

**Overseas Fieldwork Report 2024:**

## **Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia**



**Graduate School of International Development  
Nagoya University**

**Overseas Fieldwork Report 2024**

**Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia**

**March 2025**

**Graduate School of International Development**

**Nagoya University**

**Nagoya, Japan**

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Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia  
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## Acknowledgments

The OFW 2024 committee wishes to extend our sincere appreciation to the individuals and institutions who have generously supported and contributed to the success of this year's program. First and foremost, we express our heartfelt gratitude to the people of the Kampong Cham Province for their warm welcome and hospitality. We are incredibly grateful to the local authorities, including the representatives and other officials of the provincial government, for their generous assistance and cooperation during our field research. Our special thanks to the people in villages in Soupheas Commune and members of Sambo Mienchey Agricultural Cooperative (AC) who provided us with exceptional support and precious information during interviews. We also would like to express our sincere gratitude to all other people who kindly cooperated with our research and warmly encouraged us during our stay in Kampong Cham. We could not have accomplished the field research without their kind support.

Next, our appreciation goes to the Faculty of Development Studies (FDS), Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), for co-organizing this program. Our special thanks go to Prof. Kimseng Choeun (co-chair of OFW 2024), Prof. Chhinh Nyda, and Prof. Dork Vuthy, for their generous guidance and mentorship to the student before, during, and after the field research. Participants of OFW 2024 also received tremendous support and assistance from Mr. Phat Chandara, Ms. Met Joury, and Mr. Eom Nakhem as research assistants. We must acknowledge the names of Prof. Chet Chealy (Chancellor of RUPP) and Prof. Rath Sethik (Dean of FDS) for their invaluable support and encouragement for this program.

We must also acknowledge all the experts who have provided valuable lectures and guidance to our participants during the preparatory seminars and field research. We extend our wholehearted gratitude to Prof. Heng Naret, RUPP, for sharing their personal experiences and providing valuable insights for our fieldwork. We would also like to thank our dedicated teaching assistants, Hun Seyhakunthy and Gladys Bongapat, for their dedication and active engagement in this learning experience. We thank Dr. Thomas Kabara for the English editing of this volume.

Takeshi HIGASHIMURA

Professor

Chair of OFW 2024 Committee

Graduate School of International Development

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## Introduction

The thirty-first Overseas Fieldwork (OFW 2024) of the Graduate School of International Development (GSID), Nagoya University, was conducted in the Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia, from September 15 to 29, 2024. Each year, GSID carries out OFW in a developing country in Asia in cooperation with a local partner university of GSID. In Cambodia, GSID had conducted nine successful OFWs since 2005. This year, which is the tenth OFW in Cambodia, GSID collaborated with the Faculty of Development Studies, Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), to implement the OFW. Building on the long-standing partnership between the two universities, the OFW 2024 provided an opportunity to strengthen further GSID's ties for academic exchange and collaboration with RUPP.

The OFW 2024 program covered three central pillars of the GSID curriculum relating to development: agriculture, education, and governance. The agriculture working group investigated the role of Sambo Mienchey AC in agricultural development and gender mainstreaming in Soupheas Commune, and the importance of involving women in the agricultural sector and AC management. The education working group examined the reasons for students' continuation in lower secondary school and its gender difference. Finally, the governance working group analysed the factors which had influenced the increase of membership in Sambo Mienchey AC. The students conducted their research in the villages in Soupheas Commune, Steung Trang District, Kampong Cham Province, and tried to understand the uniqueness and developmental challenges of the field site from different perspectives. During the weekend, we also visited Pagoda and Bamboo Resort to enjoy the wonderful culture and scenery of Kampong Cham.

On September 27th, the students presented their preliminary research findings at LBN Asian Hotel hall at Kampong Cham to local authorities and resource persons, who provided feedback and suggestions for further improvement. A second preliminary presentation was given at RUPP on September 28th, and a final revised version of the results was given at GSID on October 30th. The invaluable advice and suggestions received from FDS and GSID faculties and students were subsequently integrated by the three working groups into producing this final report. All participants involved in OFW 2024 sincerely hope the results of the three research projects will be of use to our friends and collaborators in Kampong Cham Province.

The OFW 2024 program was a significant milestone for GSID's relationship with RUPP. We at GSID are continuously grateful for the exceptional relationship we enjoy with our partners in Cambodia and look forward to many fruitful years of cooperation to come. On behalf of the students, faculty, and staff of GSID, I reiterate our gratitude to all the people who made OFW 2024 possible and enriched the lives and professional growth of the participants.

Takeshi HIGASHIMURA

Professor

Chair of OFW 2024 Committee

Graduate School of International Development

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## List of Participants

### Advisors from GSID and RUPP (7)

Working Group	GSID, Nagoya University	Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)
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	Rahmatu Mustapha GONI	Nigeria

\*group leader

## Program of OFW 2024

### Preparatory Seminar at GSID

Date	Time	Title of the Lecture	Lecturer(s)
Apr. 17 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Introduction & Team-building	OFW Committee
Apr. 24 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Cambodia 1: Cambodian Education & Educational Development	Prof. Nyda CHHINH (RUPP)
May. 8 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Introduction to Cambodia and the Research Site	Prof. Kimseng CHOEUN (RUPP)
May. 15 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Cambodia 2: Cambodian Society and Culture	Prof. Vuthy DORK (RUPP)
May. 22 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Cambodia 3: Cambodian Agricultural Cooperative and Development	Prof. Naret HENG (RUPP)
May 29 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Cambodia 4: Cambodia Political System and governance	Prof. Chandara PHAT (RUPP)
Jun. 5 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Group presentation to share research interests	OFW Committee
Jun. 12 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Introduction to Fieldwork: Fieldwork Technique, Etiquette, and Research Ethics	Prof. Takeshi HIGASHIMURA (Nagoya University)
	16:30-18:00	Research Methods 1: Quantitative Data Analysis	Prof. Yuji UTSUMI (Nagoya University)
Jun. 26 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Research Methods 2 & 3: Qualitative Data Analysis, Interpretation of Data and Report Writing	Professors Yuji UTSUMI, Isamu OKADA, Francis PEDDIE, Akemi ASHIDA, Natsuki KONDO (Nagoya University)
	16:30-18:00		
Jul. 3 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Group Discussion	OFW Committee
Jul. 10 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Group Presentation to Share Research Proposal	Natsuki KONDO (Nagoya University)
Jul. 17 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Group Presentation to Share Research Proposal	OFW Committee
Jul. 24 (Wed)	14:45-16:15	Khmer Language Class	OFW Committee & TAs

## Schedule of Fieldwork in Cambodia

Date	Schedule
Sept. 15 (Sun)	Meet at Chubu International Airport
	NAGOYA (11:00) ⇒ BANGKOK (15:40)
Sept. 16 (Mon)	BANGKOK (18:25) ⇒ PHNOM PENH (19:35)
	Hotel Check -in
Sept. 17 (Tue)	Meet with RUPP advisors and assistants
	Move from Phnom Penh to Kampong Cham
	Visit to the Municipality of Kampong Cham
	Group work (Planning of fieldwork schedule, check research instrument, etc)
Sept. 18 (Wed)	Group work (data collection)
Sept. 19 (Thu)	Group work (data collection)
Sept. 20 (Fri)	Group work (data collection)
Sept. 21 (Sat)	Free time / Group work/ Sightseeing within Kampong Cham
Sept. 22 (Sun)	Free time
Sept. 23 (Mon)	Group work (data collection)
Sept. 24 (Tue)b	Group work (data collection)
Sept. 25 (Wed)	Preparation for preliminary research results presentation
Sept. 26 (Thu)	Preparation for preliminary research results presentation
Sept. 27 (Fri)	Presentation of preliminary findings for local stakeholders & Lunch with local stakeholders
	Move from Kampong Cham to Phnom Penh
Sept. 28 (Sat)	Presentation of preliminary findings at RUPP
	Free time & Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum
	PHNOM PENH (20:55) ⇒ BANGKOK (22:40)
Sept. 29 (Sun)	BANGKOK (00:05) ⇒ NAGOYA (07:30)

## Interim Presentations of Research Findings

The first interim presentation of research findings was held at the conference room of LBN Asian Hotel, Kampong Cham on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Each working group had 40 minutes for presentation including translation, 10 minutes for Q&A. The second interim presentation of research findings was held in RUPP on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Each working group 25 minutes for presentation, 15 minutes for Q&A.

## Presentation of Research Findings at GSID

The presentation of research findings was held at GSID by each working group to disseminate findings and collect feedback from colleagues on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

# Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia

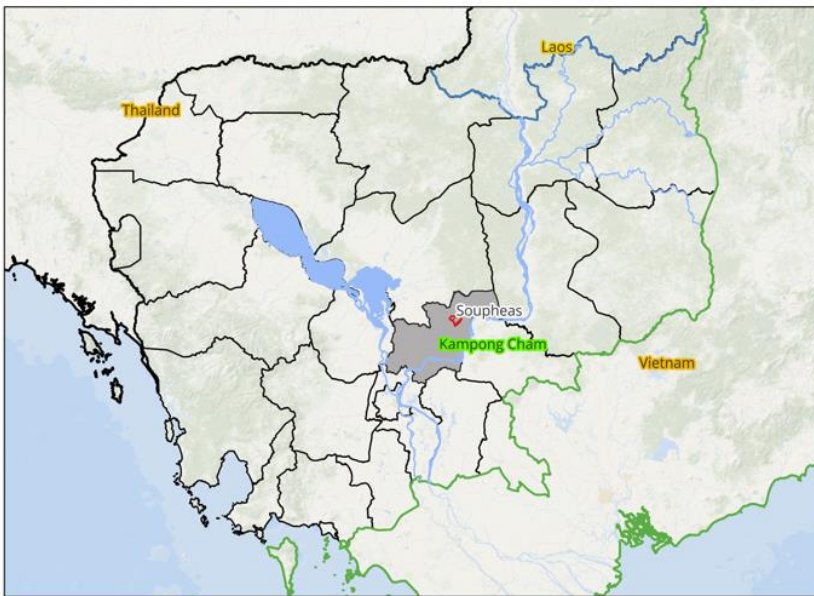
Kimseng CHOEUN

Faculty of Development Studies (FDS), Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)

Kampong Cham is one of Cambodia's central provinces, located in the heart of the country along the Mekong River. Kampong Cham means “Port of the Chams in Khmer”. Kampong means port, while Cham is a reference to the ethnic Cham people living in the Cambodian province. The capital of Kampong Cham city is located about 124 kilometers away from Phnom Penh. The province is characterized by its rich river systems, flooded fertile land, which contributes to its accessibility and strategic importance for economic and social development.

Kampong Cham spans an area of approximately about 4549 square kilometers, divided into 9 districts and 01 cities, 109 communes and 916 villages, with the amount of population around 899,791 people with 468,464 people were females in 2024. The vast majority of Kampong Cham’s population is of Khmer ethnicity, comprising approximately 96% of the population. The Cham people, who are ethnically Malay and predominantly Muslim, represent a significant minority in the province. They are the largest Muslim group in Cambodia, and many Cham people in Kampong Cham live in rural areas along the Mekong River.

## Economic Overview of Kampong Cham Province



Kampong Cham province’s economy grew by 8.6 percent to reach \$2.65 billion driven primarily by the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors in (2024) with the total economic volume of 7, 392, 738 million Riels, approximately US\$1.8 billion, which is equivalent to 6.7% of the total national economy. Kampong Cham is a province with rich agricultural potential, a growing economics,

primarily agricultural, with additional contributions from manufacturing and services, particularly in urban areas. There are total of 463 enterprises and factories in Kampong Cham province in 2024, which employed a total of 44,635 workers, including 34,360 were women.

Agriculture is the backbone of Kampong Cham's economy, with rice cultivation being the dominant activities. The province also grows crops like cashew nut, cassava, maize, and rubber, durian, banana, mango contributing to the national economy. Although the province is primarily agricultural, small and medium-sized industries, including rice milling, food processing, and garment manufacturing, have seen growth. These industries support the local economy by providing employment and creating value-added products.

## Education in Kompong Cham Province

Kampong Cham faces challenges like many other rural areas in Cambodia, there are also significant opportunities for growth in the education sector and in (2022) the province has totally about 820 school with total enrolment about 223,361 students, which 118,213 were females, and there is the total amount of about 5,840 teachers, which 3,411 were females. However, recent improvements in the education sector have helped increase enrolment rates and overall literacy levels. The literacy rate in Kampong Cham is improving, but disparities still exist between urban and rural populations. While urban schools are generally well-equipped, rural areas continue to face challenges, such as lack of infrastructure, limited educational materials, and shortages of qualified teachers. Kampong Cham has some universities and vocational institutions, such as the University of Kampong Cham, which provides higher education and technical training to meet the growing demand for skilled labour. However, there remains a need for more investment in vocational and skills development programs to address employment gaps in various sectors.



## Agriculture in Kampong Cham Province

Agriculture remains the cornerstone of Kampong Cham's economy. The province benefits from fertile soils, a tropical climate, and the Mekong River, which provides irrigation for crops. The agricultural sector contributed 41.1% of the provincial economy, increasing from 3.6% to 4% in (2021). In (2022) the service sector contributed about 37.7%, which decreased by 5.9%, while the



industrial sector contributed 21.2%, increasing 11.3% year to year. The total agricultural land area is about 368,375 hectares, including 227,600 hectares is for rice paddy (Dry + Wet) with the proportion of production about 69,399 tons, 112,277 hectares is for subsidiary and industrial crops, 28,498 hectares is for fruit and permanent crops, 13,565 is for hectares for rubber plantation area(ELC), with the proportion of production about 94,955 tons in year (2023). Irrigation systems are critical to the productivity of rice fields, especially during the dry season. However, inconsistent rainfall and outdated farming techniques have led to lower-than-expected yields in some areas. Over the last few decades, rubber cultivation has become increasingly important in Kampong Cham's agricultural landscape. In addition to rice and rubber, the province produces, durian, banana, mango, cashew nut, cassava, maize, sugarcane, and vegetables which are essential for local consumption and the national economy. Livestock farming, such as raising cattle and poultry, also plays a role in rural livelihoods. Like many other regions in Cambodia, Kampong Cham faces challenges from climate change, including flooding, drought, and changing weather patterns. There is a growing focus on sustainable farming practices, including the use of organic fertilizers, net house, drought-resistant crops, and improved irrigation systems to mitigate the effects of climate change.

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## **Agriculture**

### **Role of Sambo Mienchey Agricultural Cooperative (AC) in Agricultural Development and Gender Mainstreaming in Soupheas Commune, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia**

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## 1. Introduction

Agriculture is a vital industry for Cambodia and plays a crucial role in economic development and rural livelihoods. According to the Cambodia Agriculture Survey, agriculture contributed to approximately 22.6% of Cambodia's GDP in 2020. The agricultural sector provides employment for 37% of the workforce, with 57% of Cambodian households engaged in agricultural production. The cultivation of crops such as rice, rubber, and cashew nuts keep developing. One of Cambodia's unique crops, lemongrass, has an important place in local cuisine, contributing to a significant economic value and export potential. Especially in Kampong Cham Province, where they are rich in agricultural resources such as fertile land, groundwater, and animal labor (USAID, 2008), agribusinesses, such as lemongrass oil production, play a large role in the economy.

However, agriculture in Cambodia is also facing various challenges, such as poor infrastructure, low technological levels, difficulties in market access, and environmental changes. To cope with these problems, the Cambodian government and many international organizations are actively cooperating and trying to find solutions. These efforts include promoting the modernization of agriculture, upgrading technology, improving infrastructure, and enhancing the skills and knowledge of farmers through education and training (Heylen et al., 2020; Men et al., 2024). These efforts aim to enhance the agricultural economic performance in Cambodia, contributing to the country's economic development and improving farmers' living standards.

Furthermore, the presence of women must be highlighted, especially in Cambodian agriculture, in the topic of economic development and living standards. What is unique about the Cambodian agricultural is that many women are employed in this sector compared to other sectors. In 2016, 39.3 percent of the female population is engaged in agriculture, while only 33.7 percent of the male population did (Leapheng, 2018). The balance between male and female workers in the agricultural sector is relatively equal in Cambodia. That is why it is crucial to introduce the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, into Cambodia's agriculture cooperatives to promote inclusive and sustainable agricultural growth.

SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. According to the United Nations, huge differences still exist between men and women in all aspects of life, such as education, career development, household care, political participation, legal rights, and health. The pervasive gender inequalities faced by women in the agricultural sector may be a result of entrenched social norms in some countries, especially where norms are strong. These norms often decide gender roles and limit women's access to resources, education, and decision-making power, thereby reinforcing systemic barriers to gender equality, which are perpetuated by deep-rooted cultural beliefs that prioritize men as the primary decision-makers and landowners.

An agricultural cooperative (AC) is an organization of men and women who voluntarily assemble to meet economic and social goals through agriculture. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), cooperatives play significant roles in reducing poverty and improving food security and employment (2012). FAO emphasizes that although an AC is an organization aiming to create economic profit, it also oversees the community's development goals. The development goals include supporting small-scale producers, rural development, and empowering youth and women. ACs are created in many parts of the world, including developed and developing nations.

Most ACs are created under a similar objective and are prone to face similar obstacles. As for ACs in Japan,

the traditional gender norms of Japan are still observed in many cooperatives, pushing women away from participating in activities and services (Kurimoto, 2004). On the other hand, America is unique in terms of having diverse races within a country. Sengupta finds that females in racial minorities face difficulties in AC decision-making and are often underrepresented (2015). However, Sengupta finds that there are cases of minority races creating ACs for themselves. According to a survey done in the Philippines, members of ACs were not gender-responsive, meaning that ACs had not yet implemented measures to address gender equality and female empowerment (Esguerra et al., 2023). The research highlights that household chores were the main barriers for women to participate in AC, making them inactive in the gender and development committee. Ethiopian women are underrepresented in ACs, despite their enormous contribution to the agricultural sector (Woldu et al., 2013). The authors suggest that women represent only 20% of AC members, and men dominate the management and decision-making positions.

To address these issues, it is very important to understand the roles women take in agriculture cooperatives, as well as their motivation and challenges. Accordingly, this research explores the perspectives of women participating and not participating in AC. Furthermore, considering that participation in AC can be divided into involvement as workers and as members, our research also aims to understand the motivations and challenges of female AC members. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the difficulties and opportunities women in Cambodia's agricultural sector encounter. Understanding the views on women's contributions and the perceived barriers they face can provide valuable context for developing targeted interventions. Additionally, this research tries to identify the specific areas where women need support, such as access to credit, training, and leadership opportunities, to enhance their active participation and decision-making in agricultural activities.

## **2. Literature Review**

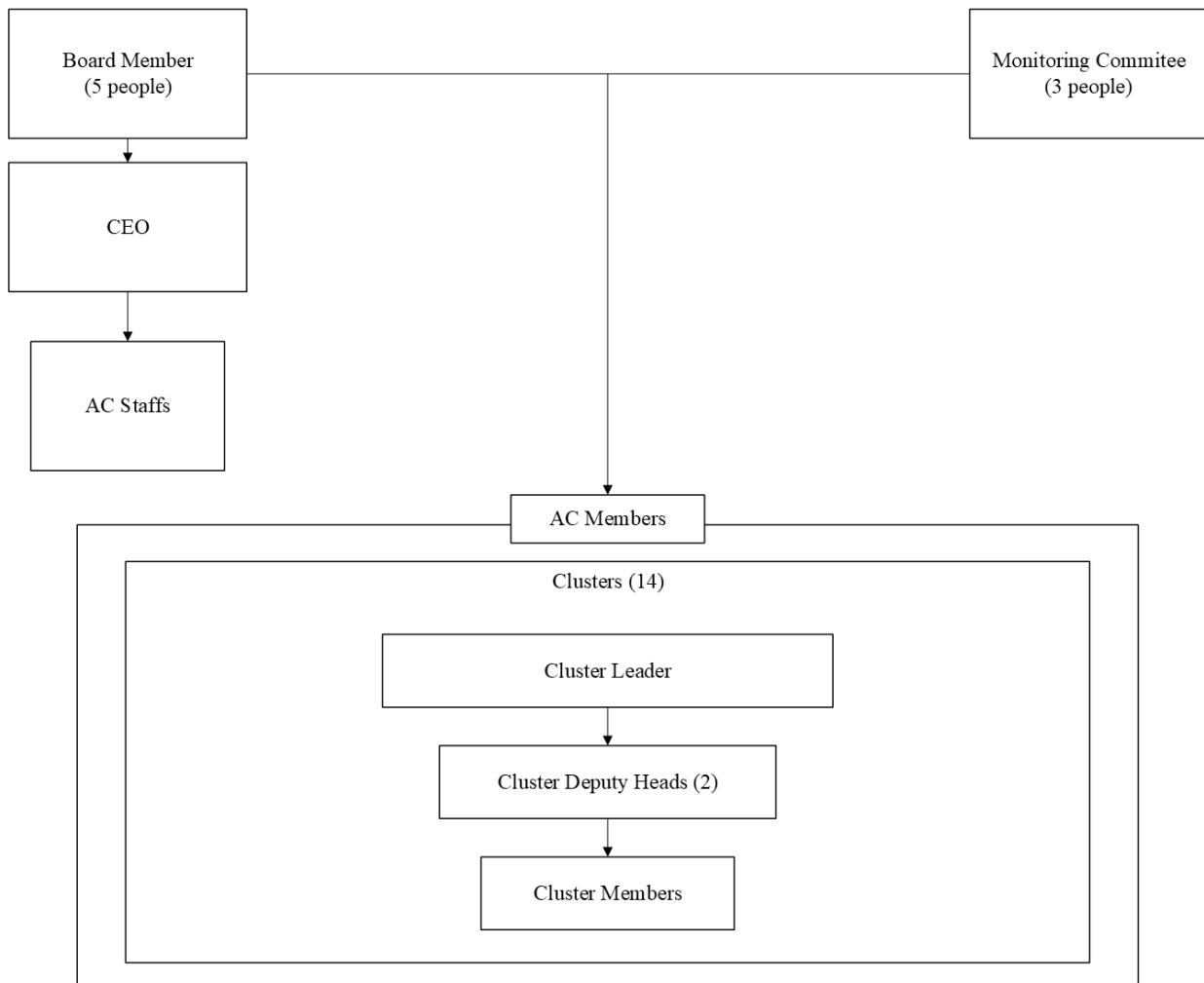
### ***2.1 Overview of Agricultural Cooperative in Cambodia***

AC plays a significant role in Cambodia's agriculture. Syden & Lee (2016) define agriculture as a private organization that aims to provide support to the community in terms of agricultural techniques and marketing and works as a bridge between the community and the government and development partners. The Sambo Meanchey AC, established in December 2010, is one of the successful ACs in the Kampong Cham Province. It is one of the two ACs located in the Steung Trang District. As of 2024, it has 2,330 registered households and focuses on lemongrass and rice markets. In addition, it provides services such as microcredit, school feeding programs, and fertilizer supply. Sambo Meanchey AC's featured product is lemongrass oil, which works as a bug repellent and itch reliever.

The structure of AC is decided by Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery as in Figure 1. There are five board members, three members of the monitoring committee, one CEO, AC staff, and approximately 500 members. Board members and monitoring committees are open to everyone and are selected through voting every five years. Board members generally manage the operation of AC, such as creating annual goals, researching the market, and double-checking the documents. Monitoring committees look over the financial decisions and budgets of AC. The CEO is chosen by the board members every five years, and CEO controls and makes financial and development decisions for AC, which is monitored by both

the board members and the monitoring committee. In 2020, the first female CEO was chosen. The CEO and the staff are the only ones who receive a salary. There are fourteen staff members, including six general workers, three drivers, two staff controllers, two lemongrass oil producers, and a farm guard. They work under the guidance of the board members and the CEO.

**Figure 1: Structure of AC**



Created by the authors based on interviews

AC members are divided into fourteen clusters or groups for easier management. Each cluster contains about one to two hundred members, which are managed by one cluster leader and 2 deputy heads. It is chosen from the volunteers. Out of the 3, at least one of them has to be female. Clusters are divided by the area, not the crop they produce.

## **2.2 Women in Agriculture and ACs**

In Cambodia, women play a significant role in agriculture. The demographic profile given by the Royal University of Phnom Penh shows that, for all agricultural households, the proportion of female household members was 51 percent, compared to 49 percent for male household members, indicating higher participation

of women within the agriculture sector. Women are heavily involved in cultivating and producing crops, where they handle tasks such as planting, weeding, fertilizing, and harvesting (Verma, 2023). In addition to their contribution to farm work, they are responsible for buying and preparing food for the family and borrowing money for food purchases, which contributes to a virtuous cycle in the agricultural economy (Gironde et al., 2022).

Despite their critical contributions to the agriculture sector, women face challenges in the agriculture sector. The first problem is whether they can access positions of responsibility. In ACs of Cambodia, the proportion of female members is as high as 60%, but accounts for only 34% of membership on boards of directors (ADB, 2018). Women are facing obstacles in acquiring and continuing leadership roles within agriculture cooperatives, such as time constraints from domestic work, limited education, and lack of proper compensation (Hout et al., 2023). Given the high involvement of women in Cambodia's agricultural sector alongside their limited access to resources and leadership opportunities, it is particularly crucial to study the issues surrounding women's participation in agriculture cooperatives. An analysis of 26 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America called GENNOVATE claims that local gender norms highly influence policy, markets, and institutions (Badstue et al., 2020). Badstue et al. further discuss that gender norms influence gender inequality and agricultural livelihoods in many rural agricultural areas (2020). Another study in Guatemala claims that women struggle from low empowerment which are coming from the stereotypes in gender norms (Hernandez et al., 2023).

Despite the challenges they face, women who contribute to agriculture leave positive marks in agriculture cooperatives. Especially in the Sambo Meanchey AC, many women participate as members and workers to support the industry and the community's growth. Moreover, Huot (2020) finds that there are women working as the board members of AC in Siem Reap and Battambang Provinces in Cambodia. Also, women's contributions to agriculture are supported by ACs. ACs support female participants to have better access to resources, markets, and information in many agricultural focused areas inside and outside of Cambodia (Chebet, 2023). Women are gaining experience and contributing through ACs and learning and achieving equality with men through ACs.

### ***2.3 Social Norms and Gender Inequality***

Along with the other countries in the world, Cambodia remains one of the countries that struggles with gender equality. In Soupheas Commune, out of 2,727 households, only 12.57% of the households are led by a female head. It is well mentioned in their Commune Development Plan that the improvement of gender equality is a key pushing factor to commune development. Female empowerment and gender mainstreaming are essential in achieving sustainable development goals and reaching “good governance.” Therefore, the Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (PD AFF) has started to highlight and disseminate information on gender mainstreaming since 2007. Since then, the PD AFF has provided gender training through AC.

Despite the efforts of the government, women in agriculture face multiple challenges that come from gender inequalities and social norms. Gender inequality still has a large influence in the rural areas of Cambodia. Leapheng (2018) highlights that women have difficulties accessing agricultural resources and services, such

as land ownership and its control. Land ownership and control are crucial, for they create power. In other words, women in the agricultural sector are often employed by men, not the other way. Gender inequality is often discussed that it comes from the education gap, as Huot et al. (2020) emphasize that gender equality in agriculture could be achieved by equal education opportunities and appropriate compensation for leadership roles.

The division of household chores is one example of social norms. Men go out to work to earn income and are responsible as household heads, while women stay at home to take care of the children and cook for the family (Arimitsu, 2023). Therefore, the time poverty of women is crucial, and it is difficult for women to work the same hours as men (Huot, 2020). Although Komatsu et al. (2018) points out that Cambodian households often live with multiple generations and household burdens are distributed within the generations, the family may still be highly dependent on the mother. Arimitsu et al. (2023) examines the male and female roles in the agricultural sector in Kampong Cham Province. Male interviewees were in charge of physical labor that required strong strength, such as plowing and harvesting on the farm. On the other hand, female interviewees work in a broad field, from preparing fertilizers, collecting weeds around the farm, and selling the crops in the market. Even for women in the labor force, gender roles strictly divide the tasks between men and women. Another example of social norms is domestic violence. According to the report by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, over 30% of females in Cambodia have experienced domestic violence from their partner, and the number is relatively the same across the country (UNFPA, 2016). Soupheas Commune had 19 cases of domestic violence in 2023, though this is not high compared to the other regions.

In addition, past literature examines how men view women's agricultural participation in different countries. In Pakistan, male workers believe that women are less strong and less efficient than themselves (Kausar et al., 2022). This is similar to the situation in Northwest Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2020). This is because social norms play a large role in gender equality, especially in the rural areas of Bangladesh. Despite the women's contribution to agriculture, men felt uncomfortable admitting their large contribution. Although there is little research examining men's perspective of women's participation in Cambodia, because social norms are still strong in Cambodia, women might be undervalued by the society in Cambodia as well. These social norms could be one of the driving sources of gender inequality in Cambodia.

## ***2.4 Gender Mainstreaming***

Gender mainstreaming is a critical strategy for achieving gender equality, especially in agricultural-intensive communities. It influences productivity, decision-making, and community development. In the context of Cambodia, where women largely participate in the agricultural sector, gender mainstreaming can be effective in many aspects.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has proposed a gender results effectiveness scale, which works as a framework for gender mainstreaming (2015). According to UNDP, the evaluation of gender mainstreaming can be divided into 5 stages: gender negative, gender blind, gender-targeted, gender-responsive, and gender transformative. Gender negative is when gender mainstreaming is not progressing at all or is progressing towards gender inequality. Gender blind is when the community does not acknowledge the importance of men and women equally. Gender targeted refers to when a community starts to acknowledge the



presence of women. The community starts to count how many women are involved or participating in certain events or programs. The majority of countries are in this stage. Gender responsiveness is the stage where a community addresses the needs of gender equality; however, it does not notice the root cause of it, such as social norms. Lastly, gender transformative is when the community has changed the systems, institutions, and community to achieve gender equality. UNDP supports communities in improving resource access and opportunities. However, this does not have a large impact on changing social norms and the way people think, which is necessary for the gender transformative stage. UNDP emphasizes that although top-down gender mainstreaming is effective in the earlier stages, down-top gender mainstreaming, meaning empowerment and involvement of women in gender mainstreaming are necessary.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) adopted UNDP's scale and upgrades (2019). The gender continuum proposed by UNICEF, has five stages: gender discriminatory, gender blind, gender-aware/sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender transformative. Gender blind, gender-responsive, and gender transformative share a similar understanding to the UNDP framework, however, unlike UNDP, UNICEF specifically aims to contribute at a gender-responsive and gender-transformative stage, which was difficult for UNDP to achieve. UNICEF focuses on how children, boys and girls understand gender mainstreaming and seek to change social norms and ideas of younger people.

In conclusion, it is widely believed that gender mainstreaming is the key pushing factor of development. Therefore, many governments try to distribute information about gender equality or set gender goals as one of the development goals. However, it is difficult to monitor at a local level, and little research has been done. Whether the significance of gender mainstreaming is recognized in one of the most rural parts of the country, how the information is distributed, and what impact the gender mainstreaming changes have in remote areas, are unknown.

In addition, women in agriculture face challenges such as household burden, time poverty, and gender norms. Gender norms are one of the biggest challenges for women in many countries, especially because women are seen as the ones who stay in the household to support the family. Women's family chores may consume so much time that even women with the appropriate skills and knowledge cannot pursue their careers. Moreover, even women in the labor force are seen as weaker, less reliable beings. It is essential to acknowledge the importance of gender mainstreaming and provide support according to the stage the community is in. This research aims to clarify what stage of gender mainstreaming Sambo Meanchey is in and see if the women in AC are facing the same challenges, how they overcome them, and where their motivation comes from.

### **3. Research Gap**

Research on women's motivation for participating in different agricultural activities and ACs in Cambodia is limited, and research on Soupheas Commune in Kampong Cham Province is especially scant. To fill this gap, this research aims to identify the motivation women in the commune have for participating in AC, the roles they play, and the challenges they face. Moreover, with gender equality improving in Cambodia, this research examines the timeline of how gender roles have changed and what role ACs have played in gender mainstreaming.

Previous literature suggests that ACs worldwide face limitations in terms of gender mainstreaming.

However, Sambo Meanchey AC has been successful. There were many female workers in AC and a female CEO. This research emphasizes the important role and contribution of women in AC, the agriculture sector, and the community as well as the role of AC in driving the changes of female presence in these parts.

#### **4. Research Question**

1. How has AC contributed to agricultural development within the commune?
2. In what ways has AC contributed to gender mainstreaming in the commune?
3. How has the enhancement of gender mainstreaming contributed to the agricultural sector and AC?
4. What are the motivations for women participating in AC, and what barriers do they encounter?
5. What are the key limitations of AC?

#### **5. Methodology**

##### ***5.1 Research Design and Locale***

This case study was conducted in Sambo Meanchey AC in Soupheas Commune in Steung Trang, District, Kampong Cham Province of Cambodia.

##### ***5.2 Research Method***

A semi-structured interview has been conducted to gather the necessary data. Attached in the appendix is a copy of the study questionnaire, which served as a guide during the interview.

##### ***5.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size***

A purposive sampling was conducted by selecting specific target participants based on the sample group listed in the Table 1 below.

**Table 1: List of Interviewees**

<b>ID No.</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>
1	AC Member	Female	Over 51
2	AC Member	Female	42
3	AC CEO	Female	25
4	AC Board Member	Male	41-50
5	AC Board Member	Female	37
6	AC Head/ Governor of the Board of Members	Male	43
7	AC Marketing Staff	Female	31
8	AC Monitoring Committee Member	Female	41-50
9	PDAFF Head	Male	-
10	PDAFF Staff	Female	-
11	Commune Leader	Male	-
12	Non-AC Member	Female	28
13	AC Member	Male	41-50
14	AC Cluster Leader	Male	49
15	AC Cluster Leader	Male	49
16	Non-AC Member	Female	38
17	Non-AC Member	Female	42
18	AC Member	Female	33
19	AC Member	Male	47

Created by the authors

In total, we interviewed 19 respondents. These comprise two government officials from PDAFF, the leader of Soupheas Commune, three board members of AC, one monitoring committee member, the female CEO of AC, two cluster leaders, one AC staff, five regular AC members, and three non-AC members. To ensure the comprehensiveness of the data, we purposely chose different groups of people at all levels related to AC as our interviewees.

#### **5.4 Target Participants**

The specific target participants of the research were:

1. Men and women who work in AC as staff;
2. Men and women who are members of AC and participate in AC activities but not as staff (i.e., voting, attending meetings); and

3. Men and women in the agricultural sector but not participating in AC.

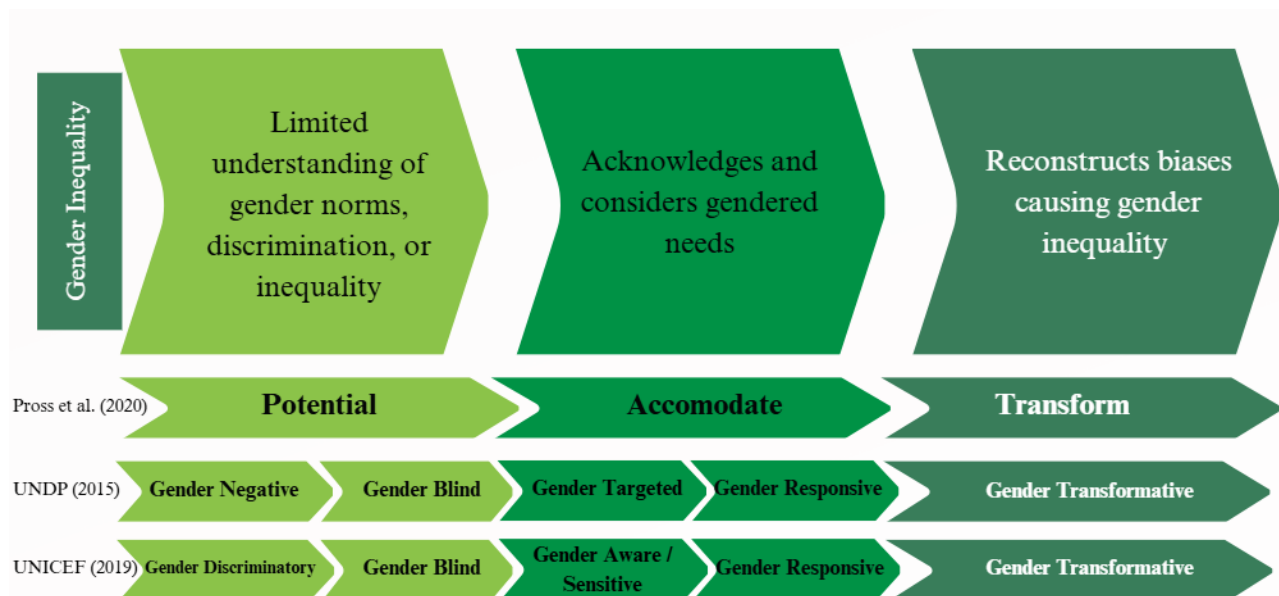
### 5.5 Data Analysis

The interview responses were analysed through thematic analysis. The researchers transcribed the data, generated the initial codes based on the responses and narratives from respondents, and identified patterns or themes. The results have been generalized to reflect the situation under study.

### 5.6 Gender Mainstreaming Timeline

For a better understanding of our data, we applied a gender mainstreaming timeline structure (see Figure 2), which was modified from UNDP's gender results effectiveness scale and UNICEF's gender continuum by Pross et al. (2020). This structure analyses gender inequality issues within organizations or communities. There are three key phases of the intervention: "Potential," "Accomodate," and "Transform," which represent the different levels of the impact of the commune/society on changing gender norms and inequalities.

**Figure 2: Structure of Gender Mainstreaming Timeline**



Authors modified from Pross et al. (2020)

The first phase is the "Potential" phase. This is characterized by a limited understanding of gender norms, discrimination, or inequality. During this phase, the interventions have not yet taken effect, thus leading to severe gender inequality issues. The primary focus here is identifying the basic elements of gender inequality that need attention.

The second phase is the "Accomodate" phase. This happens when the gendered needs of individuals within the organization or community are acknowledged and considered. It represents a transition where the interventions start to be effective in addressing specific gender issues by applying targeted programs or measures. Therefore, at this phase, the diverse gender needs within the commune can be better adapted and adjusted, which initially improves the inclusiveness of the commune.

The third phase is the “Transform” phase. This is the most advanced stage in the structure when the interventions are able to eliminate biases causing gender inequality. At this phase, the interventions go beyond merely addressing visible gender biases and fundamentally advance gender equality through transformative changes in social structures and cultural norms.

This structure summarizes a strategic approach for gender inequality, from recognizing potential issues to making accommodating adjustments, and finally transforming the gender biases. Each phase is based on the previous one, gradually leading to a more equitable and inclusive society.

### **5.7 Systems Analysis**

In order to better understand AC and its complex interactions with the community and other factors, this study also adopted a systems analysis method for the data analysis. Systems analysis is a method used to identify the components of a system and their interrelationships, helping researchers understand the structure and function of the overall system (Whitten et al., 1986).

We continued to deepen our understanding of the content of the interviews and extracted a series of factors from them. Based on the responses of the interviewees, we drew a relationship diagram between these factors. The systems analysis method allows us to analyze how AC influences and is influenced by other factors from a macro perspective. This method not only increases the understanding of the impact of a single factor but also allows us to gain insight into the interactions between different factors and the overall system dynamics.

### **5.8 Limitations**

Among the limitations on the conduct of the research are as follows:

1. Time constraints on capturing the whole picture on the field.
2. Gathering of accurate responses based on translation, considering the language barrier.
3. A limited number of respondents due to their busy schedules.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1 AC Contributions to Improving Agriculture**

The Sambo Meanchey AC has promoted agricultural development in Soupheas Commune in a number of ways. First, AC has provided diverse job opportunities to the people. AC has employed a CEO who helps in the management of AC. The CEO position is on a 5-year election cycle and subject to re-election. AC has also hired 14 staff members: 6 general staff who work in AC office and 8 non-official staff like the drivers and the people who look after AC farm. In addition, AC members have a chance to participate in the Korea exchange program, where they can earn an income by working on the farms during the internship. As of 2024, more than 20% of AC members have been able to participate in this program. These various job opportunities provided by AC have increased the household income of AC members, enabling them to invest more in agriculture and improve their livelihoods. AC members mentioned these contributions saying:

*“We receive benefits from our shares in the AC at the end of the year, jobs, market opportunities, and technical support” (ID No. 3, F, 25).*

*“My wife and son-in-law joined the exchange program in Korea to gain experience and more income. Once*

*they arrive in Korea, they can work at the farms and send money to our family. They earned approximately \$1,500 monthly while in Korea” (ID No. 19, M, 47).*

In addition, a non-AC member acknowledged AC contribution saying:

*“I would like to join the AC because I want to get more income, so I will start growing lemongrass. I would also like to join the AC because of opportunities for my children such as the exchange programs to go abroad like Korea and also seek opportunities in the net house project in the AC.” (ID No. 17, F, 42)*

Secondly, AC has contributed to the increased income of its members. AC members can earn dividends from their shares at the end of the year hence gaining additional earnings to their household income. Moreover, AC has also increased the varieties of crops farmers produce in Soupheas Commune. AC members are now growing and selling to AC, a specific variety of rice, lemongrass for making lemongrass oil, and fruits and vegetables supplied for the school feeding program, apart from other crops such as coconut, cassava, and cashew nuts, which they grow and sell to middlemen, therefore, accessing different markets for their variety of agricultural products. AC actively searches and provides a market for its members’ products, enhancing their agricultural production.

Thirdly, through AC, agricultural knowledge and skills have been transferred to the people through the training provided by the central government, the developing partners, volunteers, and AC itself. The head of the board of AC informed us that *“A volunteer advisor, a lecturer in agriculture from the University of Kampong Cham plays very important roles in the AC. The advisor guides us about how to do marketing and how to make good quality fertilizers. I am also trying to work with the advisor to test the NPK elements of the fertilizers because the NPK elements are the most important elements of crop fertilizers.”* One female member (ID No. 2, 42) also mentioned that her husband and her participate in trainings, although it’s mostly her husband who joins. She highlighted that her husband learned how to make compost through AC which facilitated the training. However, she also said that people would like to use chemical fertilizers rather than compost. On the other hand, another AC member also informed us that they were taught the effects of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides through the training in AC. She also learned chicken husbandry from training provided by the government and AC.

In addition, AC facilitates the education of the youths in the community. The head of the board of AC, together with other staff members, and the high school students in Soupheas Commune visit the capital city of Phnom Penh for marketing of agricultural products. One of the goals of AC is to build the young generations’ marketing and agriculture skills. Another goal is to give them a chance to experience a different environment and reality, hence enlarging their perspectives about life and society.

Moreover, the Korea exchange program is also meant to equip AC members with some agricultural knowledge and skills while in Korea. One female member who participated in the program twice said that she wanted to learn new skills and understand why Korea sells agricultural products at a high price compared to Cambodia. With her participation, she observed that they can sell products at a higher price because the production is good and the quality of the product is very high.

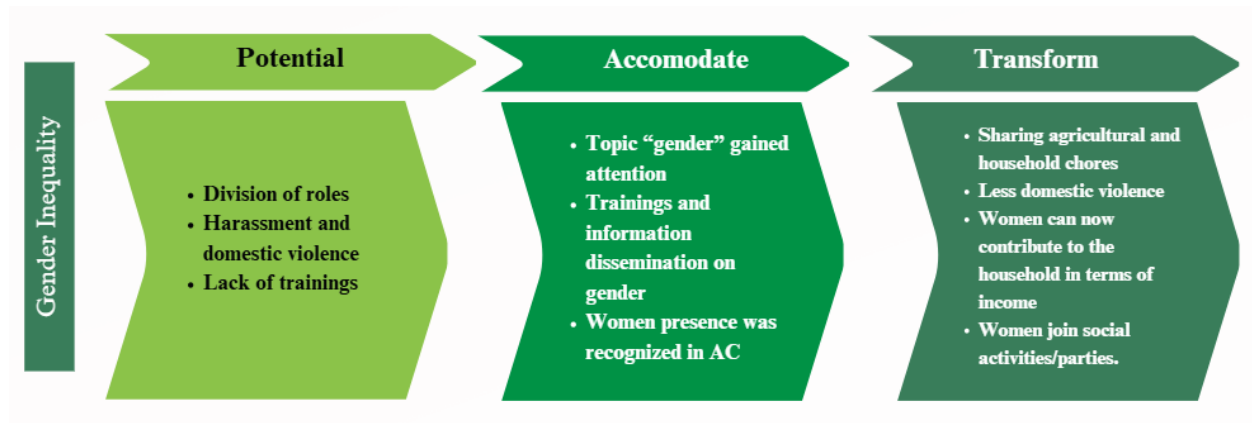
Lastly, with AC’s position in promoting agricultural development as the link between the community and the government and development partners, Soupheas Commune has benefited from an improved infrastructure such as a road network, irrigation facilities, and water reservoir, increasing agricultural productivity. One of

AC members informed us, “It’s because of AC that the government pays more attention to the commune, so road infrastructure has improved, and water irrigation facilities are constructed. The AC also rehabilitated the water irrigation facility and the road, from dust road to gravel.” (ID No. 14, M, 49).

## 6.2 Contribution of AC in Improving Gender Mainstreaming

### 6.2.1 Gender Mainstreaming Timeline

**Figure 3: Gender Mainstreaming Timeline at Sambo Meanchey**



Created by the authors based in the interview

Sambo Meanchey AC has contributed to improving gender mainstreaming in Soupheas Commune. Our study shows that the presence of AC in Soupheas Commune has influenced substantial changes concerning gender issues. We divided our findings into three parts using the gender mainstreaming framework: (i) “Potential” phase, (ii) “Accommodate” phase, and (iii) “Transform” phase. Our results indicate how the gender situation was before and after the establishment of AC, and finally, the current gender situation in Soupheas Commune. The result of gender mainstreaming is explained as follows.

In the first part, the “Potential” phase uncovers the gender situation before establishing AC. During this period, our respondents witnessed visible gender division in their homes where men only concentrated on farm work or businesses while women stayed home to perform household chores and care for the family. Some of our respondents also witnessed harassment and domestic violence in their homes and the community around them. AC members reported how the situation was, saying,

*“There is a big change from the past to the present. For example, in the past, women could only work at home, doing household chores like cooking, while men led businesses. But now, everything has changed. Women can work outside and can also lead in businesses. We all have equal rights in terms of working.”*(ID No. 6, M, 43)

*“There was domestic violence. And husbands could not do household chores.”*(ID No. 7, F, 31)

Also, a non-AC member reported this situation, saying:

*“There was a specific division between men and women and a high number of domestic violence cases, especially in the poor families .”*(ID No. 17, F, 42)

In the second part, the “Accommodate” phase reflects the period after AC was established in 2010. In this

phase, our respondents noticed that the topic of gender gained attention as the central government started initiatives to promote gender equality in the country. The government, identifying the familiarity of AC to the people, used it as its mediator to raise gender awareness among the people. Through AC, the government carried out gender training and information dissemination to the community members. AC members informed us that:

*“Since the AC was established, there has been some kind of training about gender and domestic violence provided by the AC team or the local governments. (ID No. 4, M, 41-50)*

*“There was training after the establishment of AC. People could also share knowledge and information through AC. We also met new people who visited the AC and observed and talked to them. In addition, other women could change men’s perceptions through the AC.” (ID No. 8, F, 41-50)*

In addition, a non-AC member also informed us that:

*“There is support from the government, departments, and the commune. They spread information regarding gender.” (ID No. 17, F, 42)*

Moreover, the gender training includes males and females as the participation of both men and women is important in understanding gender issues and promoting gender equality, and collaboration and solidarity in the community. We were informed by an AC member that;

*“The establishment of the AC was a good opportunity for improving gender perspectives. The AC provided certain training on genders. The training came from the government through the AC, NGOs through the AC, and the AC itself. They train men and women about gender balance, trained about roles and responsibilities of men and women, and how men and women are both important for the development of the community. So having an AC means having good opportunities for gender. (ID No. 6, M, 43)*

On the other hand, once AC was established women joined as leaders and members. This is for example, the current AC female board member was appointed in 2010 in correspondence to the law governing the Agricultural Cooperative’s establishment of having female representatives on AC board. Other women joined AC as shareholders or as representatives of their households. Men who could not attend AC meetings also sent their wives on their behalf. As a result of women’s participation in AC, their unique presence, determination to contribute, and their capabilities were recognized, changing the gender perspectives of the community. The male AC members informed us that,

*“Before the establishment of AC, gender issues were not much recognized. However, after the establishment of AC, we started considering gender issues because AC needed the contribution from women. Women play critical roles in AC and even in other activities.” (ID No. 6, M, 43)*

*“Men now understand the potential of women and have learned to respect them. Now, they have the idea that women are important.” (ID No. 4, M, 41-50)*

In the third part, the “Transform” phase represents the current gender situation in Soupheas Commune. Our respondents have observed several changes, such as families sharing tasks in both agriculture and household while considering the capabilities and availability of their household members. While men do hard manual labor, women help with lighter tasks like growing lemongrass and delivering it to AC. Men also help women with the house chores when they come from the farm. Moreover, our respondents have witnessed almost zero domestic violence cases in the commune, with the government also applying strict penalties, including prison



sentences, for violations. Women are also contributing to their household income through participating in employment opportunities and businesses. This is, for example, AC member whose wife went to the Korea exchange program while he remained home to take care of the farm and the family. Lastly, women have an opportunity to join and enjoy social activities and parties in AC. AC members informed us that,

*“There has been a change in how people speak to each other. People respect each other.” (ID No. 8, F, 41-50)*

*“There is a big change if we compare my childhood and now. For example, previously, I observed many cases of domestic violence, especially men committing violence against women. But now, there are almost no violence cases. We encourage women and promote women's rights. They now provide more education to women because they would like to make women understand and become aware of their rights and their importance in society. And currently, there's no any kind of job division. Previously, women had their own roles, and men had their own roles in the family. But now, there is no job division. They all work together.” (ID No. 14, M, 49)*

The non-AC members also recognized changes in the society, saying:

*“This is a modern society; women can work, have an education, and contribute to the household in terms of income.” (ID No. 12, F, 28)*

*“Nowadays people build good relationships between family members. If the husband sees his wife is too tired from the household chores, he would help her with it.” (ID No. 16, F, 38)*

In addition, one of the PDAFF staff noted that:

*“In the previous culture, we valued men more than women. Women were always a step behind men. In every decision-making, mostly men were the ones who made the final decision. Women had no roles. By introducing gender, we would like to have equal rights between men and women. We would like to see the value added by women in terms of decision-making. The main purpose of providing a lot of gender training programs is to build the capacity of women in terms of any decision-making and any development activities.” (ID No.10,F)*

In our research, 11 of our respondents who were interviewed concerning this matter noticed the above changes in gender mainstreaming in different timelines. First, 3 out of 11 respondents informed us that these changes happened in 2010 when AC was established. Secondly, 5 out of 11 responded with 2015, 5 years after AC establishment, implying that the shift from accommodation to transformation took 5 years to be observed. Lastly, 3 out of 11 respondents became aware of these changes in 2020, the year AC employed a female CEO.

#### 6.2.2 Gender Representation in Decision-Making

AC has also contributed to gender mainstreaming by promoting gender representation in decision-making within its functions. In the laws and rules that govern the establishment of AC, at least 30% of the board members of AC must be women, and at least 1 out of 3 of the monitoring committee must be female.

In Sambo Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative, 1 out of 5 board members is female. The board is at the top management level. The female board member informed us that her role is to manage the members by shares. She also mentioned that she monitors whether expenses and income are recorded correctly for transparency. She also attends a monthly meeting in AC. She noted that it was very busy being a board member, but the

workload has been relieved now that they have a CEO and staff. On the other hand, 2 out of 3 monitoring committee members of AC are female. The monitoring committee oversees the activities of the board and AC, ensuring transparency. One of the female monitoring committee members mentioned that her tasks are to double-check all activities, reports, and decisions made by AC board. She also evaluates and approves AC's expenses. In addition, since 2020, AC has its first female CEO who works closely with the board members and monitoring committee in the administration and management of AC. The CEO told us that her job is to check financial documents like budgets, set and prepare for meetings, and oversee general activities in AC. She also mentioned that she can make decisions on budgets below 1500 USD, but above this, she has to consult with the board. These critical responsibilities women play in AC are very important to its continuity and success. Moreover, we found out that several members of AC saw an additional value in having a female CEO in AC. Some members mentioned that the current CEO was more knowledgeable in human resources and financial management, and others noted that it was easy to communicate with her.

The head of the board AC noted that:

*"The current CEO has higher ability than the previous one. The previous CEO had some limitations regarding human resource management. But the current CEO has higher education and good skills in human resource management." (ID No. 6, M, 43)*

Other members expressed their opinions saying that:

*"She can build a huge network with others and is also good at financial management." (ID No. 15, M, 49)*

*"First, having a female CEO is a sign of gender equality. Secondly, she has good new ideas for selling products and management." (ID No. 7, F, 31)*

### **6.3 Importance of Women in the Agriculture Sector and AC**

Gender mainstreaming played a significant part in the sharing of household and agricultural work among households in Soupheas Commune. The resulting changes and improvements are reflected in the increased participation of women in the agriculture sector and in AC.

In the past, it was mostly men who worked in the agriculture sector, while women stayed at home and did household chores. However, our interview results show that women currently participate and are important in the agriculture sector in the commune. While men mostly manage their farms and do the hard work in agriculture, women assist in easier tasks like caring for the farm and growing, transplanting, harvesting, and marketing their agricultural products. The agricultural products produced by AC member households where women's participation is involved include coconut, rice, lemongrass, and cassava. Aside from doing agricultural work, women also support men in management and decision-making related to agriculture. In order to learn about the agriculture sector in Korea, one female AC member cited her commitment to participate in the exchange program despite having young children. Based on the interview with AC members who have female household members who participated in the exchange program, it was highlighted that the male household member stays at home and takes care of the family.

*"It was hard when I decided to visit Korea, and my husband stayed home caring for the kids. But I felt that I had to do it. To get a bigger view of how Korea works on agriculture, I had to commit to going to Korea." (ID No. 8, F, 41-50)*

Meanwhile, the participation of women in AC is also important and has been increasing. Several women form part of the organizational structure, such as the current CEO, board member, monitoring committee members, and operation staff. Indeed, women's contribution to AC's operation, general management, and decision-making is notable. In addition, the members who mostly attend AC activities are women, although some husbands and wives decide depending on who is needed by AC to attend. Our respondents informed us that there were times when men had to attend to AC activities, and women did some agricultural tasks in lieu of them. Likewise, when women have to attend AC activities, some men do the household chores. All members interviewed agree that women should participate and that they are important in AC. They also encourage their female household members to be a member of or work in AC.

Some members think women's participation in AC has a positive influence on the community development and agriculture sector, as follows:

*"Women are the key players in developing the AC because women are pushing factors that encourage men to work. Without women, men will have no any feeling to work." (ID No. 3, F, 25)*

*"Women will complete the task and move to another one. They are more efficient." (ID No. 4, M, 41-50)*

*"If you talk about women in this commune, women participate more than men in AC or even in agriculture activities. So they are more active than men." (ID No. 8, F, 41-50)*

*"Women also contribute in terms of making plans and are very supportive of any kind of social events." (ID No. 14, M, 49)*

*"In terms of community development, women also contribute some parts. For example, if we have some events, social events, women participate more than men." (ID No. 4, M, 41-50)*

From the perspective of the commune leader, women played a significant role in their development:

*"Women are a key pushing factor for good achievements. Without women, we believe that the success rate is low." (ID No. 11, M, over 51)*

Meanwhile, non-members were invited to attend meetings in AC for them to know the benefits of joining and to encourage them to register as members. From the perspective of a non-member who was interviewed, women's participation in AC has a positive influence on the community, such as:

*"During the meeting, women provide some advice or recommendation to the meeting on how we can move forward in the community and commune as a whole." (ID No. 17, F, 42)*

In general, the interviewees recognize women's contributions and highly encourage more females to participate, both in the agriculture sector and in AC. This is mainly due to their skills and characteristics that are highly significant, such as communication skills, which are important in marketing and public speaking; socializing skills, to help expand their network; and management skills, decision-making skills, and critical-thinking skills, which are important, especially for management and staff of AC. Women are also recognized for being efficient, attentive, keen on details, focused or concentrated on their work, and service-oriented. Interviews revealed that some women also voluntarily participate in AC activities and mostly finish their tasks ahead of time.

#### **6.4 Motivation of Women to Participate in AC**

Both AC members and non-members highlighted some motivations or reasons for women to participate in AC,

as well as the varying limitations and challenges they encounter in participating in AC.

For female AC members, among their motivations is to increase their household income through their shares in AC and access to job opportunities, either working as a staff member, in management positions in AC or working on AC farms. They also want to learn new skills through training provided to AC members by the government and AC and through participating in exchange programs in other countries. Participating in AC also improved the social relationships of some of the members as they were able to meet new friends and expand their network to people inside and outside the commune. In addition, some mentioned that they can also receive indirect benefits from being members, such as borrowing money from AC with low interest rates, especially in emergency situations.

Regarding the exchange program abroad, its duration usually took a few months as it covered the production cycle from planting to harvesting. The application to the program is voluntary, as they should be willing to process and shoulder the payments for the Visa and air tickets. Although they will pay for the expenses from their own pockets, based on the experiences of those who joined this program, they can temporarily work during the training period. Hence, aside from receiving allowances by participating in the program, they can earn additional income and send money back to their household in Cambodia. From what we gathered during our interviews, it is mostly a female household member of the interviewees who joined the exchange program. One female member (ID No. 8, 41-50) participated twice, while the daughter of a female member (ID No. 1, over 51) is currently in Korea. One male member (ID No. 19, 47) also mentioned that his wife and son-in-law are currently in Korea for the program. When asked why the wife joined the program and not the husband, he mentioned that the workload in agricultural farms in Korea is easier as they use more advanced technologies than in Cambodia. Hence, they thought that if the husband goes to Korea and the wife manages their own farm, she may not be able to handle all the agricultural work.

Meanwhile, for non-AC members, two out of three interviewed expressed their interest in being an AC member mainly to earn more income by selling products to AC, acquire higher opportunities for children through joining the exchange programs to other countries, and earn more income from AC through the net house. On the other hand, one non-AC member emphasized that she can still do business well regardless of whether she is a member of AC and that there is little difference in the market price between AC and other middlemen. According to her, the market provided by AC still needs to be opened for other products, like cassava and cashew nuts, so she can only sell their agricultural produce to another middleman. If AC scales up the market for different products, she is willing to join as a member.

*“If I join AC, maybe I can get more income by selling products to AC, and maybe my children have a higher opportunity or any specific room to join the exchange programs to other countries like Korea.” (ID No. 17, F, 42)*

*“I feel like even if I am a member or non-member of the AC, I still can do business well, so there is no need to register or to be a member of the AC.” (ID No. 16, F, 38)*

*“If you compare the market price between AC and if we sell to middlemen, the cost is not much different.” (ID No. 16, F, 38)*

*“AC does not buy cassava, so I can only sell to other middlemen. The market is still not open for all of the products.” (ID No. 16, F, 38)*

Although women are motivated to participate in AC activities, some experience limitations and challenges that hinder them. Even though husbands sometimes help with household chores like taking care of children when they have time, two female AC members reported facing challenges with time management and child care, so sometimes they could not participate in AC activities. One mentioned there was a time she could not join since she had to take care of her sick child, while the other said she is constrained from attending training conducted in a far venue, which will take several days. A male board member also shared his observation on the same limitation of women in traveling outside or far from the village or community due to their household chores. Meanwhile, from the perspective of a female board member, she pointed out that trust, in addition to housekeeping, could be among the reasons why women are hesitant to join AC, as some are still not clear about the money that comes into AC and what benefit they get back.

*“If we need to travel outside or far from the village, far from the community, women sometimes still have some limitations. They cannot travel very long distances because they have some limitations like taking care of the house and taking care of the kids.” (ID No. 4, M, 41-50)*

*“AC here is well known, but still, some women hesitate to join the AC because of trust. Another challenge is housekeeping. Sometimes they are busy taking care of the house, taking care of the kids.” (ID No. 5, F, 37)*

Meanwhile, some non-members, although not a requirement, want to have a parcel of land and expand their crop production to include crops catered by AC first before joining to gain more benefits and advantages from being a member.

*“Because now, I don't have any products to support AC. In the near future, if I can afford to buy some agricultural land and grow some crops, I plan to join.” (ID No. 12, F, 28)*

*“When I grow lemongrass, prepare the farm, I will register to be an AC member” (ID No. 17, F, 42)*

To encourage women to participate more in AC, one of the cluster leaders interviewed pointed out that AC should allocate a portion of its budget to provide small incentives. This will compensate for time spent attending meetings or training since they dedicate time supposedly allotted to do other work in their household.

*“In case of the meeting/training, we should provide some small incentive. Not kind of like big money, but just to compensate for their time.” (ID No. 14, M, 49)*

## **6.5 Limitations of AC**

While AC provides benefits and services that cater to the members' needs, it still has some limitations and room for improvements relative to its operations.

Four participants highlighted the perceived limitation on information dissemination in AC, such as on the financial report, reasons for the changes in market prices, and information and decisions relayed from staff to the members, including in the clusters. Some members highlight the importance of trust and transparency within AC and the members, especially regarding financial matters. Hence, there is a need to improve communication and networking between AC management, staff, and members.

*“There are also some minor gaps between the management team, the staff, and the members regarding communication. Somehow, people who work as a staff only communicate with staff, but they have limitations in terms of staff communication with members because they just build a network within only*

*the head of the cluster.” (ID No. 14, M, 49)*

Seven participants also mentioned the need for the management and staff to undergo capacity building and training to improve their operation, especially in accounting, writing reports, and online databases. Members find limitations in their own and their colleague’s skills, for example:

*“Gaps here mean like the board, committee, and the CEO still have some limitations in terms of education. They have difficulty, for example, writing reports, so although they are quite good in terms of management, they still somehow have some small gap.” (ID No. 14, M, 49)*

It was also emphasized that AC staff have difficulty with technical support and need to be introduced to technology and systems that will help make their workflow easier and more efficient. They also need upskilling and assistance for the creation of online systems and databases and to digitize their files and records, as they still do manual work and documentation. Moreover, the marketing staff reported that they generate higher sales from online selling and that they also cater to international customers aside from the local people. However, they need more training in communication and marketing skills and strategies to improve their promotion and selling of products on online shopping platforms and provide English translations of their social media posts and advertisements of their products.

*“Since they have limited understanding, knowledge, and capacity, there are some mistakes in some documents they need to prepare, like system and wage, for example. So they will need more improvement in terms of systematic arrangements. Some day, maybe we can put everything online, or everything online, easy to access.” (ID No. 3, F, 25)*

AC caters to a limited variety of agricultural crops, and the market is still narrow. Given this limitation, some AC members who produce other crops not catered by AC, such as coconut, cassava, and cashew nuts, sell their products to middlemen instead. Hence, they want AC to find other market opportunities and expand its scope to include other crops. Some members mention that:

*“If there is any opportunity, the AC should focus on cassava as well. Find some markets for cassava.” (ID No. 18, F, 33)*

*“Not only lemongrass, but also I would like to have markets for other products as well, and AC should secure the price of the product.” (ID No. 19, M, 47)*

AC also has a specified variety of rice seeds and only buys dry, unmilled rice that passes the standard. AC members usually grow rice as recommended by AC, while some non-AC members do not. If people want to sell unmilled rice to AC, they spend more time drying and cleaning it based on AC’s standards. A member relayed that AC system is a bit complicated, and it will take more time and resources to dry rice, which weighs less when dried. Hence, some people who do not want complications sell wet rice to the middlemen. Some previously sold it to AC but now sell to the middlemen instead. It is said that the cost is not much different if they compare. Even though they get a higher price for dry rice in AC, the weight is loose, while if they sell the wet rice to the middlemen, despite the lower price, the weight is higher. Hence, even if AC offers a higher price, some members and one of the non-members interviewed still sell to middlemen.

*“AC just buys the unmilled rice unless the farmer dries it within certain standard. If we sell to the AC, the system is a little bit complicated.” (ID No. 18, F, 33)*

*“For non-AC members, in my case, I grow another type of rice seed not introduced by the AC, so it is difficult*

*to sell products to the AC.” (ID No. 16, F, 38)*

The commune leader also pointed out that since several members commonly produce the products catered by AC, like the lemongrass, it leads to higher production but lower prices. This was likewise observed by the PDAFF staff that AC has limitations on sustainability, including lemongrass prices. Meanwhile, by selling products to the middlemen, especially those not catered by AC, one respondent mentioned facing difficulties and having less profit:

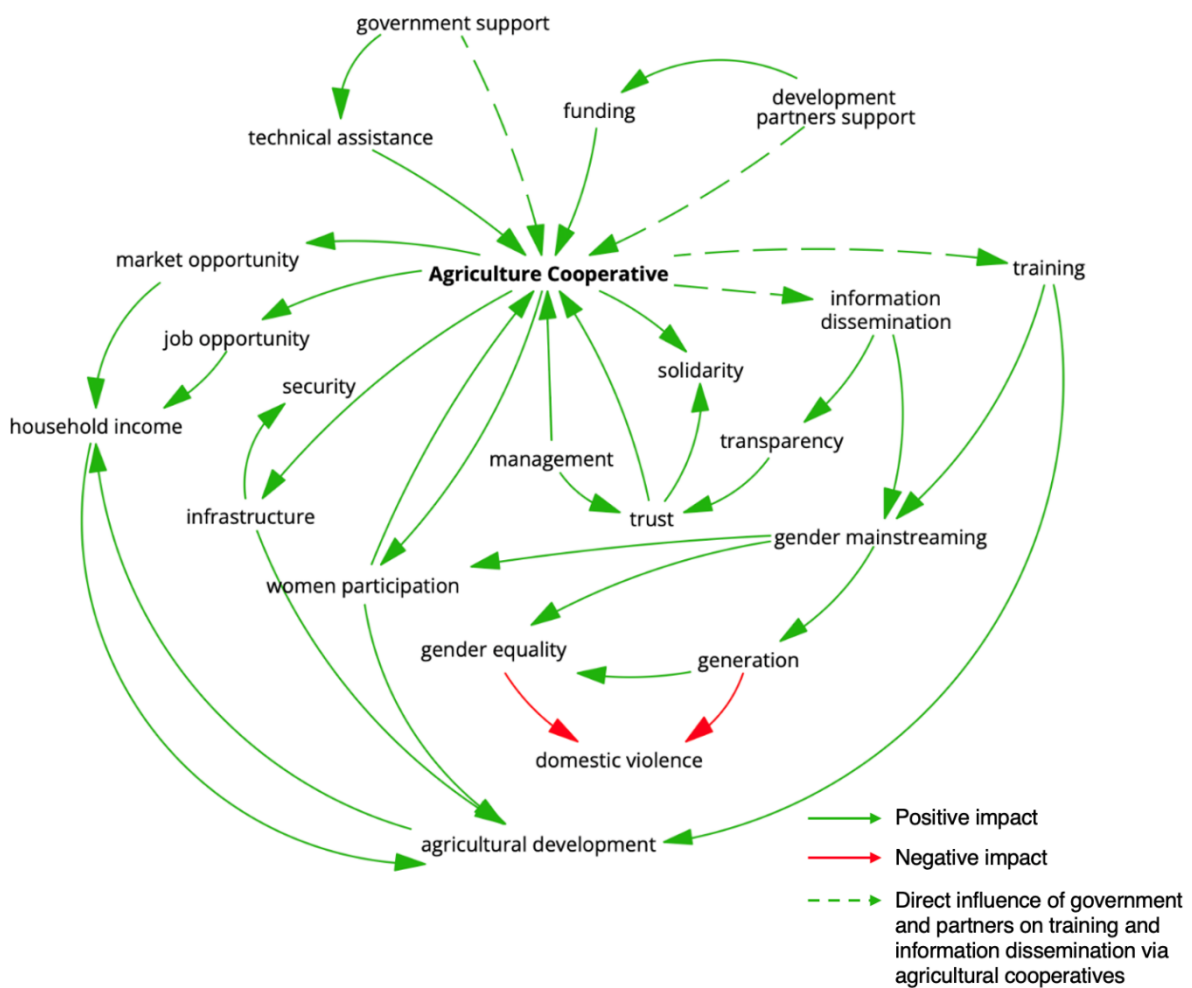
*“Now I grow cassava, but I need to sell the cassava products to the middlemen that live in other areas. So if I calculate transportation costs, there is not much profit.” (ID No. 18, F, 33)*

## **7. Conclusion**

### **7.1 System Analysis**

We applied the Systems Analysis method and summarized all the findings of this study in a graph of factor relationships (**Figure 4**). Based on the results of the interviews, a total of 22 factors were extracted, which include government support, development partners' support, technical assistance, funding, the Agriculture Cooperative, market opportunity, job opportunity, household income, infrastructure, security, agricultural development, women participation, management, trust, solidarity, information transparency, information dissemination, training, gender mainstreaming, gender equality, generation, and domestic violence. The green arrows between factors indicate a positive impact, while the red arrows indicate a negative impact. Through the graph, this research provides a comprehensive framework that illustrates the multiple roles of the Agricultural Cooperative (AC) in promoting agricultural development and gender mainstreaming.

**Figure 4: Relationship of AC Surrounding Factors**



Agricultural Cooperative (AC) is the central factor with which all other factors are connected or influenced. The input factors (e.g., government support and development partners' support) provide the necessary funding and technical assistance to enable AC to effectively implement its development agenda. In particular, the government provides technical assistance, focusing on training content that supports AC in sharing agricultural skills and gender equality concepts with the members. The financial support is provided by development partners, which resulted in an increase in the capacity of AC in terms of project implementation, member recruitment, and information dissemination.

On the other hand, management, information dissemination, transparency, trust, and training are the internal factors of the system. Through effective management practices, AC not only builds trust among its members but also enhances solidarity within the organization. This trust further fosters solidarity among members, which is essential for collective action and cooperative initiatives in the long run. In addition, training is also part of the internal management and operations of AC, which greatly improves the agricultural skills and gender perspectives of the members.

Market opportunity, job opportunity, household income, and infrastructure are the external impacts and outputs of the system. They highlight the impact of AC on economic and commune security. The proactive



negotiations by AC Head has given AC access to larger markets. The establishment of AC itself also provided more internal employment opportunities through the recruitment of management staff, which adds to household income. Economic improvement is critical to the living standards of AC members and their families, as well as the overall development of the local agriculture industry. Through initiatives funded and supported by external and internal sources, AC helps to develop local infrastructure. Improved infrastructure also contributes to the safety of the community and creates a stable environment for local development.

Figure 4 also provides an in-depth view of the core meaning of “gender mainstreaming” and “gender equality,” which is not only just a simple concept but also a deep-rooted value within AC organization. By systematically promoting women's participation in decision-making processes, AC is reshaping traditional gender power structures. Training and empowerment activities have become key mechanisms for promoting intergenerational change in gender perceptions, which gradually soften gender stereotypes and reduce the incidence of domestic violence in practice. The study clearly reveals a positive impact of women's participation in agricultural development, a finding that further corroborates the strategic value of social equity in the functioning of the organization. The effort by AC continues to advance gender equity in concrete practice. By creating more inclusive and open environments, they are reconfiguring the power dynamics of traditional agrarian societies and injecting substance into gender equality. This deep involvement not only changes the internal ecology of the organization but also has a subtle impact on the broader social field.

As a direct result of gender mainstreaming, women's participation in agriculture is significantly enhanced. When gender mainstreaming measures are implemented, it removes barriers to women's involvement in agricultural decision-making, leadership, and management roles. Women become more active participants in not only the physical aspects of farming but also in the economic and strategic decisions that shape agricultural practices. This increased participation empowers women, boosts their economic independence, and improves their influence in the community. It also leads to more diverse perspectives in decision-making, contributing to better outcomes for agricultural development. The active participation of women directly contributes to agricultural development. This research has shown that when women are involved in agricultural decision-making and have access to resources such as land, technology, and credit, agricultural productivity improves. Women often bring innovative solutions and diverse strategies to farming, which enhances the overall sustainability and resilience of agricultural systems. Additionally, when women are empowered in the agricultural sector, it leads to broader social and economic benefits for families and communities, leading to more sustainable rural development and economic growth.

The graph clearly shows how targeted support and effective management within cooperatives can lead to significant socio-economic results and development outcomes. Overall, through external support from the government and development partners, coupled with scientifically efficient internal management, AC has enhanced organizational solidarity, commune security, and economic development. Additionally, the concept of gender equality has become deeply rooted in people's minds, which significantly reduces domestic violence. This analysis underscores the transformative power of AC when they have robust support and advanced management practices, highlighting its role as a crucial driver of sustainable community advancement and social change.

## **7.2 Concluding Remarks**

This study focused on the Sambo Meanchey AC in Soupheas Commune, Steung Trang District of Kampong Cham Province, with key findings consolidating into 4 main dimensions: support of the government and development partners to AC, strengths, and opportunities of AC, contributions of AC, and opportunity and gender role in decision making. Through interviews with the management and internal members of AC, and gathering the opinions of non-AC members as well. Through the interviews with AC members and others involved, we comprehensively analyzed the current development status of AC and explored strategic paths for governmental departments and stakeholders to further improve the current situation of AC. Our research provides a comprehensive examination of its organizational characteristics, operational mechanisms, and existing challenges, thereby allowing us to formulate pragmatic recommendations for future development.

Firstly, AC gains various support from the government and development partners. From their support, AC receives administrative assistance, technical aid, and funding. The training for gender mainstreaming and agriculture skills is led by the central government through AC. Through AC, which works as a mediator, government programs and support effectively reach the public.

Secondly, there are various strengths and opportunities in AC. The capacity of the committee and CEO has been of great help to AC's market development and internal management. The funding support from non-government organizations helps to ensure the stability of AC's operations and provides financial support for the construction of infrastructure. Utilization of technical assistance from the central government improves the productivity of AC by enhancing members' agricultural production skills. We also note that the higher participation of women within AC has enabled women in the community to be less bound by their domestic roles and more involved in the development of the community through their participation in AC. This also has many positive impacts to increase the household income in the commune.

Thirdly, the contributions of AC must also be considered. AC provides job and market opportunities for its members, which helps increase household income. With increased income, it enables the commune to improve the local infrastructures. Moreover, the training and information dissemination for gender mainstreaming conducted by AC also help improve gender equality in the commune.

Our last key finding is that there is an equal opportunity for men and women to participate in decision-making in AC. This finding challenges traditional gender dynamics in the rural agricultural industry, where decision-making has traditionally been dominated by men. Contrary to stereotype, our research revealed that AC implemented various gender mainstreaming training has a significant impact on ensuring women's rights. Women in AC not only participate in discussions but also hold leadership positions, indicating the important role of AC in transforming from the conventional patriarchal structures to a more gender-equal society.

In conclusion, AC not only plays an important role in upgrading agricultural technology and information dissemination but also directly expands markets for agricultural products and community infrastructure through their practical actions, which are fundamental to ensuring the long-term prosperity of agriculture and the well-being of farmers. Through this direct intervention, AC has significantly contributed to the agricultural development and economic growth of communities. In addition, AC has fully utilized the local government's support in information dissemination to promote gender mainstreaming in the local community so that women can not only serve as housewives but also participate more in community and agricultural work and gradually

realize gender equality.

## 8. Recommendation

Although AC has many strengths and has significant contributions, we found room for improvement in four points: expansion of the market opportunities, introduction of international markets, enhancement of information dissemination, and provision of training.

The first point is the expansion of market opportunities even more. AC has market access to lemongrass, a certain variety of rice that needs to meet certain standards, and vegetables for the school feeding program. However, many members produce other crops such as cashew nuts and cassava. Moreover, AC only purchases a certain variety of rice, which needs to be dried and ready to sell. In order to produce the rice variety, members need to purchase the rice seeds from AC. After growing, members have to dry the rice by themselves at their house, which requires time and space. This is especially difficult when the weather and humidity are unstable. Due to these difficulties, members grow other varieties of rice, or even if they grow the variety that AC provides, they sell it to the middlemen because they do not require drying and have no specification over the variety. This could be a business chance for both AC and members. Provision of rice dryers in AC, for example, could be a solution to the difficulty caused by AC standards. Including cashew nuts and cassava could bring stability to the member's income with AC's professional marketing and protection.

The second point is the expansion of the market worldwide. AC expects demand from customers who are far away. Currently, Sambo Meanchey AC sells lemongrass through retail shops near AC and through live streams. AC staff which focuses on marketing conducts livestreams and manages the Sambo Meanchey AC Facebook page to promote the lemongrass oils to customers far away. There are customers from other provinces of Cambodia, as well as the United States of America and European regions. The overseas customers are mainly Cambodian people who wish to support their home country's business. However, their ambition is high, and they would like to expand their international market even more. Sambo Meanchey AC has a Facebook page and a TikTok page, which is all in Khmer. Moreover, AC does not have a developed online platform. Creating an online platform and including English in social media could support expanding the market opportunities wide globally.

The third point is information dissemination. As mentioned in the limitation, information such as the reason behind the change in market price and financial report is unclear to members. Currently, information dissemination is mainly done in two ways. First is the general meeting at AC. The board members, the CEO, and the staff explain their annual plan and development goals to the members. Another is going house by house. Staff visited the house to ask for attendance. It must be mentioned that "cluster" is not being used efficiently. Some of the members did not know its existence in the interview. Cluster is still a new concept to members and leaders. However, it could be a tool to distribute information effectively on training. The operational staff could distribute information to the cluster leaders, and cluster leaders could distribute that information to the members. Social media such as Telegram could be used as a communication tool among the staff and leaders, as well as among leaders and members. With an efficient and easy information dissemination system, more information such as monthly marketing reports and financial reports could be distributed without complication.

The fourth point is training. Some mentioned that they struggle with accounting, creating online systems and databases, and online shopping platforms. The CEO has requested the PDAFF for specific training that she needs. She has so far requested development planning and financial management, such as accounting. The training in financial accounting was already granted to her by the PDAFF. However, she *“still needs some more training on planning development”* and will continue requesting training as she finds the need. Other AC’s operational staff may be facing the same problem as well. Putting the training that is requested by one AC could be given to other ACs in advance as well. Also, members are interested in net farming, which is a new project AC has started recently and is under preparation. Currently, the cluster leader from Cluster Two is in charge of taking care of the nethouse. However, after the preparation is complete and the cluster starts fully operating, he may not be able to take care of it by himself. Although he has two deputy heads for support, three people may not be enough, and there are other members that are interested in helping. Providing training beforehand and inviting a professional to spread appropriate information could help bring the smooth future operation of the nethouse.

AC contributes to the community by providing job opportunities, increasing income, and enhancing capacities and skills. Evidence of gender mainstreaming highlights AC’s role as a pushing factor, particularly in creating jobs for women and demonstrating the importance of women in AC and the community. While challenges remain, such as information dissemination, skills of the management staff, and diversification of the agricultural crops, the proposed recommendations offer pathways for improvement.

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## Appendix

### Demographic Profile:

[Age]

Below 20

21-30

31-40

41-50

Over 51

[Sex]

Male

Female

[Marital status]

Single

Married

Common-law married/co-habitant

Separated

Widowed

Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

Since when have you been a member of AC?

Who is registered for AC?

Do you participate in the agricultural cooperative?

Yes, as a staff.

Yes, as a member.

No.

[Highest educational attainment ]

No education

Elementary level

High school level

College level

Graduate degree

Post-graduate degree

Are you the household head? (the one who makes the most decision in the household)

[Household head ]

Man

Woman

[Household type]

Nuclear

Extended [nuclear+relatives]

Who makes the financial decision?



[Household size]

[Household member composition]

**Main Questions (People in AC):**

[Agriculture Sector]

What type of agricultural activity are you engaged in (e.g., lemon grass, rice, livestock, etc.)?

What is your main task in your job (e.g., plowing, marketing, fertilizer, etc.)?

[Agricultural Cooperative]

What do you do in the clusters of AC and how often do you join the activity?

[Ask to staff] What type of agricultural cooperative activity are you engaged in (e.g., lemon grass, rice, livestock, etc.)?

[Ask to staff] What is your main task in the agricultural cooperative (e.g., plowing, marketing, fertilizer, etc.)?

How did the establishment of AC contribute to the community in your opinion?

[Ask women] Motivation of women's participation in the Agricultural Cooperative

[Income]

What is your household's primary source of income?

Aside from working in agricultural activities, do you have other jobs or means of income? (yes/no. If yes, what's that?)

How much do your other family members contribute to the household income?

What is your fixed monthly income?

What is your seasonal income?

Does participating in AC contribute to the household income?

Did you find new business opportunities through AC?

[Mental Fulfillment]

What specific activities do you enjoy doing in AC?

How about the cluster meetings? Do you enjoy them?

What was the most memorable job or event here?

[Social Relationships]

Have you made any new friends/network through participating in AC?

[Self Improvement]

Have you changed by participating in AC? (e.g. social skills, management skills, etc)

Did you participate in any agriculture skills training offered by AC and when?

Have you attended the training on gender equality offered by AC and when?

Do you know the program where you can go to Korea to learn about agriculture skills?

[If yes] From where did you find out about this?

[If yes] Did you go there? Why or why not?

[Mentorship]

Who influenced you to participate in AC?

[Ask to staff] Would you recommend this position to other people?

[Challenges of women's participation in tAC]

Do you agree that women should participate in agricultural cooperatives?

Do you think women participation in agricultural cooperatives has a positive impact on community development and on the agriculture sector?

What skills do women have that could contribute to AC? (e.g., patience, carefulness, management skills, etc...)

Do you encourage your female household members to work in agricultural cooperatives?

Do you have any household chores or situations that are holding you back from joining AC meetings and training? (e.g., inadequate skills and knowledge, social and family responsibilities, lack of access to resources, etc.)

How do you overcome the challenges you face in the agricultural cooperative?

What measures do you think should be taken to encourage women to participate in agricultural cooperatives? (e.g., education, time, etc...)

What household chores do you do?

What household chores does your spouse do?

What household chores do other family members do?

Are you satisfied with the current situation on household chores and other tasks? Do you need any support or help from your spouse?

[Chronicle Timeline]

What changes in gender roles did you observe when you were a child until present(specify the year)?

When did you observe this change?

What is the reason for the change?

How did the establishment of AC contribute to improving gender equality?

What kind of training does AC provide to improve gender equality?

What makes the commune unique, in terms of gender equality?

### **Main Questions (Women not in AC):**

[Agriculture Sector]

What type of agricultural activity are you engaged in (e.g., lemongrass, rice, livestock, etc.)?

What is your main task in your job (e.g., plowing, marketing, fertilizer, etc.)?

[Ask women] Motivation of women's participation

[Income]

What is your household's primary source of income?

Aside from working in agricultural activities, do you have other jobs or means of income? (yes/no. If yes, what's that?)

How much do your other family members contribute to the household income?

What is your fixed monthly income?

What is your seasonal income?

[Self Improvement]

Did you participate in any agriculture skills training?

From whom was it offered?  
 When did you join?  
 What was the training about?  
 Why or why did you not join the training?  
 Have you attended the training on gender equality?  
 From whom was it offered?  
 When did you join?  
 What was the training about?  
 Why or why did you not join the training?  
 Would you like to join the agricultural cooperative?  
 [YES] Why have you not participated in the agricultural cooperative  
 Why would you like to join AC?  
 [Income/ Mental Fulfillness/ Self Improvement/ Social Relationship/ Mentorship/ Other]  
 Why have you not joined AC?  
 Household work/ Time poverty/ Gender Norm/ Other  
 What kind of support do you need in order to join AC?  
 [NO] Is there a reason why you are not joining AC?  
 Why do you think some women join AC?  
 What influence do you think women participation in agricultural cooperatives have on the community?  
 (negative and positive changes)  
 [Household chores]  
 What household chores do you do?  
 What household chores does your spouse do?  
 What household chores do other family members do?  
 Are you satisfied with the current situation on household chores and other tasks? Do you need any support or help from your spouse?  
 [Chronicle Timeline]  
 What changes in gender roles did you observe when you were a child until present(specify the year)?  
 When did you observe this change?  
 What is the reason for the change?  
 Do you think the establishment of AC contributes to improving gender equality?  
 What makes the commune unique? (gender, etc)

### **Head of AC**

Composition of AC clusters (how they choose the members e.g.crops, area)  
 When did the cluster form?  
 How often does the cluster have meetings and around what time?  
 The leader of the cluster(gender, age, how its chosen)  
 You mentioned there is no domestic violence in your speech.

Was there a period of time where domestic violence occurred often?

Is it because of AC?

What is the value added to the female CEO?

## **Staff**

What is the value added to the female CEO?

## **DAFF**

[DAFF]

What is the main objective of this department?

If possible, what are some recent projects that you are doing?

We were told about the structure of the department, but it was in Kmer... Can we ask you about the units in the department? (we want to know if the gender so ask further)

What is the gender ratio of this department? How many women are employed in this department?

[Soupheas Commune]

Do you know how much AC of Soupheas Commune contribute the GDP/economy?

In general, how much of the budget is allocated to providing agriculture related training in Kampong Cham?

How much of the budget is allocated to providing agriculture related training in Soupheas Commune?

[Agriculture]

It was mentioned that Soupheas Commune is a model community. What are the criterias?

What specific support do you provide to AC to improve the agriculture sector? (e.g., funding support, technical assistance, training)

Do you provide agriculture related training to Soupheas Commune before the establishment of AC? When did you start the agriculture related training to Soupheas Commune?

How important is the role of AC in improving the agriculture sector in Soupheas Commune? What are some of the accomplishments?

[GENDER]

When did you start providing gender equality and women rights training in Kampong Cham?

When did you start providing gender equality training to Soupheas Commune?

Why did you decide to have gender training?

How important is the role of AC in improving gender equality in Soupheas Commune? What are some of the accomplishments?

The distribution of the training

How do you decide where to do the training?

How often is the training done?

Do you limit the number of participants of the training?

The training site

Who are the teachers?

How is the training done(e.g. group work. lecture, etc)?

Do you see the effects of the training in Kampong Cham?

Do you see the effects of the training in Soupheas Commune?

[DOMESTIC VIOLENCE]

Was there a case of domestic violence in Kampong Cham?

Was there a case of domestic violence in Soupheas Commune?

How about now? Is there a case of domestic violence in Kampong Cham?

Is there a case of domestic violence in Soupheas Commune right now?

In what specific year did the cases of domestic violence decline in Kampong Cham?

In what specific year did the cases of domestic violence decline in Soupheas Commune?

Is it possible to have the data or record of it?

### **Commune Leader**

[Commune]

Since when are you the leader of this commune?

How were you selected as the commune leader?

Is there a limit on the term or number of the years serving as the commune leader?

Do you know the past commune leaders?

Do you know if there were any previous female commune leaders? **[If not]** Why?

What are the main jobs and tasks as the commune leader?

How often do you interact with the members of the commune, NOT AC?

What are the most significant accomplishments of the commune and when?

What are the challenges that the community is facing currently?

[AC]

How do you cooperate with AC as the commune leader?

How do you cooperate with the cluster leaders of AC?

What do you think are the reasons behind the 10% of people that are not joining in AC?

Do you know anyone that is not part of AC? **[If yes]** Could you introduce them to us?

### **AC Member (about Management)**

[Agriculture Sector]

What type of agricultural activity are you engaged in (e.g., lemon grass, rice, livestock, etc.)?

What is your main task in your job (e.g., plowing, marketing, fertilizer, etc.)?

What cluster number are you in?

How often do you join cluster meetings?

What are the main topics of cluster meetings?

Do you know the CEO, board members, or staff of AC?

How do you work with them?

[If they know the CEO] What is the value added of the current female CEO compared to previous CEO?

Do you think there are rooms for improvement on how AC functions? (management, decision-making, skills,

etc.)

How do you receive information from AC?

Are you aware of the current situation regarding any changes on the market price of agricultural products? (e.g. lemongrass, rice, etc)

Does AC provide any explanation or reasons behind the change in market price?

In your opinion, is there a need to improve the information distribution and dissemination?

If yes, what are your suggestions for improvement?

Have you ever tried asking questions or setting a request to the cluster leaders and the management staff? Were they considered?

How did the establishment of AC contribute to the community in your opinion?

What makes the commune unique, in terms of gender equality?

Did you attend any training regarding gender equality?

How are you putting into actual practice the learnings you had from the training on gender equality?



## **Education**

### **Reasons of Students' Continuation in Lower Secondary School: A Case Study of Gender Differences in Kampong Cham, Cambodia**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Cambodian government has been dedicatedly addressing gender disparities and promoting equal access to quality education in Cambodia through long-term policies (Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), 2023). In 1999, Cambodia's Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) formulated the first Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan (1999-2003) to improve gender inequality in Cambodia. The Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan encompasses various sectors, including education, health, hygiene, politics, and leadership. In the education sector, this policy will be implemented through strengthening the partnership between the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). MoWA has emphasized education as an essential means for promoting gender equality and empowering girls and women. Through this policy, the aim is to promote gender equality, improve access to education, and raise awareness through the implementation of gender-responsive programs.

Following the first phase, the Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan II (2004-2008), Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan III (2009-2013), and Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan IV (2014-2018) have been implemented. Currently, the Neary Rattanak Strategic Plan V (2019-2023) has concluded, and the Neary Rattanak VI (2024-2028) has been issued.

During the fifth phase (2019-2023), the policy focused on gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting strategy centered on six sector strategies. Education for women and girls is Strategy 2, which states that "Education for women and girls is a necessary condition for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls in all fields" (CDIR, 2024, p.15). This phase primarily emphasized supporting higher education for girls and parenting education programs, while primary and secondary education were less emphasized. According to Ven and Pham (2022), "Despite good progress in primary and secondary level enrollment, gender disparity still exists in Cambodia by geographical areas, adult literacy, higher education and TVET" (p.7). This suggests that while significant progress has been made in primary and secondary education under past policies, higher education and TVET have lagged behind, prompting a greater focus on these areas during the fifth phase.

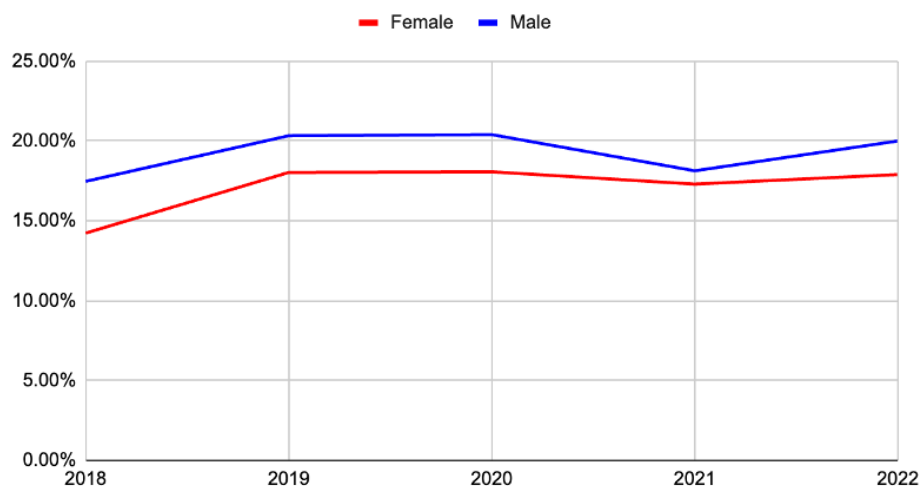
Additionally, since 2008, gender has been mainstreamed in Cambodia's education policies and plans, including the Education Strategic Plan (2009-2013) and the Curriculum Development Master Plan (2010-2014). As a result, these laws, policies, and plans have contributed to gender equality, achieving almost equal enrollment numbers between boys and girls in primary and secondary education (MoWA, 2014). Thus, through its policies, the Cambodian government has focused on girls as a disadvantaged group (CDRI, 2023), making significant progress in gender equality in primary and secondary education. However, the advancement of girls' education has resulted in a significant shift where girls are now outperforming boys in educational attainment. This consequence is called "gender gap reversal."

We obtained official data from the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) to analyze dropout rates in Cambodia's lower secondary schools. The dataset includes national, provincial, district, and commune-level statistics, enabling a multi-level analysis of trends and disparities. By examining this data, we aim to identify key patterns, gender differences, and potential influencing factors behind student dropouts. The following sections provide a detailed breakdown of findings at each level.

### 1.1.1 National Level: Cambodia

Nationwide data shows that dropout rates in lower secondary school differ significantly between genders. Male students generally have higher dropout rates than females, but the gap has been narrowing over time. From 2020 to 2022, despite the impact of the pandemic, dropout rates for both boys and girls decreased slightly. However, the overall issue of school dropouts remains a major challenge.

Figure 1: Student Dropout at Lower Secondary School in Cambodia



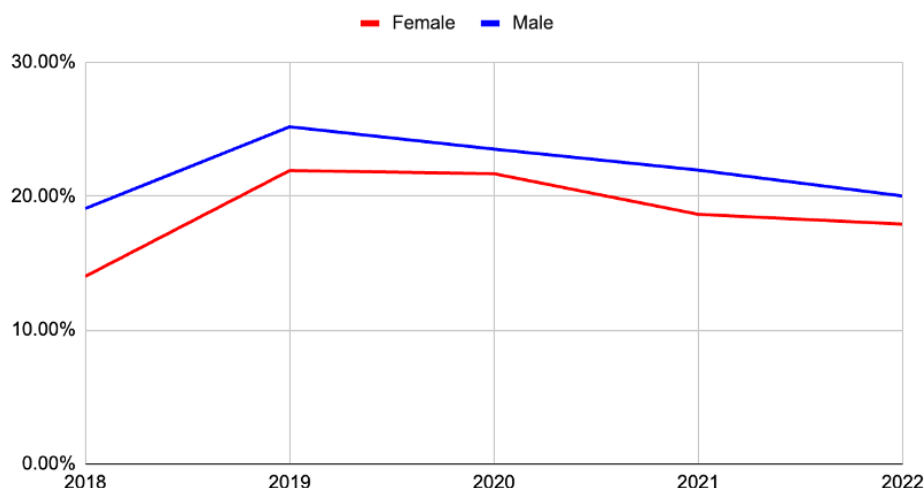
Source: Cambodian MoEYS

### 1.1.2 Provincial Level: Kampong Cham

In Kampong Cham province, the dropout rate for male students has significantly declined since 2018, especially after 2020. Meanwhile, the decline in female dropout rates has been slower, with occasional increases in some years.

**Figure 2** illustrates the dropout rates at the lower secondary school level in Kampong Cham, disaggregated by gender from 2018 to 2022. The data indicates a persistent gender gap, with female dropout rates remaining relatively higher than those of males. Further analysis is needed to explore the potential factors contributing to this disparity.

Figure 2: Student Dropout at Lower Secondary School in Kampong Cham



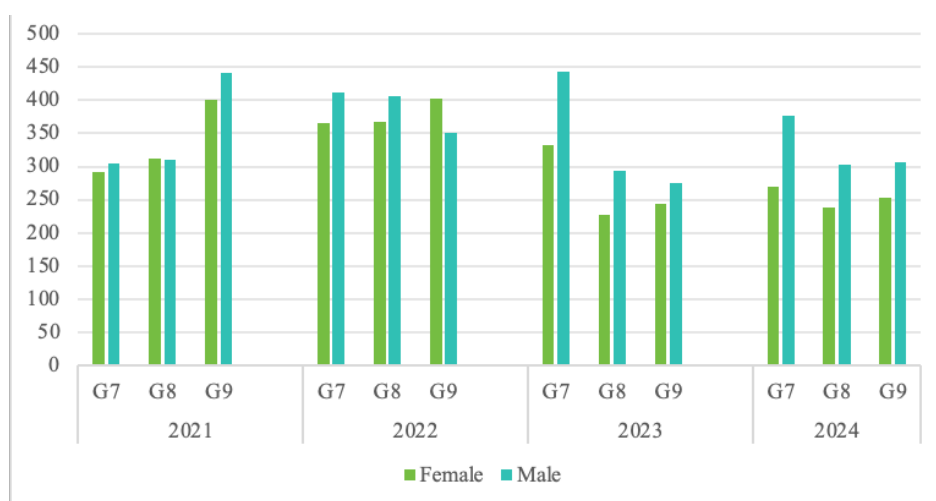
Source: Cambodian MoEYS

### 1.1.3 District Level: Stung Treng

Dropout patterns in Stung Treng district exhibit noticeable differences across grades. From 2021 to 2024, male students in Grade 9 experienced significantly higher dropout numbers compared to Grades 7 and 8, and this trend continued to rise. In contrast, the dropout numbers for female students showed a decreasing trend across the same grades.

**Figure 3** displays the number of students who dropped out at the lower secondary school level in Stung Treng district, categorized by gender and grade for the years 2021 to 2024. The data reveals that the gender gap widens as students progress to Grade 9, suggesting that male students face higher dropout risks in the final year of lower secondary education.

Figure 3: Number of Students Dropping Out at Lower Secondary School in Stung Treng



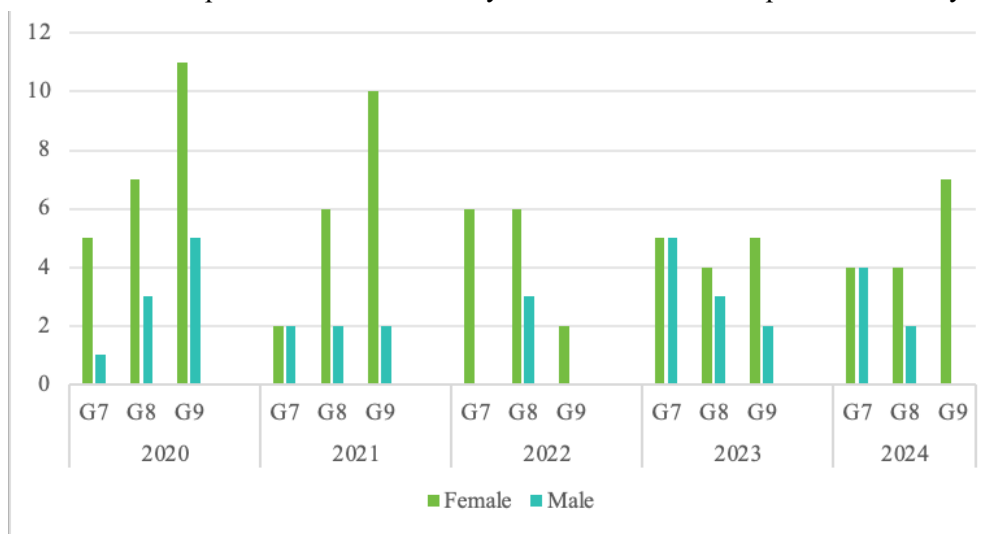
Source: Cambodian MoEYS

### 1.1.4 Commune Level: Hun Sen Sopheas Secondary School

At Hun Sen Sopheas Secondary School, the gender disparity in dropout numbers is even more pronounced. Female students in Grade 9 experienced significantly higher dropout numbers than their male counterparts, particularly between 2020 and 2024, when the dropout numbers peaked. In Grades 7 and 8, dropout numbers for both genders were relatively lower, but the overall trend suggests that female students encounter greater challenges in completing their lower secondary education.

**Figure 4** provides a detailed breakdown of dropout numbers at Hun Sen Sopheas Secondary School by gender and grade. Further analysis is required to examine the potential influence of social or cultural factors and economic pressures on these dropout patterns.

Figure 4: Student Dropout at Lower Secondary School at Hun Sen Sopheas Secondary School



Source: Cambodian MoEYS

## 2. Literature Review

Although the Cambodian government has made great efforts to address gender disparities in primary and secondary education challenges remain, especially in rural areas such as Hun Sen Sopheas Secondary School. To better understand these issues, it is essential to review existing literature on the factors influencing students' continuation in lower secondary education. In previous studies, many researchers have used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the causes of students' continuation in lower secondary education. The attitude in most studies shows that schooling will eventually improve the overall quality of life. However, such a perception does not guarantee that people will accomplish their education programs. Many studies explored extrinsic factors that influence students' continuation in education. These factors can be categorized into academic factors, family factors, school factors, and social-environmental factors.

First, students who struggle academically may feel discouraged, overwhelmed, or hopeless about their chances of success, leading to losing confidence in their abilities and goals (Rumberger, 2011; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). One research study related to academic factors was conducted in 2013 by a group of researchers from the USA; these authors noted that academic factors significantly contribute to students continuing their education. In their research, 38 percent of respondents dropped out of school due to poor grades/failing school. Students who struggle to keep up with schoolwork (32.1%) or complete course

requirements (25.6%) are more likely to abandon their education (Doll et al., 2013).

The second factor, family, includes family size, poverty, and parents' education levels. Gausel and Bourguignon (2020) unveil that the structure of a family highly contributes to the achievement of a child's education. Parental involvement, single-household, and the overall home environment can influence a student's performance, educational achievement, and motivation. For example, a lack of parental care or a negative attitude toward school leads to the interruption of their education. Moreover, other forces coming from the family also make students' education a low priority next to other chores. This includes caring for younger siblings or managing household chores, which can lead to absenteeism (Mishra & Azeez EP, 2014). Additionally, parents' educational level plays a significant role; for instance, Montmarquette, Viennot-Briot, and Dagenais (2007) and Huisman and Smits (2009) find that higher parental education often correlates with higher student retention rates.

The third factor, school encompass the quality of school, curriculum, school rules, and the quality of school teachers. According to McNeal (1997) and Alspaugh (1998), retention rates can be controlled by improving school quality and curriculum. In the same regard, Huisman and Smits (2009) note that the quality of teachers is vital to student' retention. In contrast, a disorganized curriculum and organizational problems in academic programs and other academic practices usually decrease retention rates. Gausel and Bourguignon (2020) show that the structure of a family plays a crucial role in a child's educational journey.

There are also factors such as the geographical location of the school, the quality of the infrastructure in the region, and the wider social, economic, and political environment. For example, Huisman & Smits (2009) and Jordan, Kostandini, and Mykerezzi (2012) note that the distance the student has to travel to attend school can be a factor that discourages one from going to school. It also mentioned that average retention rates are lower in the rural region compared to the urban region. Li (2018) interviewed dropout students, teachers, parents, and a principal in North China and found that the disparity in retention rates between rural and urban areas can be attributed to limited access to quality educational resources and facilities in rural regions. Moreover, inadequate transportation facilities can make it difficult for students, especially in remote areas, to attend school regularly, contributing to lower retention rates. On a macro level, decisions such as political stability, economic downturns, and recessions also influence the number of dropouts. Dreze and Kingdon (2001) describe that political instability and economic downturns entail lower retention rates. In contrast, Jordan, Kostandini, and Mykerezzi (2012) analyze the effects of economic conditions on the region and government aid to education.

A number of research studies performed in Cambodia point to a myriad of economic, familial, school-related, cultural, and social factors that influence. Economically, poverty hinders many children in Cambodia from going to school and contributes to feeding the family. Many students cannot continue their education due to poverty or sourcing other means of income. In Cambodia, 52 percent of youth out of lower secondary and two-thirds of youth out of upper secondary mentioned poverty as the reason they stopped going to school (UNICEF, 2020). Many families expect children to bring income, especially in the rural setting where most children engage in farming. For this reason, students drop out of school to work in order to meet these needs (Doll et al., 2023). Additionally, the opportunity cost of education increases as children grow older, making older students more likely to leave school as they take on breadwinner roles. This is especially common in

traditional Cambodian family structures where children are expected to contribute financially. (Doll et al., 2023). Rural-urban disparities in Cambodia exacerbate the issue, with economic challenges being more acute in rural areas. Families in these regions often rely on agriculture and require children to assist with farming tasks, leading to lower retention rates compared to their urban counterparts (Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association, 2023).

The interactions of these extrinsic factors are important in order to comprehend the multifaceted nature of student continuation in education. However, studies about intrinsic factors influencing students' continuation in education are limited. One existing theory is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT argues that students who do not have autonomy and intrinsic motivation are prone to dropping out, particularly in their studies. However, there is a lack of study regarding students' intrinsic factors and motivation to continue studying. Faiz & Karasu Avcı (2020) say that motivation drives individuals to make efforts to achieve their goals. It can be divided into intrinsic motivation, which refers to interest and enjoyment in the learning process itself, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to learning behavior driven by the desire for rewards or avoidance of punishment. Different motivational profiles of students show varying levels of engagement and academic performance. Raufelder et al. (2022) identified four motivational profiles, with highly motivated students performing better but also experiencing greater pressure.

While extensive research has examined factors affecting student retention rates globally, there are several notable gaps in the existing literature. First, while studies have identified various extrinsic factors (academic, family, school, and social-environmental) and some intrinsic factors (such as those discussed in Self-Determination Theory), there is limited research examining how these factors specifically manifest in the Cambodian context, particularly in rural areas like Sopheas, Kampong Cham.

For clarity, it is important to define two key terms that are central to this study. Academic performance refers to students' educational achievement as measured by their grades, test scores, and overall academic progress in their coursework. Retention rate, in the context of this study, refers to the percentage of students who continue their education at the lower secondary level without interruption, as opposed to those who drop out or temporarily suspend their studies.

Additionally, while previous studies in Cambodia have highlighted economic and social challenges affecting education, there is insufficient research examining gender differences in academic performance and retention rates within specific local contexts. This gap is particularly significant in Sopheas, where the preliminary data analysis revealed a unique pattern: contrary to national and provincial trends where male dropout rates exceed female rates, Sopheas demonstrates higher dropout rates among female students. This distinctive characteristic makes Sopheas an important case study for understanding how gender dynamics influence educational outcomes in rural Cambodia.

### **3. Research Questions and Objectives**

This study aims to address these significant research gaps by investigating local factors that influence educational persistence in rural Cambodia. Specifically, the research examines the unique context of Sopheas, where gender disparities in education appear to contradict national trends. By exploring both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for educational persistence, as well as gender-specific barriers, this research seeks to

provide locally relevant insights that can inform targeted interventions. To accomplish this, the following research questions are proposed:

### ***3.1 Research Questions***

1. What are the students' reasons for continuing to study at lower secondary education level in Sopheas, Kampong Cham, Cambodia?
2. How does gender difference play a role in the academic performance and retention rate of students at lower secondary education levels in Sopheas, Kampong Cham, Cambodia?

### ***3.2 Research Objectives in the Case Study:***

This study explores the factors influencing students' decisions to continue their education at the lower secondary level in Sopheas, Kampong Cham, Cambodia, and to examine the gender-based disparities in academic outcomes and retention rates. Specifically, our first objective is to identify and analyze the motivations behind students' persistence in lower secondary education. These motivations may include personal aspirations, familial support, the availability of educational resources, and external influences such as community encouragement or societal expectations. Understanding these reasons provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by students in this rural context. Our second objective focuses on examining gender differences in academic performance and retention rates. By comparing patterns of achievement and enrollment persistence between boys and girls, this study seeks to uncover the underlying factors contributing to these disparities. This analysis is crucial for addressing the unique needs of each gender, as it highlights systemic barriers and potential inequities within the educational environment. Together, these objectives aim to inform policies and strategies that can enhance student retention and promote equitable educational outcomes in similar rural settings.

## **4. Methodology**

For this study, qualitative research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The interviewees comprised 32 students, including 16 boys and 16 girls, from grades 7 and 8 in Sopheas. The demographic information of the informants is summarized in Table 1 below.



Table 1

Group	Name	Grade	Age	Gender	Group	Name	Grade	Age	Gender
1	A	7th	13	Female	4	A	7th	13	Male
	B		13			B		13	
	C		14			C		14	
	D		13			D		13	
	E		13			E		14	
2	A	8th	14	Male	5	A	8th	14	Female
	B		14			B		14	
	C		14			C		14	
	D		14			D		14	
	E		14			E		14	
3	A	8th	15	Female	6	A	8th	16	Male
	B		15			B		14	
	C		15			C		14	
	D	7th	13	Male		D	7th	12	
	E		13			E		13	
	F		13			F		13	

Source: Authors' compilation

Additionally, six teachers and the school principal were interviewed to gain further insights. The demographic information of teachers interviewed is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher	age	gender
1	39	Female
2	39	Male
3	39	Female
4	35	Male
5	38	Female
6	47	Male

Source: Authors' compilation

A total of nine parents were selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included parents residing in the Sophea area with more than one child enrolled in the school. Similarly, Table 3 presents the demographic details of the parents who participated in this study.

Table 3

Parents	Age	Gender	Number of Children
A	37	Female	3
B	46	Female	3
C	47	Male	3
D	40	Female	2
E	56	Female	5
F	33	Female	2
G	42	Female	4
H	46	Male	3

Source: Authors' compilation

Lastly, we interviewed provincial and district education officers to acquire a broader perspective on the issues under study. Data collection was discontinued upon reaching saturation, as the responses from the selected informants were deemed sufficient to address the research questions. Based on the results of the interviews, we also collected data on the dropout rate in Stung Treng and Sophea from each office.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 *The reasons for students to continue studying*

#### 5.1.1 Student perspective

To explore the reasons why students continue studying at the lower secondary education level in Sopheas, we conducted interviews with 32 students (16 boys and 16 girls) from Hunsen Sopheas Secondary School. The findings reveal two major categories of motivation: self-oriented and family-oriented reasons.

#### 1. Self-Oriented Reasons

Students shared several personal aspirations that drive their decision to remain in school. These include:

- (1) Finding a better job: Many students believe that education will provide them with better employment opportunities in the future (8 girls, 9 boys).
- (2) Career in education: Some students have specific career goals, such as becoming teachers in subjects they excel at (1 girl, 2 boys).
- (3) Attending university: Higher education is viewed as a stepping stone to achieving personal dreams and professional success (4 girls, 2 boys).
- (4) Studying abroad: A few students expressed ambitions to pursue education in other countries to expand their horizons (2 girls, 3 boys).
- (5) Desiring a better future: Education is seen as a means to improve their quality of life and achieve long-term success (8 girls, 9 boys).

#### 2. Family-Oriented Reasons

In addition to their personal goals, many students cited motivations related to their families. These include:

- (1) Parental expectations: Students emphasized that their parents strongly encourage them to stay in school (5 girls, 7 boys).
- (2) Improving family conditions: Education is viewed as a way to improve their family's socioeconomic status (3 girls, 5 boys).
- (3) Helping parents: Some students aim to use their education to provide financial or other forms of support for their families in the future (4 girls, 7 boys).

These findings highlight a combination of personal ambition and familial influence as key factors motivating students to continue their studies. Boys and girls demonstrated both shared and distinct perspectives, indicating that while some motivations are common across genders, others may be shaped by gender-specific factors. (15 girls, 16 boys).

#### 5.1.2 Parents perspective

To explore the reasons why students continue studying at the lower secondary education level in Sopheas, we conducted interviews with 8 parents. Their perspectives help reveal additional factors that influence students' schooling. Their responses are categorized into four groups.

- (1) Parents with low education push students to school (2 parents)

In the first category, parents expect their children to continue attending school and learning since they have little educational experience. They think that having the same level of education as themselves is not enough for their children to escape the hard life in rural areas. Therefore, they feel the need to provide their children with a better education.

- (2) Parents following the trend (1 parent)

The second category represents parents motivated to send children to school because it is a trend these days. This one is a minor response, and only one interviewee stated this. They are just following what other parents do and do not have any specific expectations or goals for sending their children to school.

- (3) Parents supporting students' will (2 parents)

The third group is the response that parents support what their children desire to do. Their children have a specific dream job and parents know it, for example engineer or teacher. They think their only way to support their children is by sending them to school.

- (4) Parent expecting to get a good job (2 parents)

Responses categorized in the last group represent parents expecting their children to get a good job through educational experiences in school. In this context, a good job means earning enough money to live independently, not physical work but office work.

#### 5.1.3 Teachers and School Principal's Perspective

Teachers are one important reason for students to continue their education. From the opinions of the six teachers interviewed, one can conclude about the necessity of learner-centered education to solve challenges that students meet and to increase learners' interest and activity in school. The teachers noted hindrances to education, such as financial difficulties, family expectations, and societal pressures, which a learner-centered approach can effectively tackle by focusing on individual needs and contexts. For example, Teacher 6

mentioned that students are active when learner-centered methods are involved, Teacher 4 mentioned that activities like group work and competition lead to greater enthusiasm. Encouragement was also a recurring theme, with the 1st teacher focusing on motivating students through open discussions and support and Teacher 6 linking education to practical benefits, such as securing good jobs and supporting families. Moreover, the teachers also suggested some reasons that can inspire students to continue studying. Teacher 5 stressed the importance of a supportive environment, while Teacher 2 described how schools address financial barriers to help students stay in school.

The school also affects whether students continue studying. The school sends teachers to students' households from time to time. Teachers physically go to the homes of the students to convince the parents when they give their children chores that make them miss classes and remind parents to embrace the importance of education. For example, one of the teachers said that in her communication with the parents, she often tells them, "Do not make your children do chores and make sure they attend school." To encourage the students, the school offers awards for those students who have full attendance while raising awareness among families about the value of education to create a supportive environment for learning. Also, teachers encourage students to stay in school by saying, "If you can finish middle school, you can get a better job." Besides these short-term approaches, the school has formalized long-term plans for how it intends to progress in the future. Their one-year plan focuses on monthly activities to improve the academic performance of low-achieving students, while the three-year plan involves targeted strategies to achieve broader objectives. The five-year plan outlines aspirational goals, including academic achievements, environmental improvements, and life skills development for students. These efforts have contributed to students' continuation in school.

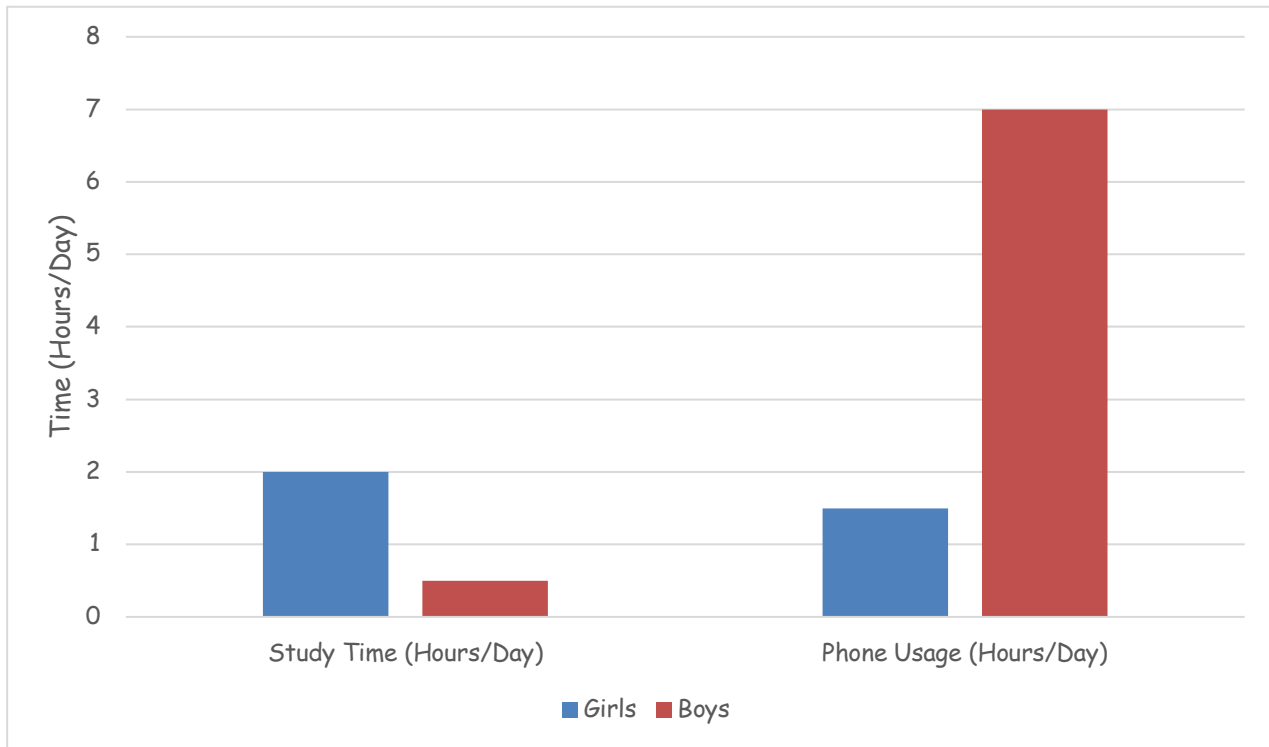
## ***5.2 Gender Differences in Academic Performance and Retention Rates***

Interviews with students, teachers, and principals in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia, highlight gender differences in academic performance and enrollment.

### **5.2.1 Academic Performance and Retention Challenges**

The survey found that 80% of girls study an average of 2 hours per day, compared to only 10-30 minutes for boys (see Figure 1).

Figure 5: Comparison of Study Time and Phone Usage Between Genders



Note: Study time and phone usage are based on interviews students in Kampong Chan.

Source: Field Research Data, 2024

This difference is evident in study habits and technology usage. Boys generally spend considerably more time on their phones, often as much as 8 hours per day. Their phone use is typically focused on activities unrelated to academics, such as social media, gaming, or leisure browsing. This extensive phone usage may contribute to distractions from their studies, impacting their academic performance.

Girls, in contrast, use their phones far less frequently—averaging less than 2 hours per day. Their phone usage is largely academic, including accessing online courses and study materials. This disciplined use of phones may be a contributing factor to their better academic outcomes compared to boys.

However, despite their academic performance, girls face some challenges in attending and continuing school. Domestic responsibilities, such as caring for siblings and household chores, can limit the time available for academics. For example, a student in Group 1 stated, “I cannot attend remedial classes because I have to take care of my younger brother” (Student #1-A).

When parents were asked in the last question of the interview, “If you had only one choice to send your child to school, would you send your daughter or your son to school?”, all parents indicated that they would choose based on their child's academic performance rather than gender. One parent stated, “We give preference to the one who is doing better in school, not whether it's a boy or a girl” (Parent #F). Thus, there are signs that the traditional gender-based school choice priorities are changing for some families.

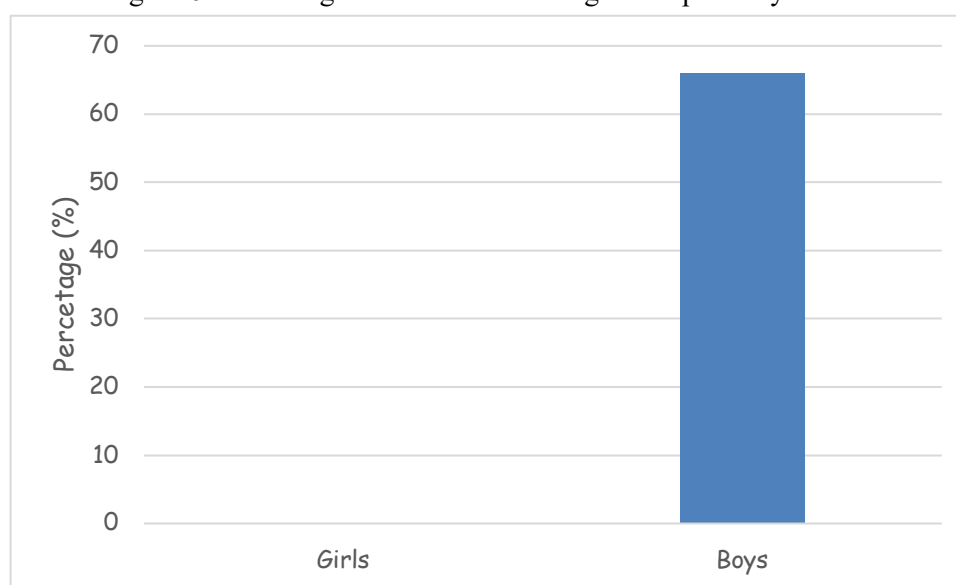
Nevertheless, limited household financial resources and family responsibilities continue to remain important barriers to continuing education, especially for girls.

### 5.2.2 Academic Trends and Retention Challenges for Male Students

Although boys demonstrate superior achievement in technical subjects such as math and physics, their lack of clear academic and short-term career goals hinders their progression to higher education. For example, the Group 4 survey found that many boys plan to leave school in 9th or 10th grade to work abroad. One student aspired to go to Korea as a migrant worker. Teachers also noted that boys were more likely to be influenced by their friends and leave school because they admired them for going to work as a migrant and earning enough money to purchase motorcycles and other things. This trend is particularly pronounced in contrast to female students, with 66% of boys indicating their intention to leave school by grade 11 (see Figure 2).

These trends may be due to their orientation toward occupations that do not necessarily require higher education.

Figure 6: Percentage of Students Planning to Drop Out by Gender



Note: Dropout plans reflect student's intentions before completing grade 11.

Source: Field Research Data, 2024

### 5.2.3 Gender-Based Subject Strengths and Academic Challenges

Interviews with students, teachers, and the school principal in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia, reveal different academic tendencies and subject strengths for men and women. These differences indicate broad gender-based trends in education.

Our interviews revealed that many female students identified Khmer as their most vital subject and had high self-affirmation in Khmer. However, in contrast to their strengths in language subjects, many female students have difficulty with technical subjects such as math and physics. In this regard, a study by Eccles (1994) found social expectations had an impact on girls' educational choices and academic outcomes. Lockheed & Verspoor's (1991) study also noted that in educational settings in developing countries, a lack of remedial classes and teaching materials hinders girls' achievement in technical fields.

### 5.2.4 Cultural and Societal Influences

Our findings reveal significant gender-based disparities in academic performance and retention rates among lower secondary school students in rural Cambodia. These disparities are closely tied to cultural and societal influences. In many families and communities, a division of labor based on gender remains pronounced, shaping the expectations placed on boys and girls. Boys are often expected to contribute financially to their households by engaging in paid labor or helping with family businesses. This financial responsibility can lead to reduced time and energy for academic pursuits, negatively impacting their school performance and attendance. Conversely, girls are frequently tasked with household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for siblings, which, while time-consuming, may allow for a more flexible schedule to accommodate schoolwork compared to the rigid demands of financial labor.

However, these responsibilities can also result in challenges to retention, particularly during critical periods such as adolescence when societal expectations for girls to prepare for marriage or assume greater domestic responsibilities intensify. These gendered expectations contribute to a complex dynamic: while girls often outperform boys academically, they face a higher likelihood of leaving school early due to societal pressures and economic constraints. Thus, the cultural and societal roles assigned to boys and girls significantly shape their educational experiences, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive policies and interventions to address both academic and retention-related disparities.

## **6. Discussion**

### ***6.1 The influence of COVID-19***

#### **6.1.1 Reduced income for farmers and academic performance**

The response to the outbreak of COVID-19 has impacted education in Cambodia in a negative way, deepening existing difficulties and creating new ones. One of the biggest challenges was the pressure of livelihood on families. According to the interviews conducted in Sophea, most of the households in the area are farmers. They suffered lower income because of the closure of borders and restrictions on trade. Parents H shared that “due to COVID-19, we couldn’t earn enough money to send our children to school and had to choose between purchasing online learning equipment and covering basic household expenses.” Parent B also explained, “During that time, the school stopped operating, and all the classes were held online. We needed to buy the online equipment but could not do so for financial reasons. Therefore, they (the kids) stopped schooling and started working at the restaurant.” The emergence of COVID-19 led schools to start conducting online classes, and parents had to purchase phones for their children to engage in online learning. Most students acquire phones for this reason. In terms of phone usage, boys generally spend significantly more time on their phones than girls, while girls primarily use their phones for studying and accessing course materials.

Moreover, according to some teachers, the principal, and the local government district, even in cases where children had access to online classes, the effectiveness of remote learning was limited due to distractions and lack of supervision. This shows how the pandemic affected the finances of families and further caused students to drop out, especially those from low-income households. This also introduced a significant gender disparity. From the interview results, it is evident that boys exhibit significantly higher phone usage, engaging with their devices 4–5 times more frequently than girls, with an average daily usage of 12 hours, primarily for diverse activities beyond educational purposes. In contrast, girls predominantly utilize their phones for online courses,

with a markedly lower average usage of less than 2 hours per day. Though phones were provided for academic activities, the principal and teachers also noted that boys usually spend more time on the phones in other activities like gaming. For example, teacher 1 mentioned, “We can see that mobile phones will cause distraction, and boys are more easily distracted.” Consequently, boys’ academic performance was lower than girls’, as the former were seen to be more irresponsible when using their phones than the girls, whom teachers noted as being more disciplined when using their phones.

#### 6.1.2 Governmental support to address the educational crisis

To handle the educational disruption during COVID-19, the Cambodian government distributed educational resources through e-learning apps, TV, and radio. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS), in collaboration with UNICEF, has established ongoing learning activities spanning early childhood, primary, lower, and upper secondary education as part of efforts to address the educational crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this initiative, they are providing remote learning assets such as videos and e-lessons. These resources are broadcast through various social media platforms, television, and radio, aiming to reach all households in Cambodia. UNICEF has supported the creation of ongoing learning materials in six core subjects, including 633 learning videos tailored for lower secondary students.

Additionally, MoEYS has collaborated with the private company Cellcard to create the official national app, providing free access to users. Cellcard is a leading telecommunications provider in Cambodia. The digital remote learning tool is designed for teachers and students from grades 1 to 12. It includes a variety of helpful educational resources and tools, such as digital versions of MoEYS’s official textbooks, online lessons, self-assessment, and exam preparation.

To address the factors influencing student retention in Kampong Cham Province, we propose four key measurements supported by literature: financial support, parental and community engagement, improving school environment, and extra classes with academic support. Each measurement is outlined below with supporting evidence.

### ***6.2 Sopheas Cases: Unique Challenges in Gendered Dropout Patterns***

The data from Hun Sen Sopheas Secondary School reveals significant challenges in retaining female students, who exhibit lower retention rates compared to their male counterparts. To understand this anomaly, we explored factors unique to the school and its surrounding community. Three main issues were identified that hinder the retention of female students:

#### 1. Financial Matters

Financial pressures heavily influence students’ ability to continue their education. For many girls, these pressures lead to prioritizing work or household responsibilities over schooling. Families with limited resources may perceive education as less critical for girls, pushing them to leave school early to contribute to the family’s income. This financial burden creates a significant barrier to retaining female students.

#### 2. Cultural Context

Societal norms and cultural expectations in the Sopheas community shape girls’ educational trajectories. Traditional views often encourage girls to take on domestic roles or marry at an early age, reducing the



perceived value of continued schooling. These cultural pressures discourage girls from staying in school, further lowering retention rates.

### 3. Social Influence

Peer and familial influences significantly impact girls' decisions to leave school. When older siblings, neighbors, or friends drop out and move to Phnom Penh for work, they often return with signs of financial success, creating the perception that leaving school can lead to a better future. This perception weakens the motivation of younger girls to remain in school, contributing to lower retention rates.

## ***6.3 Financial support***

Financial constraints are a significant barrier to students attending and continuing school. Especially in rural areas in Cambodia, due to economic factors, children must help at their family farms. Even though they often help only on weekends when school is not in session, it affects school attendance. As they work more hours, they spend less time at home doing homework, which leads to problems such as poor grades.

Scholarships, community support, and government programs can alleviate this financial burden. For example, the Building Equity in Education Program (BEEP) in Cambodia provides financial assistance to students in financial difficulty, enabling them to continue their studies (UNICEF Cambodia, 2020). Such programs have been shown to reduce household burden and decrease dropout rates. Research has also shown that cash transfer programs and scholarships directly impact student enrollment in rural and low-income communities (Baird et al., 2011).

## ***6.4 Parent and Community Involvement***

Parent and community involvement is an essential factor in continuing school, not only in Cambodia but also in many other countries. Research shows that when parents and the community are involved in school activities and decision-making, students are likelier to stay in school (Epstein, 2001). In an interview with a Kampong Cham Province officer, he said that community leaders call parents of children at risk of dropping out and that the local community talks about the significance of school. As a result, some parents and students decided not to drop out because they understood the school's significance. The Family-School Partnerships Framework also emphasizes the importance of parent-school collaboration in contributing to improved educational outcomes (Australian Government Department of Education, 2018).

## ***6.5 Improving the School Environment***

The school environment is another essential factor in promoting student enrollment. The schools we visited had pump-and-go toilets with manual flushing. The water that was flushed was collected from rain and other sources and was found to be muddy. These toilets are not at high-level sanitary conditions and should be improved for the safety and comfort of students and teachers. It is especially essential to have toilets that can be used comfortably and safely in middle schools, where many students of menstrual age attend. One study indicates that lack of basic facilities discourages girls from attending school and leads to higher dropout rates (UNESCO, 2021). Studies in rural Cambodia have also shown that improved sanitation facilities are associated with higher enrollment of girls (Cambodia Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2020).

The school environment does not only affect children. It also has a significant impact on teachers who use the same facilities. Inclusive and safe school environments can improve teacher retention and motivate students to learn (Thapa et al., 2013). Thus, facilities with high sanitation and significantly improved toilets have a high impact on children's learning and the teachers who use the same facilities. Investments in the school environment, especially sanitation, have a very high impact.

### ***6.6 Remedial Classes and Academic Support***

Providing remedial classes and academic support to students absent from school due to out-of-school responsibilities (e.g., household chores, agricultural work, etc.) can help them catch up academically. Many parents interviewed said they send their children to additional classes. They said that taking additional classes is expected, and the school is designed to assume additional classes. These additional classes are equitable and are particularly effective for rural students. It is essential to note that if equity is lost, it will highlight more educational disparities and disparities between rich and poor.

Studies in other developing countries have shown that remedial classes can help students catch up academically and increase their likelihood of staying in school (Banerjee et al., 2007). In Cambodia, after-school remedial programs supported by local NGOs have also been reported to contribute to lower dropout rates (Room to Read, 2021).

## **7. Conclusion**

This study presented an understanding and explanation of students' continuation in lower secondary education in Sopheas, Kampong Cham, Cambodia, with a particular focus on gender differences in performance and dropout rates. By considering the perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and local officials, the study revealed the complexity of issues and opportunities associated with the implementation of Virtual Learning Environments.

Our research reveals that students' continuation in education is often driven by self-related goals aligned with career aspirations and family-related objectives aimed at improving their family's socioeconomic status. Additionally, parents play a significant role, by encouraging education due to their own lack of it, following societal trends, backing their children's ambitions, and expecting future financial stability through education. Teachers and schools also contribute significantly, employing learner-centered methods, household outreach programs, and structured plans to motivate students and address barriers such as financial difficulties and societal expectations. However, significant gender-based differences emerge. Girls tend to perform better academically but face higher dropout rates due to cultural expectations and domestic responsibilities, while boys are more likely to leave school for financial reasons or peer influence.

These findings illustrate the need for strategies to reduce these disparities. Recommendations include economic assistance programs to alleviate cost pressures, community-based initiatives to shift societal attitudes, improvements to school infrastructure to make it more inclusive, and remedial classes for students facing academic difficulties. By implementing these measures, policymakers, educators, and economists can work together to promote equal education and enhance student retention. Addressing the structural and cultural barriers to education is essential for achieving sustainable gender equality and advancing education in rural

Cambodia.

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## **Governance**

### **Assessing the Factors Influencing Agricultural Cooperative Membership in Cambodia: the Case of Sambo Meanchey**

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# 1. Introduction

Cooperatives are entities created to provide services that address their members' needs, benefiting them through transactions and earnings distribution. They play an important role in delivering essential services, enabling collective action in complex market environments, and acting as a strategic mechanism for the survival and sustainability of producers (Zakaria et al., 2022). In a global economy, cooperatives impact millions of lives and contribute significantly to community development (Niyonzima et al., 2021). Governments have promoted cooperatives to enhance smallholder farmers' incomes, livelihoods, and sustainability (Ofori et al., 2019).

Agriculture Cooperatives (ACs) play a crucial role in the socioeconomic development of developing countries by addressing structural barriers and enhancing market access for smallholder farmers. They help mitigate challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited access to credit, and lack of technical knowledge. They facilitate joint activities that help agricultural producers realize their economic interests and improve market access, as seen in the Vietnamese rice production sector, where value chain links and coordination have significantly enhanced farmers' profits and market competitiveness (Khong, 2022). By linking smallholder farmers with evolving food systems, cooperatives also empower them to participate in sustainable agri-food chains, as evidenced by the positive impact on livelihoods in Eastern Cape, South Africa (Alhanaqtah, 2023).

With a rural population of about 77%, Cambodia also relies on ACs as a driver of economic growth and poverty reduction (Morris et al., 2013). ACs in Cambodia trace back to the 1950s and 1960s (Chhinh et al., 2022). After the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, they were reconstituted in the 1980s as solidarity groups, to alleviate agricultural supply shortages and support impoverished communities. The formal institutionalization of ACs was reinforced by the Royal Decree of 2001 and the enactment of the Law on Agricultural Cooperatives in 2013, which mandated the registration of the cooperatives with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF). This legislation sought to bolster agricultural productivity and provide assistance to farmers. As a result, in 2021, there were around 1,217 registered agricultural cooperatives in Cambodia (Chhinh et al., 2022).

**Figure 1: Map of Cambodia**



Source: iStock.

In Cambodia, ACs play a crucial role in enhancing the livelihoods of smallholder farmers through skill building,



technology transfer, provision of inputs, and access to credits and loans for agricultural investment (Ofori et al., 2019). These cooperatives have been instrumental in managing drought risks by increasing access to natural and physical assets. However, ACs face several constraints in their operations, namely a lack of commitment from AC committees and limited human and financial resources. Despite these challenges, ACs have empowered farmers to diversify crops and develop value chains. However, local engagement remains limited due to poor management, inadequate capital, and lack of access to competitive markets and extension services (Chhinh et al., 2022).

Membership in commercial vegetable cooperatives has not directly increased agricultural incomes. Still, it has positively influenced technology choice, access to credit services, and information transmission through technological training, highlighting the importance of the services provided by cooperatives (Ofori et al., 2019). Although they are essential for socio-economic development, food security, and climate risk mitigation, ACs in Cambodia still require enhanced government support, technological advancements, and market facilitation to overcome existing constraints and fully realize their potential.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The government of Cambodia has introduced several reforms and initiatives to strengthen the capacity of existing cooperatives and establish new ones (Engvall et al., 2008). Guided by key frameworks such as the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) Principles (1985) and the United Nations Guidelines for Creating a Supportive Environment for Cooperatives (2001), these reforms aimed to boost the economy and reduce poverty through agricultural development (ADB, 2012). The initiatives were further supported by NGOs and other stakeholders and aligned with the Cambodian National Strategic Development Plan (2009–2013). The legal foundation was strengthened through the enactment of the Law on Agricultural Cooperatives in 2013. Additionally, the government issued the Guideline for the Establishment and Registration of Agricultural Cooperatives in 2018 to foster the creation and formalization of cooperatives.

However, according to the Cambodia Development Research Institute (2013), several key challenges affect the agricultural cooperatives in Cambodia, such as inefficient leadership, limited membership, and governance and establishment challenges. Consequently, some farmers hesitate to join agriculture cooperatives due to a lack of trust and skepticism about the cooperatives' ability to improve their livelihoods meaningfully (Morris et al., 2013), as well as lack of awareness, high registration fees, and past failure cases (Reach & Lee, 2016). Therefore, this research will assess the motivations behind the farmers' choice to join the cooperatives.

## **3. Literature Review**

Globally, up to a billion people are members of cooperatives (UN, 2014). While these cooperatives do try to sustain profitability, their main goal is to provide services to its members (CFA, 2023). Historically, before cooperatives were transformed into establishments, they were more of traditional agricultural movements where people worked together and shared the benefits (Siregar et al., 2024).

Over the years, the motivations behind the creation of ACs by initiators have been social, economic, or political. Grassroots movements, NGOs, and “respectable individuals” leaned towards socioeconomic justifications adding to the development of a country, while the government incorporated a political element in addition to that (Siregar et al., 2024). Many developed countries refused government intervention in cooperatives and instead relied on self-

funded capital and sought external assistance only when necessary. However, developing countries rely on government support, and many of them cannot function without it.

In Asia Pacific, including Cambodia, ACs help smallholder farmers boost their agricultural management and reduce poverty. The Government of Cambodia has implemented a plan to promote the agricultural sector, mandating that agricultural cooperatives register with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF, 2013). This aims to diversify agricultural production and create market access.

A cooperative with democratic management and engaging participation is more likely to grow in size (MAFF, 2013). Additionally, other studies stated that internal factors such as membership are considered to play a prominent role in the success of a cooperative. The membership size of a cooperative can determine the total goods and services provided to consumers. A large number of members may affect business planning, the reduction of transaction costs, and the input needed. Some studies show that a large number of members might positively affect a cooperative's performance (Sexton & Iskow, 1988). This study aims to understand the relationship between AC's membership size and its success in providing benefits to its members.

While existing studies highlight the critical role of internal factors, particularly membership size, in the success of cooperatives (Pham, 2022), the factors that drive membership growth remain underexplored. Additionally, the relationship between these factors and their collective impact on membership dynamics has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature. By addressing this gap, this study explores the key drivers of membership growth in ACs and examine how the interaction between them influences cooperative membership.

## **4. Research Objectives and Questions**

In this research, we investigate the agricultural cooperatives' success in terms of the growth in the number of members of an AC. We aim to identify and analyze the factors that contribute to increasing membership in ACs, using Sambo Meanchey AC as a case study. Additionally, we examine the relationship between these factors. Specifically, we address the following research questions:

1. What factors increase membership in ACs?
2. How are these factors related to each other?

## **5. Significance of Study**

This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by examining the potential factors contributing to the increase of membership in ACs in Cambodia affecting the success of ACs. It provides a case-specific analysis that can be generalized to better understand the dynamics related to the increase in ACs membership. While the case of Sambo Meanchey AC is specific to Cambodia's socioeconomic, political, and cultural landscape, limiting the direct applicability of this study to other contexts, it does provide valuable insights that can be, to some extent, generalized. The AC's growth highlights how factors such as service diversification, community engagement, and external support contribute to increasing membership. Although these insights are context-specific, they possess broader significance, making Sambo Meanchey AC a relevant case study for understanding the factors affecting membership growth in agricultural cooperatives. Therefore, the information collected will be relevant to improving strategies and policies that can impact other ACs in Cambodia.

## 6. Methodology

This research uses qualitative methods utilizing primary and secondary data to explore the factors influencing membership in Sambo Meanchey AC. The methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of various stakeholders.

### Primary Data:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect primary data. The study population includes government representatives, Sambo Meanchey AC leaders and members, and non-members, as shown in Table 2. A total of 44 participants were interviewed based on their relevance to the study (Creswell, 2014). The study population includes the following:

**Government Representatives:** The government representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Department of Rural Development, and the Department of Labor and Vocational Training provide political and regulatory supervision to cooperatives; hence, their insights are relevant to assessing how governmental initiatives and regulations impact cooperatives' profitability and effective governance.

**Sambo Meanchey Cooperative Leaders:** They are involved in the completion and running of decisions of the cooperative. Interviewing them gives insight into the internal rules and regulations as well as cooperative management.

**Sambo Meanchey Cooperative Members:** They can provide perspectives about the motivations for their participation in the AC. Hence, their motivations and expectations can provide valuable information about factors that can influence new membership.

**Non-Members:** They can provide input on why people choose not to join the AC. Understanding their perspective may help identify challenges, barriers, or concerns that discourage participation, guiding the AC's efforts to increase membership.

Table 1: Population of the Study

Population	Number of People
Department of Agriculture	3
Department of Rural Development	4
Department of Labor and Vocational Training	2
Sopheas Commune Council	10
Sambo Meanchey Cooperative Leaders	5
Sambo Meanchey Cooperative Members	18
Non-Members	2
Total Interviewed Population	44

Source: Authors

### Secondary Data:

In addition to primary data, the study uses scholarly documents, legal frameworks, policy papers, reports, etc. These sources offer a contextual background by using information other than the primary data provided by

interviewees to strengthen the findings (Kothari, 2004).

### **6.1 Research Design**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 18 and September 24, 2024, in Sambo Village, the Sambo Meanchey AC Building, the Sopheas Commune Council, and government offices in Kampong Cham. This method allowed for a balance between guided discussion and open-ended responses, ensuring the exploration of relevant topics while capturing diverse perspectives (Esterberg, 2002). There were a total of forty-four (44) participants interviewed. We contacted participants with the assistance of local village leaders and relevant stakeholders, who introduced the research team to interviewees and helped coordinate the interviews. Interviews were conducted in Khmer language and translated into English in real-time with the help of an interpreter.

Ethical considerations were prioritized as all participants provided informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality measures. In order to maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a code. This code is used throughout this report when referencing their responses. The complete list of codes is provided in the appendix for reference. This approach ensured anonymity while allowing for detailed, transparent analysis of the data.

This list of codes provides a breakdown of the interviews conducted for this research. It categorizes participants by their roles, positions, affiliations, dates, and locations of the interviews. The first group includes government representatives (GOV1–GOV9) from the Department of Agriculture, Labor, and Education. These individuals include Heads and Deputy Heads of Departments and Assistants, all interviewed at their offices on September 20, 2024. Their insights are crucial for understanding policy decisions, government initiatives, and their role in supporting agricultural cooperatives. The second group includes members of the Sopheas Commune Council (LOC1–LOC10), including the Commune Council Chief and staff. These interviews were conducted on September 19, 2024, at the Sopheas Commune Council office, offering perspective on the challenges and benefits experienced by the community when engaging with agricultural cooperatives. The third group focuses on leaders of the agricultural cooperative (LDR1–LDR5), including the Chief, Deputy Chief, Board Members, and the CEO as the head of the office who manages the overall staff. Interviews with this group were conducted at the Sambo Meanchey AC on September 17, 2024, to explore governance and decision-making within the cooperative.

The fourth group comprises the agricultural cooperative (MEM1–MEM18) members who reside in Sambo Village. These interviews were conducted on various dates to understand members' motivations for joining the cooperative and their experiences. Finally, the last group includes nonmembers (NMEM1–NMEM2) from Sambo Village, interviewed on September 24, 2024. Their perspectives are essential for identifying the reasons some individuals choose not to join the cooperative and understanding their experiences as nonmembers.

## **7. The case of Sambo Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative**

Sambo Meanchey AC, officially registered on December 10, 2010, is located in Sambo village, Sopheas Commune, Steung Strong District, Kampong Cham Province (see Figure 2). At its foundation, the AC had 88 members, of which 45 were women. It has 117 shares valued at \$12 each, totaling approximately \$2,003 in capital (APFP, 2019; CFPA, 2024). By 2024, the cooperative had grown significantly to 2,250 members, nearly 17,000 shares, and a

capital base of approximately \$750,000 <sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 2: Sambo Meanchey AC at Sambo Village**

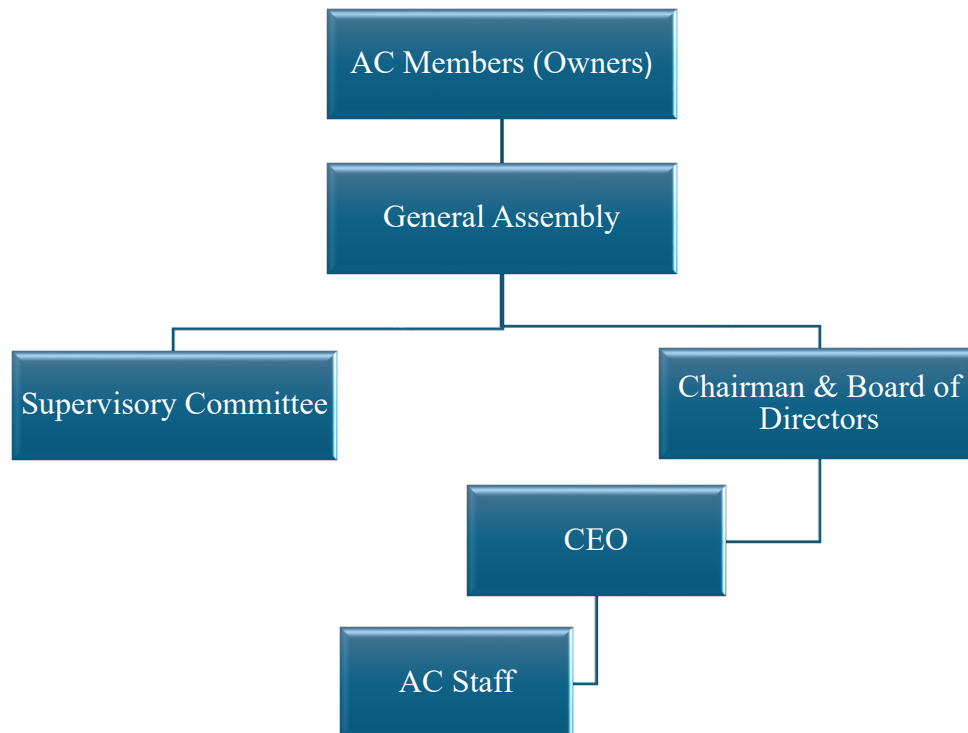


Source: Authors.

The cooperative was established to address farmers' concerns about securing markets, negotiating product prices, providing agricultural loans, and offering technical skills and information to its members (CFPA, 2024). Over time, the AC's activities expanded to include renting facilities and tools, creating jobs at the net house and communal land, training, and internship, producing rice seed and lemongrass oil, and facilitating market access for its members' products, particularly in Phnom Penh. As of 2024, lemongrass and rice seeds are the AC's main products. The AC's current organizational structure and management system comprises the AC's members (owners), the General Assembly, a Chairman and Board of Directors, a supervisory/audit committee, the Head of Office (called CEO), and the AC's staff (see Figure 3).<sup>2</sup>

According to the overseeing authority, Sambo Meanchey AC is a reference case in governance in Kampong Cham, notable for achieving its social objectives and substantial membership growth.<sup>3</sup> The cooperative growth from 88 members in 2010 to 2,250 by 2024 reflects its ability to provide meaningful services such as loans, transportation, and sales facilitation. The focus on sustainable resource development and value chain integration enabled members to transition from traditional subsistence farming to more diversified and profitable agricultural practices, significantly enhancing their economic stability and community well-being.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3: Organization and Management Structure of the AC**



Source: Authors, based on the information provided by the AC.

## **8. Findings**

### **8.1 Membership increase**

In an overview, membership in the Sambo Meanchey AC appeared to be primarily on the increase due to the benefits of profitability anticipated by the members. However, this research took an exploratory approach to acquire a clear picture of why people joined the cooperative from the fieldwork. Our study has uncovered three factors determining the members' choice to join the Sambo Meanchey AC. First, profitability informed the membership boom on account of people getting market for their farm produce through the cooperative.

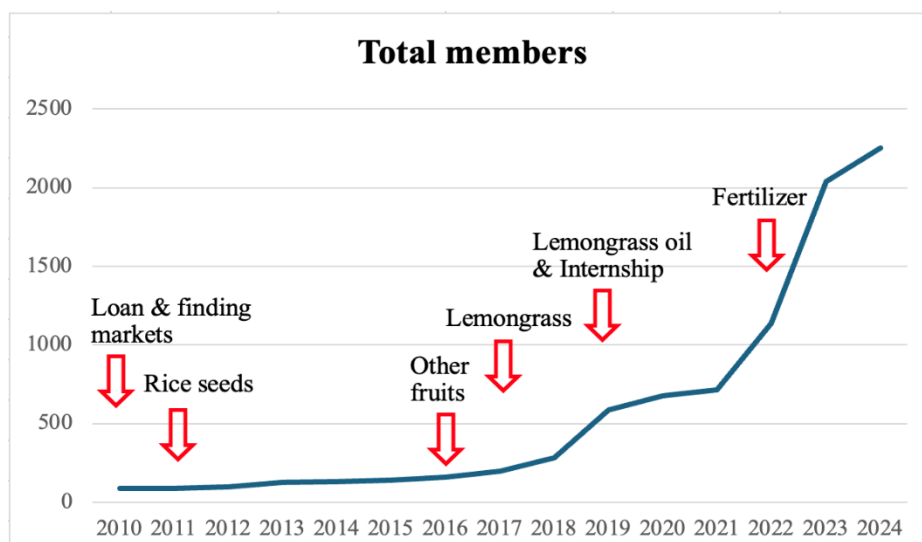
The farmers complained of instances where their harvests went badly and experienced losses after investing resources as non-members. Also, the cooperative changes their lives for the better as it improves their lifestyle in many aspects. Leadership also attracts more people through trust in the leader, which confirms a relief for one's wealth in safe hands. Even though that notion solidified in a post hoc manner, revealed by the achievements brought to the cooperative, as shown by the length he stayed in office. These two factors directly shaped people's decision to join the Sambo Meanchey AC in a significant way.

Another factor, which is indirect, in the form of external support, has made an impact on the cooperative. This is attributable to the involvement of the government and other influential bodies in creating a solid foundation for the cooperative and boosting its capacity to fulfill its mandate. Monetary support channeled into projects for community development, initiatives to ease the transport of farm produce, and, later, empowerment are some examples. That and profitability directly influence people, while external support from the bodies impacts indirectly. In addition, other factors, such as people's recommendations and political pressure, are less significant. It further reveals that leadership and external support ensured the AC's growth at an early stage, while external support primarily shaped

profitability. The recognized pattern of the analysis broadly demonstrates a self-reinforcing cycle, where one factor enables the other.

The number of members increased over the years with the introduction of certain goods and services. Figure 5 shows the steady and rapid increase in membership from the inception of the AC in 2010 to 2014 at different times. From 2010 to 2016, membership remained relatively flat, with a gradual increase towards the end of the period. The changes in the trend of membership in the Sambo Meanchey AC alternates depending on the significance of the factors.

**Figure 5: Membership evolution from 2010 to 2024**



Source: Authors, based on information given by the AC.

The probable explanation for why membership increase was slow in the early years is the difficulty in persuading people to join the cooperative. This stemmed from the fear of being seen as similar to suspicious groups, such as the Agricultural Community, common during the Khmer Rouge regime. Many Cambodians during this period were forced to work under difficult conditions while they survived on small food rations. “When the AC was established, it was difficult to get more people to join. This was because some people were scared that they were joining some suspicious groups that existed during the Khmer Rouge regime, and a typical example is the group called ‘Agricultural Community,’ which brought so much suffering to the people.”<sup>5</sup>

The first set of products (papaya, rice seeds) had limited markets, not allowing the AC to profit in its first years, so people did not see the attractiveness of joining<sup>6</sup>. In 2017, a noticeable but steady increase in membership occurred when lemongrass became a main product, creating the biggest market for the AC. That year signifies the booming era for lemongrass, and it extended into 2019. This was confirmed during the interview as follows: “Lemongrass started to sell in 2017, and it was a huge market. To date, the AC’s biggest market is that of lemongrass”<sup>7</sup>.

However, the COVID-19 period from 2019 to 2021 slowed membership as global challenges persisted, which shows relatively uniform changes. A significant increase in membership begins around 2021. The slope shows rapid growth, suggesting a major change within the AC. Analytically, as opportunities returned due to relaxed pandemic restrictions, the internship in Korea introduced in 2019 became the prime element. The data confirmed that the internship was a significant factor affecting the rapid increase in membership, as it required the beneficiaries,

spouses or parents to at least own some shares to get qualified: “In 2019, when the internship started, it became higher as the opportunity to get more benefit has come. Since that year, there has been almost a thousand increase to date”<sup>8</sup>.

In 2022, the members enjoyed some incentives, making the Sambo Meanchey AC more attractive. For example, fertilizer became available for the AC members at a discounted rate, compared to the one purchased by non-members at market price. This also encouraged them to use compost instead of chemical fertilizers as part of inculcating global agricultural best practices.

## ***8.2 Factors affecting the membership increase***

Our findings suggest multiple factors affecting the membership increase. Among them, external support is the most significant determinant of the success and membership growth of ACs. This external support, provided in tangible (e.g., rice seeds, infrastructure) and intangible forms (e.g., training, internships), shapes the effectiveness of other factors, such as leadership and profitability, which directly impact membership. However, the interviews with government officials revealed that while external support is essential, it alone does not guarantee success; effective leadership plays a crucial role as well.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, this study identifies a self-reinforcing cycle, where external support increases membership, and rising membership attracts further external support, creating a loop of perceived success.

### **8.2.1 The Role of External Support**

The central factor we identified as influencing membership volume in the AC is external support. This factor is the only one that we classify as indirect, which means that the members of the AC did not list it as one of the reasons for joining the AC, but it influences the effectiveness of the other factors.

External support comes to the AC through various channels. One form of support is the provision of rice seeds by the Department of Agriculture. These seeds are loaned to AC members, who pay for them after harvest.<sup>10</sup> This system ensures members access to necessary resources without immediate economic burden.

Infrastructure development is another vital area of support. The construction of facilities, such as net houses and irrigation systems, has been financed through external aid from the Department of Agriculture. These structures enhance the cooperative's productivity and sustainability, enabling better agricultural practices.

Training programs are also provided to AC members by the Department of Agriculture. These programs cover a range of topics, including business administration and advanced agricultural techniques, equipping members with the skills needed to effectively manage their activities and improve their yields. Additionally, since 2019, the AC has facilitated internships in South Korea, which last between two to six months and can be awarded multiple times. Managed by the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, these internships are exclusively available to AC members<sup>11</sup>. To qualify, participants must pass several tests, including basic Korean language proficiency and physical condition assessments. This opportunity offers members international exposure and advanced training, further contributing to their personal and professional development.

These four elements can be classified into two groups: tangible benefits (rice seeds and infrastructure) and intangible benefits (training and internship). The first classification includes elements that act as material support. In the case of rice seeds, the AC members have the physical object for planting and harvesting. When it comes to



the net house, the members of the AC see the actual infrastructure built, where they can work for a daily wage. The second classification, intangible benefits, provides, in principle, knowledge. However, they can also provide economic benefits, which will be explained later.

### 8.2.2 The Role of Leadership

Leadership is a direct factor influencing affiliation to the AC. It is classified as so because it was explicitly cited by the AC members in the interviews as an important factor that led them to choose to join the cooperative. We asked the interviewees about the influence of leadership on their decision to join the AC, with a phrasing that was easy to understand: we asked the AC members about their thoughts about the chief of the AC and the board members. A member declared that, when the AC was founded, her reason for joining relied mainly on trust in the leadership as she had personally “known the AC Chief since he was very young.”<sup>12</sup> Another member said that the AC Chief is a “good guy with a good reputation”.<sup>13</sup> On a similar note, another person described the leader as a “very nice guy who is leading the villagers to prosperity.”<sup>14</sup> Comments about the AC Chief from the rest of the interviewees followed the same line of thinking.

Leadership inspired trust in the community and channeled the external support available. These elements were especially important in the early stages of the AC for three reasons. First, active leadership ensured the survival of the AC early on, a time when the cooperative was especially vulnerable as they went through a trial and error stage to choose what products they could find a market for. A commune leader expressed that the Sambo Meanchey AC’s Chief “invested a lot of time on it since the beginning.”<sup>15</sup> Second, without previous experiences and lack of information, the community did not know the purpose and benefits of the AC, and the leadership had to work hard to inform people and convince them to join. One member of the AC stated that the leader “clearly explained to them how to do good business.”<sup>16</sup> Third, the available external support continued because of active leadership, as the government agencies expressed that they should increase their support to the ACs with effective leadership that can channel it to the members. In the words of an interviewee, “Active leadership is fundamental for the development of ACs.”<sup>17</sup> Another interviewee stated that the Sambo Meanchey AC “gets more support from the Department of Agriculture than the other AC in the Commune” because of the leadership described as “very active” and “with a “good network.”<sup>18</sup>

From the opinions quoted above, we can deduce that the leadership had, a priori, the job of inspiring confidence in the members when no evidence that could guarantee success existed at the early stage. Now that the AC has been firmly established, the leadership *post hoc* influences member affiliation as the potential members see the achievements of the leadership managing the AC.

### 8.2.3 The Role of Profitability

Profitability is also a direct factor that influences increases in membership for a number of reasons.. First, during the fieldwork, we discovered that potential members become interested in joining the AC after hearing that current members’ general economic situation has become more stable and profitable since joining. One member stated that he could now “gain money because I sell my production to the AC.”<sup>19</sup> Additionally, another member said that her economic situation is “much better than before,”<sup>20</sup> and one more interviewee followed the same line of thought by stating that she is now “producing more and earning more money.”<sup>21</sup>

Second, members have access to services that allow them to invest (loans) and profit from their shares (dividends). One member said that she joined the cooperative because of the “access to the loans that have low interest rates” and also stated that “I can get a loan of one million riels, and the interest is only fifteen thousand per month.”<sup>22</sup> Another member stated, “We get our portion of the profit of the AC each year, according to our shares.”<sup>23</sup>

Third, with the rice seed loans, members pay for the rice seeds after harvesting. This is a 0% interest loan. One of the members stated that their initial reason for joining was that “I could access the rice seeds without having to pay upfront.”<sup>24</sup> Another interviewee commented that “the rice seeds attracted many new members.”<sup>25</sup>

Fourth, working at the net house and communal land gives members, especially the ones that do not have land, the opportunity to work daily shifts at these places and get paid by the AC. In the words of one member who does not own any land, “I joined because I wanted to get paid by working on the net house.”<sup>26</sup> Another member had a similar opinion: “I also work in the net house, it was why I joined.”<sup>27</sup>

Fifth, predictable and stable income are important as members can sell their harvest to the AC at reasonable prices every time. In this way, members stop worrying about negotiating with the middleman to get access to markets. One member stated, “Since I joined the cooperative, I don’t have to worry about finding a market myself because it’s easy to sell my production to the cooperative.”<sup>28</sup> When it comes to the difference from how it was before, an interviewed member said, “I don’t worry anymore about the middleman; the cooperative is always open, and they buy my products.”<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, members can apply for internships in South Korea through the Ministry of Labor; if they pass the examination, they work on farms in said country and get paid a monthly salary that surpasses the Cambodian minimum wage. A member said she “was interested in the internships; I can’t go myself because of my age, but my children can apply.”<sup>30</sup> On a similar note, another member said that, because she is not a landowner, she “wanted to access the internship because you can make a lot of money if you get it.”<sup>31</sup> From the perspective of AC leaders and government representatives, internships are a strong factor that mobilizes people to join. One interviewed leader stated that “the internship becomes very attractive, especially for the young people.”<sup>32</sup> And a government representative said he considers that “the internship attracts many new members.”<sup>33</sup>

In sum, we interpret that these opportunities have shaped the image of the AC, which is viewed as a good investment choice for new members and attracts new members.

### ***8.3 Relationship between Factors***

The second research question we tackle in this study is about the relationship between the above factors. Both the profitability factor and the leadership factor are connected to the external support factor and are influenced by it in the following ways. First, at the early stage, leadership and external support were crucial to the AC’s success, especially in driving membership growth. Active leadership not only facilitated external support but also boosted financial and membership growth. As we show above, the opinions of government representatives illustrate the fact that the support that institutions like the Department of Agriculture give is only effective under an active leadership that channels them to the members of the AC. For example, rice seeds are only given by the Department of Agriculture to the AC and never directly to farmers. That is also the case for infrastructure projects such as the net house; according to the Commune Council, both are offered to ACs in general, but the active leaders are the ones who secure them for their members. A member of the Commune Council stated that “if the AC has a good leader,

they will get more support from outside.”<sup>34</sup>

Second, the profitability factors that attracted members to the AC were largely shaped by external support. While members joined for potential profits, these opportunities existed because of external support. The rice seeds, the training, and the fertilizer are provided by the Department of Agriculture. The internship in South Korea is coordinated by the Ministry of Labor. ODA agencies like JICA and others provide infrastructure projects such as a net house and an irrigation system.

For these reasons, we consider the external support factor central to AC’s success as it connects the other two factors. However, it is important to note that external support alone is insufficient to guarantee the success of ACs.

As a result of our analysis, we observed what could be called a “reinforcing cycle.” The trends in membership point to a self-reinforcing cycle where external support for the AC (such as funding, resources, or policy incentives) drives an increase in membership. Consequently, membership growth is seen by outside actors as the positive performance of the cooperative, mobilizing further external support. As a result, the cycle continues because additional external support is accompanied by an increase in membership, and in turn, more members mean more external support granted.

In our fieldwork, we found evidence in support of this theory but not enough to confirm it. The interviews with government officials revealed that, indeed, the ACs that are more “active” and “successful” usually get more external support. One interviewee explicitly revealed that “successful ACs usually get more benefits.”<sup>35</sup> Another interviewee stated that “the other AC in this Commune is not that successful, and that’s why it doesn’t get many benefits from the Department.”<sup>36</sup>

There is another conclusion that can be drawn by the self-reinforcing cycle: the growth in membership is perceived by potential members as a sign of the success of the AC, and that influences them to join; consequently, the membership keeps increasing, which encourages others to keep joining. A member stated, “I saw many people join, so I thought it was a good idea to join, too.”<sup>37</sup> A non-member said that she wants to join “because the AC has many members, so it seems it is successful.”<sup>38</sup>

#### **8.4 Less Significant Factors**

Outside of the previously listed factors, we also found little evidence for other factors that might influence membership growth. Only two interviewees referred to factors not listed above, and we could not corroborate them with the testimonies of other persons. One of these other factors is recommendations by other members. Existing members invite others through word of mouth, sharing information about their benefits. The AC’s meetings enhance the sense of community and encourage existing members to spread the word about the cooperative. A member claimed that “another member recommended me to join, and that’s why I got to know about the AC.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, another member stated, “I recommended my friend to join, and now they are also part of the AC.”<sup>40</sup>

A second factor refers to political pressure. Based on his position of power, political figures from government agencies endorsed participation in the cooperative, thereby increasing membership. An interviewee from the Commune Council mentioned that “when the AC was created, His Excellency<sup>41</sup> instructed people to become members.”<sup>42</sup> On the same note, an interviewee from a government agency mentioned, “I heard that at the beginning, all of the people in the Department were supposed to join that AC.”<sup>43</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

This study explored the key factors influencing the membership growth of ACs in Cambodia, focusing on the Sambo Meanchey AC case. Membership volume in ACs plays a vital role in ensuring their operational success. The findings of this study reveal that leadership, profitability, and external support are the primary factors for membership growth. Moreover, these factors function individually and mutually to foster the success of AC.

For one thing, leadership emerges as a critical factor, particularly in the formative stages of cooperative development. The leader not only builds trust and credibility among potential members but also establishes networks and secure external resources. This multidimensional leadership role is important for shaping both the internal dynamics and external perceptions of the AC. The leader is seen as trustworthy and communicative, encouraging broader participation and active engagement among members.

Profitability is another direct driver of membership growth. Economic incentives, such as access to non-interest loans, dividends, and income stability, significantly encourage farmers to join ACs. The study of the Sambo Meanchey AC case study demonstrates how financial benefits, such as loans for rice seeds and the availability of shared resources like the net house, can address the immediate economic needs of members while contributing to long-term stability. The cooperative's ability to secure markets and negotiate favorable prices makes it appealing, particularly in a context where market unpredictability challenges farmers' efforts. This is evident in our findings, where the majority of interviewees were AC members, and non-members expressed a strong interest in joining. This reflects a growing recognition of AC membership's economic and social benefits.

External support is essential by indirectly providing the resources and opportunities that enable profitability and enhance leadership effectiveness. Government programs, international collaborations, and development initiatives, such as JICA and ADB, have significantly contributed to the cooperative's growth. These organizations' support includes not only tangible resources like loans, training, and infrastructure but also capacity-building and internships.

Finally, the relationship between these factors is arguably the result of a Reinforcing Cycle. In the early stage, leadership played a role in initiating the cycle by efficiently channeling external support. This, in turn, attracted additional external assistance to the AC, which drove membership growth. Then, the growing membership itself continued to drive the cycle as more individuals became motivated to join due to the increasing number of existing members. Finally, other factors, such as member recommendations and political endorsements, may contribute, but this could not be confirmed.

### 9.1 Limitations

A significant constraint of the present study was the limited time frame (two weeks) to conduct fieldwork. More time may have helped build substantial trust and rapport with local leaders and the community, which could have fostered a more transparent, trust-based conversation.

Furthermore, limited time restricted our ability to conduct comprehensive sampling. Because of time constraints, we could not interview many AC members living in other villages and were unable to acquire significant non-members' perspectives. We were also unable to revisit households to review the information provided. Additionally, the short time spent in the field made it difficult to observe the community dynamics or participate in the events the interviewees described during the interviews. The above circumstances did not allow enough flexibility to test and adjust the methodology and research tools to adapt to the field reality and to unforeseen circumstances, such as

participant nonavailability or sociocultural barriers.

The language barrier was another constraint that sometimes led to poor communication. Data was collected in both English and Khmer through simultaneous translation. Despite the dedicated efforts of the RUPP advisor, Prof. Dork Vuthy, and the Research Assistant, Nakhem Eom, to provide accurate translations, conveying the intended message occasionally proved to be difficult. Certain terms were particularly challenging to translate into Khmer, and even after translation, some concepts remained unfamiliar to the interviewees. The above constraint can potentially lead to misunderstandings or incomplete data, which might bias the study's results, in deep research and understanding of the phenomena is still necessary.

## ***9.2 Policy Recommendations***

Considering the main findings and the challenges faced by Sambo Meanchey AC, we would like to propose the following recommendations for the attention of main stakeholders to promote membership and the AC's long-term sustainability.

Continuous government support is essential to help ACs thrive. Their role in providing resources, advisory services, and network support is essential to promote ACs. Therefore, although the self-sustainability of ACs is desirable, governmental financial incentives such as grants and low-interest loans, capacity-building, training programs, and advisory services are needed to guide cooperatives. Additionally, implementing policies that support ACs, organizing networking opportunities (such as business-to-business forums), launching awareness campaigns about the benefits of cooperatives, and implementing a governance monitoring system are important to empower and keep ACs transparent and accountable.

Enhancing leadership training could empower more individuals, reducing reliance and excessive burden on the current leadership. Identifying and nurturing potential leaders by implementing leadership training programs to develop essential skills will foster the growth of qualified members who can support both current and future management of the ACs.

Transitioning from memory-based information to digital data management is vital to safeguard the good management of the ACs. Digital data management is essential to improve accuracy, efficiency, and competitiveness, mitigating the risks associated with human error and forgetfulness. This shift not only modernizes operations but also improves data accessibility, enabling efficient analysis and simplified operations while also facilitating better record-keeping. Therefore, digitalizing the data and training administrative staff can address memory-based information concerns.

Finally, diversifying revenue sources through expanded services and agricultural products can strengthen cooperatives' financial stability. For instance, diversifying revenue sources helps reduce financial risks associated with climate change, pests, and market fluctuations. By having multiple income sources, cooperatives can better handle economic challenges while staying financially stable, even when some products or services do not perform well, enhancing members' loyalty, ultimately attracting more members, and fostering sustainable growth.

In conclusion, continuous government support, leadership training programs, diversification of revenue sources, and digital transformation are essential for fostering sustainable growth. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the strengths identified in this study, agricultural cooperatives in Cambodia can better serve as vehicles for rural development, improving the livelihoods of their members and contributing to broader societal benefits.

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- <sup>1</sup> Interview with LDR5 at Sambo Meanchey AC Building on September 23, 2024
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with LDR1 at Sambo Meanchey AC Building on September 17, 2024.
- <sup>3</sup> Interview with GOV1 at the Department of Agriculture on September 20, 2024.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with LDR1 at Sambo Meanchey AC Building on September 17, 2024.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with LDR4, at Sambo Meanchey AC Building, on September 17, 2024.
- <sup>6</sup> Interview with LDR4, at Sambo Meanchey AC Building, on September 17, 2024.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with LDR2, at Sambo Meanchey AC Building, on September 17, 2024.
- <sup>8</sup> Interview with LDR3, at Sambo Meanchey AC Building, on September 17, 2024.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with GOV1 at the Department of Agriculture on September 20, 2024.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with LDR2 at the Sambo Village in September 19, 2024.
- <sup>11</sup> The Korea Partnership for Innovation of Agriculture (KOPIA) internship program provides the cooperative members with valuable skills and exposure, enhancing the cooperative's capacity as well as increasing its recognition in other communes.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with MEM1 at Sambo Village on September 18, 2024.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with MEM5 at Sambo Village on September 18, 2024.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with MEM6 at Sambo Village on September 18, 2024.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with LOC1 at the Sopheas Commune Council on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with MEM1 at Sambo Village on September 18, 2024.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with GOV2 at the Department of Agriculture on September 20, 2024.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with LOC2 at the Sopheas Commune Council on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with MEM8 at Sambo Village on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with MEM12 at Sambo Village on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with MEM15 at Sambo Village on September 23, 2024.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with MEM10 at Sambo Village on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with MEM14 at Sambo Village on September 23, 2024.
- <sup>24</sup> Interview with MEM12 at Sambo Village on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with LDR5 at Sambo Meanchey AC Building on September 23, 2024.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with MEM7 at Sambo Village on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with MEM14 at Sambo Village on September 23, 2024.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with MEM12 at Sambo Village on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with MEM1 at Sambo Village on September 18, 2024.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with MEM10 at Sambo Village on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with MEM3 at Sambo Village on September 18, 2024.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with LDR2 at Sambo Meanchey AC Building on September 17, 2024.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with GOV1 at the Department of Agriculture on September 20, 2024.
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with LOC2 at the Sopheas Commune Council on September 19, 2024.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview with GOV1 at the Department of Agriculture on September 20, 2024.
- <sup>36</sup> Interview with LOC3 at the Sopheas Commune Council on September 19, 2024.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with MEM16 at Sambo Village on September 23, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with NMEM1 at Sambo Village on September 24, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with MEM18 at Sambo Village on September 24, 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with MEM4 at Sambo Village on September 18, 2024.

<sup>41</sup> In 2011, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (DAFF), under the leadership of the Secretary of State and National Project Director on MAFF, His Excellency Mr. Teng Lao, introduced rice seed loans and provided agricultural training, laying a solid foundation for the cooperative's growth.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with LOC1 at the Sopheas Commune Council on September 19, 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with GOV3 at the Department of Agriculture on September 20, 2024.

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## Appendix

**Table 1: Interviewee information and codes**

	Interviewee Code	Meaning	Position	Place	Date
1	GOV1	Government Representative	Head of Department of Agriculture	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
2	GOV2	Government Representative	Deputy Head of Department of Agriculture	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
3	GOV3	Government Representative	Assistant	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
4	GOV4	Government Representative	Head of Department of Labor	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
5	GOV5	Government Representative	Deputy Head of Department of Labor	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
6	GOV6	Government Representative	Head of the Department of Education	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
7	GOV7	Government Representative	Deputy Head of the Department of Education	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
8	GOV8	Government Representative	Assistant	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
9	GOV9	Government Representative	Assistant	Department of Agriculture	September 20, 2024
10	LOC1	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Chief	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
11	LOC2	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
12	LOC3	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
13	LOC4	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024

14	LOC5	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
15	LOC6	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
16	LOC7	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
17	LOC8	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
18	LOC9	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
19	LOC10	Sopheas Commune Council	Commune Council Staff	Sopheas Commune Council	September 19, 2024
20	LDR 1	AC Leaders	AC Chief	Sambo Meanchey AC Building	September 17, 2024
21	LDR 2	AC Leaders	AC Deputy Chief	Sambo Meanchey AC Building	September 17, 2024
22	LDR 3	AC Leaders	Board Member	Sambo Meanchey AC Building	September 17, 2024
23	LDR 4	AC Leaders	Board Member	Sambo Meanchey AC Building	September 17, 2024
24	LDR 5	AC Leaders	CEO (Head of Office)	Sambo Meanchey AC Building	September 23, 2024
25	MEM1	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 18, 2024
26	MEM2	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 18, 2024

27	MEM3	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 18, 2024
28	MEM4	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 18, 2024
29	MEM5	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 18, 2024
30	MEM6	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 18, 2024
31	MEM7	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 19, 2024
32	MEM8	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 19, 2024
33	MEM9	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 19, 2024
34	MEM10	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 19, 2024
35	MEM11	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 19, 2024
36	MEM12	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 19, 2024
37	MEM13	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 19, 2024
38	MEM14	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 23, 2024
39	MEM15	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 23, 2024
40	MEM16	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 23, 2024
41	MEM17	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 24, 2024
42	MEM18	AC Members	-	Sambo Village	September 24, 2024
43	NMEM1	Nonmembers	-	Sambo Village	September 24, 2024
44	NMEM2	Nonmembers	-	Sambo Village	September 24, 2024

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