

Micro-Policy Intervention

CONTEMPORARY POLICY DISCUSSION IN CAMBODIA



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Chapter 3 | Accessible and Affordable Daycare: Unlocking Women’s Earning Potential

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Executive Summary

Balancing daycare and income generation is a recurring gendered challenge encountered by mothers around the world, especially in developing countries. Cambodian mothers, in general, have faced a daycare barrier to maternal employment, and have experienced great consequences disproportionately bearing the brunt of unpaid caregiving responsibilities when daycare is either inaccessible or unaffordable.

The absence of accessible and affordable daycare has negative impacts on three groups: parent(s) from low-income families leaving the workforce to become a full-time caregiver; children with the needs of adequate care for their early childhood development; and the government suffering from the decline in annual economic growth due to the loss of labor productivity and national revenue.

This policy paper will propose three policy alternatives:

- (1) promote an enterprise-based system,
- (2) encourage factory workers to utilize the daycare centers at the factories, and
- (3) establish a negative income tax system.

Introduction

Since the earliest days of civilization, females have always been characterized as inferior to their male counterparts. For thousands of years, the patriarchy has been embedded in every society and has become a foundation for the

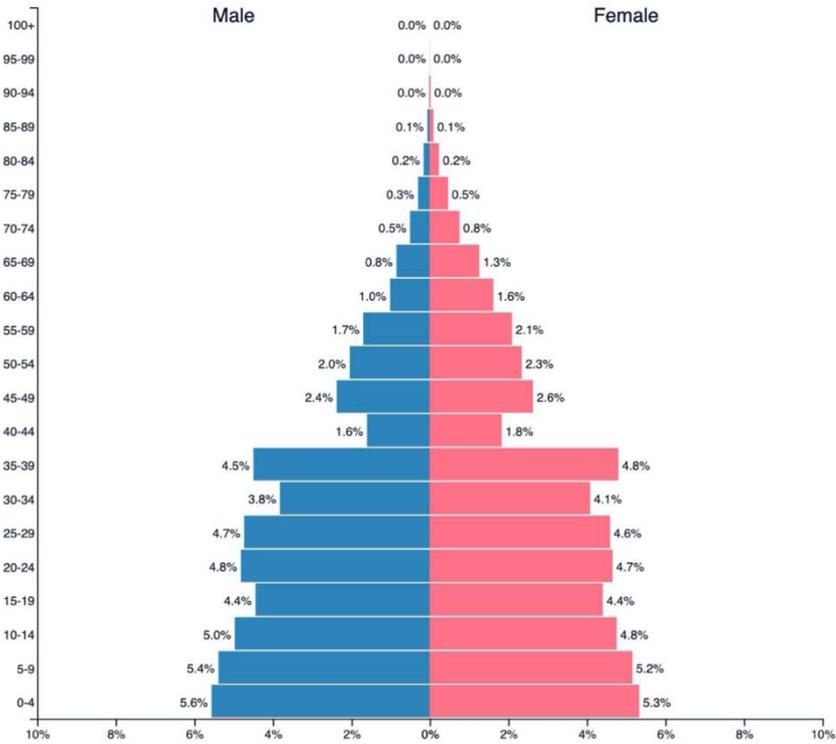
construction of all traditions and cultures worldwide. The notion of gender inequality has been passed down from generation to generation. The basic roles women and girls are expected to fulfill are cooking, maintaining the household, reproducing, raising the children, and performing other light 'feminine' tasks. These expectations oblige women and girls to carry their responsibilities accordingly. The patriarchy further shapes women and girls' roles beyond the private/household sphere. The disproportionate division of household responsibilities between men and women limits women's opportunities to participate in public life. The absence of women and girls' roles in the public sphere hinders the development of society. Moreover, the under-participation of women and girls will eminently affect their livelihoods which are already at a disadvantage.

For decades, despite the tremendous efforts made by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) and partnership organizations on tackling gender inequality, the participation of women and girls in public life has remained insignificant compared to their male counterparts. A majority of women continue to face many obstacles rooted in the stereotypes and expectations towards women. Currently, women empowerment has become an objective in combating gender inequality issues. Women empowerment has appeared in countless forms and various ways, but more often than not, the main focus of women empowerment is on achieving a quota, rather than on tackling the roots of the issues. This policy paper specifically emphasizes on the most crucial, yet commonly neglected barriers to increasing women's earning potential in Cambodia. Daycare is a significant topic of concern for modern Cambodian families.

According to the National Institute of Statistics (2019), the provisional result of the 2019 census shows that the female population makes up 51.5% of Cambodian population. Unfortunately, because the NIS has yet to release the full report of the recently finished 2019 census, the Cambodian population pyramid below is taken from a different source. More than half of the population are females, and a significant proportion of them are of early working age (15-24 years) or prime working age (25-54 years), suggesting a huge number of potential workers within the economy and the opportunity for economic growth. This development prospect is likely to be hampered by insufficient

daycare access which restricts employment opportunities for women.

Figure 1. Cambodia’s Population Pyramid (2019)



Source: Population Pyramid 2019. Retrieved from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision.

Background to the Problem

Daycare Context in Cambodia

The Royal Government of Cambodia’s responsibility for public daycare is mainly visible through the state’s efforts in providing preschool education with maximum three-hour sessions per school day to children between three to six years old. Regardless, Cambodia’s public daycare is inadequate. Besides preschool education, the RGC has shown no commitment to public daycare matters, including daycare for children under three years old. The lack of public daycare gives rise to private daycare with high fees, allowing only high-income families to access such resources.

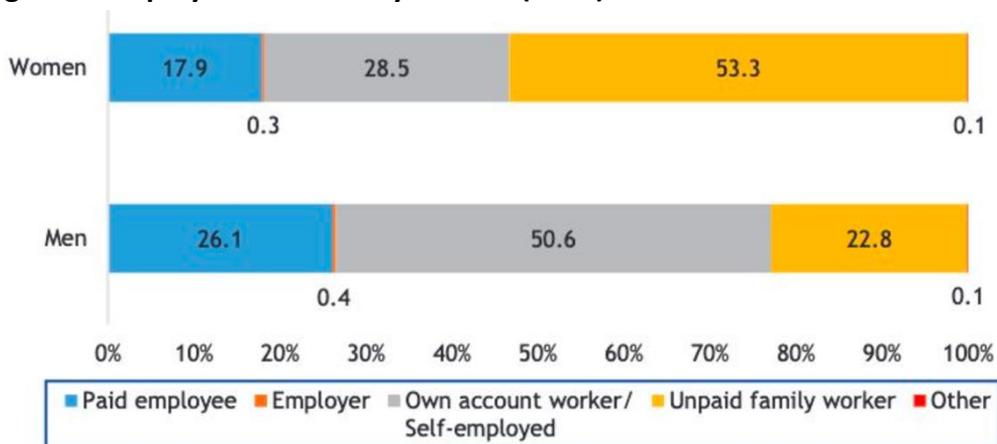
My (2019) states that Articles 73 and 16 of the Constitution and the 2007 Education Law stress the state’s role in providing daycare, especially to “women

without support who have many children under their care.” The National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (NP-ECCD) of 2010, the Action Plan of NP-ECCD, and Goals 4 and 5 of the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) are the relevant policy frameworks. Together, the policies prioritize one-year preschool educations with daily three-hour sessions and endorse the state’s role in caring for children under six years old. Notwithstanding, the state passes on these provisional daycare responsibilities to enterprises under the Labour Law.

The Cambodian Labor Law (1997), Article 186, states “An employer who employs 100 women or more must set an operational nursing room. If an employer is not able to set up a daycare center for children over 18 months of age, then they must pay women employees the cost of providing daycare for their children.” The details on childcare coverage outside of the factory are not provided by the Law. Better Factories Cambodia’s assessment of factory compliance (2018) indicated that twelve functioning daycare centers were reported during the assessments. Three of those reported the presence of some children. The reasons why factories may not provide care include: (1) additional costs that impede on the marginal profitability of factories and its competitiveness; (2) potential physical harm infants and young children on factory premises; (3) inadequate management of child care facilities; (4) insufficient space on premises; and (5) the risk of accidents when transporting children to-and-from home and the factory. Out of all 395 factories, 166 factories provided a childcare allowance varying between \$5-\$20/month. Nearly half of those factories paid \$5, while one-third paid \$10. According to the World Bank (2019), garment workers spend \$47-\$105/month for informal childcare provided by relatives and friends, which is comprised of a \$25-\$70 service fee and \$22-\$35 for children’s food while garment worker’s salary is approximately \$180/month. Therefore, the negligence of public-funded daycare and legal enforcement of enterprise-based daycares are limitations of the above policies, which strongly affect low-income families, especially garment workers and poor women-headed families. In target 5.4, as part of Goal 5 in the CSDGs framework, UNDP (2016) recognizes the value of unpaid care, domestic work and shared responsibilities within the household. Public services, infrastructure and social protection policies are to be provided to address the work-life balance and promote decent work for women.

The consumption of women and girls’ time by household responsibilities hinders women empowerment, participation in the labor force, engagement in economic activity and school attendance. As of 2013, women were doing almost three times more unpaid work than men (National Institute of Statistics, 2013). By 2016, women in Cambodia were doing four times more unpaid care and domestic work than men according to UNDP (2016). Evidently, the gap in the disproportionate share of unpaid work between men and women has widened remarkably in the period of three years.

Figure 2. Employment Status by Gender (2013)



Source: Cambodia Inter-Censual Population Survey 2013

All these frameworks show that public daycare is key to achieving gender equality and rapid development. The absence of daycare threatens to pull out low-income parents from the workforce to become full-time caregivers. Domestic businesses and foreign companies are then faced with inadequate human resources. The annual economic growth is declining due to the loss of labor productivity and national revenue. How can Cambodian youth help alleviate the problem? How can the RGC and organizations (IOs and NGOs) respond directly to the concern? It starts with the actions of individuals to tackle the problem on a micro-level. The government also needs to have a concrete plan and allocate funds for providing accessible and affordable daycare. Support from organizations with sufficient knowledge and resources will be needed as well.

Literature Review

The concept of masculinity and femininity has a consequential effect on the division of labor inside the household between men and women. Generally, there are certain household tasks which are exclusively assigned to women. The traditional responsibilities women are expected to do are childcare and household chores, which are time intensive tasks regardless of household structure and size (Seebens, 2011), while men mostly do work for wages. A time allocation study has shown patterns of increased engagement of women in unpaid care work when there are children in the household, while no significant effects on men at all (Budlender, 2008). Fengdan et al. (2016) highlighted that the time spent on housework increases for both spouses when they have young children in the household, but the wife's time spent on housework increases considerably more than the husband's (89.3 minutes vs. 29.8 minutes).

Ilahi (2000) found a negative relationship between the need for childcare and propensity of adult women to participate in income generating activities. From economic and gender standpoints, childcare is important because: (1) the early years investment into the upbringing of children is critical to their long-term development; and (2) time is usually allocated to childcare at the cost of other activities. The substitution of the time mothers spend on childcare with the time they spend on income generating activities have both short term and long-term consequential effects. In the short term, the lack of accessible and affordable childcare may impact employment rates because mothers are induced to halt labor force activities. In the long run, the lack of childcare alternatives might avert incentive of potential mothers to invest in their education as they may realize that their probability of their future participation in labor force is low, decreasing the accumulation of human capital. Thus childcare is a major constraint to women (economic) empowerment.

The imbalance of shared responsibilities in the household between men and women is not to be understated. If childcare is available, women could acquire more free time to participate in the labor force. This will add on to the family's household income due to the presence of two earners. It is widely believed that couples of two earners provide more resources for their family and are more likely to share the responsibilities of unpaid household activities equally than single-earner couples.

The Impacts of the Absence of Accessible and Affordable Daycare

Inadequate provision of daycare not only jeopardizes the effectiveness of programs designed to increase women's opportunities in income generating activities, but also leads to increased economic stress and longer workdays (Folbre, 2018). This factor undermines the international and national efforts promoting women empowerment. For families in which husband and wife are both income-earners, women are most likely to leave the workforce if an alternative for childcare is not available (Ilahi, 2000). Access to affordable daycare is one of the keys to unlocking women's earning potential.

The absence of accessible and affordable daycare negatively effects early childhood development, especially given the fact that migration in Cambodia is highly prevalent. According to UNICEF (2019), an equivalent of one-fourth of the population is internal migrants, of which 8.3 percent are adolescents between 10 and 19 years of age. Numerous children are being left behind in the care of grandparents who may not be able to provide adequate care necessary for healthy child development. This is concerning, as it is the early years when the brain develops most rapidly and has a high capacity for change, which lays the foundation for health and wellbeing throughout a child's life (World Health Organization, n.d.).

A practical example of free daycare services can be seen in the Korogocho project under Africa Population and Health Research Center (APHRC). According to International Development Research Centre (2017), subsidized access to daycare in Korogocho increased the percentage of working mothers from 48.9% among those without free daycare to 57.4% among mothers with subsidized daycare. The gap between male and female participation in the labour force narrowed by 8.5% due to the increase of working mothers. This public childcare success is a great model to learn from and should be adopted by the Cambodian government.

Micro-intervention

Based on the recurring challenges, statistical data, and a literature review on the matters of daycare and women's participation in labor force, which have been illustrated and analyzed above, this paper makes the following policy recommendations to the policy makers and organizations:

Policy 1: Promote enterprise-based daycare**A) Overview**

This policy's main focus is free private professional childcare training. By narrowing the stakeholders, this initiative can be implemented by an individual or a small organization with sufficient funding.

B) Justification

As mentioned above, early childhood development is crucial to children's health and well-being throughout their lifetime. Hence, a part of solving the accessibility and affordability of daycare is both the availability of daycare centers and the professionalism of caregivers.

C) Implementation

Providing free private professional childcare training will create incentive for citizens who would like to become caregivers in their respective area. The course is to be provided by private institutions that specialize in professional training. Students who complete the training receive a certificate of recognition as a qualified caregiver. Caregivers can establish a private daycare service at home. They can set up a nursing room that will be suitable for children aged 6 months to 36 months. According to Better Factories Cambodia (2018), an "ideal nursing room", as defined by Helen Keller International (HKI), has (i) basic standard of cleanliness; (ii) functional refrigerator; (iii) internal locking entrance door; (iv) comfortable chairs, ideally recliners; (v) easy access for lactating workers; (vi) breast-milk pump machine; and (vii) informative pictures/posters related to childhood development topics. The cost of building a nursing room is approximately \$1,600, with an additional \$150 for the equipment within the rooms. Bear in mind this estimated cost is from the assessment of garment factories in Cambodia, installing a nursing room in the house of caregiver probably costs less compared to building a new one.

Policy 2: Encourage factory workers to utilize the daycare centers at the factories**A) Overview**

Many factories in Cambodia have a daycare center on-premise, although most are not functional. On top of that, many mothers who are factory workers usually spend half of their monthly salary on informal daycare services provided by their relatives or friends. Combine these two factors, therein lies the solution.

Rather than individual mothers seeking informal daycare services for their children, mothers who work in the same factory can collectively hire professional caregivers to work in an on-premise daycare center.

B) Justification

Primarily, this policy enables mothers to concentrate on work without worrying about their children. Moreover, they will have more disposable income to spend on improving the nutrition of their whole family, especially of the children. At the same time, children can receive the proper care needed for their childhood development.

C) Implementation

Recall the legal provision above: a factory with more than 100 workers is required to have a childcare center. Therefore, the center of this policy recommendation is for individuals to take initiative and propose the idea to factory workers, especially mothers with children under 36 months. Factory workers have the right to request the opening of a functional daycare center if the factory already has one set up. Together they can foot the bill for formal daycare service on-premise, a cost-effective alternative to childcare service.

Policy 3: Establish a negative income tax system

A) Overview

Negative income tax is a form of welfare in which money is given to citizens who have an income below the state threshold.

B) Justification

This policy can help alleviate the financial burden experienced by poor households and give them the funds to provide their children with the proper nutrition and care necessary for healthy early childhood development.

C) Implementation

In this respect, the state will give money for daycare services to households with young children (0 - 36 months) with an income below \$400/month. The household income is the total gross income of all members of a household. The rate of subsidy is 50 percent. For every \$1 earned below the threshold, the family would receive \$.5 to spend on daycare services.

Notwithstanding, it is important to notice that this specific policy alternative requires more attention and research from scholars and policymakers as the concept of negative income tax is still unknown and foreign to Cambodia. It

might become a key solution to many recurring issues around basic services in Cambodia.

Conclusion

Accessible and affordable daycare in Cambodia is a fundamental to enhance women's economic empowerment, which has been overlooked by the government for decades. This policy paper has highlighted the multidimensional structural issues of the inadequate daycare system on Cambodia and how it affects local women, especially young mothers' access to the workforce. The absence of accessible and affordable daycare produces various negative consequences on women, households, and the nation as a whole. More importantly, early childhood development is crucial for children who are the future of Cambodia and are going to be the main source of economic growth in the Industrial Revolution 4.0. For these aforementioned issues, the paper has suggested three different policy recommendations that can be implemented on a grassroots level. These micro-policies will allow researchers or/and entrepreneurs to make a positive impact on the daycare system in Cambodia and help mothers and children from low-income families.

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