



## Marginalised Urban Women in South-East Asia

Understanding the role of gender and power relations  
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Globally, the poorest and most vulnerable people face the daily struggles of income poverty and access to vital services including health, education and livelihood support. These same communities often also face major social and structural barriers to development, including social and political exclusion and discrimination. Internationally CARE works to support these marginalised communities improve their social standing and address inequalities and social injustice. This paper provides an overview of gender and power analysis undertaken in CARE's programming across South-East Asia that is supporting CARE to better understand the underlying causes of exclusion and marginalisation in the region and is informing the design of long term programming to address these issues.

## Understanding social exclusion and marginalisation

CARE recognises that social exclusion is a global issue, taking place not only in developing countries but also within developed and middle income countries. The Australian Government states that to be socially included requires 'that people have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to:

- Learn (participate in education and training)
- Work (participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities)
- Engage (connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities)
- Have a voice (influence decisions that affect them)<sup>1</sup>

Social exclusion manifests not only through limited access to public services, health, education and economic opportunities, but also vulnerability and low resilience to shocks including natural disasters and unexpected expenses, exclusion from social and legal protection and people's ability to enact their rights. CARE recognises some of the underlying causes of this exclusion as stigma and gender relations; weak legal protections and enforcement; restrictions on representative civil society; and discriminatory policy environments among others.

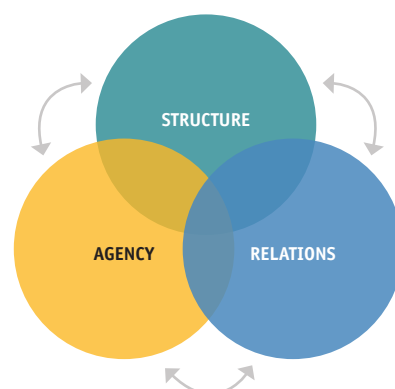
Women are disproportionately affected by issues of exclusion and marginalisation. However this exclusion is not defined by gender alone. Where gender identity intersects with many other identities and experiences, such as identification with an ethnic minority group, originating from a remote area, economic roles in a community, living with a disability or sexuality identity, this can reinforce multiple layers of discrimination and risk. CARE recognises that the experience of exclusion and vulnerability for women varies greatly where individuals face diverse experiences of power, sexuality, class, caste and religion.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions and intersections of poverty and social injustice in designing long term programs, CARE undertakes analysis across a range of areas, including underlying causes of poverty and social injustice, policy and institutional context, and gender and power analysis.

## Gender and power analysis frameworks

CARE's Women's Empowerment Framework provides a basis to understand the multiple layers of exclusion and inequality marginalised women face. The framework, articulated further in CARE's Strong Women, Strong Communities<sup>2</sup> report, demonstrates that whilst agency and empowerment of individual is an important element of creating change at the individual level, sustained change will not take place without addressing inequalities and power differentials in the relationships people are surrounded by and embedded in, or without addressing issues in the enabling environment.

Using this framework as a basis, CARE undertakes gender and power analysis for each of its long term programs that explores key domains of empowerment such as division of labour, household decision making, control of productive assets, access to public spaces and services, claiming rights and meaningful participation in public decision making, control over one's body, violence and restorative justice as well as personal aspirations.



## Analysis from South-East Asia

### VIETNAM

Vietnam is a lower-middle income country experiencing rapid urbanisation and growing inequality. By 2040, it is expected that 50 per cent of the population in Vietnam will be living in urban areas. In this context, CARE works with socially marginalised groups in urban settings who experience multiple denial of rights and live and work in unsafe environments. This includes groups such as sex workers, sexual minorities, and female migrants (women who have moved from rural to urban settings).

CARE's gender and power analysis in this context has identified that these diverse groups experience a range of common vulnerabilities, which contribute to marginalisation and inequitable development. Key vulnerabilities include deep rooted and wide ranging stigma; overt discrimination; limited access to safe and stable employment options; very poor living conditions; weak resilience to shocks; and barriers to accessing quality services. Many remain effectively 'hidden' populations, linked to negative stereotyping, lack of legal status and often punitive legal and policy frameworks. These socially marginalised groups remain at risk of exploitation, and physical and sexual abuse. The gender and power analysis noted that the experience of stigma for these marginalised groups in



In a study on causes of vulnerability in Vietnam a significant proportion of female garment worker respondents gave between 60-70% of their monthly salary to their mother-in-law every month

Vietnam for example is undoubtedly gendered with women having relatively fewer social contacts outside the family and greater dependence on men, creating a much more isolating experience and more challenges for example in social reintegration. In many cases this has been a driving factor in engaging in sex work. This stigma also has a strong impact on women's personal aspirations. At the individual level, Vietnam's analysis found that in response to social stigma, women in particular self stigmatise, taking themselves away from families, especially children.

To address these issues CARE works with Socially Marginalised Groups in urban settings who experience denial of realisation of multiple rights and live and work in unsafe environments, especially women. The program focuses on

key challenges experienced by socially marginalised groups, and the underlying causes of exclusion. Program priorities include women's economic empowerment, addressing gender based violence, and addressing social opportunity and women's voice, particularly through partnering with civil society.

### LAOS

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos) is also experiencing rapid expansion of the urban population; with a high rate of urbanisation at 4-5% per year. A large proportion of the population is of working age, and this age group is increasing rapidly. Key challenges faced by the urban poor and disadvantaged include low and often insecure incomes combined with exploitation, violence and high costs of living. The urban poor generally live in inadequate housing and have poor access to and information about services. Recent migrants to urban areas are often particularly vulnerable, as in addition to lacking local knowledge they lack the social networks that are often the only source of social support in the absence of any state provision.

Nationally 81% of women in Laos believe men are justified in beating their wife/female partner in certain circumstances<sup>3</sup>

Poverty and vulnerability are strongly gendered in Laos, with women generally experiencing the greatest disadvantages as well as the highest vulnerabilities to risks such as labour or sexual exploitation. Forty-five per cent of women in urban areas work in the informal sector, and of the 10% working in the formal sector, the vast majority work in low paid jobs in the garment industry with poor protections or benefits.

Analysis around control over productive assets found that many women who migrate to urban areas looking for work lose their livelihood networks, making them vulnerable to influence of dominant males and at risk of exploitative relationships. Lao society is strongly gendered and ethnicity is an important determinant of how rigid the gender roles are. However, some aspects of gender norms are shifting quite rapidly in response to the economic transition of the country.

In Laos CARE works with socially and economically marginalised women and adolescent girls in urban and peri-urban settings, including recent migrants, as part of its Marginalised Urban Women Program. CARE's program focuses

on key challenges experienced by marginalised urban women, and the underlying causes of exclusion. Program priorities include equitable access to services and safe employment options; practical vocational skills; equitable participation in society, including through representation through civil society; reduced risks of gender based violence, maternal and reproductive health issues; and fairer economic and legal protections.

## CAMBODIA

In Cambodia urban women earn 33% less than their male equivalents<sup>4</sup>. While there is near parity in primary school enrolment attendance, retention rates are much lower than boys leading to low participation in secondary schools. Young women who migrate from rural areas face very real risks of trafficking and being drawn into risky income generation options such as commercial sex work, beer promotion and other forms of entertainment work. The growth of urban-based industries has resulted in considerable rural to urban migration, especially of young women for the garment industry.

Women and girls from ethnic minorities face particular challenges in participating in social development activities due to language and literacy barriers as well as discriminating gender attitudes towards women's traditional roles and behaviours. Across Cambodia there remains a high acceptance of gender based violence<sup>5</sup>, while most victims do not have access to or do not seek professional or legal support.

In Cambodia CARE works with Socially Marginalised Women, including urban women marginalised by their occupations, and rural women at risk of violence and denied sexual, reproductive and maternal health rights, and voice. CARE's analysis has identified key causes of poverty for these groups such as limited access to education and health

Women now make up half of Cambodia's formal labour force, although they earn an average of 33 per cent less than their male equivalents

services, systematic discrimination on the basis of gender, barriers to participation in decision making, and the lack of implementation of legislation and policies

due to lack of resources and commitment by governments. The program aims to support and promote good governance that recognises gender equality, build effective relationships for policy engagement and advocacy to achieve better outcomes for women, and be an acknowledged leader in the coordination and strengthening of quality services that

improve the lives of women and their communities. The program has identified key pathways of change in improving economic opportunities, social opportunity and voice and enabling effective governance.

## MYANMAR

Myanmar is a country in transition, experiencing rapid urbanisation and unprecedented opening up, paving the way for significant change. Within this context CARE has identified empowerment of women as a key pathway to equity and highlight gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health and economic and social participation of women as key constraints to achieving equity.

In Myanmar CARE works with Socially Marginalised People, including those in urban settings who experience multiple forms of exclusion and exploitation such as Sex Workers, People Living with HIV, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT); People Living with a Disability and Recent Female Migrants. The long term program aims to ensure this Impact Group are equitably accessing safe employment and have a legitimate voice. Through the development of this program CARE has identified

the following pathways of change; change that needs to occur for sustained improvement in people's lives in the areas of income options and services, protection (legal and policy) and social inclusion.

Whilst the Government of the Republic of Myanmar appointed its first women minister in 2012, currently only 4.6% of seats in parliament are held by women.<sup>6</sup>

- **Income Options:** jobs, businesses, vocational skills, private sector interests.
- **Services:** health, legal, and social protection
- **Protection:** Legal literacy, labour law, policy formulation and implementation, legal protection and enforcement.
- **Social Inclusion:** Stigma, gender relations, violence, collaboration, civil society.

The program has prioritised addressing the areas of women's economic empowerment, protection from gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health services and rights and women's voice.

## Addressing marginalisation in the region

Drawing on the country level and analysis and programming across the four countries above, CARE's Enhancing Migrant Urban Women's Rights and Gender Equity (EMERGE) Regional Program commenced in 2013. It aims to enable women to participate and use their voice in an environment free of violence, where there is legal protection, responsive governance and equitable access to services and income opportunities. The program defines Marginalised Urban Women as women living or working in urban settings who are socially, politically or economically marginalised and are excluded from participating in decision making on matters that affect them. As noted, despite their major role in the economic, political and social transformation occurring in the region, the ways women can participate in community life are hampered by narrowly defined attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours that stereotype them, and by weak or inappropriate legal and policy environments that fail to offer adequate protections from discrimination and violence. In addressing these issues the regional program has three key pillars:

**Gender Based Violence:** Gender based violence is endemic across Asia. Physical, sexual and psychological abuse against MUW occurs in the home and within the communities where women live, at their place of work and within public institutions.

In Myanmar CARE is working to increase access to health and legal services by migrant women by improving the knowledge, understanding and capacity of health service providers on gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health, and establishing referral networks with health and legal service providers.

**Decent Work<sup>7</sup> :** The rapid economic growth occurring in the region has seen a corresponding transition toward waged based employment in urban settings. These emerging urban economies provide both opportunities and risks for women, including insecurity, low wages and poor conditions. Decent Work, including the ability to enact rights at work safely, is fundamental to MUW attaining financial security and consequently an important step towards social, political and economic empowerment.

In Laos CARE provides training to women and girls working in the garment factory, on self-protection, reproductive health, life skills and personal and financial management. Whilst also working with factory managers on work conditions and workers' rights.

**Meaningful Participation:** In recognition that marginalisation often results from:

- Exclusion by gender
- Exclusion by identity
- Criminalisation of behaviour

CARE recognises that marginalisation affects women and girls directly but also has flow on effects for the whole community. Increasing participation of marginalised urban women is not only an essential pathway of change toward gender equity but is a precursor to achieving a reduction in violence against women and increasing women's economic resilience in the region. Through addressing all three pillars CARE aims to achieve the goal of supporting the empowerment of women across the region to safely learn, work, engage in their communities and have a voice.

In Vietnam CARE works to reduce stigma and discrimination for female sex workers and LGBT communities and to reinforce the fulfilment of legal responsibilities amongst duty bearers, such as government and service providers; including by undertaking

- 1 [www.afsa.gov.au/about-us/annual-report/annual-report-2012-13](http://www.afsa.gov.au/about-us/annual-report/annual-report-2012-13)
- 2 <http://www.care.org.au/document.doc?id=368>
- 3 Brief for the committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the UN country team in Lao PDR, June 2009.
- 4 CARE Cambodia, Program Statement, August 2011
- 5 20% of men in Cambodia reported perpetration of rape in the P4P study Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can we Prevent it?
- 6 Oxfam, Trocaire, CARE, ActionAid, Women and Leadership in Myanmar, September 2013
- 7 As defined by the International Labour Organisation 'involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.'