

DC-Cam Policy: Gender Issues at DC-Cam

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The purpose of this document is to outline relevant gender issues and assess (verbally point by point) how well Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) has handled these issues. It was used as an accompanying document for a discussion of gender at a team leaders meeting on August 10, 2010. The discussion was prompted by a comprehensive evaluation by Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), one of DC-Cam’s main donors, which found that DC-Cam needed to evaluate and promote gender mainstreaming within the organization and its activities. After the discussion, the Center’s management team drafted gender related internal policies based on the issues raised in the discussion.

The term *gender* is relatively new in Cambodia, appearing in conversational usage in the past decade or so. The term however, which in Khmer is simply “*yenda*,” is still unknown to most Cambodians and those most likely familiar with the term, city residents who have had greater exposure to international media and organizations, do not understand or misunderstand it. Below is a brief explanation of the modern concept of gender, followed by some issue areas relevant to the DC-Cam workplace.

I. Gender as a Socially Constructed Concept

- While there are biological differences between men and women, the status, relationships, and roles of men and women in society are socially constructed. This means that each society assigns roles and structures relationships between men and women. This social construction is based on beliefs, traditions, and customs.
- As societies change over time via internal and/or external forces, the concept of gender can too change. Along with a changing understanding of gender comes a change in the roles and relationships between men and women.
 - An example of this is the progression of women’s status in the United States which led to the right to vote, entrance into jobs once prohibited or denied to women, laws that protect women (rape laws, domestic violence laws, and sexual harassment laws), and an overall recognition and respect for women’s contributions to society.
- Change in the conceptualization of gender at the societal level is gradual and may take several generations or longer, but nevertheless the concept of gender and its societal manifestations (roles and relationships) are flexible.

II. Gender Equity: Workplace Benefits and Opportunities

- Salary & bonuses: should be equal for men and women
 - Equal pay is still an issue even in America where there exists a so-called “glass ceiling” that prevents women from reaching the employment positions and salary that men of equal qualifications obtain.
- Work opportunities
 - Working in the provinces: both male and female staffs should be given equal opportunities to work in the provinces (work trips to the provinces usually last between 4-10 days).
 - Accommodations: flexible working hours should be considered for all staff that have greater responsibilities in parenting and taking care of elderly family members.

- Respecting and recognizing the abilities of women: female staff should be recognized equally for their successes and expected to perform at the same level as male staff.
- Study opportunities abroad: male and female staff should be given equal encouragement and opportunities to study abroad.

III. Gender Empowerment

- Gender mainstreaming: the active participation of women in every planned action of the organization.
- Encourage female staff to undertake assignments normally given to men and encourage men to undertake assignments normally given to women.
- Encourage female staff to study abroad and attend conferences abroad.
- Support female staff's participation in women's empowerment programs.

IV. Gender Sensitivity

- Men should be trained to be aware of and avoid making statements and taking actions that are offensive to and uncomfortable for women.
 - Sexual jokes and inferences: although sexual jokes are prevalent in Cambodian society (even teachers are known to make sexual jokes during instruction), they should be limited or eliminated if possible.
 - It would be difficult or awkward for a female staff to lead a team to the province if a team member makes sexual jokes directed at her or in front of her.
 - Sexual harassment: in many countries, and in Cambodia as of 2010, sexual harassment is a crime.
- Parental leave: one cannot fire a female staff member because she has a baby, instead DC-Cam should create a program that provides her with paid leave and helps her to transition back into her job, possibly in a more flexible capacity.
 - In recognition that child-rearing should be the joint responsibility of men and women, parental leave should also be awarded to male staff.
- Double-standard: in Cambodian society men and women are held to different sets of moral, social, and behavioral standards which affects how female staff are perceived in the workplace
 - Examples: the opinions of male staff might be respected more than that of female staff; moreover, a woman who speaks out on an issue normally ascribed to men might be regarded as aggressive or unfeminine.

A general principle that all DC-Cam staff members should follow is: be open-minded and sensitive to all differences in society.

The discussion of gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights is not an attack on men's rights or an effort to blame men as is sometimes perceived. We must understand that throughout history women have been oppressed by men and thus it is crucial to promote ideas and behaviors that reduce and ultimately stop this oppression. Advancing the status of women in the workplace will help society overall to respect women, recognize the challenges they face, and create solutions to alleviate these challenges. Further, this will help people to be more open-minded and sensitive to all differences in society, thereby promoting a culture of tolerance.