



Cambodian Men's Network

For The Elimination Of Violence Against Women

**Regional conference on
Men as Partners to End Violence Against Women (EVAW)
3-4 September 2007
United Nations Conference Center, Bangkok, Thailand**

“Engaging Men to End Men’s Violence Against Women: A Cambodian Case”

**By: Chhay Kim Sore, Gender and Development for Cambodia (GAD/C),
and Cambodian Men's Network Coordinator**

1. Violence against women –background information

Violence against women has multiple roots and implications to multiple stakeholders including the perpetrators, especially when it takes place in intimate relations (i.e., spousal relations at household level). Violence is a major barrier for women’s development and improvement of their status. Women in contemporary Cambodia experience violence in the forms of domestic violence, rape and trafficking. Studies (NIPS, et. al, 2006; MoWA, et. al, 2005) reveal that almost one quarter of ever-married women of age 15-49 years experience violence by their husbands. Studies (ADHOC, 2007, LICADHO, 2007, UNIFEM et al, 2004:116) also reveal that the incidence and reported case of domestic violence, rape and trafficking of women in the country have not been decreased over the period of at least last five years despite relevant laws¹ and program interventions are in place.

2. History of GAD/C’s program to engage men to end violence against women

Gender and Development for Cambodia (GAD/C) is a Cambodian local non-governmental organization which has goals:

- a) There are gender sensitive laws, policies, plans and decision-making institutions in place
- b) Elected bodies, Ministries, NGOs and national and local institutions are able to implement gender sensitive laws, policies, plans and programs.
- c) There are effective advocacy networks of civil society, youth and state institutions that promote gender equality.
- d) There is increased mutual recognition of and respect for the rights and contributions of men and women in the family, community and nation.

GAD/C has a vision of

A Cambodian society where all people are equally empowered to use their potential to participate in national development with full dignity and justice thereby creates a fair, just and stable living environment.

¹ The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) adopted an anti-domestic violence law in 2005.

GAD/C started its program to engage men to end violence against women in 2000 through establishment of Cambodian Men's Network (CMN) with first time celebration of 16-day white ribbon campaign in that year. But the initiation of CMN started in September 1999 by myself. In early September I attended a conference entitled 'gender and gender balance: what's in it for men' in Chiang Mai, Thailand organized by DIAKONIA. Discussion in the conference gave me an idea to form men's group in the country to promote status of women through ending violence. I realized that men's involvement in ending violence against women in the country is crucial because men are the perpetrators of violence in most cases. As a staff of an organization (GAD/C), I also realized that men's engagement is also important in the movement of gender and development, as men are better off than women in gendered power relations in family, community and society. Later, with the support of DIAKONIA I traveled throughout the country to brainstorm with like-minded men. Along with searching the like-minded men I also provided basic gender training to the men to build their awareness of the issues of women and secure their support. Finally, we established the Cambodian Men's Network (CMN) in the year 2000. Over the years, GAD/C has added new and more program activities that explicitly engage men to end violence (against women) and improve the status of women at different levels.

3. Rationale of engaging men to end men's violence against women

There is tremendous potential to engage men in prevention and changing the culture of violence to peace and cooperation. Men have an essential role to play in addressing violence and confronting the factors that contribute to the perpetuation of violence in our society. The focus of engaging men in ending domestic violence is because:

- They are responsible for most domestic violence, as well as for their forms of violence against women in our society.
- Men are the primary role models for boys. Boys learn from observing the relationship dynamics of their own parents. We consciously or unconsciously accept the role of father. Fathers are the boy's first and crucial example of what it means to be a man and the way in which a man relates to his partner in an intimate relationship.
- Men understand men's attitudes, behavior and perception (i.e., masculinity) of men, not women. Men's activism against men's violence against women can be seen as complementary, rather competitive by the male perpetrators of violence.
- Due to the wide spread acceptance and practice of violent masculinity, non-violent men feel isolated because of their gentle behavior. Their masculinity comes under question and is in crisis. So, we who possess gentle masculinity must speak out and challenge the dominant aggressive role model. In this way we can protect and promote non-violent masculinity on one hand and confront the structures that lead to violent masculinity on the other hand.

4. Major activities of GAD/C to engaging men to end men's violence against women

GAD/C carries out the following activities with the recognition of engaging men to end men's violence.

Networking with men

GAD/C establishes, manages and runs a network of men called Cambodian Men's Network. Currently CMN has approximately 1000 members (both individual and institutions) throughout the country. Members of CMN actively take part in concerned activities. GAD/C provides support in the form of training, meetings, and exchange programs to improve their

capacity to work with their fellow men to end violence by men. It holds regular meeting (quarterly and annual meeting) of the network. In the meeting members also share good practices and lessons learnt in protecting women from violence.

Capacity building activities for CMN members

The CMN secretariat organizes training, workshops, symposiums and meeting on different issues concerning gender equality, women's rights and status for the CMN members. The objective of these activities is to improve capacities of the CMN members to promote status of women and girls and gender equality at their respective work places.

16-Day White Ribbon Campaign (WRC)

GAD/C celebrates the 16-day white ribbon campaign (WRC) every year starting from November 25 until December 10. Through campaigns, we broadly call the stakeholders, particularly the men to take action against violence against women. A number of activities take place during the campaign. Activities include pinning white ribbon, meetings and discussions, public concerts, vox-pop screening, distribution of promotional materials, media appearances, and press releases.

The strategy of this campaign is to break the silence of the society about violence and discrimination against women and put to pressure on policy makers, lawmakers, local authorities and law enforcement officials to implement legal and policy interventions against violence and discrimination.

Advocacy and lobbying

The CMN members advocate for and lobby the policy makers, legislators and program managers for gender-responsive laws, policies and programs. There are examples of successful of CMN advocacy and lobbying. For instance, CMN collaborated with other networks and civil society groups to lobby the legislators to adopt a law on domestic violence. As a result of continued lobbying by civil society groups and CMN, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) adopted an anti-domestic violence law in 2005.

Media appearance

Besides the 16-day white ribbon campaign, the representatives of CMN appear on national television and radio for talk shows and roundtable discussions on occasions such as international women's day, international human rights day and so on. They have discussions on relevant issues such as domestic violence, men and masculinities, and societal roles for peace and harmony in family and society.

Men's Perspective Bulletin

The CMN secretariat (based in GAD/C office) publishes quarterly Men's Perspective Bulletin. CMN members and other men are the target readers of the bulletin. This is the only bulletin in Cambodia published in both Khmer and English, which has discussions on men's role and responsibility to end violence against women and portray good male role models. Local good practices of men on addressing violence against women are also reported in the bulletin.

Publication and dissemination of IEC materials

GAD/C publishes and distributes IEC materials such as posters, stickers, leaflets among people to build awareness of men's roles and responsibilities on promoting gender equality and ending violence against women.

Media monitoring/advocacy

The CMN secretariat and members keep a watch on media, both electronic and print media at their respective levels to make sure that media reports news in gender-sensitive manner and portrays women in positive way. For example, the CMN secretariat lobbies reporters and journalists not to mention the name and specific particulars of women victims of rape, trafficking and domestic violence reported in the newspapers. The secretariat also keeps records of cases of domestic violence, rape, trafficking and other forms of women's rights

violation reported in Khmer and English Dailies. The purpose of keeping record on reported cases of women's human rights violations is to document the trend on status of women's human rights for future policy and program directions.

Community-based men's groups (CMGs)

This is a new program started in January 2007. Initially we launched this program in the provinces of Pursat, Kampong Chhnang, and Prey Veng. Under this program, we establish and train community-based men's groups to transform their harmful behavior, which cause domestic violence and other forms of violence. Each of the CMG consists of 5-7 members. Members are good male role models. To transform men's traditional and harmful masculine ideologies, CMGs organize peer meeting, personal counseling at the village level.

Research and Developing Training Manual on Men and Masculinity

GAD/C is currently designing a research proposal on men and masculinity to conduct in the near future. The overall objectives of the research are to unveil the local version of masculinity in relation to violence and men's control over women and strategize to work with men effectively at grassroots level. A training manual will also be developed based on the research results.

5. How do we approach men?

It is not an easy task to approach to men, particularly perpetrators, to transform their harmful behavior and practices. Our community-based men's groups (CMGs) and men activists are specially trained on counseling, advocacy and mentoring. They use multiple approaches while they talk with the grassroots men. In their approach, the CMG members and activists are flexible and situation oriented. While they talk with the grassroots people through campaign or regular programs they broadly talk from economic and mutual respect points of view. More specifically, they send the following messages to the target men to transform their harmful ideologies and practices towards tolerance, respects and peace.

Violence is not only women's problem; it is also men's problem.

Violence against women not only affect women but also affect men as it impacts the cognitive development of children, family efficiency in terms of economic earning and mental and physical health of all members of the household, including the perpetrators. Violence affects individuals (both men and women), family and society as a whole. To save and protect family, our society and ourselves we need to stop the occurrence of all forms of violence.

Violence is not the way to show manhood

Violence is not the way to show or express men's manhood. Rather control and tolerance at the time of anger are the best means to let others know our manhood.

Mutual respect (between husband and wife) can bring peace and prosperity in the family, community and nation

The grassroots men are especially encouraged to increasingly recognize and respect the rights and contribution of women and men in the family, community and nation. Their awareness on complementary, not competitive roles of women and men in managing family and community are built through different activisms.

6. Success/challenges

There are ample evidences that:

- Men, because of our activism increasingly recognize the importance and contribution of women in managing the family, community and nation. They do value and respect their partners more than before.

- Violence against women has become a widely talked social issue, particularly among the men. Sometimes before, violence against women, particularly domestic violence was considered as private matter among many of the men. Men are not silent about this issue.
- Men who used to perpetrate violence (domestic violence) have changed their harmful practice. They do not violate any more and are more focused on family income and development
- There are also examples that nowadays, when men who have joined in our activities come to know any incidence of domestic violence, they immediately intervene and report to the local authorities for taking action against the perpetrators.

While we have these successes, we encounter a number of problems and challenges. Challenges include resistance (by men), lack of cooperation and collaboration (i.e., many of the donors and development partners who work on gender and women's issues do not recognize and consider the importance of engagement of men in gender and women's issues), lack of cooperation by the local authorities –who are mostly male, and inadequate funds.

7. Key recommendations

We would like to make the following recommendations for consideration of local, national and international agencies, both government, non-government and inter-governmental ones to best tackle the violence against women.

- Conduct empirical study on men particularly in the context of shifting economic and cultural affairs. It is unlikely that economic and cultural changes will have no effects on men's masculinity, particularly in relation to violence. We need to study the effects of growing economic opportunities of women, changes in femininity of women, and cultural changes on men's masculinity.
- Mass media including music, Karaoke should promote good male role models so the current generation learns non-violent behaviors.
- The gender advocates need to be more careful in approaches and strategies so the men do not feel marginalized and considered women's increased independence and empowerment as a threat to their masculine identities.
- Existing program and projects on gender and development run by government and non-government agencies should target men more in number to build their awareness and capacities on women and gender issues.

Reference

- 1 ADHOC (2007) *Human Rights Situation 2006*, ADHOC: Phnom Penh
- 2 LICADHO (2007) *Violence Against Women in Cambodia 2006*, LICADHO: Phnom Penh
- 3 MoWA, GTZ, EWMI and UNIFEM (2005) *Violence Against Women: A Baseline Survey (Final Report Cambodia 2005)*, MoWA, GTZ, EWMI and UNIFEM: Phnom Penh.
- 4 National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics [Cambodia] and ORC Macro (2006) *Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2005*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Calverton, Maryland, USA: National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ORC Macro.
- 5 UNIFEM, WB, ADB, and DFID/UK (2004) *A Fair Share for Women: Cambodia Gender Assessment*. UNIFEM, WB, ADB, DFID/UK. Phnom Penh, ISBN:1-932827-00-5