

## POLICY BRIEF

# ADDRESSING UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK (UCDW) IN CAMBODIA

February 2025

## INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is crucial for sustainable development, yet earlier studies often overlooked the time-use component, especially within the domestic sphere. Recent research highlights significant gender disparities in unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW), which remains predominantly the responsibility of women and girls. This imbalance restricts their access to education, paid employment, and personal development, thereby

perpetuating gender inequalities. In Cambodia, traditional gender norms, economic disparities, and inadequate infrastructure exacerbate these challenges. National data on UCDW has not been updated since 2004, leaving a significant gap in understanding the current state of UCDW distribution.

To address this, Oxfam, in consultation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Cambodia, conducted a pilot Household Care Survey (HCS) to collect and analyze relevant data. The study used a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data from time-use and perception surveys with qualitative insights from focus group discussions. It covered four provinces: Prey Veng, Siem Reap, Kampot, and Mondulakiri, representing diverse socio-economic and geographical contexts. Key findings include the average time spent on UCDW by different demographics, insights into social norms influencing time-use patterns, and the impact of access to infrastructure and services on UCDW. These findings are vital for advocacy and policy formulation to advance gender equality.



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# KEY FINDINGS



## TIME-USE PATTERNS



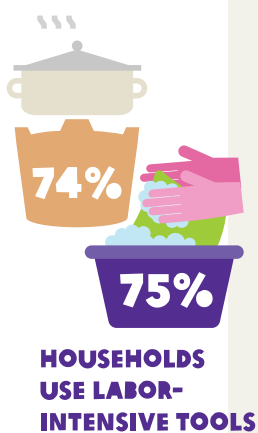
- **Women's overrepresentation in UCDW:** Women spend 5 hours and 2 minutes per day on UCDW, compared to 2 hours and 6 minutes for men. This disparity, rooted in traditional gender roles, necessitates interventions to promote a more equitable distribution of unpaid care responsibilities.
- **Impact on women's time allocation:** Women spend 3 hours more per day on UCDW than men, limiting their opportunities for education, personal, and professional development. This time poverty restricts women's participation in economic and social activities, hindering their empowerment and contributing to gender inequalities.
- **Childcare as the most time-intensive UCDW activity:** Childcare peaks between 4-6 pm, significantly limiting women's ability to engage in paid work or other activities, reinforcing gender disparities.
- **Generational shift in caregiving responsibilities:** Migration trends for paid work often shift caregiving responsibilities to older women, particularly grandmothers, impacting their health and well-being.



## INFLUENCING FACTORS



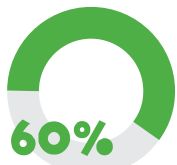
- **Age variations:** Young women (18–24) dedicate the most time to UCDW, while median-aged men (35–39) contribute the most among men, though still less than women.
- **Geographic variations:** Urban women in Siem Reap and rural women in Kampot spend the most time on UCDW, influenced by access to infrastructure, support services, and local economic opportunities.
- **Income and UCDW time:** Higher-income households spend less time on UCDW due to access to time-saving equipment and external help, while lower-income households spend more time, perpetuating economic disparities.
- **Reliance on traditional tools:** 74% of households use labor-intensive tools like wood-fired stoves, and 75% use handwashing tubs for clothes, increasing the time and effort required for daily tasks.
- **Financial barriers to modern equipment:** Affordability remains a major barrier for low-income households, preventing the adoption of modern appliances that could alleviate UCDW responsibilities.
- **Affordability and reliability of care services:** Limited access to affordable and reliable care services exacerbates women's caregiving responsibilities, with only 10% of respondents reporting access to such infrastructure.
- **Insufficient supporting care infrastructure:** Many areas lack developed care facilities for children, elderly people, and people with disabilities, leaving women with limited options to redistribute their UCDW responsibilities.
- **Persisting gender norms:** Traditional societal expectations frame UCDW as women's work, limiting the redistribution of these responsibilities despite progress toward equity.
- **Potential for attitude shifts:** Awareness campaigns, education, and peer examples can challenge stereotypes and promote shared responsibilities. 32% of male respondents reported that the Chbab Bros (Code of Conduct for Men) has no influence on their views on UCDW roles, while 52% acknowledged some level of impact.



- **Collective values and infrastructure preferences:** Many prefer care services, including childcare and eldercare, to be located close to home, reflecting a cultural value of proximity and trust in familiar caregiving arrangements.



## DECISION MAKING POWER



**OF WOMEN  
MAKE DECISIONS  
ON UCDW**

- **UCDW as a barrier to empowerment:** Unequal UCDW responsibilities diminish women's agency and empowerment by restricting their time and energy, limiting their opportunities to engage in paid work, education, or social and political activities.
- **UCDW as women's domain in household decision-making:** Women predominantly make decisions on UCDW tasks (60%) and small daily purchases (76%), while more significant decisions are taken jointly with their spouses. Notably, 70% of women reported making their own decisions about how they spend their time.



## WELL-BEING AND TIME CONSTRAINTS



**OF WOMEN  
REPORTED FEELING  
STRESSED DUE TO UCDW**

**UCDW as women's mental load:** The heavy and unequal UCDW responsibilities take a significant mental and emotional toll on women. 52% of women reported feeling stressed due to UCDW, compared to 22% of men, highlighting the correlation between unpaid care work and women's mental and emotional well-being.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To further progress gender equality by addressing the impact of unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW) and barriers to women's empowerment, the study proposes the following policy recommendations:

## 1 STRENGTHEN EXISTING MEASURES



- **Deepen policy implementation:** Enhance infrastructure development, especially in remote areas, to ensure equitable access to essential services and facilities, reducing the time and effort required for daily tasks, including UCDW. Expand care facilities and increase training programs to support women in entering or re-entering the workforce, providing accessible and affordable childcare, eldercare, and disability services, as well as skills development programs tailored to women's needs.
- **Broaden social security schemes:** Continue to extend the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) coverage to informal workers and self-employed individuals, including those engaged in UCDW, providing crucial social protection and benefits to women who often lack access to formal employment schemes.
- **Consider women's specific needs:** In policy monitoring and evaluation, set clear, gender-equitable targets and collect sex-disaggregated data to ensure women benefit from these initiatives. Empower women by equipping them with the skills, resources, and opportunities to participate fully in society and the economy.

## 2 PROMOTE THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION'S 5R FRAMEWORK FOR DECENT CARE WORK



### Raise awareness and encourage action:

Educate stakeholders on the 5Rs framework, which includes Recognizing the value of UCDW, Reducing the time spent on UCDW through public services and technology, Redistributing UCDW tasks more fairly between genders, Rewarding care workers with decent work opportunities, and ensuring Representation, social dialogue, and collective bargaining for care workers.

## 3 INTEGRATE UCDW INTO POLICIES



**National policy integration:** Ensure UCDW is clearly reflected in national policies with actionable commitments and adequate funding. This should align with Article 36 of the Cambodian Constitution, which states that "Khmer citizens of either sex shall enjoy the right to choose any employment according to their ability and the needs of society. Khmer citizens of either sex shall receive equal pay for the same work. Housework shall have the same value as work outside the home."

## 4 EXPAND GENDER STUDIES IN EDUCATION



**Educational integration:** Incorporate gender equality topics into school curricula at all levels, from primary to higher education, to foster awareness and promote a more equitable society. This challenges traditional gender norms and stereotypes that confine women to unpaid care and domestic work.

## 5 SUPPORT INVESTMENT IN BUILDING A CARE ECONOMY



**Develop supportive care policies:** Establish clear guidelines and standards for care services and domestic work, create pathways for formalizing care jobs, and offer relevant training programs. Ensure regulations protect care workers' rights and provide incentives to encourage participation and investment in the care economy. Building a robust care economy is crucial for recognizing, valuing, and redistributing UCDW, promoting gender equality, and achieving sustainable development goals.

## 6 INSTITUTIONALIZE TIME-USE SURVEYS



### Reintroduce time-use modules:

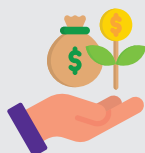
Incorporate time-use modules in national surveys to track UCDW trends and refine policies based on evidence. Encourage further research on UCDW across Cambodia to deepen understanding and find innovative solutions, informing policymaking to promote gender equality and support unpaid carers.

## 7 TRANSFORM PUBLIC MINDSETS



**Promote mindset shifts:** Implement awareness campaigns and education programs that highlight the significance of UCDW and challenge traditional gender norms. Build trust in services provided by others by promoting quality standards, regulation, and professionalization in the care sector.

## 8 EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



**Inclusive job growth:** Provide opportunities for productive work that delivers fair income, workplace security, social protection, better prospects for personal development, and social integration. Ensure equality of opportunity and treatment for all women. Invest in education and training programs tailored to women's needs and aspirations, addressing barriers such as gender discrimination and disproportionate UCDW responsibilities.

## 9 DISSEMINATE RESEARCH FINDINGS



**Share insights:** Disseminate findings from the Household Care Survey (HCS) and related studies to raise awareness and promote a better understanding of UCDW among stakeholders, including government agencies, policymakers, civil society organizations, and the public. This fosters dialogue, advocacy, and informed policymaking on UCDW.