

The Diverse Cambodian Woman

An exploration of minority
women outside the mainstream



An initiative of *Our Turn*



The photos in this publication have been taken by participants to share visuals of their minority communities. Images do not reveal the identity of participants who shared their opinions and stories in conversations.

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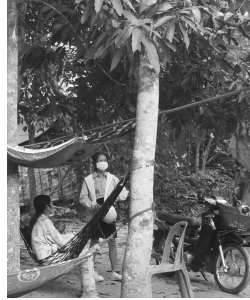
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Cambodian diversity as a gift

Minority women navigate life outside the mainstream

Le Sen

Cambodia is often synonymous with Khmer. We think about Buddhist traditions, historical Angkor wonders, Khmer language, and how to be a good Khmer woman in a society of tradition, and often conservative norms. Although *Khmer* is a word that appears to connect people, it can also make others feel invisible under a banner that we are all one under a dominant group. We also often think a Cambodian is someone who was born and has roots to what is today Cambodian territory. Cambodia, however, is an incredibly diverse country with a vibrant society of different ethnicities, languages, cultures, and migration histories.

Cambodian minority women are often excluded from the bigger picture. Cambodian Muslims are both ethnically distinct and religiously unique. Many of us find our roots to the ethnic Cham of the Champa Kingdom who have migrated over centuries across the region. Ethnic Vietnamese are ethnically different and are often excluded and “othered” in Cambodian society due to

longstanding negative perceptions towards Vietnam. They are frequently isolated from the rest of Cambodian society and struggle in a place where they may not be recognised or even have any clear legal identity. Khmer Krom may have a strong ethnic connection to mainstream Khmer, but their migration paths and association to modern day Vietnam often cause them hardship in contemporary Cambodia where they do not always feel equal. As minority women, we find similar experiences with each other. It also feels natural for us to join with others in the initiative Our Turn and share with and learn from women with disabilities, Indigenous women, the LGBTIQ community, and the interethnic youth that are challenging age-old perceptions of how we see Cambodian society.

This publication explores the voices of 30 minority women coming from Muslim, Vietnamese, and Khmer Krom communities across the country. Each group is distinct and has very specific concerns, issues, hopes,

and dreams. At the same time, however, we have found connections and, to some extent, unity in sharing our stories as minority women in Cambodia.

As a Cham Muslim who is not always immediately identified as one in mainstream Cambodian culture, I am often able to blend in. Sometimes people are surprised to find out my identity after talking with me. There are even times when I'm told by others that it's okay to be Cham. At first, that might sound like positive affirmation. However, my instinct is to always question why wouldn't it be? Why does somebody need to tell me it's okay? I'm very proud to be a Cham Muslim Cambodian. I speak Cham as my first language. I practice Islam as my ancestral religion. I love and appreciate Khmer culture but I am not ethnically Khmer so I don't understand when someone labels me as "Khmer Islam." I think it is so important for us to value diversity in Cambodia and to allow for the multitude of ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities we are blessed with in this country.

My Vietnamese and Khmer Krom sisters in Cambodia face similar issues. We have distinct migration histories. We all have unique accents when we speak Khmer. We have faced poverty and exclusion in different ways. We want to be able to practise our traditions, speak our languages, and be who we are in Cambodian society without being judged or worrying about our futures. How do we hold on to our unique minority identity, navigate

our own cultures and the mainstream culture as women, and ensure that our future generations can live better than we have as doubly marginalised women?

I dream about minority women in Cambodia taking genuine leadership in so many aspects of our lives. To be university educated, to be leaders in our households, to advocate for our minority cultures to be valued and accepted in a multicultural Cambodian society, and above all, to achieve the dreams we each have. The findings in this publication may appear stark at times, but they are a call for action. If you read carefully, through all the challenges you will also see the hopes and dreams of minority women in Cambodia who envision a society where we can thrive and lead.

Le Sen

Representative for minority women at Women Peace Makers, gender advocate, community expert in intersectionality



Facilitative Listening Design Steps

1



Listener recruitment

2



Customising tools

3



Coaching and Training Lab

4



Trial conversation and reflecting

5



Fieldwork and recording

6



Info-Space Lab

7



Information verification and analysis

8



Writing and planning relevant outputs

Design: Valentina Rivero

The Study

This study provides a snapshot into the double marginalisation that minority women face in their communities, in mainstream society, and in their lives. As part of a larger endeavour to capture narratives of intersectionality among people who are marginalised in multiple aspects of their identity, this subsection of the study explores the lives, experiences, and perspectives of Cambodian Muslim, ethnic Vietnamese, and Khmer Krom women through a qualitative information gathering methodology known as Facilitative Listening Design (FLD). An evolving peace research approach, FLD was chosen for this work largely due to its advantage in providing the space for informal sharing on sensitive issues in local community contexts.

The Methodology

Facilitative Listening Design is an innovative “insider” human-to-human centred approach to better understand prevailing dynamics and explore sensitive topics that make for difficult conversations. It encourages deeper critical thinking and leverages the process to bring together groups at odds with each other and find solutions to protracted negative attitudes, stereotypes, or sentiment. It maintains the rigorous procedural and information-checking steps in conducting qualitative research but puts a stronger emphasis on gaining relatively in-depth insight into a topic as a snapshot at a given moment.

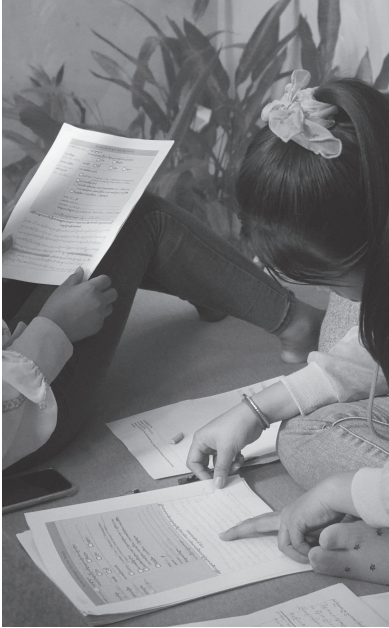
The advantage in this context is that it can be carried out quickly and respond to situations in a timely manner. It is also discreet. Conversations can happen in private or can be informal in nature to provide anonymity to the participants. There is no need to connect any recorded information to the individuals who participated as all documentation happens after and away from where conversations took place. The conversational style of information-gathering can be employed nearly anywhere, even in extremely sensitive environments where conducting more traditional research, using audio recording or questionnaires, may not be feasible. With no need for papers or devices, participants can blend into different environments and engage with people simply as people rather than research participants.

For this study, women from three minority groups (Cambodian Muslim, ethnic Vietnamese, and Khmer Krom) joined together to carry out research in their own communities. They simultaneously worked with members of the LGBTIQ community who also carried out similar activities and processed data together. Their work mirrored earlier studies exploring intersectionality and multiple marginalisation conducted and led by blind women, Indigenous women, rural-to-urban migrant women, and women facing violence. The general procedure of a FLD approach was carried out to better understand thoughts and opinions of women from minority groups. Eight general steps guided the process from design to implementation.

¹ For a detailed understanding of FLD methodology, refer to *The FLD Handbook: Using Facilitative Design For Your Project* (October 2017) provided at <http://wpmcambodia.org/project/the-flid-handbook>.

The Demographics

This study included individual conversations with 30 women from three minority groups who are referred to as Sharers. The conversations were carried out by six information gatherers referred to as Listeners. The Listeners come directly from the communities they are seeking to understand. Through existing networks of Women Peace Makers working on intersectional issues of minority and gender, Listeners connected to their Sharers to engage in conversations with a diverse range of Cambodian Muslim women in Kampong Chhnang province, ethnic Vietnamese women in Kandal province, and Khmer Krom women in Siem Reap province. Sharers represented diverse aspects of their own communities, including both younger and older women, both traditional and orthodox Cham adherents among Muslims, mixed-race and ethnic Vietnamese women, and Khmer Krom women who migrated from present-day Vietnam to Cambodia at different times of their life. The age range was quite diverse including Sharers from the ages of 19 to 74 years old.





CHAM

MUSLIM

WOMEN





A Profile of our Listeners

Listeners play a crucial role in the FLD process. For our Cambodian Muslim study, Riya and Sas joined us from two distinct communities. Riya is an 18-year-old Cham Orthodox (Khmer Islam) while Sas is a 19-year-old Cham traditionalist. They are both from Kampong Chhnang and are currently studying at university. Riya is pursuing a degree in medicine and Sas is working towards an accounting degree. They met Cambodian Muslim women in their FLD fieldwork and learnt more about their lives. In reflection on their journey, they both said that they heard so many new things about women from their own

communities. They also appreciate that they met Listeners from other minority communities that they became close friends with. Interestingly, they also both mentioned that the process changed some of the negative stereotypes they had held about other groups including ethnic Vietnamese and LGBTIQ. Processing the data together, they learnt that so many of the challenges they heard from women in the Cambodian Muslim community were faced by others. Experiencing discrimination, for example, seemed to be something that every group shared, and was seen as a theme that they could work on together and mobilise around to advocate for real change as a collective force.

The Findings

Initial findings of FLD were analysed by the Listeners themselves based on the data they collected and the themes they heard the most during their fieldwork. Through a process of early analysis, the following findings emerged among the conversations had between Listeners and Sharers.

Emerging themes

Cham Muslim women

- 1.** Our clothing is very important to our identity but causes us complex issues both within our communities and with others outside.
- 2.** We live with discrimination, violence, and harassment.
- 3.** We want to be treated equally in Cambodian society.

Clothing conflict

Finding 1 - Our clothing is very important to our identity but causes us complex issues both within our communities and with others outside.

I don't think I'm accepted by others for who I am as I'm practicing a different religion. When I was in secondary school, my teacher told me to take off my hijab and demanded that I should sit at the back so I don't block others. I had no choice but to take it off.

- A 22-year-old Cham Muslim in Kampong Chhang

Cham Muslim women in Cambodia are generally required to wear certain kinds of clothing due to their religious and cultural beliefs. Orthodox Cham women, who often refer to themselves as “Khmer Islam,” wear hijabs when outside of their homes and in the presence of men who are not their family members. Traditionalist Cham women, who do not normally wear a hijab, still have some norms in their community that are similar to orthodox. For example, it is common for them to wear a scarf on their heads and cover their necks. Muslim women are also often required to cover most of their bodies. It is therefore seen poorly in their communities if they wear shorts, skirts, or revealing clothing. They often wear loosely fit or baggy clothing.

Cham Muslim Sharers discussed in detail how clothing affected their lives. A dividing opinion emerged between older and younger women. Older Sharers tended to feel it was important that women in their community prescribe to traditions. Younger Sharers, however, often expressed that they would prefer to have more freedom to dress how

they wanted when outside their communities. Many said that inside their community, if they did not adhere to more conservative dress, they would be accused of not being a proper Muslim. Some women said they were even cursed at or insulted if they did not follow proper dress code.

Sharers also mentioned challenges in wearing their religious and traditional clothing outside of their communities. Their hijabs, scarves, and loose clothing sometimes made them feel uncomfortable, especially in Khmer mainstream society. Some discussed being teased in public schools, and even having their hijabs ripped off their heads. Others also felt that wearing a hijab or other traditional clothing to job interviews, such as in nearby factories, made them less likely to get the job they were applying for. Unlike Muslim men, who they felt could easily blend into mainstream Khmer society and wear whatever they wanted, women shared that it was impossible to hide being a Muslim woman.



“My family and villagers criticise me for not covering my hair. They said I should wear a hijab or scarf as a Cham Muslim woman.”

- A 19-year-old university student from
Kampong Chhnang

Discomfort and suffering

Finding 2 - We live with discrimination, violence, and harassment.

My husband used to beat me and broke everything in the house. I was so scared that I had to hide in the water storage or in a tree to escape from him. I sometimes had to sneak away to my mother's house, but he came to threaten me with a knife. I still have the scars from the beatings.

- A 37-year-old Cham Muslim who works at a factory in Kampong Chhnang

Cham Muslim women felt discriminated against, faced violence, and experienced harassment from both within their communities and from outside. Many Sharers expressed they were made fun of because of their identity including their names, accents, clothing, and their social status. They were concerned about the future of Muslim girls having a challenging time in pursuing higher education or future careers since they have always been told that it would be difficult if others knew they were ethnic Cham or Muslim.

Some women experienced domestic violence from their husbands or were cheated on but were unable to share with others because they felt embarrassed. Due to their cultural practices, many women remained silent to avoid further conflict with their husbands or to avoid hav-

ing people talk behind their backs. They often saw domestic violence as a family problem and believed that others should not intervene. Many chose to put up with violence because they were concerned about the future of their children. Some also associated domestic violence with alcohol. A woman from the Cham community shared that she had to hide from her husband every time he got drunk because he always hurt her and sometimes even severely injured her.

Many Sharers also discussed experiencing harassment by strangers which led to fear or discomfort to go out. This came in the form of catcalling or verbal assaults in the street. Some were even physically groped or touched but felt unable to defend themselves or believed it was normal behaviour.



*“I have
experienced
harassment
from a stranger.
He groped me
and I felt so
uncomfortable.”*

- A 37-year-old Cham Muslim food seller in Kampong Chhnang

It's time for equality

Finding 3 - We want to be treated equally in Cambodian society.

If I have a chance to connect with women from other minority groups, I want to end the oppression towards us and to understand more about others' perspectives since we all have differences to learn from each other.

- A 23-year-old who fight against all odds to become a nurse in Kampong Chhnang

Women from the Cham Muslim community feel like they are being treated unequally, not only within the community, but also comparing to others outside their community or the Khmer mainstream. They wanted their families to understand and to be more open minded to what women can achieve. Many Sharers expressed that minority women tended to be treated differently from others, for example, when they apply for jobs, and believed they had less chances of being chosen. Some Sharers said that as girls, they were often told to quit school early in order to work and support the family since their education was not prioritised to the same extent as the

men in their community. They also felt that they were seen as less equal than men in Muslim society given that they were often seen as the income earners, and were valued differently from women.

Many Cham Muslim Sharers said that they valued their culture and traditions but also wished to have more freedom from the cultural norms that felt like barriers to them in pursuing their dreams. They often felt like they did not have the same privileges as others because of their identities and wished that others would be more open minded and accept them for who they are.



*“I wish I
could turn
back time
and pursue
a higher
education so
I could get a
good job.”*

- A 24-year-old Cham woman reflects on her life in
Kampong Chhnang

The background of the entire page is a monochromatic purple image of a mountain range. The mountains are layered, with some peaks appearing more prominent than others, creating a sense of depth. The lighting is soft, with the sky area being a lighter shade of purple and the mountain slopes being darker. The overall texture is slightly grainy, typical of a printed or scanned image.

ETHNIC

VIETNAMESE

WOMEN





A Profile of our Listeners

Theary and Chanphal joined the FLD initiative as Listeners to carry out conversations with ethnic Vietnamese women in their own community in Kandal province. Both young women are teachers who work with ethnic Vietnamese children. They felt it was an eye-opening experience to connect with mothers and women to hear directly from them about their lives. For Chanphal, an ethnically Khmer woman who feels part of the Vietnamese community as a teacher for Vietnamese students, the findings from her listening surprised her. She said that she had been unaware of many of the issues

that ethnic Vietnamese women were facing in her own province, particularly in regard to legal identity and status in the country. For Theary, a mixed-race Khmer-Vietnamese Cambodian who was familiar with the situation of women in the Vietnamese community, it was an important opportunity to share the voices of these women to a larger audience. She felt that the status of ethnic Vietnamese women in Cambodia was often ignored, and she was proud to bring new information to the group for analysis.

The Findings

Initial findings of FLD were analysed by the Listeners themselves based on the data they collected and the themes they heard the most during their fieldwork. Through a process of early analysis, the following findings emerged among the conversations had between Listeners and Sharers.

Ethnic Vietnamese women Emerging themes

1. Living without clear legal status in Cambodia or anywhere else causes constant stress and difficulties to live our daily lives.
2. The discrimination we face is strong and affects us deeply.
3. We want to speak better Khmer and have good relations with Khmer people in Cambodia.

We have no country to call our own

Finding 1 - Living without clear legal status in Cambodia or anywhere else causes constant stress and difficulties to live our daily lives.

*I'm worried they will chase us away
because I don't have any legal
documents.*

- A 32-year-old ethnic Vietnamese woman
born in Cambodia

Ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia without clear legal identity are often unable to access basic services due to the lack of legal documents. Many Sharers in Kandal said that although they had lived in Cambodia for most or all of their lives, they were still unable to access public services. Some expressed they were afraid to be relocated to Vietnam since Cambodia was their home and they did not have any family or relatives there. Some of the women mentioned that they had difficulty in understanding their identities, and that they were unsure who they were, where they should be living, and what rights they had living as ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. Most of the women who shared their stories said they did not have a Cambodian identity card, family book, or birth certificate, without which it was particularly challenging to have a normal life like others always feeling uncertainty. Some

Sharers said they had tried to register for an identity card, but they were rejected because they were unable to speak Khmer.

Without clear legal status in Cambodia, children were not able to go to public school. Generation after generation they continued to be unable to prove their citizenship, causing a vicious circle of children who could not obtain a birth certificate. Sharers expressed worry and concern that their children could never improve their lives without a birth certificate to be able to attend school, which meant there was no opportunity for advancement for them or for their future children. On top of that, the constant feeling that they would be expelled from the country or from their homes due to precarious legal identity caused them great anxiety in imagining their futures and that of their children.



*“My children
can’t study in
Khmer because
I don’t have
enough legal
documents
like a birth
certificate,
family book, or
an ID card.”*

- A 19-year-old university student from
Kampong Chhnang

Discrimination hurts

Finding 2 - The discrimination we face is strong and affects us deeply.

I'm hurt when I hear people call me "Yuon" because I was born and raised here in Cambodia my whole life, but I can't communicate in Khmer. But it shouldn't be a reason to be treated so badly.

- A 20-year-old ethnic Vietnamese student in
Kandal

Ethnic Vietnamese who have been living in Cambodia for generations have generally faced forms of discrimination. Some Sharers talked about being looked down on for being unable to speak fluent Khmer. Some women said they were blatantly told to leave Cambodia or to go to Vietnam. Others talked about difficult relationships with neighbours or other residents who did not like them because of their Vietnamese backgrounds. Mixed-race Khmer-Vietnamese Sharers also mentioned that mainstream Khmer residents often would not want to talk to them because of their Vietnamese heritage. Some also said they were sometimes called “srey yuon,” a derogatory term to mean Vietnamese girl, which

was often associated with impurity or prostitution. Many women said they felt extremely uncomfortable to be called “yuon” by others.

Many Sharers worried about sending their children to school for Khmer literacy because other students would bully them. They did not want their children to face in school the treatment they received by others in public for being Vietnamese in Cambodia. Language ability was also an issue for them with many expressing that they faced discrimination for not speaking Khmer. This led to being rejected for jobs, harassment in public, and less opportunities for them and their children.



*“They don’t like
our family and
always call us
‘yuon.’ They told
us to go back to
Vietnam.”*

- A 29-year-old woman who farms in Kandal

We want to fit in

Finding 3 - We want to speak better Khmer and have good relations with Khmer people in Cambodia.

Whatever happens I will try to study and speak Khmer to have better communication and better relations with them.

- A 30-year-old mixed-race woman in Kandal

Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia are often excluded and seen as “the others” in society. Given negative perceptions of Vietnamese in the country, it is often difficult for Vietnamese and Khmer to build strong relationships. In the community in Kandal where the study took place, many of the ethnic Vietnamese residents lived relatively isolated from Khmer culture. They spoke Vietnamese in their community, and many sent their children to Vietnam to study rather than in Cambodia due to lacking proper documentation and the proximity of the school across the border. Despite living in Cambodia, this led to a population that primarily uses Vietnamese and has little exposure to Khmer language in daily life.

Many Sharers talked about language and its importance in Cambodia. Some Sharers said they tried to speak Khmer but were not always received well by others in Cambodia either due to their lack of fluency or their Vietnamese accents. They had difficulty in daily life interacting with Khmer with many misunderstandings. Although most of the Sharers were struggling to speak Khmer, nearly all said they hoped to improve their ability and be able to have better relations with Khmer people in their area. Many of them said they were studying Khmer and trying to send their children to school to learn Khmer so that they would not face the same issues they did living in Cambodia.



*“I hope
children
of the next
generation
try to study
Khmer hard...”*

- An ethnic Vietnamese mother of two children

A blue-toned photograph of a mountain range, likely the Annamite range in Southeast Asia, with the text 'KHMER KROM WOMEN' overlaid in large, bold, black capital letters. The mountains are rugged and layered, with some peaks appearing more prominent than others. The sky is a pale, clear blue.

KHMER

KROM

WOMEN





A Profile of our Listeners

FLD was carried out in a Khmer Krom community in Siem Reap with two Listeners. Nary and Chanthy both study at university in Siem Reap and were able to reach out to neighbours and community members to participate. Since Khmer Krom people do not always live in the same area, they had to travel around to find more Sharers through connections of those they already spoke with. Both women were born in Cambodia and often felt they identified more as mainstream Khmer Cambodians but came from families that held onto their cultures and traditions from before migrating to Cambodia. The listening stage of FLD led them to meet ten Khmer Krom women and subsequently they both felt they had a chance to connect to their own roots and better understand the background of their parents. Nary is a 20-year-old woman from a Khmer Krom community and currently studies public administration. Chanthy is also 20 years old and is also a university

student in Siem Reap. They paired up to conduct the FLD process in their own Khmer Krom community. They said it was challenging to find the Sharers since the Khmer Krom community is very spread out all over Siem Reap and other provinces, so they did not know many of them. They also mentioned that they had never had such a chance to get to know other Khmer Krom people which made them feel somewhat disconnected to their roots. However, both of them said that they came from Khmer Krom families that have continually held onto their unique identities even after migrating to Cambodia and providing a sense of community rooted in ancient southern Khmer traditions. In the FLD process, they connected to women from other minority communities quite different from their own. Nevertheless, they felt that they shared many common themes with them and that it helped them to see their own identity as a minority community in Cambodia.

The Findings

Initial findings of FLD were analysed by the Listeners themselves based on the data they collected and the themes they heard the most during their fieldwork. Through a process of early analysis, the following findings emerged among the conversations had between Listeners and Sharers.

Khmer Krom women **Emerging themes**

- 1.** We are misunderstood by others about our identity and background, causing us many complicated problems and issues in Cambodia.
- 2.** Despite having the right, getting or renewing a Cambodian National ID still continues to be a problem.
- 3.** We want to be proud of our identity and have a stronger community among Khmer Krom people in Cambodia, especially for women.

We are Khmer!

Finding 1 - We are misunderstood by others about our identity and background, causing us many complicated problems and issues in Cambodia.

Some people here discriminate against Khmer Krom, even though we are also Khmer, but they assume we are Vietnamese. I want to live in Cambodia with the same rights and freedoms as other Khmer here.

- A 40-year-old Khmer Krom food seller in Siem Reap province

“Khmer Krom” refers to people who come from today’s southern Vietnam area in the Mekong Delta. Historically, the area was part of the greater Khmer Empire. With borders changing over time, the Khmer population in southern Vietnam eventually became Vietnamese nationals and formed a minority group. Many migrated into Cambodia over the last century where they are supposed to be welcomed as Khmer and integrated into the national scope. The reality is, however, that they are often mistaken for being Vietnamese by the general public. Given mainstream discrimination against Vietnamese, they can face similar obstacles that Vietnamese in Cambodia experience.

Nearly all Sharers in the study discussed being seen as Vietnamese in everyday life by other Cambodian Khmer residents. Particularly those working in public, such as in markets or selling food, had many stories of being insulted or facing discrimination by Khmer. Many shared stories of being called “yuon,” a derogatory term for Vietnamese, or being questioned why they were living in Cam-

bodia. Some were even told they should return to Vietnam. Food sellers or those who sold items in markets or on the street also shared that some customers would refuse to buy from them because they assumed they were Vietnamese. Some even said that the police and local authorities discriminated against them, insinuating they were in Cambodia illegally or even refusing to provide identification cards because they believed they were immigrants.

A few Sharers also said that even for those in the general public who understood they were Khmer Krom still had negative perceptions about them. One woman told Listeners that when applying for a job, after finding out she was Khmer Krom on her resume, they refused to interview her. Another said that when revealing her Khmer Krom identity, she tended to have less support from others in getting housing or buying land.



“When I sell groceries, they say we are Vietnamese and won’t buy from us. I’ve told them over a dozen times that I’m Khmer Krom!”

- A 41-year-old food seller in Siem Reap who moved to Cambodia 20 years ago

ID matters

Finding 2 - Despite having the right, getting or renewing a Cambodian National ID still continues to be a problem.

For other documents, like ID cards, they won't renew them for us as Khmer Krom even though I've been here for a long time.

- A 50-year-old housewife who rents a house in
Siem Reap

In Cambodian law, Khmer Krom who migrate from Vietnam are entitled to Cambodian citizenship. In practice, however, Khmer Krom residents are often not granted identification documents at the local level. When applying for ID, some are presumed to be Vietnamese rather than having the ethnic Khmer background which would provide them with the right to Khmer naturalisation. This gap in law to practice often puts Khmer Krom migrants and their children in a precarious situation pertaining to their legal identity in Cambodia and hence their access to services and provisions offered to citizens of the state.

The majority of Sharers said that they were unable to apply for ID cards or could not renew their existing IDs from the past. Many of the Khmer Krom women said that they had no idea how to get an ID card from their local authorities. Some shared stories of applying but being rejected because of their Khmer Krom identity or being mistaken for being Vietnamese. One woman went through the process and when they were ready to take her photo, noticed she was Khmer Krom and then refused to continue to issue her ID. For those

who were successful in getting an ID card, some said that they had to change their address on the application in spite of having only Vietnamese ID that had their former address in Vietnam before migrating. Some even had to change their names when they applied since their legal names were often Vietnamese-sounding and on their original IDs. It was noted that in 2007 there was a process to normalise ID card procedures for Khmer Krom but that by 2017, local authorities were refusing to issue cards to them.

The impact for women and families without national ID cards was often felt in their everyday lives. Some expressed feeling like perpetual immigrants without any clear status in Cambodia. They talked about the difficulty in getting work or starting a job when asked for ID. Some said it was impossible to leave the country because they were unable to obtain a passport without proving they were in fact Cambodian citizens. Many also stated that they only were able to rent properties, likely because only those with clear proof of citizenship can own land in the country.



*“I want the
government to
issue ID cards
for Khmer Krom
again like
before.”*

- A 23-year-old Khmer Krom woman who moved to Cambodia
when she was three years old

Pride

Finding 3 - We want to be proud of our identity and have a stronger community among Khmer Krom people in Cambodia, especially for women.

*I'm proud of my identity and
I won't be ashamed of being
Khmer Krom.*

- A 40-year-old food seller who migrated to Cambodia when she was 18 years old

In spite of the complex situation for Khmer Krom identity in Cambodia, there is a long history of pride among Khmer Krom people both living in Vietnam and Cambodia. Living as a minority group in Vietnam, the Khmer Krom there continue practising longstanding Khmer traditions, speak and write Khmer language, and follow traditional Theravada Buddhist customs that make up the core of Khmer society everywhere. Coming to Cambodia, where Khmer Krom are sometimes misunderstood by the mainstream and tend to hide their identity, they often continue to feel pride for their background.

All Sharers expressed immense pride in being Khmer Krom to the Listeners. They felt proud to be Buddhists and to hold onto ancient traditions of the Khmer people. There was a great desire among

Sharers for others in Cambodia to recognise them as Khmer Krom, as part of the same people, but with the unique characteristic of being southern Khmer. Older Sharers felt more comfortable revealing their identity than younger ones. Some wanted to be more publicly open about being Khmer Krom in order for the Khmer mainstream to better understand where they came from and how they were all connected.

Several of the women discussed their desire to build a stronger Khmer Krom community in Cambodia where they could count on each other and find connection through shared experience. Some mentioned wanting to learn the Khmer language more fluently and creating Khmer Krom women groups to build more unity in the community.



*“I want Khmer
Krom people
to be united,
especially
women to be
able to gather
and share.”*

- A 33-year-old Khmer Krom woman born in Cambodia



This initiative would not be possible without the generous support of Voice.



Cambodia is a diverse country and home to many ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities. Each one of them faces various challenges living with their minority identity in mainstream Cambodian society. This study engaged with 30 women from three minority groups across the country including Cham Muslims, ethnic Vietnamese, and Khmer Krom who shared their stories, challenges, hopes, and dreams. It was led directly by minority women from their respective communities who came together to conduct Facilitative Listening Design (FLD), a grassroots approach to better learn about people's thoughts, opinions, and stories while leveraging the inquiry process to come together and build connections.

The findings draw attention to the challenges of minority women. Each community is unique but also shares connections to other minority groups in their experiences and daily lives. This study highlights challenges for women in three communities, but also brings women together across minority groups to support each other and foster a stronger collective voice. It also paves the way for doubly marginalised women to work together to advocate for change while continuing to focus on their own group's specific issues and holding on to their unique identity – an essential component of the diverse Cambodian woman of today.



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