambodian girls correlates to the fact that a family will send a son rather than a daughter to school, especially when they are financially poor or when they cannot afford both of them to be formally educated at school. This has been widely practiced in the nation and has become a social pattern or a cultural norm that men have been given greater attention and priority since they have been perceived to be physically and mentally stronger, more intelligent, and more decisive.”²⁶

Daily expenses for their children’s studies, including textbooks, bags and clothes, money for daily spending, and study materials, are very costly for Cambodia’s poor. If their income or financial resources are limited, they will stop sending their children, especially daughters, to school. As a result, most women in the workforce are in lower level jobs, due to lack of capacity to hold higher positions. The same report indicated “only 0.2 percent of women in the total labor force have a university degree. Women constitute 20 percent of all university graduates.”²⁷ Therefore, low numbers of girls or women in higher education, especially in upper secondary and tertiary education, leads to a key constraint to women’s active participation in civil service, decision-making, and defense and security sectors.

Another barrier is the nature of educational publications, Khmer literature, and the media. Some Cambodian novels, myths, and stories give more value to men rather than women. In one of the old Khmer stories titled “Kong-Hean,” the word “Kong” is the name of an old man and “Hean” means bravery. The story tells of two women, both wives of Mr. Kong, who killed a tiger attempting to attack them in the jungle. Because the villagers treated women as physically and mentally weak, they attributed the achievement to Mr. Kong rather than his wives. Thus, this is the reason they called him

24 UNICEF (2010): Challenges for girls and education in Cambodia, Retrieved October 16, 2014, <http://blogs.atlassian.com/2013/11/atlassian-foundation-in-cambodia-current-challenges-for-girls/>

25 Education First: An Initiative of the United Nations Secretary General, 2012, Retrieved October 16, 2014, <http://blogs.atlassian.com/2013/11/atlassian-foundation-in-cambodia-current-challenges-for-girls/>

26 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

27 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014 http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

“Kong-Hean,” meaning brave “Kong.”

This story clearly illustrates the cultural gender-bias towards women. Although women accomplish much, they are not valued as much as men. Therefore, myths or novels reinforce misperceptions about women and their societal roles, hindering their commitment and ability to societal development.

Media and social media can play very important roles in raising awareness of the values or importance of the women’s participation in the whole society. They can influence Cambodian People’s mindsets and shape or change cultural beliefs on roles and responsibilities. However, the media are too often gender-biased and/or male-dominated. One report stated that: “the media and Khmer literature have empowered men, downgraded women’s real abilities and tangible contributions to democratic governance and peace-building, and also discouraged women to take part in promoting social development, political stability, and economic growth.”²⁸ These factors make it difficult to change overall social perceptions regarding the traditional and future roles of women in Cambodian society.

3) Poverty and Women’s Basic Needs

Cambodia is one of Southeast Asia’s poorest and most populous countries. According to a U.N. factsheet, “80 percent of the population is rural, and an estimated one-third of Cambodians still live below the poverty line. 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.”²⁹ With impoverished living conditions, Cambodian citizens, especially women, are not interested in social and political involvement, with women’s priority earning a living for their daily survival. Their work leaves them little or no spare time to think about getting involved in social and political life and helping their community and society as a whole.³⁰ As stated earlier, girls serving as domestic laborers, for example, work an average 13.5 hour per day

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women points out that poverty falls particularly heavily on women, especially on female heads of households.³¹ Deterring women from living an active social and political life, this hinders them in having a voice

28 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

29 UN Women (2005): Cambodia, , Retrieved October 15, 2014, <http://www.unwomen-eseasia.org/docs/factsheets/01percent20CAMBODIApercent20factsheet.pdf>

30 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

31 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

in policy planning, decision-making, social, political and economic development, and security cooperation development.

Most of the poor living in rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Due to poverty, food insecurity and lacking livelihood options, most Cambodian women or girls go to work in the garment industry, textile factories, private sectors in the city or big towns, and emigrate to work abroad. 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.³²

In short, poverty and women's basic needs cause deficiencies in Cambodian women's societal and political participation, including in defense and security sectors. With the absence of this social and political engagement, their grievances and concerns are not heard by the nation's decision makers or political leaders. They tend to neglect women's voices in their policy planning and decisions and doubt the level of women's knowledge, skills, and contributions towards societal development.

4) Security and Support

In Cambodian society, parents rarely, or never, talk about defense or security issues among their families. Even though their parents are serving in the military or in another security sector, these parents seem to rarely discuss such issues with their children, especially their daughters. They do not encourage their daughters to join the military or take jobs that are far away due to safety and security concerns. This idea might be true, because by living far away from home, Cambodian women can be more vulnerable to rape, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, robbery and theft, and physical abuse. Assaultants can be unknown men on the street, gangsters, male co-workers, construction workers, and motor taxi drivers. Cambodian women are also vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitative prostitution. As both a recipient and origin point, Cambodia is a major focal point in the regional sex trade.

Domestic violence is also widespread. According to a 2009 survey by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, despite the 2005 law on prevention of domestic violence, 22.5 percent of married women experienced violence at home with up to 89 percent not reporting it. And, women continue to face barriers in accessing justice;³³ in rural communities, Cambodian women

32 UN Women (2005): Cambodia, , Retrieved October 15, 2014, <http://www.unwomen-eseasia.org/docs/factsheets/01percent20CAMBODIApercent20factsheet.pdf>

33 UN Women (2005): Cambodia, , Retrieved October 15, 2014, <http://www.unwomen-eseasia.org/docs/factsheets/01percent20CAMBODIApercent20factsheet.pdf>

are generally susceptible to domestic violence with little legal recourse. Due to their limited education, some Cambodian women are unable to protect themselves from discrimination, gender inequality, violence, and abuse, because they are not aware of their legal rights and are also unaware of global human rights standards.³⁴

Women face such challenges even in the workplace where discrimination can be accompanied by physical abuse and even sexual assault. Poor housing and workplace conditions, poor bathroom conditions, and lack of sexual and reproductive health care programs add to the challenge.

Furthermore, women find it difficult to reach high-level positions because of lack of support from their counterparts. For instance, women comprise 90 percent of all workers in the garment industry. In a recent study involving garment and other enterprises (hotel and restaurant, rubber plantation, tobacco manufacturing, and airport services), women workers outnumber men; about 55 percent of all union members in the enterprises covered were women. However, the study indicated that men still dominate union leadership; this shows that women have less opportunity to hold leadership or high-ranking jobs.³⁵

Additionally, when women have children and lack support from their spouses and workplaces, they are likely to be passive in their jobs. They will probably leave employment and stay at home to take care their families. As a result, women do not actively or fully participate in society, especially in developing defense and security sectors.

III. Suggestions

In order to solve the aforementioned challenges effectively, the following realistic suggestions or recommendations should be taken into consideration.

First, the Royal Government of Cambodia should effectively enhance and broaden understanding and awareness of the importance of women and their contributions to societal development. Furthermore, it should support the gender mainstream at all levels, empower women, and gradually change gender-biased traditional and cultural stereotypes, perceptions, and social attitudes towards gender role, justice, and equality. Finally, the government should

34 Eng (2013): Challenges for girls and education in Cambodia, Retrieved October 16, 2014,

<http://blogs.atlassian.com/2013/11/atlassian-foundation-in-cambodia-current-challenges-for-girls/>

35 Women and Gender Issues in Trade Unions in the Cambodian Garment Industry (2012), Retrieved October 16, 2014, <http://betterfactories.org/?p=3205>

respect and implement U.N. Resolution 1325, which...

“... calls on the Security Council, the Secretary-General, member nations, and non-state actors to act in four interrelated areas: increasing the participation of women in decision-making and peace processes; adopting gender perspectives and training in peacekeeping; protecting women; and gender mainstreaming in UN reporting and implementation mechanisms ...”³⁶

“the United Nations, The Secretary Council, ... reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution...”³⁷

This can be done successfully through education at family, school, and whole-of-society levels. Working at these three levels should prove effective in changing people’s mindsets and cultural norms towards women and gender equality. It should also encourage more women to actively participate in the defense and security sectors and societal development. This cannot be achieved easily unless the government provides physical and social support. Likewise, the government can implement this recommendation successfully only if there is cooperation and support from main stakeholders. If government and civil society cooperate well in accomplishing this recommendation, they can effectively develop defense and security sectors on the strength of a diverse workforce offering a myriad of ideas.

The second recommendation is that the Cambodian government revise certain educational curriculums, books or literatures, which are gender-biased and/or male-dominant, in order to draw more attention to female roles and capabilities, gender equality, justice, security. They should also place greater emphasis on a positive view of women, especially women in peacekeeping, national security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The government should also use various media, to include social media, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, periodical publications, Web sites and others to raise public awareness of women’s important contributions to the national and international community and society, and encourage more women to engage in such activities. This would be an effective response to U.N. Resolution 1325 that...

“... encourages the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes, ...urges the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel...”³⁸

36 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

37 United Nations, Security Council : Resolution 1325, (2000), Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325percent 282000percent 29

38 United Nations, Security Council : Resolution 1325, (2000), Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325percent 282000percent 29

“Calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: (a) The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction; (b) Measures that support local women’s peace initiatives and Indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements...”³⁹

Using the media or social media to facilitate this should prove effective because there is a high demand for a variety of news and information among the population. They need reliable information, especially from official authorities or sources, so the government plays a very important role in this field. If successful, the government will gain more trust, and the country can work towards a more capable and diverse human resources in defense and security sectors.

The third recommendation is that the Cambodian government and organizations related to policy or decision-making, defense, and security, should develop practical and effective policies and programs to build and enhance women’s capacity and improve women’s leadership. This could include widespread provision of equal opportunities and promotion of women into higher-level positions at decision-making or leadership levels. This cannot be successfully achieved without funding from the government and donors. Therefore, the government should raise the budget for the women empowerment sector, and transparently, effectively and efficiently spend this budget to enhance required skills for women. The government will not be strong or exercise good governance unless its ministers and officers are comprised of skilled and capable men and women.

“UN, The secretary council, ... urges Member States to increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes, inter alia, the United Nations Fund for Women and United Nations Children’s Fund, and by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant bodies...”⁴⁰

The fourth recommendation is for the Cambodian government to seek out donor countries and the international community for conditional foreign aid, both financial and technical, together with a concrete and realistic framework for how aid should be administered and delivered. This would assist in poverty alleviation and increase opportunities for Cambodian girls and women in secondary and tertiary education. Moreover, they should cooperate with and increasingly fund non-governmental organizations that help fight against poverty and enhance capacity-building of women in the country. A very good example of such NGOs is Women for Prosperity (WFP).

39 United Nations, Security Council : Resolution 1325, (2000), Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325percent 282000percent 29

40 United Nations, Security Council : Resolution 1325, (2000), Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325percent 282000percent 29

“... Women for Prosperity (WFP), a leading Khmer women’s organization which has previously been funded by The Asia Foundation, The National Democratic Institute (NDI), and USAID, ... encourages women nationwide to stand for office and trains them in running effective campaigns. In 2002, 65 percent of the women elected had received training provided by a women’s professional support network developed by WFP.”⁴¹

In so doing, donor nations and the international community can play a functional and constructive role in promoting Cambodian women’s social, political, and economic participation, which is the fabric of democratic governance and peace-building.

The fifth recommendation is that the Cambodian government develop a sustainable support system for women to increase their participation in the defense and security sectors as well as in the whole of society. This means that the government should provide more infrastructure to support women’s needs for full societal involvement. This would include more financial support or incentives; proper female living facilities and amenities; women’s family support programs; security or protection supports; legal assistance; and other supports, such as a gender-blind promotion system. These will enable women, their families and ultimately society as a whole to feel more secure, motivated, and included as they participate in the defense or security sector as well as in developing the country.

In doing this, the Cambodian government should respect and implement U.N. Resolution 1325 or other legal documents related to women’s empowerment. Resolution 1325 states,

“UN Secretary Council, ... reaffirming that women’s and girls’ empowerment and gender equality are critical to efforts to maintain international peace and security, and emphasizing that persisting barriers to full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) will only be dismantled through dedicated commitment to women’s empowerment, participation, and human rights, and through concerted leadership, consistent information and action, and support, to build women’s engagement in all levels of decision-making, ...”⁴²

“UN Secretary Council, ... call upon Member States to take measures to promote sustainable livelihoods for households led by women, especially widows, in post-conflict societies, including through financial support and access to productive resources and sustainable income-generating activities. In this regard, we stress the importance of assisting post-conflict countries in creating favourable conditions that can generate decent jobs for women, nurture their business skills, encourage them to join the workforce, and deliver the financial services that these women need, both in the formal and informal sectors...”⁴³

“UN Secretary Council, ... taking note with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General of 4 September 2013 and the progress and emergence of good practice across several areas, including in prevention and protection, and the significant heightening of policy and operational focus on the monitoring, prevention and prosecution of violence against women in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, ... protection from human rights abuses and violations; opportunities for women to exercise

41 Virak (2009): Challenges to Women's Full Participation in Cambodian Society, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=639

42 United Nations, Security Council : Resolution 1325, (2000), Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325percent 282000percent 29

43 Security Council: Draft declarant, women’s economic empowerment for peace building, Retrieved October 16, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2122percent 282013percent 29

leadership; resources provided to address their needs and which will help them exercise their rights ... to advance women's participation and protection ..."⁴⁴

Although these objectives seem difficult due to poverty or lack of a national budget, there is an old English proverb that states "where there's a will, there's a way." It means that if we are determined enough, we can find a way to achieve what we want, even if it is very difficult.⁴⁵ Therefore, the government should exercise a strong commitment to effectively cope with all challenges to empower women in defense and security sectors.

IV. Conclusion

Even though there is much documentation related to empowering Cambodian women for societal engagement, there is no research paper done so far regarding their full participation in the defense and security sectors. Thus, this analytic paper is unique and designed to seek public awareness and acknowledgement of the importance of women in the security sector. Moreover, it addresses the status of Cambodian, their challenges, and offers realistic recommendations for improvement.

Women empowerment in the defense and security sectors is very important because women are involved in and often victims of armed conflict, wars and other security concerns. Like men, women want to contribute to societal development, including national security. Cambodia needs a diverse workforce and armed forces because diversity can lead to greater ideas,, flexibility, motivation and higher work quality.

However, encouraging women's active engagement in the security sector will be effective and achievable if the four main challenges are adequately addressed and recommendations put into real practice. Additionally, promotion of greater participation of Cambodian women should not be misinterpreted as women's desire for control or domination over men and resources. It should, however, positively illustrate their genuine commitment to contribute in helping develop security policy, the community and the whole society.

⁴⁴ United Nations, Security Council : Resolution 1325, (2000), Retrieved October 16, 2014,

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325percent 282000percent 29

⁴⁵ Cambridge Dictionary online: "where there's a will, there's a way" , Retrieved October 16, 2014,

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of APCSS, the U.S. Pacific Command, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.