5 Gender mainstreaming in a hybrid state

Entanglements of patriarchy and political order in Cambodia's food security sector

Saba Joshi, Elisabeth Prügl, and Muy Seo Ngouv

Introduction

Like governments around the world, Cambodia has committed to mainstreaming gender considerations into its policies, including in the area of food security. It has in place policies that recognize the role of women in fighting hunger and the connections between achieving food security and gender equality. These policies also call for an empowerment of women in agriculture and for valuing their work in the provision of food. Cambodia's GM policies thus resonate with liberal international understandings that have made gender equality a core policy goal.

Yet, Cambodia is not a liberal state. The UN-led political transition established a democratic constitution for the country in 1993, which continues to be in place. But almost 40 years of leadership of Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) have created an increasingly authoritarian state. They have entrenched powerful party-based patronage networks that have served to enrich the elite (McCarthy and Un, 2017; Morgenbesser, 2018). In 2017, the CPP repressed opposition political parties, independent media and civil society, *de facto* turning the country into a one-party state. Democratic institutions, including elections held at national and local levels, thus co-exist with authoritarian practices, leading scholars to label Cambodia a hybrid state.

How does such a state advance the democratic goal of gender equality? There is little research on how illiberal governments have implemented GM, a relatively recent strategy to advance gender equality. Embraced by the UN in the 1990s, its intent is to ensure that gender becomes a consideration in all stages of policy-making and implementation in order to counteract the inadvertent reproduction of unequal gender norms. A key objective is to change institutional cultures in government that disregard the interests and needs of women and in so doing reproduce their marginalization. The strategy has received considerable critique from feminists because it often ends up inserting women into institutional hierarchies and structures without changing them. Yet, it continues to be a preferred approach to addressing gender inequality in international governance.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003202004-8

Much of the literature on GM has focused on liberal democracies and wealthy countries, or on international organizations and development interventions, where the strategy has been framed as an aspect of democratization. In these contexts, the implementation of GM has often encountered bureaucratic inertia and passive resistance. But little is known about how GM operates in politically hybrid contexts, such as contemporary Cambodia. This is particularly problematic, as authoritarian tendencies are asserting themselves globally, raising the question of how illiberal governments deal with gender equality. In this chapter, we seek to contribute such an analysis by focusing on the implementation of GM in the food security sector in Cambodia.

Food security is an area of considerable national importance in Cambodia. Around 3 million people (17.7% of the population) are considered to be poor and another 8 million are living 'near poverty' (World Bank, 2015). Approximately 2.3 million Cambodians face severe food insecurity with households spending at least 70% of their income on food, and the quality of diets remains poor (USAID, 2018, 2). Agriculture plays a key role in achieving Cambodian food security. Though the country is developing rapidly, agriculture employs at least 42% of the population (World Bank, 2018). With rice farming predominant, it provides staple food for many rural households; in addition, agricultural wage labour is increasingly becoming a source of income. Food security in Cambodia is also a gender issue. Twenty-seven percent of households are headed by women, and these are particularly likely to be poor (Maffii, 2016, ix). They have less access to resources, smaller plots of land, lower income, difficult working conditions, and lack political representation. Mainstreaming gender considerations into the food security sector thus has the potential to alleviate female poverty and strengthen women's role as farmers.

It is beyond the remit of this chapter to ascertain whether GM achieves these goals in Cambodia. Rather, we probe how the Cambodian government implements GM in the area of food security, taking into account the hybridity of its political order in interaction with hybrid gender norms. In the next section, we situate our study in the literature on GM and present our methodology. Subsequently we develop our conceptual framework by discussing Cambodia's hybrid political system and the multiple, overlapping norms related to gender equality that shape women's rights and entitlements in the field of agriculture and food security. Our empirical section explores the effects of such hybridity in institutional practices linked to GM. We first examine the way in which the entanglement of the hybrid political order with gender norms undermines efforts to correct the disproportionately male staffing of the government and slows the development of gender expertise. Second, we show how the egregious underfunding of GM is ensured through masculine patronage networks that exclude women while using their subordinate positionality to garner donor support. Finally, we discuss how civil society participation has increasingly become an empty performance as

Cambodia has transformed into a one-party state, weakening the power of feminist activists to advance gender equality through the state.

Literature review and methodology

Gender mainstreaming today consists of a dual strategy of charging sectoral administrations with integrating gender consideration into their processes, supported by strong women's machineries that oversee and monitor this integration. The literature has identified significant weaknesses in this dual structure, including a lack of resources, capacities, and expertise, but also a lack of political will, resistance, and a dearth of accountability (Hankivski, 2013; Miller and Razavi, 1998; Rai, 2003; Woodward, 2008). Typically, as the mandate moves from policy towards implementation in sectoral operations, and from national and sub-national levels, scholars have identified a process of 'evaporation' and gender concerns gradually disappearing (Kusakabe, 2005; Moser and Moser, 2005). The question of how to negotiate and counter bureaucratic resistance has become an important focus of the literature (Bustelo et al., 2016; Ferguson, 2015; Eyben and Turquet, 2013; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2007).

Research on GM is thus intensely attuned to the power politics of the strategy. Yet it often narrowly focuses on institutional and organizational processes, and the state has tended to drop out of the picture in contemporary treatments. This may be a reflection of the fact that the GM literature disproportionately focuses on countries in the EU, or countries such as Canada and Australia, with few explorations of non-Western states (Schech and Mustafa, 2010). Democracy appears thus as a background condition that apparently needs no questioning.

However, the state was a central concern of the early literature: Goetz (1997) suggested that GM bureaucracies should be conceptualized as embedded in 'political environments', and for Rai (2003), GM was about the relationship of women's organizations and the state and a matter of good governance and democratization. Indeed, the state has been an important factor in discussions of gender equality policies in Africa and Asia. Governments sometimes have embraced gender equality agendas, such as 'anti-democratic African governments' jumping on the women in development (WID) bandwagon, or 'otherwise discredited dictatorial regimes' (such as those in Ghana and Nigeria in the 1980s) pursuing 'grandiose projects' run by the wives of the heads of state, providing legitimacy to their regimes (Mama, 2007, 151). Similarly, in contemporary Northern Africa, autocratic leaders in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria have embraced women's rights as a way of gaining legitimacy (Tripp, 2019). A somewhat different logic seems to have motivated semi-authoritarian Malaysia when it has made the business case for gender equality, framing it as an aspect of enhancing the country's competitiveness (Elias, 2020). But in other instances, authoritarianism seems incompatible with gender equality goals. Thus, illiberal governments, such as those that have emerged recently in Europe, the United States, Brazil, or the

Philippines, are hostile to the mere reference to gender (which they frame as 'ideology'), and have attacked and dismantled gender equality machineries and legislation. Thus the character of the state matters to the way gender equality is framed and influences the kinds of policies that are advanced.

The literature on gender policies in illiberal states often explores such policies and framings. But it rarely investigates bureaucratic processes of GM that often continue to exist even in hostile policy environments. An exception is Ozkaleli (2018), who suggests that in an increasingly authoritarian state, such as Turkey, GM needs to change to become 'equity organizing' in order to account for the ethnic polarizations fostered by the regime. We hope to add additional insights through our study of Cambodia, which, like Turkey, combines liberal and illiberal characteristics. We seek to do so by focusing on the implementation of GM in one specific policy sector, that is, food security.

Our analysis draws on 15 semi-structured interviews with gender experts engaged in governmental agencies related to agriculture and food security and with civil society-based gender experts that have closely worked with or advised the government on policy-making relating to agriculture. The first 5 of these interviews were conducted from 2016 to 2017 followed by another 10 in 2020; they ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in duration.[1] Digital recordings of these interviews, obtained with participants' permission, were translated and transcribed. In some cases, the same organizations were contacted in both 2016–2017 and 2020.

Interview transcripts were coded inductively in Nvivo 12, using grounded theory methods of data analysis (see Charmaz, 2014). We coded in two rounds – first we engaged in line-by-line inductive coding, allowing the coding process to stick closely to the data. This was followed by 'focused coding', a process of refining and re-categorizing codes and drawing out themes across interviews. Memos and coding notes were developed following each round of coding, which helped capture the major reflections and ideas that emerged from the coding. To maintain the anonymity of participants, we do not state their names in this chapter.

In the following, we first draw the contours of the political order that characterizes the Cambodian state as hybrid based on secondary literature and argue that this order is entangled with a hybrid gender order. This provides us with the lens through which we then analyse our interviews, teasing out interactions of hybrid political and gender dynamics in the implementation of GM.

Political and gender orders in a hybrid state

Cambodia's political system defies easy classification; some recent labels include 'semi-authoritarian', 'semi-democratic', 'limited multi-party regime', 'civilian dictatorship', and 'party-based regime' (McCarthy and Un, 2017; Morgenbesser, 2018). Despite this diversity of classifications, several accounts concur that informal political institutions, particularly patron–client relations, play a significant role in determining political outcomes in the country.[2] Ruled by the CPP since the country's fraught transition to democracy

in the early 1990s, state repression of civil society and opposition parties has accelerated since 2017. After effectively eliminating its most viable political opponents, the CPP has occupied all 125 seats in the national assembly in national elections since 2018. For many, this effectively symbolizes the 'death of democracy in Cambodia' (Sokhean, Dara, and Baliga, 2017).

Yet, while Cambodia may have entered a new era of 'hegemonic authoritarianism' (Morgenbesser, 2018), the liberal constitution of 1993 continues to endure, serving as a means to consolidate the regime's power. Thus, the judiciary practices a 'thin rule of law' to legitimize elite control (McCarthy and Un, 2017), and elections have served to reinforce and validate patron–client relationships that have historically underpinned the CPP's political authority (Morgenbesser, 2017). In other words, Cambodia's current political order represents a melange where state institutions as defined by the constitution persist but are simultaneously overlaid with networks of patron–clientelism that serve as the predominant source of political and economic power (Un, 2019).

Parallel processes have generated a hybrid gender regime that gives women strong rights to property through unwritten, customary norms on the one hand, while cementing notions of subordinate femininity in historical texts, Khmer Buddhism, and to some extent in post-civil war statutory law. Under customary norms of inheritance, Cambodian women have access to land. These, alongside other kinship practices such as uxorilocality, where the in-marrying man moves to or near his wife's natal home and typically pays or provides service to her parents, have been interpreted as markers of the 'high status' of women in Khmer society (Ledgerwood, 2018, xxii; Jacobsen, 2008, 2). According to such norms, not only do women inherit land from their parents, they also have the right to keep it in case of divorce. While both sons and daughters inherit portions of their parents' farm lands, daughters commonly inherit the family home in addition because they tend to have more care-giving obligations towards their elderly parents (Kusakabe, Yunxian, and Kelkar, 1995).

The privileging of joint marital property, codified in Cambodian law after the civil war, has somewhat weakened women's customary rights with regard to property. According to the Marriage and Family Law of 1989, all properties that the spouses gain after marriage are considered the joint property of the husband and wife, who share equal rights in owning, using, managing, and benefiting from the interests of the properties (Royal Government of Cambodia 1989, Section IV and Article 32). Women now mostly hold land jointly; while 54% of Cambodian women own land, more than two-thirds of them do so jointly (National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International, 2014, 246–247). The practice of joint titling has accelerated this linking of land access to marital status. Introduced as a means to ensure women's equal land rights, it generates problems in the case of divorce, which often is not officially registered and may leave the names of men on women's land titles, thus limiting their rights (see Bourke Martignoni and Joshi, this volume).

Indeed, women's land rights and customary law exist in parallel to social norms that constrain women's power and rights in the family, community, and society. These are outlined in the *chbab srey* ('women's code'), a poem originating in the 19th century, which is widely memorized and reproduced in school curricula (see Anderson and Grace, 2018). It constructs the notion of the 'perfectly virtuous woman' (*srey kruap leak*), subordinate to men and obeying them irrespective of their demands or behaviour, including violence (Lilja, 2008, 70–71). Such norms often lead rural women to consider themselves inferior to men, with men entitled to more decision-making power regarding property and resources, including land ownership (Maffii, 2016, 1–4). Viewing their husbands as the heads of their families, women shoulder the burdens of taking care of children and the elderly while their active roles in farming, food production, food processing, and food distribution are overlooked and undervalued.

Liberal gender equality norms and policies, adopted by the Cambodian government in conjunction with international commitments, interact with these existing norms. The moderate rise in the percentage of women elected for office at the national (1993–2013) and sub-national levels (2002–2017), or appointed to senior government positions, has been linked to GM in government institutions and legal reforms, in addition to the advocacy efforts of civil society (Kim and Öjendal, 2014a, 26, 28). But this 'success' is not divorced from the logics of the hybrid political order. Lilja's study of female politicians in Cambodia finds that participation in electoral politics often requires family connections. Moreover, women are placed in lower ranks, in charge of stereotyped 'women's issues', and their behaviour is judged according to standards of femininity outlined in the *chbab srey* (Lilja, 2008, 62–65, 69–72). This entanglement of formal and informal gender rules also means that as politicians 'women are less connected to patronage structures and are therefore in greater need of funding to get things done' (Kim and Öjendal, 2014b, 24). Just as Cambodia's 'patriarchal state' with its 'patrimonial control over land and natural resources' shapes constructions of gender in rural areas (Beban and Bourke Martignoni, 2021), it also insinuates itself into gender equality policies.

In sum, Cambodia's hybrid political order is entangled with hybrid gender norms. The hybrid state described in the literature is a patriarchal state that encompasses a gender order with contradictory elements from religion and culture, customary and statutory laws, national and international norms. In the following, we seek to elicit how these interwoven hybridities shape GM in the field of food security at the granular level of bureaucratic implementation.

Gender mainstreaming in Cambodian food security policy

Cambodia adopted GM as a government strategy in 1999. Under the leadership of its Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), it established a gender

equality plan (*Neary Rattanak*) that has been updated regularly since. 'Health and nutrition for women and girls' has been a strategic area of focus in these plans from the beginning, as has women's economic empowerment, including in rural areas. Women's nutrition also figures in the country's National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition, in particular in objective 2, which focuses on enhancing the use and utilization of food for improving child and maternal malnutrition, eliding women's food and nutritional rights with child and maternal nutrition (CARD, 2014). In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has had in place a GM strategy since 2006, which was last updated in 2016. The strategy largely approaches women as farmers, and seeks to empower them economically by facilitating their 'access to goods and services for agricultural development and markets' (MAFF, 2015, 10).

MOWA oversees the mainstreaming of gender into national and sectoral policies and programmes. It is tasked to scale up GM work, support accountability mechanisms, and build capacity for the promotion of gender equality across government agencies and programmes. Most ministries have established GM action groups (GMAGs) to implement the strategy and developed associated GM action plans. MAFF's GM architecture includes a Women and Children Working Group, which is made up of representatives of the different MAFF departments.[3] The GM groups are convened regularly by MOWA.[4]

Parallel to this GM architecture is a Technical Working Group on Gender (TWG-G) which serves as a mechanism for government-donor coordination. It includes, in addition to the GMAGs, donors that work on gender, such as UNDP, UN Women, Oxfam, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, civil society organizations, NGOs, and the private sector. The TWG-G consists of about 60 members and meets four times a year on average, co-chaired by the Minister of Women's Affairs and a representative of UNDP (Interview with Head of MOWA Gender Department, 22 May 2020).

While MOWA is the main technical agency in charge of advancing GM, there is a parallel political structure. The Cambodian National Council for Women (CNCW) was created in 2001 as an advisory body under the auspices of the Queen, and today also liaises with and reports to international bodies, such as CEDAW. It is also presided over by the Minister of Women's Affairs, and includes high-level officials from each of the sector ministries, as well as the prime minister's wife (Suon, 2015, 25f; Interview with MOWA, 17 February 2017). It thus offers a political connection between the women's machinery and the ministries. The opacity of CNCW's role in guiding GM and the personalist link it establishes between the prime minister and the state bureaucracy exemplify the blurring of political and bureaucratic authority in policy-making processes in Cambodia's hybrid state.

In the following, we demonstrate how the entangled hybridities of the Cambodian state shape the institutional practices of GM in food security. We

identify two problems aggravated by the entanglement of the political order with Cambodian patriarchy: the male staffing of the bureaucracy, and the lack of resources for GM. In a third step, we discuss the limits of civil society participation in gender equality policy-making, and the failure of MOWA to serve as a potential feminist beachhead within the hybrid state.

Patriarchal staffing

The male staffing of government agencies has been a problem for the implementation of GM virtually everywhere. Because the strategy relies on the bureaucracy to apply a gender lens to its work, it needs staff that are willing to adopt such a lens. Studies have shown that this requires building capacity. Masculinist common sense, often associated with disproportionate male staffing has been widely described as an obstacle. In the literature, this problem has been diagnosed as a 'lack of political will'. In Cambodia, the lack of political will is amplified by logics of hybridity.

Male staffing is pronounced in the Cambodian government, where women made up around 41% of civil servants in 2017, but the proportion of women in decision-making positions was only 24% in 2019 (MOWA, 2019, 22). Disproportionate male staffing has been recognized as a problem, and since 2009, there has been a quota in place for 20%–50% women. Constituting a large bracket, these percentages offer considerable leeway for retaining the status quo. Moreover, the quota targets only those serving in technical positions and in jobs at the sub-national level of government. Thus, where the quota did influence the recruitment of women, they mostly have ended up in low-level positions (Interview, National Assembly, 15 May 2020). Ironically, there are no gender quotas for high-level jobs.[5]

The limited impact of gender quotas can be interpreted as an effect of patriarchal attitudes and a lack of political will. However, the reactions to MOWA's efforts to promote women into leadership positions also illustrate the impacts of the political order. MOWA's efforts encountered resistance from men, who complained that they were the victims of gender-based discrimination because they had to pay for their positions whereas the women were promoted without having to bribe their way up (Interview, MOWA, 11 February 2017). Liberal equality logics thus clashed with logics of patronage to counteract the progress of women in government. Political will emerges as structural constraint inscribed into the institutions of the hybrid state.

The effects of the continued male staffing of the state have been pernicious. While we encountered some young, male, often Western-educated staff at MOWA sincerely committed to advancing GM, men in the other ministries have shown little interest and expertise in working on gender equality. The remedy in GM typically is to create 'capacity'. However, our interviewees told us that the predominantly male staff in MAFF rarely attend technical trainings related to gender equality offered in the ministry, by MOWA or NGO partners. They considered the topic a women's issue, and their way

to support it often was to support women. As one of our interviewees from MOWA recounted,

> When we talk about gender during the meetings with the representatives from ministries, they say 'I promote gender since I always assign women to participate in all gender-related meetings. They are responsible for gender'.
>
> (Interview, MOWA, 11 February 2020)

In this way, gender equality remains relegated to a different kind of politics, outside the mainstream not only of policy-making but also of masculine networks of power. Indeed, the disproportionate focus on domestic violence in Cambodian gender equality politics reinforces this understanding, precluding interventions that address structural power relations beyond the family, including those in male patronage networks that govern the allocation of land and resources (Beban and Bourke Martignoni 2021; Brickell 2020). Thus segregated, the GM bureaucracy reproduces the hybrid gender order, combining aspirations to advance equality with assuring a lack of power for women. Many of our interviewees confirmed that GM is almost exclusively a woman's job. Located in low-level positions in the line ministries, these women often lack the status and power to effect major change. The same MOWA official expressed her concern about this.

> Sometimes we worry that there will be no gender equality because there are more women involved in gender work than men. … we will not be able to achieve gender equality if no men get involved.
>
> (Interview, MOWA, 11 February 2020)

Because, in the entangled hybrid state, power lies in the hands of men, delegating gender equality to women working at lower levels amounts to marginalizing the issue.

This refrain is, of course, familiar from other contexts, and there have been concerted efforts at the international level to win men as allies for advancing gender equality. But in Cambodia, gender specialists encounter also gender constructs that delegitimize feminist agency, and these constructs are aggravated by age, as women working in the bureaucracy tend to be younger (Interview, NGO, 11 June 2020). They run up against gender norms that expect them to act submissively.

> In our culture, it is difficult to talk about gender issues with powerful men. When we approach them, they respond saying that 'You are too young to give me advice'. We must have a strategy to talk with such persons. We can negotiate with them and be flexible …. If we start to advise them directly and tell them what to do (to support women), there is no

> way. Therefore, if we want to talk with them about gender, we should not talk directly. We need to be smart.
>
> (Interview, MOWA, 11 February 2020)

The quote illustrates the double challenge that those tasked to implement GM face. Logics of patronage make it difficult for women to reach high positions in government, and thus GM is less likely to find feminist allies in positions of power. In addition, the efforts of the gender specialists run up against constructions of submissive femininity and male superiority, which are amplified by age differences. Even if male staff were to attend them, gender training and capacity-building constitute relatively weak weapons against such norms. Thus, the male staffing of the state, the predominance of men in power, and the hybrid gender order, conspire to dull the strategy of GM, forcing gender specialists to 'be smart' and resort to subterfuge.

Patriarchal resourcing

The Cambodian state has a relatively strong planning capacity. Since the general election in 1993, in the aftermath of the UN intervention, it has undergone six planning cycles that established broad mandates and developed associated policies and instruments to monitor implementation. The Neary Rattanak national policies on gender equality follow these planning cycles, setting ambitious goals. However, the necessary budgetary allocations have not followed (Suon and Ross, 2020). This is not simply a matter of a poor state lacking resources, but a matter of a politics of resourcing that entangles equality planning with patronage and patriarchal values.

MOWA, the main agency tasked to implement the policy, has a miniscule budget of about USD 13 million, which has increased by about 5% annually over the past few years, but has remained at about 0.25% of the total national budget of Cambodia (Interview MOWA, 11 February 2020; Suon and Ross, 2020, 17). In the words of one of our interviewees at MOWA, it is a budget that went 'from nothing to less and from less to small', although she saw prospects for larger increases in the future (Interview MOWA, 11 February 2020). And while this interviewee assured us that the budget was 'ok', NGO critics disagreed: 'The big problem is money. We advocate for allocating a budget to do it, but this is not their agenda. … They're just mainstreaming … but have no budget to work on it' (Interview, NGO, 5 May 2017).

Other NGO experts pointed out that even a small budget could be sufficient for promoting gender equality, if appropriately allocated. But an interviewee argued that the MOWA channelled much of its budget towards programmes promoting women's economic empowerment at the cost of more radical feminist objectives:

> Women economic programmes do not possess a strong gender component. The way women's economic empowerment is implemented

> is patriarchal. In the execution of such projects, the roles of men and women are meant not to be equal. They do not really understand what's feminism.
>
> (Interview, NGO, 11 June 2020)

MOWA's small budget may actually be by design. In the early part of the century, MOWA's annual expenditure amounted to about 2.5% of the total national budget of Cambodia, but was dramatically reduced in 2005 from about 16 million KHR a year to 2 million, that is, to 0.35% of the national budget. Discovering the reasons for this decline proved difficult (indeed, current MOWA staff do not recall it); but some of our sources have speculated that this may have been connected to a new minister coming on board who did not have the same clout in the patronage networks. Alternatively, as one NGO activist argued, the government has used MOWA to attract donor funding, recognizing the interest of their development partners in the issue: 'MOWA has a low budget, less than the other ministries, because the government is very, very smart. They expect the MOWA to be the face of the government to deal with the donors and get money' (Interview, NGO, 1 March 2017). Indeed, Cambodia has received a massive injection of development assistance funding since 1993, including, presumably, to address gender inequality. Ironically, the promise of donor funds may have encouraged the government to underinvest in gender equality. The fact that the TWG-G is the largest of the many TWGs seeking government-donor coordination in Cambodia would support this assessment (Interview, MOWA, 11 February 2017).

While this strategy may attract international funding, it hampers the mainstreaming of gender issues into line ministries. Again, the NGO critic:

> Look at how much funding comes from UNDP, IFAD, FAO, WB, ADB to spend on these stupid things! At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture doesn't integrate gender at all.
>
> (Interview, NGO, 1 March 2017)

Indeed, the gender work in the ministries is largely unfunded. One of our research participants at MAFF confirmed that programming and policy development work related to gender is often stalled due to lack of funding.

> There is no gender stand-alone budget line. Gender work is funded through other budget-lines such as the administrative budget. Budgeting for gender work remains a controversial issue. Thus, the Women and Children Working Group needs to shop around to implement their gender work; otherwise, the limited budget is only sufficient for organizing a small training and one event. The WCWG tries to seek support from development partners such as the Cambodian Agriculture Value Chains Program (CAVAC).
>
> (Interview, MAFF, General Directorate of Agriculture, 20 May 2020)

Funded by the Australian government, CAVAC provides a promising venue for requesting funding, but the WCWG needs to hunt for it rather than accessing it through the ministry's core budget.

Gender equality work then becomes a way to extract resources from international donors. We learned of an instance where MAFF rejected GM training because the donors would not pay per diems to those taking the training. The head of an organization working on women and development narrated:

> We were very involved in GM work for the agricultural law. We wanted to introduce training tools with the MAFF staff. The minister liked our training ideas a lot but there was a technical issue about finance so we couldn't go further. We developed this tool with an international civil society organization. To use the training tool, the Ministry of Agriculture wanted the international civil society organization to offer per diems to participants. The international organization said no per diems, only lunch. So, they couldn't do the training – it was painful.
>
> (Interview, NGO, 1 March 2017)

Rather than investing in gender equality and appreciating the offer of free capacity-building, an under-resourced bureaucracy thus used gender equality programming as a source of personal enrichment for staff.

Gender units are not the only ones to have to request funds from the general government budget and from donors, and, according to one of our MOWA interviewees (MOWA Gender Department, 22 May 2020), some are more successful than others. The fact that the GM machinery in MAFF seems to be particularly unsuccessful in securing government funding may not be unrelated to the dynamics of the patriarchal, hybrid state, in which it matters whom one knows and what networks of influence one belongs to. For the officer at MOWA, this was a matter of 'capacity', of knowing how to draw up a proposal that would be convincing to the Ministry of Economics and Finance (MEF):

> Money is there, but the next question is if you have sufficient capacity to plan or to request for it. Sometimes, the [requesting] ministry did not even draft the plan. … When they request for gifts or sarongs to be distributed during 8 March – International Women's Day, … what is the benefit?
>
> (Interview, MOWA Gender Department, 22 May 2020)

But she also recognized that it takes influence to convince one's own ministry to send a proposal to the MEF.

> The GMAG needs to lobby with [the internal] Department of Economy and Finance and their leaders… Their request may be removed [by their own ministry] … It might be due to budget constraints with certain main activities already prioritized, and the rationales the working group

> presented were not parallel or convincing. The MEF would never reject [a proposal] if the budget is there. All the working group needs is to convince their internal department to address it in the proposal.
>
> (Interview, MOWA Gender Department, 22 May 2020)

In this quote, GM or gender equality considerations are assumed not to be 'main activities' or a priority in the ministries. Instead, unfunded GMACs[6] are expected to lobby internally to have gender projects included in requests of their ministries to the MEF, so that they can get their work done. There may be a lack of capacity among GMAC members to develop such plans; but this lack of capacity must be considered in relation to the framing of the issue as marginal, the low positions of those in charge, and their lack of clout in lobbying ministerial priorities. Kept outside patriarchal networks of patronage and influence, staff charged with implementing GM struggle to insert themselves into funding processes that are intrinsically based on such networks.

This patriarchal funding structure weakens gender equality work. Thus, for example, MAFF has been hampered in developing its new GM Framework and Strategy in Agriculture. At the time of our interviews, only the General Directorate of Fisheries had finished drafting its part because it received support from the Asian Development Bank. But, as we hope to have shown in this section, the main problem hindering gender equality work is not a lack of policies; it is a lack of resourcing. One of our interviewees at MAFF confirmed that the main problem is the lack of human resources, which is directly related to a lack of core funding (Interview, General Directorate of Agriculture, 20 May 2020). And, we would argue, this lack of funding is pre-programmed in the way hierarchical male networks grease the state bureaucracy, making it difficult for the mostly female gender equality staff to get a share of the budget. In this context, international funding may contribute to further hybridizing the Cambodian gender order, but the practice of using gender equality to attract foreign funding also marginalizes the issue, excluding it from core funding streams. Patriarchal processes of resource allocation thus allow the hybrid state to perform GM for an international donor audience while undermining it from the inside.

Ambiguous allies: state–civil society interfaces in gender mainstreaming

Since 2017, with the hardening of Cambodia's one-party state, civil society organizations in the country operate on increasingly fragile grounds. In this political environment, where spaces of civic engagement have been constricted through restrictive legislation on freedom of association, surveillance, intimidation, and incarceration of civil society actors (see LICADHO, 2017, 2020), what are the possibilities for alliances and networks between feminists working in state-based agencies and those in civil society? In this section, we briefly examine the relationship between women's organizations and the hybrid state, identified in the literature as crucial for advancing gender equality agendas.

The drafting of national policies such as the National Policy on Gender Equality and the Neary Rattanak typically involve consultative meetings with various actors from the relevant ministries, NGOs, and development partners. These meetings are part of an effort of participatory policy-making that stands in contrast to informal practices of exerting influence. Our interviewees at MOWA appreciated the consultations and the contributions of NGOs to the work of governmental agencies. In the words of one, the NGOs 'had lots of good ideas', and she affirmed that these ideas were 'rarely rejected' (Interview, MOWA, 11 February 2020). Moreover, the understanding was that civil society organizations would be working on the ground, given their capacities and access:

> MOWA will work to improve capacity building in the line ministries and departments, NGOs will work at the commune level, UN Women will sponsor NGOs to work on this. This has been very helpful, and we complement each other.
>
> (Interview, MOWA Gender Department, 22 May 2020)

MOWA thus styled itself as an ally and partner of civil society with interviewees keen to establish that there were no tensions between civil society perspectives and MOWA's work on gender equality. Even with reference to points of divergence, such as the role of NGOs in highlighting the prevalence of *chbab srey* in CEDAW shadow reports, MOWA experts were quick to clarify that despite their disagreement on this issue, they did not 'blame NGOs' for raising these concerns at international fora.

> I do not care whether one works for academia, NGOs, or the government. We must work together for societal improvement and development. But let us not try to demote each other. We do not blame NGOs, but the CEDAW committee has not believed us (the government) until now.
>
> (Interview, MOWA, 11 February 2020)

Here, while the interviewee from MOWA invokes unity between the government, academia, and civil society, she suggests that the NGO shadow report to CEDAW served to 'demote' the government instead of 'working together'. This message echoes the anti-dissent and anti-critique sentiments perpetuated by the hybrid state in Cambodia where civil society is expected to perform depoliticized 'development'.

Some NGOs we spoke with voiced their dissatisfaction with the MOWA and the processes of policy consultation. Already in our 2017 interviews, an expert based in an international civil society organization in Phnom Penh questioned whether their inputs produced any impact on policy processes.

> I used to join a Technical Working Group on Gender, which was about one or two meetings per year. The discussions at these meetings are more

> like an orientation, not really seeking inputs from civil society. What they [MOWA] consider input from the civil society in policies is not clear for us. We don't see this bringing about change. Because when I talk to our [international] partners, they say that it seems like we submit inputs, but nothing changes.
>
> (Interview, NGO, 7 March 2017)

Another civil society interviewee confirmed that it was not straightforward to integrate community perspectives into policy dialogues with the MOWA. Speaking about her organization's work with women in the provinces, she recalled,

> We try to bring issues from their daily lives to the national level, to put on the agenda of the meetings of the Technical Working Group on Gender at the MOWA. Sometimes they just hear but they don't pay attention, and we have to keep raising the needs from the communities again and again.
>
> (Interview, NGO, 1 March 2017)

Thus, civil society organizations have long struggled to achieve visible impact through their advocacy efforts. Our follow-up interviews in 2020 reiterated the message that consulting with civil society was mostly a 'formality' but went further to suggest that it now also violated the democratic spirit of policy dialogues in that it simply invited civil society to rubberstamp previously made decisions.

> During the drafting process of either Neary Rattanak or NAPVAW [National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women], the Ministry failed to work through democratic principles as the Ministry only sought our comment after the consultants conducted their research. It seems to be just for formality's sake to prove that the Ministry has already consulted with CSOs.
>
> (Interview, NGO, 21 May 2020)

But the same interviewee also recalled instances when MOWA paid heed to their recommendations. She argued that the work of NGO networks on women's economic empowerment was integrated in the drafting of the new National Policy on Gender Equality, and MOWA invited civil society networks to lead technical working groups. In this way, civil society-based gender experts felt both validated and excluded in GM processes involving the government. Considering their ambiguous relationship, NGOs argued that their expectations for advocacy were low, but they looked forward to being pleasantly surprised when their voices were heard. 'From a civil society perspective, if we make 10 recommendations and 4 out of 10 of these are accepted, we consider this a success' (Interview, NGO, 21 May 2020).

The feminist literature shows that gender equality advocates inside and outside democratic states often form alliances to advance common goals. In the progressively more-authoritarian Cambodian state, such alliances remain

weak and to an extent, perfunctory. Processes of participation maintain the outward appearance of openness and exchange, but spaces for reliable partnerships and horizontal collaboration remain narrow. In parallel, MOWA loses its function as a beachhead for advocating for gender equality; with whatever remnants of liberal democracy there are, the authoritarian state falters as an ally for realizing feminist agendas.

Conclusion

What does the case of food security in Cambodia teach us about GM in a hybrid state? And what does it illuminate about GM more broadly?

Our discussion of the Cambodian bureaucracy unveiled typical problems of disproportionately male staffing, a dearth of gender expertise, and a lack of funding. But rather than considering these a matter of a lack of political will, we hope to have shown that they are linked to institutionalized practices, what we call the hybrid political and gender orders of the Cambodian state. It is these hybridities that retain the staff of MAFF male and that of MOWA female, and that render the MOWA staff powerless; it is they that excuse male cadres from having to learn about gender equality; and it is their entangled operations that keep gender specialists outside the male patronage networks and GM off core government budgets. While the state's hybridity also has enabled alliances with civil society organizations, its authoritarian turn has easily ruptured these advocacy networks.

Considering types of state advances the understanding of how governments implement GM. It highlights how obstacles and resistances are not simply a matter of political will and attitude, but also a matter of institutionalized political and gender rules. It moreover finds these rules not only in the bureaucracy, but also beyond, in the complex common sense of a polity and its fragments of history. The Cambodian hybrid state is one such polity, and it is worth interrogating others.

Notes

1 The interviews in 2020 were conducted in Khmer by Muy Seo Ngouv and in 2016 and 2017 by Saba Joshi and Joanna Bourke Martignoni in English or Khmer (with the assistance of an interpreter). We would like to thank Joanna Bourke Martignoni for sharing her interview transcripts with us.

2 Helmke and Levitsky (2004, 727) define informal institutions as 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels.'

Informal institutions such as patronage and clientelism are understood to be structured by socially shared rules that hinge on principles of exchange and reciprocity (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Scott, 1972; Stokes, 2007).

3 According to the Group's Director, only three of the members participate actively (Interview, General Directorate of Agriculture, 20 May 2020).

4 Note that the Council of Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD), which spearheads nutrition policy, is not a member of the GMAG group assembled by

MOWA. This emerged in our interviews with MOWA and prompted a promise to rectify the matter.

5 There also are no gender quotas for the legislature. After the dissolution of the main opposition party in 2017, women held only 15% of seats in the Cambodian parliament. Leonie, Kijewski (November 2017). *Only Two Women Join the National Assembly*. The Phnom Penh Post. Retrieved from https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-politics/only-two-women-join-national-assembly.

6 Whose members 'mostly are occupied by their core tasks, the tasks on gender is just an accessory' (Interview, MOWA Gender Department, 22 May 2020).

References

Anderson, E. and Grace, K. (2018). 'From Schoolgirls to "Virtuous" Khmer Women: Interrogating Chbab Srey and Gender in Cambodian Education Policy.' *Studies in Social Justice*, 12 (2), 215–234. https://doi:10.26522/ssj.v12i2.1626.

Beban, A. and Bourke Martignoni, J. (2021). '"Now the Forest Is Over": Transforming the Commons and Remaking Gender in Cambodia's Uplands.' *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 5. https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fsufs.2021.700990.

Brickell, K. (2020). *Home SOS: Gender, Violence, and Survival in Crisis Ordinary Cambodia*. Hoboken, NJ and Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

Bustelo, M., Ferguson, L. and Forest, M. (eds.) (2016). *The Politics of Feminist Knowledge Transfer: Gender Training and Gender Expertise*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd edition. Introducing Qualitative Methods. London: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Council for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) (2014). 'National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (NSFN) 2014–2018.' Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Council for Agricultural and Rural Development.

Elias, J. (2020). *Gender Politics and the Pursuit of Competitiveness in Malaysia: Women on Board*. https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=6132266.

Eyben, R. and Turquet, L. (eds.) (2013). *Feminists in Development Organizations: Change from the Margins*. Bourton on Dunsmore: Practical Action.

Ferguson, L. (2015). 'This Is Our Gender Person.' *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 17 (3): 380–397. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2014.918787.

Goetz, A.M. (1997). *Getting Institutions Right for Women in Development*. London: Zed Books.

Hankivski, O. (2013). 'Gender Mainstreaming: A Five-Country Examination.' *Politics & Policy*, 41 (5): 629–655. https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12037.

Helmke, G. and Levitsky, S. (2004). 'Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda.' *Perspectives on Politics*, 2 (4): 725–740. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592704040472.

Jacobsen, T. (2008). *Lost Goddesses: The Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Kim, S. and Öjendal, J. (2014a). 'Gendering Decentralization in Cambodia.' Research Report 4. Research Report. Malmo: Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD).

———. (2014b). 'Gatekeepers in Local Politics: Political Parties in Cambodia and Their Gender Policy.' Working Paper No. 87. Working Paper Series. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI).

Kusakabe, K. (2005). 'Gender Mainstreaming in Government Offices in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos: Perspectives from Below.' *Gender and Development*, 13 (2): 46–56.

Kusakabe, K., Yunxian, W. and Kelkar, G. (1995). 'Women and Land Rights in Cambodia.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 (43): WS87–WS92.

Ledgerwood, J. (2018). 'Introduction.' In Ebihara, M.M. (ed.), *Svay: A Khmer Village in Cambodia*. Edited by A. Mertha. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

LICADHO (2017). 'The Dangers of Dissent: Attacks on Human Rights Defenders'. Briefing Paper, Phnom Penh: LICADHO. https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/2232017_HRD_ENG[finalWeb].pdf

——— (2020). 'The Fight for Freedom: Attacks on Human Rights Defenders 2018–2020', Briefing Paper, Phnom Penh: LICADHO. https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/23320201218_Human%20Rights%20Defenders%20Report%202018_2020_EN.pdf

Lilja, M. (2008). *Power, Resistance and Women Politicians in Cambodia: Discourses of Emancipation*. Copenhagen, Abingdon: NIAS.

MAFF (2015). *Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategic Framework in Agriculture 2016–2020*. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery.

Maffii, M. (2016). *Summary of the Impact of Gender Policy Processes on the Right to Food: The Case of Cambodia*. Rome: FAO. http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5489e.pdf.

Mama, A. (2007). 'Critical Connections: Feminist Studies in African Contexts.' In Cornwall, A., Harrison, E., and Whitehead, A. (eds.), *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*. London: Zed Books, pp. 150–160.

McCarthy, S. and Un, K. (2017). 'The Evolution of Rule of Law in Cambodia.' *Democratization*, 24 (1): 100–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2015.1103736.

Miller, C. and Razavi, S. (1998). *Missionaries and Mandarins: Feminist Engagement with Development Institutions*. Intermediate Technology Publications in association with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

Morgenbesser, L. (2017) 'The Failure of Democratisation by Elections in Cambodia.' *Contemporary Politics*, 23 (2): 135–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2016.1230317.

———. (2018). 'Misclassification on the Mekong: The Origins of Hun Sen's Personalist Dictatorship.' *Democratization*, 25 (2): 191–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1289178.

Moser, C.O.N. and Moser, A. (2005). 'Gender Mainstreaming Since Beijing: A Review of Success and Limitations in International Institutions.' *Gender & Development*, 13 (2): 11–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070512331332283.

MOWA (2019) *Cambodia Report: On the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Mukhopadhyay, M. and Wong, F. (2007). *Revisiting Gender Training: The Making and Remaking of Gender Knowledge: A Global Sourcebook*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Oxford: KIT Publishers; Oxfam Publishing.

National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International (2014). 'Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey.' Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Rockville, Maryland, USA: National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International.

Ozkaleli, U. (2018). 'Intersectionality in Gender Mainstreaming: Equity Organizing in Turkey.' *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 39 (2) (April): 127–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2018.1449524.

Prügl, E. (2021). 'Smart Economics.' In Berik, G., and Kongar, E. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 468–476.

Rai, S. (2003). *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratizing the State? Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Schech, S. and Mustafa, M. (2010). 'The Politics of Gender Mainstreaming Poverty Reduction: An Indonesian Case Study.' *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 17 (1) (March): 111–135. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxp025.

Scott, J.C. (1972). 'Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia.' *The American Political Science Review*, 66 (1): 91. https://doi.org/10.2307/1959280.

Sokhean, B., Dara, M. and Baliga, A. (2017 November). '"Death of Democracy": CNRP Dissolved by Supreme Court Ruling | Phnom Penh Post.' *Phnom Penh Post*, 17, Online edition. https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-post-depth-politics/death-democracy-cnrp-dissolved-supreme-court-ruling.

Stokes, S.C. (2007). 'Political Clientelism.' In Stokes, S.C. and Boix, C. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 604–627.

Suon, S. (2015). Review of Responsive Laws, Policies and Strategies toward Gender Equality in Cambodia. Unpublished draft.

Suon, S. and Ross, S. (2020). 'A Review of Cambodian Law, Policies, and Politics Related to Land Governance, Gender Equality and Food Security.' DEMETER Working Paper 1/2020.

Tripp, A.M. (2019). *Seeking Legitimacy: Why Arab Autocracies Adopt Women's Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Un, K. (2019). *Cambodia: Return to Authoritarianism*. 1st edition. Elements in Politics and Society in Southeast Asia. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108558648.

USAID (2018). 'Cambodia: Nutrition Profile.' USAID. 24/3/2021. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Cambodia-Nutrition-Profile-Mar2018-508.pdf

Woodward, A.E. (2008). 'Too Late for Gender Mainstreaming? Taking Stock in Brussels.' *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18 (3): 289–302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928708091061.

World Bank (2015). 'Cambodian Agriculture in Transition: Opportunities and Risks.' Economic and Sector Work Report No. 96308-KH. Agriculture and Global Practice, East Asia and Pacific Region. Washington, DC: The World Bank. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/805091467993504209/pdf/-96308-ESW-KH-White-cover-P145838-PUBLIC-Cambodian-Agriculture-in-Transition.pdf

———. (2018). *Cambodia: Overview*. Retrieved on 14 May 2018, from http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview.