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STRENGTHENING THE VOICE OF WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS

Report of Finding
July-August 2022



About this Report

This report is made by ACT staff for Strengthen Voice of Women Worker projects objectives: finding the situation of the women from factories worker and asked for their engagement for the project objective. To identify for women to join in the project for strengthen their leadership. And to empower them to advocate for their right. The finding was conducted during the July-August 2022 with three provinces/city (Phnom Penh, Kandal province, and Kampong Speu Province).

The result of this survey is to help ACT to put the right activities with the right person at the right time for newly selected network or peer from each factories worker. The finding is seeking for the engagement in the project from the women as the garment worker still face time challenges to participate. Moreover, the challenges and gap of participation and communication, miss-understanding and win-lose concept among factory manager and workers to improve their lives standard with able to solve the existing conflict management mechanism in their factories through other intervention strategy.

Significantly, this finding is a first line indicator for fiscal year 2022 to measure the project implementation activity in order to comparing to the achievement of project at the end of fiscal year 2022.

Acknowledgement

This finding can happen with the financial support from CARE-Cambodia through grant of GIZ and ACT financial team who making their best effort to support project staff for this survey. ACT research team consists of Mr. Ean Leanseng, Project facilitator and Ms. Thol Chanthou, Project facilitator; Ms. Sarin Sreyna, assistant, and Ms. Srey Sotheavy, Executive Director of ACT, had prepared a series of discussion on the selection of target women factory workers, the development of questionnaires to collect with online and phone call only.

With this Covid-19 pandemic restriction the project also understanding the accessibility and difficulty of using internet at community level, this questionnaire is set to be both online/offline and if not possible conduct via phone call. Special thanks to all relate partner, stakeholders such as NGOs who work relate to the factory workers sectors.

ACT hopes that this report will help ACT to better prepare training manual, handout and serve as an evidence-based documents for the future project implementation among selected target provinces with align to the current ACT goal, objectives, and value. On the other hand; ACT would like to apology for any inconvenience during the survey and unexpected mistake.

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Statement of Problem

The garment industry in Cambodia accounts for a large part of each country's national exports, making it an important economic sector. It is also one of the largest employers Cambodia. Millions of garment factory workers are employed in the Mekong region, and the majority of these workers are women. There are over 750,000 garment factory workers in Cambodia, 77% who are women, which makes the industry the biggest employer. In Comparison to the other countries in the region, the availability of labour is relatively low in the manufacturing industries, which proportionally lowers the size of the garment labour force.

The garment industry, especially female workers have been one of the hardest hit sectors by the COVID 19 impact. In November 2020, a Cambodian government official informed that at least 110 garment factories had closed in the first nine months of the year and left more than 55,000 workers without jobs – but union leaders worry those numbers could be much higher.¹ From late February 2021 to late April 2021, the situation has led the country from gradual to full lockdown, especially in the most widespread area of Phnom Penh and Kandal province. Based on the DFAT report on COVID-19 Development Response Plans 2020-21 and 2021-22, the pandemic is threatening to unwind Cambodia's impressive poverty reduction over the last two decades. Pre-pandemic, official figures showed around 10 per cent of Cambodians were below the poverty line and thirty per cent near poor. The pandemic could see many of these near poor fall back below the official poverty line. This risked entrenching intergenerational poverty given high rates of microfinance indebtedness. The Cambodian migrant domestic workers who had to return home due to the closure of borders face difficulties in getting back to work due to travel bans and requirements such as health certificates which is obligatory for entering Thailand from 22 March 2020.

There is also a reduction in workforce demand, due to employer's fears, related to COVID-19 transmission, as well as impacts of interrupted supply chains and therefore reduced workload. The situation of COVID-19 pandemic, the failure by the employers to pay the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) for a period of two months means the NSSF card will be deemed invalid, leaving them in a situation that they have no more social protection in the time of desperate need. Moreover, the current social security framework is only vertical, which means it could only cover the individual workers and could not cover the immediate relatives. There has been no renewed commitment to adapt social protection regime to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which means the same unsatisfactory rules are being applied, putting the vulnerable workers in disadvantage.

Although women represent the majority of the garment sector's workforce, they are often concentrated in the lowest-paying positions with the least recognized skills.² A high proportion of garment workers migrate from rural areas where jobs are limited to urban or peri urban industrial areas where they can find work. They often have a low level of literacy and lack knowledge about labour laws, making them even more vulnerable to exploitative contractual terms.³ In Cambodia many women working in garment factories who had migrated from other provinces most commonly did not register with the local

¹<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/cambodia-ministry-of-labour-confirm-that-over-110-garment->

² Asian Institute of Technology and Mekong Migration Network 2019 <http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Jobs-in-SEZs-23-Sep-2019.pdf>

³ Phouxy and Tollefsen 2011, <http://lad.nafri.org.la/fulltext/2939-0.pdf>

authorities. This likely presents challenges for the women knowing where the local authorities were to seek help if needed e.g. to receive compensation payments for laid off workers.⁴The challenges that women workers face are compounded when they are also migrants, as migrant workers experience unique vulnerabilities

Human rights and labour abuses remain prevalent throughout the global garment supply chain. Common gendered labour rights abuses in all three countries include arbitrary dismissal of pregnant workers, non-payment of maternity entitlements, poor access to sexual and reproductive health services in the factories, lack of rest and toilet breaks which can result in urinary tract infection (UTIs) and other health problems for women workers.

Garment factory workers are mainly young women and have mostly migrated from rural areas and live in small rented rooms, in crowded areas, and lack privacy and security which makes them vulnerable to Gender Based Violence, which remains a largely hidden issue in the workplace and within their residential areas. They are often subject of bullying and harassment in the workplace and within their residential areas.

A CARE study found that the productivity cost of sexual harassment, in the Cambodian garment industry is estimated, at US\$89 million per annum.⁵ In 2020, CARE's research among garment workers revealed that the rate of violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic almost doubled to 53.2% compared with the previous 12 months.

Efforts to bring sexual harassment out of the shadows are hindered by low awareness and understanding (among workers and managers alike) and a culture of fear among the victim. It is now widely recognized that gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) has soared in many countries during the pandemic and the global economic crisis following in its wake, leading to a 'shadow pandemic' of GBV. With many women confined to their homes due to lockdowns and other restrictions, the rise in domestic violence rates has been particularly concerning. Globally, intimate partner violence (IPV) may be the most common type of violence women and girls experience during emergencies. In the context of COVID-19 quarantine and isolation measures, IPV has the potential to dramatically increase for women and girls. Life-saving care and support to GBV survivors may be disrupted when front-line service providers and systems such as health, policing and social welfare are overburdened and preoccupied with handling COVID-19 cases. Restrictions on mobility also mean that women are particularly exposed to intimate-partner violence at home with limited options for accessing support services. This shadow pandemic is also affecting women where they work – in frontline occupations, in their homes, in workplaces and online.⁶

In June 2019, a new ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, (C190), and an associated Recommendation, R206, were adopted with an overwhelming majority vote at the annual International Labour Conference in Geneva. This marked a significant milestone as the Convention is the first international labour instrument that recognizes the right of everyone to work free from violence and harassment. Strong and inclusive in scope, it covers all workers, regardless of contractual status, and irrespective of where they find themselves in the course of doing their work, including home-based workers. The Convention recognizes that online activity forms part of the world of work, and its

⁴ CARE "Safe Workplaces safe communities" baseline study 2014

⁵ CARE "Safe Workplaces safe communities" baseline study 2014

⁶ <https://www.care.org.vn/project/what-work-reducing-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/>

protective provisions extend to this domain as well. Whilst it does not focus exclusively on women, the Convention is especially important to women in jobs characterized by a high risk of GBVH and challenges to accessing justice and legal protection. These include many home-based workers and those in precarious jobs in the informal sector.

The Convention is also hugely significant in its recognition of the impacts of domestic violence on workers. It is therefore directly relevant to our current situation of increased rates of GBVH in homes, in workplaces and online. (C190 and R206 is the first time full pledged ILO Convention directly addressing the violence and harassment in the world of work involving both the formal and informal sectors. Informal sector, being so vast, has traditionally been out of the government radar, is also under the coverage of this instrument and here lies its uniqueness. Recognizing the significant contribution of domestic workers to the global economy, undervaluation and invisibility of the works carried out mainly by girls and women in the domestic environment also in consideration of women migrant workers, the ILO adopted Convention 189 to guarantee them a decent job like what enjoyed by their counterparts in other sectors. ILO has another instrument like Convention 183 adopted to ensure Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) is the most up-to-date international labour standard adopted to protect expectant and nursing mothers as they should not lose their job simply because of pregnancy or maternity leave. Such protection not only ensures the equal access of women to employment, it also ensures the continuation of often vital income, which is necessary for the well-being of their entire family. Convention No. 183 provides for 14 weeks of maternity benefit to women to whom the instrument applies. In addition, there is C156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities and R123 on Employment (Women with Family Responsibilities) especially concerning the girls and women given that they are disproportionately obliged to family responsibilities. The adoption of C190 was the result of a long campaign by workers organizations and civil society including CARE (Made by Women).

A general problem for the garment industry is that women's issues often are raised by stakeholders from outside. In Asia, trade unions and worker organizations are commonly patriarchal, resulting in specific concerns of women being ignored. This comes from a lack of awareness among women about their rights, as well as the patriarchal norms not giving women space to draw attention to their rights. Through the inclusion of garment workers in participatory research women will learn about their rights and entitlements. Their involvement in the design of the research is part of their empowerment, creates ownership and ensures that their specific concerns are addressed in the assessment.

Organized women's activities in Cambodia are branded as not what society expects of women, and they are supposed to care only about the family and their household chores. The Cambodia garment industry has more than 100 trade unions, with over 90 % female membership.⁷ Cambodia's trade unions are still male dominated, although there is one women-led TU. There has been an increase of active female members over the last two years. The project intends to increase the number of women in workers organizations especially in leadership functions.

⁷ CARE, Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19, Cambodia, (July 2020), www.careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/CARE-Cambodia-Rapid-Gender-Analysis-for-COVID-19-FINAL-APPROVED-July-2020.pdf

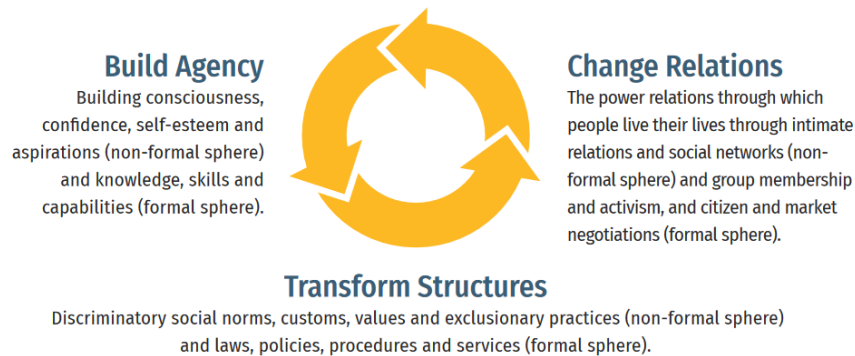
The Purpose of the survey is to:

- 1- Understand the possibility of the women from garment worker who able to join in the project life. And to strengthening female leadership
- 2- Identify for potential women to connecting women leaders to an established platform is the heart of the proposed action.

Significant of the finding:

The finding is expected to objectives to seek and identify women from garment worker from factory in Cambodia for strengthen the capacity of them. The finding is not the official survey for the global use but for only internal project to target beneficiary for the project implementation and seeking for their engagement in project for expect them to bring all the knowledge to disseminate to the worker in their own factory. The finding will

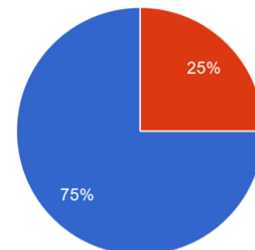
Figure 1: CARE's Gender Equality Framework



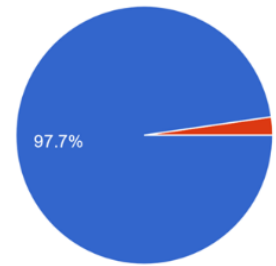
Finding Result:

The finding had reach 44 respondent with “41 women” from eight garment factory worker. The finding found that 100% of them interested to join in the project from July-December 2022. The respondent answer by 100% committed to advising and supporting other women workers in their workplace after they got training from ACT.

Most of them can participate with ACT every Sunday or whenever that ACT asks them to join so they will ask permission from their workplace. Participants 75% responded that they can stay outside one night between Phnom Penh, Kandal and Kampong Speu province. Only 25% of them can't stay outside.



97.7% of the respondent answer willing to keep going on to educate other women in their factory or community.



Women garment workers struggle in organise and to be involved in male--dominated social dialogue. Male leaders lack of understanding the gender specific dimensions of rights abuses and therefore not address those in their work. One big barrier to women’s participating in and leading trade union activities is the constraint of time. Women assume a huge share of unpaid household work, which leaves them with little time for social activities. Furthermore, gender stereotypes still exist concerning men and women’s suitability for leadership. In Cambodia male dominated trade unions need to be influenced to include women in their leadership. Workers lack of confidence and capacity as this is not a popular practice and also the power imbalance between workers and factory is very prominent and does not enable engagement. Furthermore, lack of time due to high level workload, and fear of being cut-off, especially during the context of the pandemic hamper workers engagement. The lack of representation and articulation of women specific concerns leads to the fact that duty bearers are often not aware about the inequality and rights abuses women experience in the world of work.

Recommendation and Suggestion from participants:

- All of them they need more capacity building training from ACT to improve their capacity building and more knowledge.
- Strengthening female leadership and connecting women leaders to an established platform is the heart of the proposed action.
- Strengthening women`s voice and awareness raising of key stakeholders towards gender specific concerns are key elements
- Provide leadership training, Social Security and social protection.
- Give space for **open dialogue with industry and governmental institutions advocating for their rights and to** implement respective policies **to** result in changing social norms and laws in the long run (transform structures)
- Advocate for the worker right in dignity at work place
- National law integrate for the better implementation of the labour benefit.