

# Women's Empowerment:

## Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

**The Context:** Cambodia, a post-conflict country, has the highest HIV prevalence in Southeast Asia. While the government has been proactive in combating the spread of HIV, women remain vulnerable to the disease. In a time of massive rural-urban migration, women enter cities with few income-earning opportunities and are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and trafficking.

**The Projects:** CARE Cambodia assessed three projects for the Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII):

- **Sewing for a Healthy Future**, which works in garment factories to support reproductive health services for workers;
- **Selling Beer Safety**, 2003 to 2005, aimed to provide sexual reproductive health measures to deal with difficult customers for beer promotion women;
- **SAFE (Sex Workers HIV/AIDS Reduction, Advocacy Facilitation and Empowerment)**, 2004 to 2007, worked with sex workers, entertainment workers and men who have sex with men to develop leadership, reduce HIV risk and promote advocacy.

### CARE Cambodia's Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII)

CARE Cambodia undertook the SII in 2006 and 2008. For the studies it focused on its work with women to explore:

- How do women define empowerment in their own terms?
- What were the impacts of the projects on women's lives (particularly around empowerment, sexual/reproductive health and vulnerability to HIV)?
- For SAFE, the study also explored:
  - Sex workers' views of HIV;
  - Gender/power relations and sex worker decisions;
  - The impact of programmatic and organizational processes.

**The Methods:** In the SII, each phase utilized qualitative and participatory research.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Research Team:** Engage project staff from both SII sites and non-SII sites to participate in research team
- **Workshop:** Team discussion of draft plan, development of data collection methods and research methods training

#### DATA COLLECTION

- **Document Analysis:** Reconstruct project activities and implementation
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Perceived meaning of empowerment and vulnerability to HIV
- **In-Depth Interviews:** Understand perception of project from non-participants
- **Key Informant Interviews:** Context of HIV work

#### DATA ANALYSIS

- **Triangulation:** Data validation across methods, locations and researchers
- **Reflective Process :** Each day of data collection followed by a day for reflection. Research team debriefed on data collection, reflected on emerging trends and refined hypotheses
- **Participatory Analysis:** Team analysis of findings, emerging conclusions and lessons

#### Limitations:

- Low response on quantitative research
- Difficult to access project documentation
- Sex workers difficult to locate for research
- Government crackdown on brothels changed sex worker context and environment

# CAMBODIA

The [Strategic Impact Inquiry](#) (SII) seeks to evaluate CARE's impact on women's empowerment. For CARE Cambodia's full SII reports, please contact: [pqlibrarian@care.org](mailto:pqlibrarian@care.org).

For more information, please contact Paula Gleeson ([paula.gleeson@care-cambodia.org](mailto:paula.gleeson@care-cambodia.org)).

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### Women's Own Views of Empowerment:

#### AGENCY

Knowledge and action on rights, health risks/services  
Self-confidence and esteem  
Defend self from violence  
Economic security  
Ability to travel freely  
Ability and persistence to overcome obstacles  
Responsibility for one's HIV prevention and care

#### RELATIONS

Ability to fulfill traditional gender roles  
Respected by and respectful to others

#### STRUCTURE

Access to services

### Implications:

**Empowerment** is an individual and collective process that is not linear and requires time and resources.

- Unequal gender relations is structural and CARE must work to reorient institutions and engage men to address male privilege;
- The program should take an integrated approach that engages all key stakeholders, particularly men for the protection of women's rights.
- Incorporate advocacy comprehensively into programming to sensitize power-holders to women's needs— especially to advocate for law enforcement and zero tolerance to harassment against women in addition to the end of impunity for perpetrators of violence against women.

#### Economic empowerment

- Cater to group needs/context with sustained support.
- Savings programs should build on existing practices, and be implemented systematically.

#### Solidarity among women

- Recognize tensions among women to advance sustainability
- Empower peer educators to form groups, spread information and continue activities after the end of SAFE.
- Cross-learning opportunities for peer educators foster knowledge sharing and solidarity.

#### Organizational Alignment:

- Multi-dimensionality of empowerment/HIV requires long-term financing and commitment.
- Donor support and its disruption must be taken into account for sustainable programming.
- Staff and partners require training to understand CARE's empowerment approach and codes of ethics.

### Impact on Empowerment

	Selling Beer Safely	Sewing for a Healthy Future	SAFE
Agency	Knowledge/Action on workplace rights, sexual/reproductive health and services Self-confidence, esteem, leadership Changed attitudes and perceptions of rights and power Speak about sexual/reproductive health Solidarity, ability to help others	Speak publicly about sexual and reproductive health to peers Use of services, knowledge in order to protect selves through informed choices Confidence, ability to help others Increased condom use	Peer Educators: leadership, group agency, rights awareness/activism Confidence, mobility Knowledge of HIV, condom use (do not use with lovers) Lack of control over earnings Use of health services Decision-making around sex
Structure	Access to services, antiretroviral drugs Medical care coverage by beer companies Beer company policy changes for workers More worker-friendly environment government and private sector responses to violence against women	Regular activities conducted by health promotion group for workers Health services available and accessible at workplace	Services available but inefficient, corrupt
Relations	Raised status of beer promotion workers to company and clients Share information to peers Ability to deal with difficult customers	More trusting relationship between factory and women in terms of health services Government agencies work with services to supervise staff and ensure sustainability	Stigmatized by friends, colleagues Lack of solidarity Engagement of elites /powerful not sustained