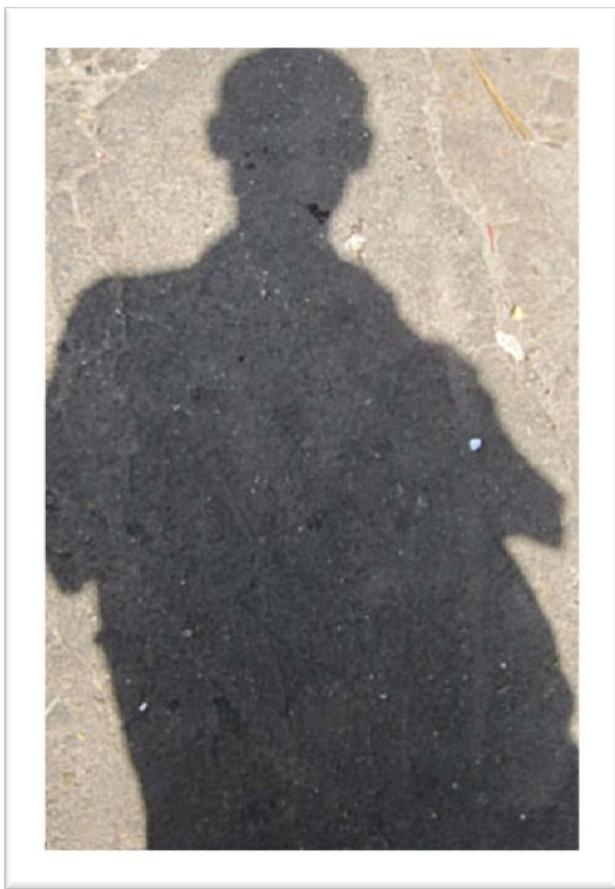


Main Findings Report

Navigating the Mainstream: research on strategies to resist gender discrimination and violence against women

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If we do something bad, and even if nobody else knows, our shadow will still follow us. We cannot escape ourselves!



Violence is preventable
UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women & UNV
Asia-Pacific regional joint programme
for gender-based violence prevention

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Navigating the Mainstream: research on strategies to resist gender discrimination and violence against women

OVERVIEW

This report provides a summary of the *Navigating the Mainstream* research that aimed to understand how and why Cambodian women and men negotiate and resist social gender norms. The overall research question is “how are Cambodian women and men negotiating and resisting dominant gender norms, particularly those concerned with acceptance and perpetuation of violence against women and women’s political leadership and participation?”.

Navigating the Mainstream was supported by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Partners for Prevention (P4P), a joint UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV Asia-Pacific regional programme for gender-based violence prevention, Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (HBF), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID)ⁱⁱ in cooperation with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs of Cambodia and Gender and Development for Cambodia. It overall draws upon a positive deviance approach (Marsh et al., 2004) using Critical Incident Technique (Fisher, 1997 and Flanagan, 1954) as well as participatory action research where the participatory photography tool, Photovoice, (Wang and Burris, 1997) was applied. The research was conceived, on the one hand, from an acknowledgement of and concern for the high levels of gender-based violence in Cambodia (Fulu et al., 2013) and, on the other, a recognition that Cambodian women and men negotiate social norms on a daily basis (Wong, 2009).

The study population includes 68 Cambodians (37 women and 31 men) from diverse backgrounds but whose practices and beliefs differ, to varying degrees, to what would be considered dominant gender norms in Cambodia. These norms concern what are considered acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours and activities for women and men in work, at home, in the community and Cambodian society more generally. Data was collected in two sub-sample groups: 40 (24 women and 16 men) participated in semi-structured interviews, as part of the Critical Incidence Inquiry (*Cii*) component while 28 (13 women and 15 men) participated in nine weekly participatory photography workshops to produce a series of personal photostories along the theme of “I am special and different”ⁱⁱⁱ, as part of the Visions of Change (*V4C*) component^{iv}.

The research used purposeful sampling where participants were invited to join the research due to a perception that they demonstrated positive deviant gender attitudes and behaviour. As Flanagan (1978: 138) states of sampling with Critical Incident Technique, “The purpose...was not to obtain accurate estimates of frequencies but rather to insure that differing points of view and types of experience were represented”. In this regard, participants have diverse backgrounds. Most are over 20 years old and are evenly distributed over main age categories. While 54% are urban/peri-urban based (and 46% rural based), almost all have backgrounds from rural contexts. Participants come from different walks of life: urban professionals, civil servants, farmers, potters, professional boxer, beer promoters as well as members of community organizations (such as PHD and BPA), village and community

leaders, community volunteers. They represent diverse civil status (married, divorced, widowed, single), different sexual orientations (hetero-sexual, gay and lesbian) as well as health status (gender-based violence survivors, person living with HIV/AIDS).

Given the sensitive nature of the subject, measures were taken to uphold ethical standards of research. Informed consent was sought and confidentiality and anonymity ensured. In the case of *V4C*, specific measures were taken to follow ethical participatory photography standards such as training in photographic ethics, seeking permission of subjects and sharing of copyrights with photographers (OPC, 2011).

MAIN FINDINGS

Nature of Gendered Beliefs and Practices Among Participants

For some research participants, they claimed that they have always had these beliefs and practices. Their stories are about how they stay true to these in the face of social pressures. Others claimed to have changed, such as men who have stopped their violence, ceased or decreased their drinking of alcohol, no longer gamble and remain monogamous. Or women who no longer accept abusive relationships, violence or social restrictions. The reasons for changing are many. Some stated to have started to question old beliefs and the applicability of norms in contemporary times while others did not see the value in following norms. Challenging or negotiating gender norms is not necessarily a rejection of social norms or conventions more generally. A number of participants, when speaking of women in particular, did not see the countering of norms as ill behaviour: there is an element of trust and seeing non-traditional acts within the wider context of the person's character and as undertaken by responsible adults with agency. Another reason for changing thinking and behaviour is a realization of how one's actions contribute to society and reproduce norms. For some participants, changing was related to having visions for society and aspirations for a better future for themselves, their children and others.

While a number of respondents spoke of resisting gender norms, others referred to conforming to them but in ways that do not necessarily suggest being controlled by them. For some women, particularly socially marginalized as in the case of the beer promoters, following prescribed roles provided a sense of identity and "normalcy". In other cases, adopting dominant gender norms were a way to challenge prescribed norms. Following particular norms can also be a survival strategy with the overall aim of escaping social pressures more generally. For men, in particular, negotiating gender norms meant re-defining dominant notions of what it is to be a man, such as challenging what it is to be a "real" or "complete" man. This also concerns reflecting upon notions of power associated with dominant understandings of masculinity.

The real man can change

I have changed. Today I am a completely different man.

Photo & Story: 61 year old married man and Village Chief.
© V4C participant 7GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011



Negotiation of gender norms concerns a rejection of gender division of labour toward more equitable arrangements: men doing “women’s” work and vice versa. Men who take on such roles do so for a number of reasons such as being more responsible and being practical: who is free, who has more work, who has time and what makes sense to get chores done.



It takes time if my wife does housework alone. After I get up, I clean the house. I carry a bamboo basket and go shopping to the market. I help my wife to do housework such as cooking rice, washing the dishes, selling and washing laundries. Then I go to work in the commune. I know that if I lend her a hand, it saves us both time and we can concentrate on other important things like community and our family.

Photo & Story: 66 year old man, Commune Chief, never committed violence and follows the Buddhist faith tradition.
© V4C participant 1GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011



Women assuming men's traditional roles is often in the realm of productive work, particularly the undertaking certain types of activities, or assuming public leadership positions. This often happens for pragmatic reasons such as they could not afford, due to their circumstances, to make such a distinction, particularly because they did not have the privilege of being able to do so. Others defied the notion of a gender division of labour and that there is men's work and there is women's work. Challenging such divisions is also about who can do what and a re-definition of what constitutes work and, in particular, physical work and strength. Part of this challenging concerns a re-valuing of work and, for example, seeing housework as valuable. For female respondents, this was about both the sharing of reproductive work among all household members and women undertaking productive, community work and public service.

Often norms present conflicts and require negotiation to resolve them. One tension arises from the contradiction between social expectations and when life circumstances demand otherwise. Still, working against dominant gender norms has its challenges and costs: respondents noted that it can be a lonely and frustrating experience. Both women and men went go against the grain faced ridicule from the community. For men doing housework, community members viewed this as work that only women should do. Not following traditional roles is often seen in terms of dominant associations with these: men undertaking

such roles were questioned in terms of their masculinity. For women, assuming non-traditional roles was associated with not fulfilling socially expected behaviour and was related to not conforming to social relations. In some cases, social exclusion is the cost for being different, but this does not mean total exclusion. For example, while men may be no longer included in social circles because of their choice to not drink, they still could carry on with business relations.

For women, in particular, going against the grain required determination. In many cases, because they are women, they had to work harder to prove themselves and to be socially accepted, as a public figure for example. Still, this does not mean that women who struggled to earn their place wanted the same for their daughters, which is both telling of their personal sacrifices but also a sense that the struggle for gender equality still continues.

Support and Influence from External Sources

Role of mass media

A number of participants talked about learning of gender issues from radio and television programmes, but what and how they learned varies. A number of respondents spoke of hearing about equal rights, some of the dangers women face while others about the need to be more self-educated. Such programmes made a difference because the messages and information were relevant and intelligible. Others spoke of being inspired by role models to whom they were exposed to via radio and television. Mass media was also a source of information participants turned to based on their lived experience and need for information and knowledge. While a number of respondents mentioned the positive influence of mass media, others also referred to its limits. First, depending on scheduling and design, programmes were not accessible to everybody. Second, there was a risk that media programmes can reproduce gender norms.

Attitude and Behavioural Change Programmes

Given the sampling for the research, it is not surprising that respondents spoke a great deal about their experiences with behaviour change programmes and how they influenced them. While participating with an NGO community programme is a form of education and awareness raising of diverse issues from HIV to sexual identity, their participation also served as a process of confidence building and affirmation while, for others, it provided a safe space to talk.



Also coming across gender focus organization and getting involved helped me learn more about law and be able to help not only myself but others.

Photo & Story: 46 year old rural-based divorced woman and domestic violence survivor.

© V4C participant 10GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011

Background and Previous Experiences

Respondents' backgrounds are important influences on their positive deviance. For some, this started with their upbringing both in terms of positive reinforcing experiences as well as negative ones later in life. As children some tended to be brought up to make their own decisions and assess risk, such as choosing whom to marry in order to avoid abuse. Related to this is gaining a sense of being able to make choices about your life. For others, their family circumstances was what provided them ideas of work not being men's or women's. In this way, parents can have strong influences on children in constructive ways, particularly to instill a sense of independence. For many, school teachers were also positive influences, particularly at young ages, and support from these actors tended to reinforce other experiences promoting positive deviance. In some cases, interventions and support from teachers were critical and life changing.

Experiences later in life are also seen as influential. For women in particular, experiences of being abused were key to motivating them to struggle. Living overseas and returning to Cambodia were also important influencing factors as an adult for some.

Family, friends and community members

Support comes from a variety of sources within the family with parents being cited as strong influencers, particularly when growing up. Fathers and other male family figures especially seem to have an influence on women and their professional choices, particularly when their daughters followed their footsteps. For men, parents continued to be of source of influence in adulthood. Still, accepting support from family members was not always automatic, but required openness and engendering of such support that comes with time and experience.



I am not like other women; I do not stay at home and do not agree that women should only *turn around the kitchen*

All this would not be possible if not the support from my husband, children and family but also the Village Chief and community people, who started seeing me as a strong, capable person, helping me and respecting me.

My husband and children inspired me and gave me strength and opportunity to stay away from the kitchen so we together build ourselves, our family and the community to be stronger and stronger.

I try to learn more and more. I observe and listen carefully to be able to learn, analyse problems and help those who need help. I also watched TV and read newspapers.



Photo & Story: 48 year old, rural-based woman, believes women should get out of the kitchen. Reformed her husband.
© V4C participant 2GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011

The community is also a strong source of influence and support for people. For some participants, the kindness and generosity from the community made a difference between life and death, particularly if they have no family. Community support, which can also come from external community development efforts, can have knock-on effects. For former idle drunkards, changing their ways increased community support for and acknowledgement of them, which helped them become more responsible and involved in the community, which in turn led to increased support. Increased social status in the community also impacted positively on livelihoods.



I have stopped drinking, stopped violence. I participate in the community life and development instead. My community inspires me today; I was appointed a Village Chief.

Photo & Story: 61 year old married man and Village Chief.
© V4C participant 7GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011

Friends can be an important source of encouragement and support, while for others, support from within the work place, such as from superiors and peers, is instrumental, particularly for women pursuing non-traditional careers. These are not always sources of support but need to be selected purposefully while other negative sources avoided.

Similarly, mentors are a significant source of inspiration; sometimes, it was a matter of a few words of reassurance. Encouragement from persons with social status is often a main influence. For example, support from the village chief was critical for both women and men. In the case of the latter, a number cited such leaders as reasons for changing their ways to be sober, productive and more involved in the community.



Getting out of the house and learning from other people helped me develop and change things. Now I am a Deputy Village Chief and know all the village statistics by heart. I also help other women in the village. I like helping our community to develop. It also helps me to improve as a person and offers me value.

Photo & Story: 44 year old woman who became active in her community and changed her husband.
© V4C participant 4GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011

A main strategy of change is leading or being led by example where role modelling is a key element of this approach. As noted by different participants, having someone to follow was important to challenge the mainstream and know that it can be done. For men, examples of doing things differently and that change is possible were also important change strategies. Being a role model is about being a good example and, as needed, working on yourself. A number of participants spoke of the need to change themselves where the process and potential of change was as important of being a role model as the actual change. Role-modelling is thus about being able to draw lessons from your own past and using those as lessons for others as well as being credible. The process of change through role-modelling is not linear but involves credibility (demonstrating consistency), value (having something to offer), peer learning as well as building trust. It also concerns processes of others becoming convinced, which needs perseverance, confidence and courage.

We have to change ourselves first to be a role model and then the community will see it and will follow us.

Women should dare to be brave, speak out to share experience.

Teach sons and daughters equal responsibilities and rights.

Change the old idea and say that nobody can turn around the kitchen. It is physically impossible – I have checked!

Photo & Story: 48 year old woman who stands against “women can only turn around in the kitchen”.
© V4C participant 2GI/OPC/GIZ,



Religion

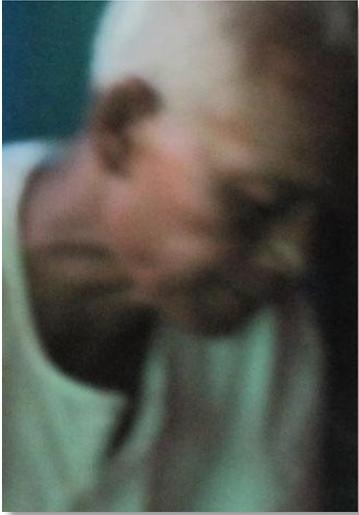
Religion, particularly Buddhism but also Islam and Christianity although to a lesser extent, serves as a source of inspiration and support for people to change. Buddhist precepts of *karma* and *dharma* were particularly influential, especially the idea of good deeds. For example, some participants interpreted their current situation as karmic, as something that was a consequence of a former life, which somehow made their circumstances somewhat more tolerable but not necessarily acceptable. It was not only Buddhist beliefs that provide support and strength, but also its practices, particularly meditation. The beliefs in spirits more generally was important as well.



I know I would not be today who I am if not my mom's hard work. I also understand Buddhism and karma and believe that if I do not help and look after my mom I will be punished.

Photo & Story: 21 year old male student and PHD volunteer.
© V4C participant 10GIII/OPC/GIZ, 2011

While Buddhism is a source of change for a number of participants, how they came to follow Buddhism differs. Some discovered Buddhism late in life and changed their ways to resist dominant male gender norms. Others studied Buddhism at a young age and retained these teachings into adulthood. However, for many men, coming back to Buddhism in adulthood proved to be a turning point. Many had attended school at Buddhist temples when they were young and, commonly, became a monk for a limited period. But it was not until later in life that they came back to Buddha's teachings which entailed, for some, new social networks as well as new founded respect.



Faith and belief can make us good

My father died suddenly a few years ago and his spirit came to me through a medium and lectured and warned me: *“My son, do wholesome actions and you will live a long life”*.

Photo & Story: 57 year old man who changed following death of his father.
© V4C participant 6GI OPC/GIZ, 2011

Internal Factors and Change Processes

Self-Realization

For many participants, their change concerns greater realization of themselves as persons. Part of this process is becoming aware of their own self-worth, gaining self-respect and attaining a sense of belonging. Integral to this process was participants realizing that they deserved and were worthy of respect. Having self-respect relates to wanting to be accepted for who you are and knowing that your life has value and is worth developing. From increased self-esteem comes internal strength and vice versa.

Having a sense of self-worth seems related to an absence of shame for being who you are and not caring of what people think where self-esteem provides a sense of relative value. Self-realization is also related an understanding of one’s entitlement to ones rights and wanting to be treated as an equal. For some, particularly women, a realization of equal rights instilled a sense of principle about what is right. More generally, having an understanding of principles and what is right motivated people to fight for change.

Contributing to self-realization is also a sense of wider purpose that motivates people to struggle and change. For many, it was their family and children that provided this perspective: not being to care for the family was one motivating factor, another was the social stigma they could potentially face if they did not provide for the family. For others, it was the future prospect of having a family and a realizing of sense of purpose. Particularly for younger people with parents, purpose related to not bringing shame to the family as a reason to resist anti-social behaviours. This is an example of one social norm, respecting parents, outweighs others, such as following peers.



I believe that women should:

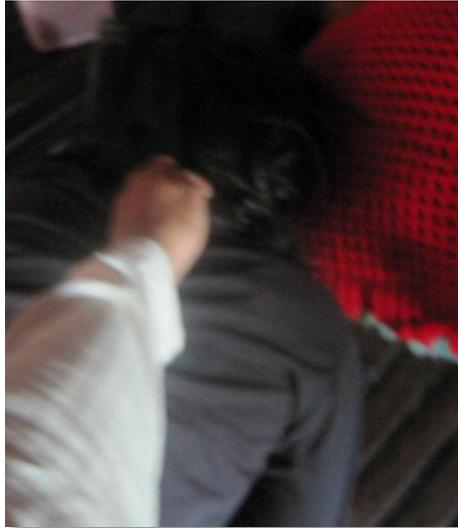
- demand respect but they have to respect and value themselves first
- teach their kids respect for others and themselves from a very young age
- get involved with a group or organization

Photo & Story: 35 year old former beer promoter and abuse survivor and now member of BPA.
© V4C participant 2GII OPC/GIZ, 2011

Contributing to society provides another form of purpose and motivation. For women, this sense helped them overcome challenges posed by gender norms and women working in non-traditional occupations.

This contrasts with self-realizations of men who changed their unhealthy ways because of a realization of their mortality. An awareness that they were neither invincible nor omnipotent seems to be a strong catalyst for change. Some feared becoming ill; others death. A sense of shame for men was also a key factor. When men realized personal embarrassment, to themselves as well as their families, caused by their behaviours such as drinking, philandering and laziness. This seems to be moment when they wanted to change. For men, a sense of shame came from feeling they were not fulfilling the role expected of men as the breadwinner. An often cited phase in their life when they began to feel embarrassed was when their children grew up: their children became or were adults and being a drunkard to adult children seemed to be different than when they were young.

Self-realization comes from seeing the consequences of others' decisions and actions. A number of men recalled how their observations of other men, particularly how they treated women, influenced their outlook and behaviours in a number of areas. One main issue concerns alcohol abuse and the impact this had on other people's lives. Another area concerns housework. Men who took on more responsibilities at home did so when they saw how women in other families suffered. Many of the learnings of women of others' experiences were about the struggles and abuse they faced as women and how they did not want to repeat them or want their children to do the same.



For Men

Before when my father was unemployed there was a lot of violence in my family. I've promised myself to study hard and to avoid violence by all cause. I also want to avoid alcohol as it is an often the cause of violence. I wanted to study hard not to depend on my family.



Photo & Story: 20 year old male university student who succeeded in inspiring his father to reform.

© V4C participant 7GIII/OPC/GIZ, 2011

Changing perspectives

Seeing things in a different light, regardless of the dominant view, was part of people's change process. It was about seeing things from inside-out, not standing on the outside, and being informed by others who were also on the outside. Empathy was part of this and concerns the capacity to recognize and understand the emotions of others from their perspective. Participants often discussed their deviance in terms of others and putting themselves in others' shoes.

Taking Responsibility

Participants spoke of taking responsibility for themselves, their actions and, in some cases, for changing their ways. Much of this comes from a sense of how they were impacting others, not only in terms of having adverse effects but how they could also make a positive impact. This is an extension of self-realization; it represents an understanding that they are interconnected and how their behaviours have a knock-on effect. Related to this is a sense of indebtedness and not letting someone down.



If we commit violence, it can cause a terrible poverty and unhappiness like that. I make such a comparison so as to prohibit myself from violence.

Photo & Story: 66 year old man, Commune Chief who never committed violence and follows Buddha.

© V4C participant 1GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011

Taking responsibility is manifested as self-education, personal development and prioritising. Participants described different ways they undertook self-development. One approach, particularly interesting for Cambodia given the perception that Cambodians do not read, was reading. A number of respondents spoke of being inspired by reading and specific readings for which they were referred to by different people in their lives. Reading was seen not only in terms of self-development but also a way for self-distraction from what were seen as undesirable behaviours or activities and keeping minds off other topics, such as sex particularly among young men. Undertaking training was another approach to personal development.

Remaining focused and prioritising is a key approach, such as sticking to the plan, even if it means making sacrifices. This seemed particularly important for women in order to achieve their dreams and plans and often involved future implications and compromises concerning marriage and family. Staying focused also becomes a way to block out discouragement and distractions.

Determination, Independence and Self Confidence

Determination is a common trait among participants struggling against adversity, particularly among women, which for some, started at a young age. Such fortitude relates to perseverance, resourcefulness and a certain headstrongness. For some, ambition, daring to dream as well as passion were the basis of determination as was wanting to prove yourself to yourself. Perseverance is not just a matter of resolve, it involved patience and taking time to

create change. Part of facing opposition was to be strong, which itself was a self-empowering process.



Before I felt that being a women is like having a rope with a tight knot on your neck and the knot is just getting tighter and tighter through the life time. Now I know it is up to me to untie the knot slowly.

Photo & Story: 53 year old Deputy Village Chief who is also a widow and divorcee.
© V4C participant 8GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011



Changing yourself and your husband's bad habits is a very hard work just like carrying a very heavy piece of wood.

Photo & Story: 44 year old woman who became active in her community and changed her husband.

© V4C participant 4GI/OPC/GIZ, 2011

Participants in the research showed a particular independence and “not caring” or disassociating from what others think. Not caring was about not being affected by social pressure, which can be angering, but knowing what matters was more important to be able to ignore pressures. “Not caring” was not necessarily being ambivalent: participants did care, but in specific ways. It can also be about knowing what is right and wrong. It was not always about ignoring about what others think, but also entailed empathy while also living with the consequences and accepting them, even if it meant being different from the mainstream. As a coping strategy, not caring about others was accompanied by knowing what you can control and taking control for positive outcomes.

Much of the attitude of not caring about what others think concerned independent thinking, which was about not worrying about what others think because it was only you who would loose from such worrying. Independent thinking was also about a sense of independence

especially financial independence. For many women, gaining independence concerned being independent from men.



I learn how to control your emotion when the problem emerges, for example if someone says: "You're a man, why do you do women's work?". Know yourself and trust yourself that you are doing a correct thing. Have no effect on others. Share women's work.

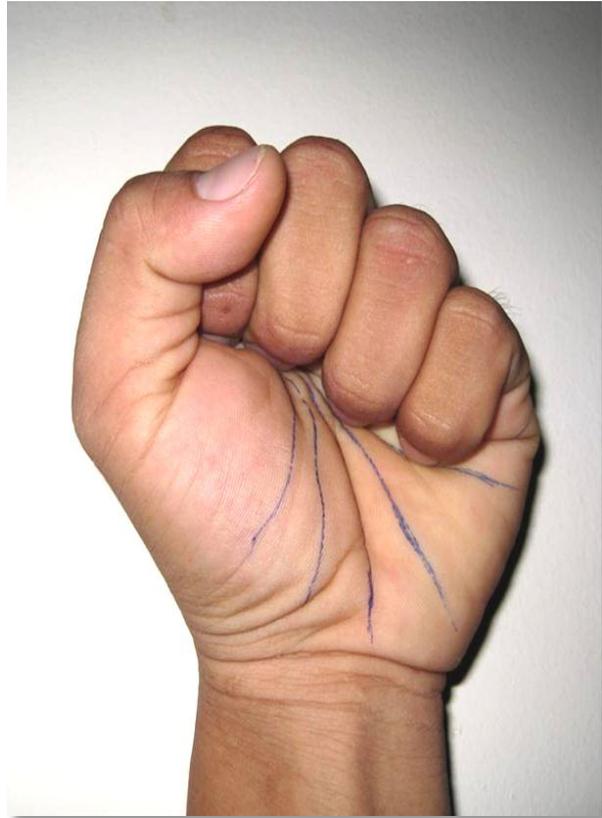


Photo & Story: 27 year old male university student and PHD volunteer.

© V4C participant 9GIII/OPC/GIZ, 2011

A running theme about determination and independence was self-confidence: a certain self-assuredness, braveness and fearlessness. Many participants talked about becoming self-confident as a process, such as building self-assuredness as an incremental process of overcoming fear and shyness. For others, building self-confidence was a cyclical process of sensing of being on the right path and being proud which acted as positive reinforcement to continue the path. Self-confidence also came from humility and humbleness, such as being able to ask for help.

PATHS FOR CHANGE

Working within Social Structures and the Rules of the Game

A number of strategies that emerged concern working within the rules of social gender norms. For people with different norms, they employed different strategies that allowed for positive deviance within the confines of society's expectations in different ways. Ultimately, these strategies contribute to social change in the long term, likely in generational terms.

One strategy that respondents described, in terms of challenging the mainstream, was to make themselves economically relevant and useful. Another was to demonstrate capacity and certain skills, which often meant having to try harder than one's peers. This level of hard-

work and commitment required a certain self-assuredness from the respondents, which appeared to engender further self-confidence.

Notions of human rights and legal frameworks, as judicial institutions of society, also provided a basis for being different and acceptance. For some, particularly women, the normative framework of human rights was a basis for argumentation, motivation as well as a source of inspiration. But knowing about your rights is one matter; knowing how to claim them is another where support is needed in rights claiming.

Radical change and Changing the rules

Literature on Khmer norms often discusses them as unchanging when in fact they have changed, are changing and will change. Considering norms can change, this strategy concerns how to facilitate change and shift the nature of the discussion. Knowing that norms can change is also about choosing norms and what to follow. For some, changing norms was an imperative because, in part, they considered some norms are obsolete and unacceptable. For others, following social norms was impossible and not realistic.

One strategy is to shift what is considered as normal through changing the reference point which often is about altering your social context. For men who changed their drinking habits, changing their social networks was key to changing their behaviours and also what they got from such networks. A number of men discussed how they left their drinking buddies and replaced them, in particular, with more spiritual friends. Shifting their reference point also concerned changing whom they listened to and what they valued.

Opting out

A number of strategies concern avoiding social systems. This is common, for example, of men who stopped drinking and avoided situations when they used to drink. For some, avoiding friends required elaborate strategies, employing different ruses and negotiation.

For others, avoidance meant completely removing themselves from their context where they faced discrimination. Their situation was so intolerable that they had to leave. In many cases, this meant moving into poverty conditions that required them to struggle and do what they could to support themselves. People had to leave their situation because, unlike strategies of not caring noted above, they did care, and community stigmatization was so hurtful and overwhelming that the only option was to remove themselves. Escaping violence for some women meant removing themselves from men. For others, avoiding discrimination meant re-making yourself and, in some cases, escaping your gender by assuming, in some cases of women, male qualities and appearances.

CONCLUSIONS

The approach of positive deviance serves to counter dominant approaches that focus on problems and deficits: a lack of awareness, low skills, and little knowledge. The problem with deficit perspectives is that they tend to be based on binary relationships of either-or, privilege the negative and obscure the individual and individual capacity.

This research on positive deviance and gender norms has allowed for enduring stories of spirit, courage, empowerment and capacity to change. These stories may not represent the majority or even many; the aim of the research was not to quantify positive deviance. They do, however, represent resilience of human spirit so often lost in stereotypes and facelessness produced by quantitative research that focuses on the incidence of a particular phenomenon, such as gender-based violence. This is not to say that knowing the types and occurrence of gender violence women face is not important. Such studies are critical to underscore the urgency of these human rights abuses and to promote policies to eliminate them.

Still, what can we learn from 48% of Cambodians who do not support, accept or commit violence against women? (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2009). The *Navigating the Mainstream* research attempted to understand this population by focussing on a purposeful sample of Cambodian women and men who more generally demonstrate positive deviance to so-called Khmer gender norms and, in particular, to gender-based violence.

Their stories and change indicate a variety of reasons for their positive deviance broadly including altruism, personal fulfilment and survival. At the core is a certain groundedness: a coming to terms of who they are and what they want to be as well as their circumstances. This sense of realism should not, however, be confused with passivity. Participants are engaged in their lives to varying degrees of urgency and timeliness.

Similarly, different influences helped participants confront gender norms. What is evident from the research is that, for many, a combination of different factors not only contributed to their beliefs and behaviours, but also reinforced each other. Participants have different paths but one common factor is present: a strong sense of self and confidence. While external influences, particularly from mentors and role models, play a role, ultimately it is individual characteristics of courage, self-respect and confidence that allowed for these influences to be transformed into difference. Self-reflection, which concerns seeing themselves in others or themselves, is critical.

What these participants' stories also describe are processes of self-fulfilment and empowerment, mainly from gaining power-within, where internally-generated energy, positive or negative, creates energy. Change processes are iterative, self-reinforcing and dialectic. When people are pleased, this acts as a motivating factor to continue to change in order to further please. When people change, this creates respect and admiration, which creates further impetus to change that is driven by pride, self-respect and value. This points to a specific finding from *V4C* (OPC, 2011); positive deviance is not so much a definitive state but a process or, rather, a work in progress.

Moreover, the process of positive deviance and change is a gendered process. The struggles women and men faced because of their positive deviance are different largely due, in part, to their socially ascribed identities based on their sex. As a result, their life paths and strategies to negotiate respective norms are different as are the relative importance of factors such as shame, self-confidence, self-respect and courage. This is not to say that women and men experience different factors; they are similar but how they experience them is different. This indicates, again, that the ways they can be supported needs to take such differences into account. In the end, it is about independence in thinking and believing, and will-power being stronger than expectations

Such differences also point to a variety of ways that Cambodians, more generally, and Cambodian women and men, in particular, experience gender norms. They “negotiate” them in the true sense of the word: they make of them what they can and abandon what does not suit them. This contrasts a common portrayal of gender norms as absolute, fixed and rigid categories: rather they are fluid and can co-exist. It is also not a matter of retaining what are “good norms” and getting rid of “bad” ones.

Moreover, there is a certain flexibility but with different norms not having the same moral and social weight or degrees of flexibility where these differences also vary with women and men. For example, transgressions concerning dominant gender divisions of labour appear negotiable and flexible. Sexuality, particularly for women, is less negotiable and negotiating issues of sexuality concern adhering to norms for women as a way to gain independence in other areas of their life, such as social mobility or career choice. Moreover, as indicated elsewhere (Miedema, 2011), when transgressions of norms are concerned, women often face more scrutiny than men, particularly concerning sexuality.

The importance of negotiating norms seems to be in the meaning that people make of them in ways that is self-affirming and empowering. In this respect, norms should not only be seen as oppressive but ways people make meaning of their lives, gain a sense of belonging and re-affirm themselves. Part of this self-affirmation process is discovering and establishing new social networks – whether a circle of peers and mentors or an association of like-minded people, such as the Public Health Development or Solidarity Association of Beer Promoters – that facilitate a shift of what is “normal”. These networks can be seen as the beginnings of new social structures that allow for different social rules or institutions to exist.

That change is an iterative process driven by social and individual factors largely out of the control of external agencies has implications for them. Their role is one of encouragement, facilitator and catalyst. There is no one path of change; what external agencies can do is to make known that change and alternatives to the norm are possible and inspire and support people to undertake this journey.

OVERALL STRATEGIES

Celebration of Difference

The research reveals a richness and diversity among participants in their resistance of gender norms. One common denominator is present: research participants wanted to speak about their lives and celebrate their difference once they understood themselves as different and special. Part of changing the discourse is to move away from normative messages (“do not commit violence”) but celebrate those who are different to acknowledge difference and recognize people are and can be different. Often it is a matter of helping people realise they are or can be special.

- ✓ One way to do this is through role-modeling, on different levels and in different ways (individually and collectively, informally and formally). People can be inspired to be positive role models as well as to look for role models. Promoting role models becomes a virtuous spiral: the research demonstrated that people with positive deviance do not always see themselves as such but are proud to be considered special when they do make such realizations. This in turn inspires people to change, further develop and inspire others. It is critical to support positive role modeling where the role of external agencies could be to support capacity building for role modeling as well as guidance for those seeking role models.

Individual Agency

The research reveals that individuals can and do resist social gender norms and ultimately they do so as individuals with determination, individuality and resourcefulness. They can be supported, inspired and led by others, but they ultimately take responsibility for themselves. This entails

- ✓ Support initiatives that use processes of self-reflection, self-development and empowerment. This can be through behavioural change programmes but also through campaigns that encourage and make appealing learning, recognition and enhancing of agency.
- ✓ Continue with efforts to promote and protect women’s rights as well as the establishment and enforcement of legal frameworks that uphold women’s rights.

Changing the “norm”:

Gender norms are about what men and women should or should not be doing based on idealized and dominant notions of what it is to be a man or woman. Participants demonstrated different values and priorities – compassion, empathy, taking responsibility and realizing the inter-connectedness of people – that superseded gender norms. What the research also reveals is that changes in norms do not mean a destruction of morals in society or society itself. In fact, the exact opposite argument can be made. It is an imposition of norms, which are seen to hold society together such as gender division of labour, that causes disruption. Norms of the mainstream are not necessarily beneficial for all of society but can increase and/or sustain inequalities. Rather, it is the adoption values which keep society unified – respect for self and others, selflessness, empathy – that changed people or helped them tolerate social pressure^v. The process of change concerns the transformation of norms as values and allowing individuals to choose what makes sense and gives meaning to their lives.

- ✓ Promote the values of gender sensitivity and respect for gender equality as a new norm.
- ✓ Complement programmes that communicate what is unacceptable (i.e., gender-based violence) with alternatives that engender and build on these different values and priorities: people can have the capacity to care and do care.

Strategic Entry Points

The research reveals a number of opportunities for external agents to facilitate and support change which are not mutually exclusive.

Work with parents and older people as well as youth

The research reveals that elders and parents hold prominent social positions in communities and within families and can have positive influences. Parents can be powerful facilitators as well as barriers to change. While much of the attention of gender awareness and behavioural changes programmes has been on youth; efforts need to also be made with older generations, as parents and community members, and on generational dialogue. This serves not only to support and strengthen this segment of influencers in society but also may lay the foundations for future generations by providing role models

- ✓ Target older generation, particularly positive influencers, to be champions and role models.
- ✓ Support generational dialogue, such as GIZ inter-generational dialogue processes^{vi}.

Norms-based strategies

The research reveals that particular socio-cultural norms play important roles in stimulating, encouraging and promoting individual change. These norms concern being a provider (breadwinner or home maker), social status within a community and a sense of community and belonging. The problem is when these become divisive and means for exclusion as opposed to motivating factors for change.

- ✓ Explore community values and beliefs that resonate with Cambodians and “market” them strategically in ways that they become factors to strengthen social fabric.

Buddhism

While Cambodia is a predominantly Buddhist country, the engagement with the spiritual community is rather limited. This represents a missed opportunity, particularly given the strong influence that Buddhism has. Engagement with this community will need to be selective, strategic and based on dialogue.

- ✓ Explore how Buddhist precepts can be made applicable to contemporary life and “marketed” in ways that are about revival in contemporary times.
- ✓ Use as entry points to provide inter-generational linkages.
- ✓ Craft social messages that extend from and allude to precepts of *karma* and *dharma*.

Behavioural change programmes

The sample included a number of participants from behavioural change programmes sponsored by different Cambodian NGOs (Karol and Setha, Youth Star, GAD/C, Banteay Srey). While the aim was not to assess impact of these, participants' stories consistently revealed the positive influence these initiatives had on their lives. In other countries, such initiatives have become basis for social movements. What seems important about these programmes is that they allow for people to internalize and operationalize ideas about change (ideas that are often promoted by awareness campaigns e.g., what it is to be a "real" man but fall short of providing such opportunities). Of course not all behavioural change programmes are the same and some, unintentionally, may reproduce harmful gender norms.

- ✓ Assess key factors that allow for behavioural change programmes to work for participants and identify potential for scaling these up as social movements.
- ✓ Facilitate the encouragement of sustained social mobilization on different levels (individual leadership, community networks, society) in ways that are complementary and inter-related.

Mass and Social media

The research shows critical role of mass media but also the need for having the right content in order to communicate clear messages to pre-defined targeted audiences. People use and respond to media in different ways: some seek out the information, others come across it accidentally. The life stories of research participants can be used in a variety of ways to demonstrate and celebrate difference and positive deviance based on a segmentation of intended audiences and market testing of messages and media best suited for those audiences.

There are a number of opportunities to use materials and case studies generated by *Navigating the Mainstream* that need to be part of an **overall communications and marketing strategy based on market research**^{vii}. These include

- ✓ Develop, through participatory processes and market research, a theory of change to develop communications and marketing strategy that utilizes multi-faceted media and different communication processes.
- ✓ Identify and segment strategic media and communication targets and identify appropriate media (social media, mass media etc.) and processes (one and two way communications, participatory communications).
- ✓ Promote messaging supported by *V4C* images and stories (the research reveals a number of potentially marketable themes and messages such as "What is a man?", "Being a man is taking responsibility", "Sharing housework: it makes sense", "Women do more than turn around in the kitchen", "You can't escape your shadow", "Think of the consequences, we are all inter-connected").
- ✓ Popularize life stories of *Cii* and *V4C* participants communicated through various media (radio series dramas, social media, training materials).
- ✓ Promote "Everyday Cambodians: stories of change and courage" campaign featuring real people with real stories, such as *Navigating the Mainstream* participants giving testimonials and interviews supported by mass and social media.

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Footnotes

ⁱ Photo & Story: 24 year old research participant, © Participant 003-GIII/OPC/GIZ, 2011

ⁱⁱ This project would not have been possible without the generous financial support of GIZ, P4P, HBF, BMZ and AECID.

ⁱⁱⁱ The images included in this report are excerpts from these stories. Participants were enrolled from different programmes and organizations including Gender and Development Cambodia (GAD/C), Public Health

Development (PHD) and the Solidarity Association of Beer Promoters (BPA). Copyrights are co-owned by GIZ, On Photography Cambodia (OPC Co., Ltd.) and respective photographers, the latter of whom agree that their images can be used in the context of *Navigating the Mainstream* such as analysis, publication and showcasing. This report acknowledges the leadership for the *Cii* and *V4C* components by Dr. Pem Catalla and Maria Cieszewska-Wong respectively.

^{iv} For more on the study methodology, refer to the full report or contact the lead researcher (Franz F. Wong, f.wong@kit.nl), CDRI (cdri@cdri.org.kh) for *Cii* or Maria Cieszewska-Wong (maria@mcwresearchandconsulting.com) for *V4C*.

^v Mowles (2008) makes a similar distinction between norms and values.

^{vi} Intergenerational dialogue, or generational dialogue, was originally developed by GTZ in the context of female genital mutilation. As a process of community learning and mobilisation across generations, it can be adapted as structured participatory communication to reveal and celebrate positive deviance in communities as well as role models.

^{vii} In addition, agreements of confidentiality, anonymity and copyrights need to be respected and adhered to.