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Cambodia's gender policy: An analysis of women and girls' education strategies under the Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan (2014-2018)

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Abstract

In 1999, Cambodia's Ministry of Women's Affairs established the first Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan to build Cambodian women's capacity by offering them more opportunities and access to education. From early 1998 to 2017, Cambodia showed good progress in increasing girls' school enrolment. Later in 2018, the final year of Neary Rattanak IV's implementation, the percentage of girls' enrolment in Cambodia's primary schools declined. This study analyzes the implementation of education strategies in Neary Rattanak IV by using the seven steps of Mintrom's (2012) policy implementation analysis to examine whether the strategies have been well implemented. From the analysis, it seems that the education strategies have indeed been successful in their implementation and have reached their targets. However, the study has discovered some potential obstacles and shortcomings that the government may have to act upon through its education and gender policy. Those shortcomings and difficulties, including traditional norms, discrimination against women in employment, and safety issues, have impacted the implementation of the education of women and girls in the Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan.

Keywords: Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan; policy implementation; education of women and girls; education strategies; Cambodia

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Introduction

Providing opportunities for women and girls to receive a proper education is crucial in reducing gender inequality (World Bank, 2020). In recognition of the issue of gender inequality in the education sector, Cambodia's Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) established the first Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan (1999-2003) in 1999, followed by Neary Rattanak II (2004-2008), Neary Rattanak III (2009-2013), and Neary Rattanak IV (2014-2018), to achieve mainstream gender equality and build Cambodian women's capacity by offering them more opportunities and access to education. Currently, MoWA is implementing its fifth Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan 2019-2023. From early 1998 to 2017, Cambodia showed good progress in increasing girls' school enrolments (Ball et al., 2019). Later in 2018, the final year of Neary Rattanak IV's implementation, the percentage of girls' enrolments in Cambodia's primary schools declined. This decrease in enrollment posed questions about the effectiveness of the education strategies used in Cambodia's national gender policy, Neary Rattanak IV, and its implementation.

The objective of the Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan was to promote gender-equal access to education, particularly to encourage the participation of vulnerable women and girls in education services, such as short course training and career consulting, through social accountability measures, awareness-raising activities, and financial assistance. Advocating gender-responsive social attitudes and promoting positive images of women were also one of the objectives stated in the Strategic Plan (MoWA, 2019).

As a national gender policy, Neary Rattanak IV encompassed four thematic areas: (1) economic growth, (2) access to social services and protection, (3) cross-cutting issues, and (4) institutional strengthening and capacity development toward gender equality (MoWA, 2014a, p. 16). These are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Four thematic areas of the Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan*

Thematic areas	Targets
1. Economic Growth	1.1. Women's Economic Empowerment
2. Access to Social Services and Protection	2.1. Education of Women and Girls, and Behavioral Change 2.2. Health, HIV and Nutrition of Women and Girls 2.3. Legal Protection for Women and Girls
3. Cross-Cutting Issues	3.1. Women in Public Decision-Making and Politics; Gender Responsive Government Policies and Reform Programs 3.2. Gender and Climate Change, Green Growth and Disaster Risk Management
4. Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Development toward Gender Equality	

The first target in the second thematic area, "education of women and girls, and behavioral change," focuses on promoting equal access to education for Cambodian women and girls (MoWA, 2014a). This target consists of six strategies. These six strategies include the improvement of the technical capacity of relevant officials in the education sector, the growth of kindergarten facilities, the coordination of the National Action Plan, the promotion of women's positive image, the study on the needs of vulnerable groups of women, and the provision of gender comprehensive education to sub-national administration. The first strategy was used to encourage and monitor the development of education projects and programs for vulnerable groups of women, while the second strategy focused on the general reduction of overage enrollment and dropout in primary education. The last four strategies covered matters of positive attitudinal change toward gender equality and social

welfare. These six strategies were planned to address the existing education inequality and are expected to improve educational opportunities for Cambodian women and girls (MoWA, 2014c).

Statement of the problem

Even though Cambodia has had a concrete strategic plan to improve girls' access to education, the results were still far from the expected outcome of the plan. According to the Global Economic Data, Indicators, Charts & Forecasts (CEIC), the gross percentage of girls enrolled in Cambodian primary school declined from 96.9% in 2015 to 90.26% in 2018 (CEIC, 2018). The percentage of enrollment was considered high. However, it has decreased since 2015, a year after the implementation of Neary Rattanak IV. Moreover, some girls also dropped out in the middle of primary school or before they reached secondary education (CEIC, 2018). There are various reasons for these undesirable results. Traditionally, girls have been expected to carry out more domestic chores than boys; thus, the opportunity cost is high for girls to attend school. Parents may not invest in their daughters' education because they think educating women to higher levels is unnecessary due to women's perceived lower status, particularly when economic resources are scarce. Moreover, traditional and social attitudes are deeply rooted in society and prevent women from fully utilizing their capacities and exercising their rights, including the right to education (MoWA, 2014e).

Given those factors, doubts arose about Neary Rattanak IV and its implementation as the policy was initiated to tackle the mentioned issues. According to Mintrom's (2012) analytical strategies, the unsatisfactory outcome of a particular policy is the result of either theory failure or implementation failure. Therefore, to achieve the expected outcome, a policy has to be well designed and carefully implemented.

Research objectives

Having raised concerns regarding the quality of the Neary Rattanak IV policy and the way it was implemented, this study aimed to explore the implementation of the first target of the second thematic area (i.e., education of women and girls) of Neary Rattanak IV and behavioral change to evaluate the

success of its implementation. Due to time and resource constraints, this study did not evaluate the effectiveness of the policy in terms of changes over time, so the focus was only on its implementation.

Dropout issues in rural primary schools in Cambodia

The dropout and repetition rates in Cambodia remain persistent challenges, especially at the secondary school level. The Asian Development Bank ([ADB], 2014) indicated that in the school year 2012–2013, 87.4% of Cambodian children completed primary school, yet only 53.6 percent enrolled in the lower secondary school stream. Hence, approximately 34% of children gave up their education after primary school. The lower secondary school completion rate was 10% to 14% lower than the enrollment rate in 2013; the completion rate was even much lower in rural schools (ADB, 2014).

According to Tuy (2019), the women and girls' education target of Neary Rattanak IV was based on the belief that it would improve women and girls' education levels. There is a need to prevent overage enrollment and primary school dropout (Tuy, 2019). Kitamura et al. (2016) observed that overage enrolment and primary school dropout were a result of a lack of family economic opportunities combined with inadequate access to education. For financial and economic reasons, many families who live in rural areas are forced to move to urban areas or the capital city to look for employment opportunities. This trend has, in turn, placed more stress on schools in urban areas or the city. According to an investigation of enrollment trends in Phnom Penh carried out by the Kampuchean Action to Promote Education (KAPE) in 2013, one of the common problems for students was overage enrollment, resulting in unsuitability between students' age and learning environment, which affected their learning motivation (KAPE, 2013).

Tuy (2019) stated that to respond to overage enrollment and early school dropout problems, Neary Rattanak IV education strategies focused on building early learning centers in Cambodia and enhancing teacher capacity and learning materials. Girls and female teachers were named as specific populations of interest for achieving the objectives of the Neary Rattanak IV education plan. Simultaneously, Anderson and Grace (2018) found that

Cambodia's teachers play an instrumental role in protecting girls at school, helping female students stay longer in school.

Positive attitudes towards gender equality and the promotion of social welfare

So et al. (2013) explored the implementation of policies to address violence against women in Cambodia. They claimed that positive and responsive interactions with male counterparts and societal attitudes toward women were believed to have a significant effect on women's performance and self-confidence. The critical challenges to implementing gender-related policies cited by respondents across all levels of society were associated with gendered norms, attitudes, and behaviors in women's communities (So et al., 2013).

Tuy (2019) discussed gender-responsive attitudes regarding educational discrimination against Cambodian women in his study. He explained that the last objective of Neary Rattanak IV's education of women and girls involved four strategies that aimed to coordinate the development and promotion of a positive image of empowered women and girls among their communities and individuals, especially among men and boys. The objectives and activities in this target were considered to challenge Cambodia's tradition in which women are expected to respect and follow their husbands' guidance. Tuy (2019) added that people in Cambodia, especially the older generations, still think in traditional ways about women, which is why many women could not pursue higher education. In light of these conditions, Tuy (2019) also acknowledged the necessity of implementing the last four strategies of Neary Rattanak IV's education of women and girls.

Research gap

Based on a review of related studies above, it could be seen that there are studies on the purpose and importance of Neary Rattanak IV education strategies in response to Cambodian women's challenges in accessing education. However, there remain some gaps in the literature. First, almost all the previous studies tend to focus only on Cambodia's existing gender education issues, the objectives of the Neary Rattanak IV strategies, and the importance of this policy. There is not yet a study that examines the

effectiveness of the implementation of such strategic activities. Second, this study will use policy implementation analysis to evaluate the implementation of each key activity in Neary Rattanak IV education strategies claimed by Tuy (2019) to be vital to tackling Cambodian women's education issues. The use of policy implementation analysis as a method in this study also fills a gap in the literature since previous studies do not critically look at the role of MoWA's strategic plan in achieving and dealing with women's education challenges in Cambodia.

Table 2. *Seven steps of Mintrom's policy implementation analysis (Mintrom, 2012, pp. 292-295)*

Steps	Activities
Step 1	Identify the overall purpose of the new policy, where it will be implemented, and how success has been defined
Step 2	Identify who will be responsible for policy implementation and the behavioral changes that implementation is expected to produce
Step 3	Specify the institutional, organizational and procedural changes required to support the new policy
Step 4	Treat implementation as a project, note the key tasks required to establish the new policy context
Step 5	Identify any significant threats to successful implementation and how they can be addressed
Step 6	Consider how institutional inertia might hinder change and how it can be overcome
Step 7	Ensure provisions have been made for the evaluation of the new policy and associated programs.

Analytical tool

To evaluate the degree to which the implementation of Neary Rattanak IV's education of women and girls and behavioral changes was effective, this study employed Michael Mintrom's policy implementation analysis as an analytical tool. Mintrom (2012) established seven steps of policy implementation analysis as a mechanism to evaluate how well a particular public policy is implemented.

Hassena et al. (2016), who reviewed Mintrom's policy implementation steps, claimed that they were an up-to-date and reliable process for policy implementation analysis. Another review by Pacheco-Vega (2016) also claimed that Mintrom's work, called Contemporary Policy Analysis, on the division of policy analysis into 17 chapters, including policy implementation analysis, gender, and racism analysis, is instrumental. The Contemporary Policy Analysis focuses not only on cost-benefit analysis but also on other areas that apply to a range of people such as students, policy analysts, and practitioners (Pacheco-Vega, 2016). Mintrom's (2012) policy implementation analysis consists of seven steps, as seen in Table 2.

All the seven steps were applied to analyze Neary Rattanak IV's education of women and girls, and behavioral changes. The evaluation involved reviewing existing government and non-governmental reports and studies on the actual implementation of the education framework for women and girls in Neary Rattanak IV to reflect on each of the seven steps of the policy implementation analysis.

Analysis of the implementation of Neary Rattanak IV's second strategic framework: Education of women and girls, and behavioral changes

In the following sections, the study applied Mintrom's (2012) seven steps of policy implementation analysis to analyze the second strategic framework of Neary Rattanak IV, namely the education of women and girls, and behavioral changes.

Step 1: The overall purpose

Besides the objectives indicated in the policy itself, the target plan of Neary Rattanak IV was viewed by the United Nations Development Program as a core gender principle in Cambodia (WoMA, 2014d). As a policy, Neary Rattanak IV outlines the essential part of the national gender mainstreaming strategic plan, including the provisions for promoting gender equity in education, supporting education for women and girls, and eliminating discrimination against women. One of the purposes of the education of women and girls was to articulate Cambodia's inter-sectoral approach to gender mainstreaming, offering provisions for girls and women's social and education entitlements. An inter-

sectoral approach to gender mainstreaming is believed to help confirm existing knowledge and add new insights into innovation in Cambodia's education system (Khieng et al., 2015).

Neary Rattanak IV does not explicitly define the success of either the entire policy or each target in the policy itself, as Mintrom recommends in his policy implementation analysis. In the policy action plan, however, each key activity of Neary Rattanak IV comes with the indicator(s) of the work that needs to be accomplished. Pintér et al.'s (2004) study on the use of indicators in policy analysis demonstrated that policymakers could create an indicator for their policy paper based on the actual type of policy. There is no one standard rule for developing the policy indicators; however, they all are used to strengthen policy planning and evaluation. Moreover, to increase a policy's likelihood of success and its profitability, it is important to identify and establish clear and measurable indicators (Pintér et al., 2004).

Step 2: Key actors in policy implementation

Collaboration among Cambodia's ministries

Under the Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan, MoWA also worked with the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) in collaboration with all line ministries to ensure the national programs associated with vulnerable groups of women received a national budget in line with gender-responsive budgeting processes. A report by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on Gender Mainstreaming for Women's Economic Empowerment suggested that the purpose of the collaboration between MoWA and MEF is to strengthen MoWA's capacity for planning, monitoring, and evaluation as well as to build up the capacity of the Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans to integrate gender equality into line ministries' policies and budgets (JICA, 2018).

The establishment of new government agencies

According to the policy brief of the Cambodia Gender Assessment, MoWA is responsible for the protection of Cambodian women's rights. MoWA ensures women's rights are fulfilled by initiating sectoral programs in education, health, and economic empowerment and setting up committees to address

women's special issues. The Program-Based Approach Committee (PBAC) was one such committee. It was set up in late 2012 and became active in 2014 during Neary Rattanak IV's implementation. PBAC's work was to direct and coordinate the formulation and implementation of the program-based approach to gender equality. Since 2014, PBAC has played a significant role in mobilizing resources and capacity building around the program-based approach, following the guidelines of the Public Administrative and Public Financial Management Programs (WoMA, 2020).

Step 3: Behavioral and procedural changes of the government

The changes in existing agencies can be divided into three levels: national, community, and individual. In terms of the national level, the National Committee for Upholding Social Morality and Women's and Khmer Family Values is an institution in charge of operating, checking, and updating the national action plan related to women's protection and gender equality. The committee's work was to ensure that plans were up-to-date and responded to the actual situation to serve Cambodian women's interests and solve their ongoing problems (Farha, 2009). At the community level, MoWA and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) worked with the media to distribute information on the status and role of Cambodia's women to youth, families, and the community through television, radio, websites, and magazines (United Nations, 2020). Another task assigned to MoWA under the fourth strategy of education of women and girls was to provide training on the empowerment of women, gender equality, gender inclusiveness, and social equity to national and provincial-level officials. Prior to implementing the Neary Rattanak IV policy, gender and education training were focused only on girls, which was the work of MoEYS. However, MoWA had a shared responsibility with MoEYS in terms of gender-related training since the target trainee group was expanded to women regardless of age. With the knowledge of gender equality, MoWA and the relevant ministries were also required to conduct an evaluation study on gender-related matters such as violations and discrimination against vulnerable women to generate a report as a reference to set up response measures (So et al., 2013). As reported in Cambodia's sixth periodic report on the elimination of discrimination against women, for accountability purposes and to promote sub-national administrative participation, the budget plan by MoWA has to be double-checked by Sub-

National Administration and the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic for Human Rights (WoMA, 2020).

Concerning the procedural changes at the individual level, it is very important to embed knowledge and a sense of gender-sensitive role models among Cambodian men and boys. To achieve this task, MoWA and MoEYS were responsible for working together to initiate training courses, workshops, public forums, and awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality, women's well-being, and social morality. A study by the Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia suggested that the sub-national authorities have encouraged and increased discussions on topics of gender equality and vulnerable women's difficulties in public forums and school debate events (Kem et al., 2019).

Step 4: The development of projects or education programs

As a national policy, Neary Rattanak IV acted as a guideline for local and international programs that aim to improve the quality of Cambodian girls and women's education. For instance, in 2014, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) launched a project called Enhancing Education Quality to improve learning materials, laboratories, and libraries in order to expand learning resources and encourage students' enrollment, especially female students who live in rural areas (ADB, 2016). The support from ADB is in line with Neary Rattanak IV's strategic objectives to increase access of girls and women to education through material and financial assistance. Furthermore, ADB's work has contributed to various papers and policy briefs on education empowerment, which in turn formed the basis of Cambodia's gender assessment, resulting in improvement in gender equality (ADB, 2015).

Along with the Enhancing Education Quality project, the implementation of education strategies for women and girls and behavioral changes also inspired and supported international education projects in Cambodia, such as the World Bank's Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP). The project was approved by the World Bank in 2018 with a fund of US$ 90 million for a period of six years (Heng, 2020). With MoEYS as the executing agency, the project was designed to focus on specific education fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and agriculture. With specific targeted areas, the overall objective of HEIP is to reduce obstacles to vulnerable female

students' access to education by expanding classroom facilities, building dormitories, strengthening quality assurance, and working with relevant partners to improve the curriculum of the priority subject areas (World Bank, 2018). Indeed, the project's objective is aligned with one of the key activities outlined in the first strategy of women and girls' education in Neary Rattanak IV, which was to reduce education barriers and address girls and women's needs in their educational journey.

In addition to responding to problems related to overage and early dropout, the education strategies in Neary Rattanak IV focused on building early learning centers and enhancing teacher capacity and learning materials. With MoEYS as a lead ministry in this strategy, the third education program, called Strengthening Teacher Education Programs, was launched in 2018. His Excellency Nath Bunroeun, the Secretary of State of MoEYS, explained that the program was built with the financial support of a US$20.6 million grant from the Global Partnership for Education, providing complementary materials to assist early grade teachers in enriching their teaching practice and skills (Roolvink, 2018).

Overall, Cambodia's early education system needs to be improved; STEM tends to support early-grade education in general rather than focus only on early education for vulnerable groups of girls. Based on the Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan to strengthen teachers' teaching ability, this effort will still not be enough without participation from students, parents, and the community. Therefore, MoEYS has been working with MoWA and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training to reduce gender stereotypes in Cambodian people's mindsets by running campaigns and incorporating human rights courses such as education rights into the school curriculum and teaching methodology (Tuy, 2019).

Step 5: Significant threats to policy implementation

Financial constraints

Undoubtedly, Neary Rattanak IV, as Cambodia's gender strategic plan, also encountered a financial deficiency in its implementation. Most of the activities in Neary Rattanak IV's education of women and girls were developed into an

annual program that required consecutive implementation from 2014 to 2018 (MoWA, 2019). Cambodia's national budget was insufficient to cover all the education programs; therefore, some of the projects were run with the support of international institutions, such as ADB and the World Bank. Financial means remain a challenge for the Cambodian government to implement gender policy as the country still largely depends on international donors. In 2019, MoWA acknowledged financial resources as a substantial obstacle to policy enforcement in advancing women's education. Because of financial constraints, MoEYS also had to prioritize its education programs on higher education. As a result, lower educational levels, such as secondary school, faced financial insufficiency in terms of improving learning materials and learning space (MoWA, 2014b).

Inadequate skills and human resources

According to ActionAid Cambodia (2018), even though the implementation of gender policy continued, the outcomes were still below expectations, reflecting ineffective policy implementation due to limited human resources in Cambodia. MoWA also recognized the lack of human resources as the gap in implementing policies and plans at all levels of education and institutions. Although it could be seen that the education policy framework had improved remarkably, there were still insufficient human resources and skills and a lack of clear guidelines to carry out the enforcement of the gender strategies. In addition, MoWA (2014a) noted that there were considerable gaps in the education policy implementation at the sub-national level as the human resource capacity in gender mainstreaming in communes and villages remained weak.

Step 6: Challenge of institutional inertia

Cultural and social norms

It could be seen that while education and gender policies exist and are sufficient for the country, commitment to their implementation is limited (Maxwell et al., 2015). The policy initiative to increase female students exemplified in the Neary Rattanak IV target largely had little impact due to the lack of internal motives and an effective system to support the policy. Cambodians' mindsets and

internal motives are heavily influenced by conservative, traditional norms that value men more than women and perpetuate gender power imbalances (Maxwell et al., 2015). Regardless of Neary Rattanak IV's efforts to increase female students' school enrollment and completion, a report by the United States Agency for International Development ([USAID], 2018) on women's literacy in Cambodia showed that female students' secondary school completion rate was still significantly below the average of low-to-middle-income countries. In 2017, two years after Neary Rattanak IV was implemented, the girls' secondary school completion rate was 42.7%, which remained low compared to the previous years (USAID, 2018). The undesirable outcome could result from many causes; however, the cultural barrier was acknowledged as the principal and critical concern for girls' access to education in Cambodia (USAID, 2018).

Discrimination and low employment opportunities

In Cambodia, most top professional positions, such as managers or directors, are held by men in both the public and private sectors. In the government, women represented only 20.3% of parliamentarians between 2008 and 2015 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). Discrimination against women in the job market could markedly impact the attitudes toward education for girls and women. Moreover, low employment opportunities could discourage girls from getting an education and lead them to believe that education is not necessary for them (UNESCO, 2015). Thus, the negative cultural values, employment attitudes, and practices in Cambodia, which reinforced the subordinate role of women and hindered their equal participation in all spheres of life, needed to be addressed by the gender policies for effective implementation (UNESCO, 2015).

Financial resources in Cambodian families

Due to policies concerning the education of women and girls, which included disseminating the importance of girls' education to parents, most parents changed their perspectives toward their daughters and supported them in pursuing higher education. Moreover, many parents still prioritized their sons when it came to education if they were not able to send all their children to school (Tuy, 2019). It is known that boys and girls have different mental and

physical structures, which means different responsibilities and expectations. Thus, a comparison is often made between the two genders regarding who could achieve more, become more powerful, or be more productive. The answer is often boys; therefore, they are usually chosen to send to school while girls are kept at home to help with the housework. Consequently, most women grow up lacking qualifications and skills, which severely restrict their job opportunities (Tuy, 2019).

Safety concerns

Women and girls' safety is another challenge to the education of women and girls targeted in Neary Rattanak IV. This is understandable given that safety has been considered one of the barriers for Cambodia's female students (Ngeth, 2018). Due to safety concerns, many parents hesitate to let their daughters go to school far from home. In urban areas, safety is not really a big problem because many schools are close to where the people live and work. It was reported that female children living in the northeastern part of Cambodia faced the safety problem, as there was a lack of schools in remote areas. For example, some students had to walk more than 12 kilometers from their houses to school in most of the rural areas of Ratanakiri province (Ngeth, 2018). The long distance between home and school poses a concern for students, especially for girls, as safety along the roads is not completely assured for them. A 2016 report by the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights ([LICADHO], 2016) showed that there were 282 cases of rape or attempted rape. The cases involved 292 victims, 217 of whom were children under 18 years old. As women and girls' safety is a major concern, it is an obstacle not only to their education but also to their physical and mental well-being. Therefore, it is recommended that women's education policy and safety policy, such as the Village and Commune Safety Policy, should be simultaneously implemented for a better outcome (So et al., 2013).

Step 7: Evaluate the provision of education of women and girls

The Cambodian government recognized the evaluation phase as one of the most effective stages in achieving its various policies. Therefore, it launched many monitoring and evaluating programs over the preceding decade. For instance, it established the Monitoring and Evaluation for the National Strategic

Development Plan Implementation System (MENI) Orientation Guidelines, led and coordinated by the Ministry of Planning. Since it concerns gender and equity, this guideline has been outlined below to supplement and operationalize the MENI document by assimilating gender-responsive and equity-focused aspects in the evaluation (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2016). To ensure unbiased guidelines and avoid conflicts of interest, MENI was drafted with broad consultations from relevant stakeholders, such as inline ministries, civil society organizations, and development partners, before getting approval from the national working group for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the National Strategic Development Plan in 2014 (RGC, 2016).

Discussion and conclusion

As a result of using Mintrom's (2012) analysis to assess Neary Rattanak IV education strategies, this study shows that the strategies were initiated with clear objectives and responsible actors to deal with Cambodia's gender inequality issues. Besides the existing ministries such as MoWA, new agencies were established to carry out different roles and bring about positive behavioral and procedural changes regarding gender equality at all societal levels, from the individual to the national level. Between 2014 and 2018, many education projects and programs were created in response to the mission of the first education strategy. Education projects such as HEIP and Strengthening Teacher Education were reported to significantly contribute to giving Cambodia's women and girls more opportunities to access education and making the process easier. Additionally, many social and school events were created to allow for discussion and debate on the topic of gender equality and women's education in recent years, which directly raised the awareness of Cambodians, especially parents, about the importance of women and girls' education.

With the ongoing implementation of these educational activities, the government appointed the Cambodian National Council for Women as the institution responsible for evaluating and monitoring the implementation of Neary Rattanak IV strategies. Regarding the evaluation process, Neary Rattanak IV went through a comprehensive evaluation, starting from the baseline evaluation supported by a series of donor-drafted policy briefs. The policy was initially based on detailed background papers, and after many steps

of baseline evaluation, it developed into a national gender policy. A year after the completion of Neary Rattanak IV's implementation, MoWA submitted a report to the government stating that Neary Rattanak IV's education mission for girls and women had been accomplished and brought fruitful results and new life for women and girls, especially those in vulnerable groups (MoWA, 2019).

In line with the above findings, it can be concluded that girls and women's education strategies under Neary Rattanak IV were effectively implemented based on the Mintrom policy implementation analysis. According to the Education Congress (MoEYS, 2019a), the enrollment in lower secondary education was increased, while dropout was reduced. There was an increase from 53.8% in 2015-2016 to 59.1 percent in 2018-2019 in the gross enrollment rates in lower secondary education (MoEYS, 2019b). Moreover, MoEYS also worked toward achieving the goals of inclusive and equitable education, as evidenced by the implementation of an Inclusive Education Program for preschools in Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Prey Veng, Ratanakiri, Kratie, Preah Sihanouk, Oddar Meanchey, and Phnom Penh. This program is linked with 542 public preschools, covering 453 children (208 were girls) with disabilities (MoEYS, 2019b). This could be seen as an influence of Neary Rattanak IV's education for girls and women on the improvement of Cambodian girls' education. With this successful implementation, however, there remain difficulties and shortcomings that should have been recognized and addressed. What follows are some key points that policymakers should consider for better implementation and impact of future gender and education policies in Cambodia.

Remaining challenges and recommendations

Unclear definitions of policy success

Two indicators, the establishment of new daycare centers and education events, were mentioned in Neary Rattanak IV's second strategy of education of women and girls. They are considered targeted activities to be implemented for policy success. Regarding the establishment of new daycare centers and education events, the policy did not outline a specific or expected number of daycare

centers or events to be established. Moreover, the policy did not prioritize provinces or areas in Cambodia that face a lack of daycare facilities and are therefore in greater need than others. Without setting a clear number of activities and establishments that need to be initiated and having clear priority areas, it is difficult for the government and policymakers to assess whether the Neary Rattanak IV education strategy has been implemented as planned.

This evaluation has shown the significant role of parents in their children's education and the need for education policy to encompass parental participation. Nonetheless, in 2019, a year after the completion of Neary Rattanak IV's implementation, Tuy's (2019) study on gender discrimination in Cambodia's education system found that no specific parental education program had been conducted in response to the objective of promoting positive parental views toward education. Some parents who lived in rural areas still did not care about their children's education (Tuy, 2019). In its Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023, MoEYS (2019a) also stated that Cambodia urgently needs to increase parental education events and programs by working with public education institutions to teach parents the importance of education. Given this result, it could be seen that the education events for parents that were planned by the education strategies in Neary Rattanak IV should have been improved and monitored (MoEYS, 2019a).

Limited financial support and commitment of the Cambodian government and donors

In So et al.'s (2013) study, financial support was mentioned to be a critical issue for the Cambodian government in reducing gender inequality. As a low-income country, Cambodia has a limited national budget, and its gender-related activities and policies rely largely on its two biggest development partners: ADB and the World Bank. However, in 2016, the World Bank officially revised the status of Cambodia's economy, moving Cambodia from a low-income to a lower-middle-income country. Economists expected that the reclassification of the economic status would lead to a drop in foreign funds and aid for Cambodia's economic and social development in subsequent years (McGrath & Hor, 2016). While the shift could be a good sign of Cambodia's economic growth, the country also has to be more financially independent in implementing social policies.

ADB is one of the developing partners that continues to demonstrate a commitment to achieving a prosperous, resilient, inclusive, and sustainable Cambodia. Under its 2019-2023 country partnership strategy, ADB will provide $1.45 billion to support Cambodia's development. However, the amount will not be solely given in the form of grants; the support will come as loans and technical assistance and will prioritize areas such as agriculture, natural resources management, and renewable energy (ADB, 2020).

Inadequate human resources

Inadequate human resources are not a problem in some sectors, such as administration and the environment. However, the lack of teachers in rural Cambodia is regarded as a potential issue for education-gender policies. A recent study from Ravet and Mitka (2021) showed that there were not enough teachers, especially female teachers, in Cambodia's rural primary schools; consequently, there were too many students in each classroom, which affected the quality of teaching and learning. Moreover, it was found that training was required to build up teachers' knowledge and teaching skills. The lack of teachers and limited in-service teacher training are linked with the shortage of financial support from the government. Teachers living and teaching in isolated rural areas need more technical support and financial incentives to encourage them and improve their quality of life and teaching. The current shortage of female teachers in primary education indicates gender inequality in the education sector, which also could be a demotivating factor for girls to pursue their education.

Existing social problems

This study has identified Cambodia's existing social issues as an obstacle to implementing the gender and education policy. Some of those problems, such as cultural norms, gender discrimination in the workplace, and safety issues, are perceived to either make it difficult to implement the gender policy or lower the effectiveness of the policy outcomes. Despite the policy effort to reduce gender inequality in education, the older generation still holds the mindset that it is not necessary for women to attend school or receive higher education. This belief leads to the expectation that daughters are to take care of the children and perform housework. Although some modern families do not forbid their

daughters to go to school, they still express concerns about employment discrimination and safety issues. Among these social problems, women and girls' safety has been discussed by many local and international organizations whose work focuses on protecting women's rights. In 2018, in a joint report, ActionAid with other organizations mentioned safety issues as a potential obstacle for Cambodian girls to obtain an education. This issue is also associated with other problems such as discrimination against students with disabilities, the distinction between punishment and violence in the classroom, and bullying (ActionAid Cambodia, 2018). These issues may have been overlooked by the Neary Rattanak IV education strategies, which have in turn affected the effectiveness of the policy implementation.

Women's limited capacity and skills

As mentioned above, one of the remaining challenges for Neary Rattanak IV's education of women and girls strategies is the lack of skilled teachers in primary school education. Thus, MoEYS should initiate more professional training for primary school teachers in remote areas. In addition to the training, more social and professional events should also be created for teachers, especially female teachers, to discuss and exchange their experiences and skills. This type of event is believed to be useful for female teachers to share information and build a network and support system for their profession. Given the crucial role of international development partners in Cambodia's education and gender policy implementation, it is strongly recommended that these international institutions introduce projects and funding schemes for events like professional teacher gatherings to provide benefits to teachers in terms of their teaching qualifications and professional well-being.

Suggestions for future research

There is a need for an appropriate social policy and a well-implemented mechanism to bring a positive social impact. This study only covers the analysis of the implementation of Neary Rattanak IV education strategies to determine how well the policy was implemented. Hence, the findings of this study could not determine the impact on specific areas that the strategies had influenced. Therefore, it is suggested that further research should be conducted to see

whether the education strategies in the Neary Rattanak IV policy are appropriate and well-responded to the current educational issues in Cambodia.

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