

Chapter 6

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

6.1 Introduction

Improving gender equity in any country requires that gender inequalities in the economy be addressed. In Cambodia the economic empowerment of women is recognized as a key development goal by the Government. The General Population Census provides basic data needed to assess the situation.

The 2008 Census asked of every person their economic activity during the previous year, with response categories: (i) employed³¹; (ii) unemployed but previously employed; (iii) unemployed and never previously employed; (iv) home maker; (v) student; (vi) dependent; (vii) rent-receiver, retired, or other income recipient; and (viii) other. Those in categories (i) – (iii) are considered to be in the labour force (or “economically active”), while those in categories (iv) to (vii) are not (they are considered “economically inactive”). For those in categories (i) and (ii) a number of follow-up questions were asked about occupation; whether they are an employer, a paid employee, an “own-account worker” (i.e. self-employed), or an unpaid family worker; sector of employment; and place of work.³²

6.2 Labour Force Participation

Table 6.1 shows that the vast majority of the adult population ages 15- 64 years (79.9 percent) consider themselves to be in the labour force, and that this is true for both sexes (81.6 percent of males and 78.5 percent of females). For young adults under 25, the economic activity rate is higher for females; for those over 25, it is higher for males, with the difference becoming more marked with age.

When we control for residence we see (Figure 6.1) this pattern is even more pronounced for the urban population compared to the rural, with economic activity rates declining more steeply with age for both sexes and the difference between males and females being more pronounced.

Age-specific economic activity rates have increased on average by a few percentage points for those in working ages (15-64) since 1998 (Table 6.2). This is true for both males and females, and for both rural and urban populations.

³¹ “Employed” is defined as: “persons who were in the following categories for 6 months (183 days) or more during the one year preceding the census date:

- (i) Persons who were in paid employment (e.g. working in public or private organization etc.).
- (ii) Persons who, during the reference period, performed some work for wage, salary, profit or family gain in cash or kind.
- (iii) Persons who did not do any work for pay or profit during the reference period although they had a job to which they could return (e.g. off season workers like farmers or fishermen), those on sick leave without pay, those who could not work due to strike or lockout in the organization they were working.
- (iv) Persons who were self-employed (e.g. running a shop by himself or herself, selling eatables, practicing as doctors, lawyer, etc.)” (NIS 2009a: 160).

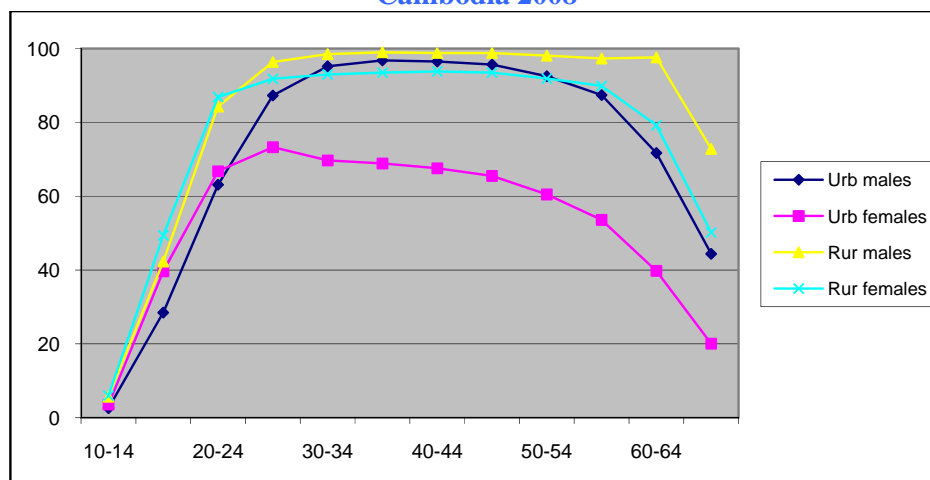
³² Questions were also asked about any secondary economic activity.

**Table 6.1 Economically active population 10 years and over (number and percent)
by age group, sex, and residence, Cambodia 2008**

Age	Total population			Rural population			Urban population		
	BS	M	F	BS	M	F	BS	M	F
10-14	90,813 5.4	44,978 5.2	45,835 5.7	83,066 5.8	41,660 5.7	41,406 6.0	7,747 3.1	3,318 2.6	4,429 3.6
15-19	700,844 43.3	330,626 39.6	370,218 47.2	583,028 45.7	284,661 42.3	298,367 49.4	117,816 34.4	45,965 28.5	71,851 39.7
20-24	1,095,941 80.0	527,565 78.8	568,376 81.2	854,913 85.6	417,978 84.3	436,935 86.9	241,028 65.0	109,587 63.1	131,441 66.8
25-29	1,116,248 90.5	570,245 94.1	546,003 87.0	864,064 94.1	436,986 96.4	427,078 91.8	252,184 80.1	133,259 87.3	118,925 73.3
30-34	643,283 92.8	327,588 97.8	315,695 88.1	522,884 95.6	259,047 98.5	263,837 93.0	120,399 82.3	68,541 95.2	51,858 69.7
35-39	789,086 93.4	402,311 98.5	386,775 88.6	644,880 96.2	318,531 99.0	326,349 93.5	144,206 82.7	83,780 96.8	60,426 68.9
40-44	687,858 93.3	338,386 98.3	349,472 88.9	568,623 96.1	268,747 98.8	299,876 93.8	119,235 81.9	69,639 96.5	49,596 67.6
45-49	606,184 92.7	293,492 98.2	312,692 88.2	502,566 95.9	234,229 98.8	268,337 93.5	103,618 79.9	59,263 95.7	44,355 65.5
50-54	441,988 90.1	189,640 96.8	252,348 85.6	354,985 91.8	148,555 98.1	216,430 91.9	77,003 74.2	41,085 92.5	35,918 60.5
55-59	342,455 87.6	154,625 95.3	187,830 82.1	289,305 92.4	125,119 97.3	164,186 88.9	53,150 68.3	29,506 87.4	23,644 53.6
60-64	220,273 79.3	104,515 89.5	115,758 72.0	192,936 85.2	88,930 93.6	104,006 79.2	27,337 53.4	15,585 71.7	11,752 39.8
65+	311,480 54.5	157,456 68.4	154,024 45.2	284,128 59.4	141,647 72.8	142,481 50.2	27,352 29.4	15,809 44.4	11,543 20.1
Total 15-65	6,644,160 79.9	3,238,993 81.6	3,405,167 78.5	5,388,184 83.5	2,582,783 83.6	2,805,401 83.4	1,255,976 67.6	656,210 74.6	599,766 61.4

Source: C1.

Figure 6.1 Economic activity rate (percent) by age group and residence, Cambodia 2008



Source: Using data from Table 6.1.

Of course, not all in the economically active population are currently employed, some are “unemployed.”³³ However the census reports very low unemployment rates (Table 6.3).³⁴ Unemployment appears to have decreased significantly since 1998; the decline for young adults (15-24) in urban areas is especially noteworthy. Unemployment is reported as below 1.0 percent for adults 25-64 in rural areas. These employment statistics presumably mask a great deal of underemployment.³⁵

Table 6.2 Economic activity rate by age group, sex, and residence, Cambodia 1998 and 2008

Age & Year	Total population			Rural population			Urban population		
	BS	M	F	BS	M	F	BS	M	F
10-14									
1998	4.5	3.6	5.5	5.0	3.9	6.1	2.4	1.8	2.9
2008	5.4	5.2	5.7	5.8	5.7	6.0	3.1	2.6	3.6
15-24									
1998	60.7	56.3	64.9	64.6	59.5	69.5	46.1	43.9	48.2
2008	60.1	57.1	63.2	63.2	60.1	66.4	50.3	46.4	53.8
25-34									
1998	89.1	96.6	82.4	92.2	97.6	87.4	77.7	92.9	62.2
2008	91.3	95.4	87.4	94.7	97.2	92.2	80.8	89.9	72.2
35-44									
1998	90.5	98.4	84.4	93.4	98.9	89.3	80.0	97.0	64.5
2008	93.3	98.4	88.7	96.1	98.9	93.7	82.4	96.7	68.3
45-54									
1998	89.5	98.0	83.3	92.5	98.6	88.2	77.2	95.4	62.3
2008	91.6	97.6	87.0	95.3	98.5	92.8	77.4	94.3	63.1
55-64									
1998	78.8	91.6	69.3	82.9	94.1	74.6	58.2	79.2	42.7
2008	84.2	92.7	77.9	89.4	95.7	84.9	62.4	81.3	48.1
65+									
1998	46.6	62.6	35.2	50.3	65.8	38.9	26.7	43.6	16.6
2008	54.5	68.4	45.2	59.4	72.8	50.2	29.4	44.4	20.1

Source: NIS (2009a: Table 5.3).

From a gender perspective it will be important to study further the marked differences in economic activity rate between males and females in urban areas. The 2008 Census enumerated a total of 598,771 females in ages 25-64 in urban areas: of these women one third (202,097, or 33.8 percent) are listed as economically inactive. Who are these women? What are they doing with their time? Are they full-time home makers? Are they economically inactive by choice? Are these women economically active over the long-term, or do they enter in and out of the labour force over time, depending on circumstances? These questions are highly relevant to understanding how development is changing gender relations in society. They are also important for understanding the dynamics of the growing urban economy, and for assessing the real and potential contributions women are making to economic growth.

³³ Defined as “Persons who were without employment, but were seeking employment or available for employment, for 6 months (183 days) or more during the one year preceding the census date” (NIS 2009a: 163).

³⁴ This needs further analysis: The definition of employment used is very broad and complex and this could mean that some people who are really “out of work” still get classified as “employed” because during the year preceding the census they can claim they have (for example) performed some activity “for family gain.”

³⁵ This could be explored further using the data collected by the Census on number of months employed during the last 12 months.

**Table 6.3 Unemployment rate by age group, sex, and residence,
Cambodia 1998 and 2008**

Age & Year	Total population			Rural population			Urban population		
	BS	M	F	BS	M	F	BS	M	F
10-14									
1998	10.8	11.0	10.6	9.7	10.1	9.4	22.5	21.6	23.1
2008	4.1	4.1	4.0	3.3	3.4	3.2	12.5	13.8	11.5
15-24									
1998	12.2	12.4	12.0	10.2	10.9	9.7	22.4	19.7	24.7
2008	3.3	3.4	3.3	2.2	2.4	2.0	7.8	8.1	7.7
25-34									
1998	3.9	3.2	4.6	2.6	2.2	3.0	9.4	6.6	13.6
2008	1.6	1.3	1.9	0.8	0.7	0.9	4.7	3.5	6.1
35-44									
1998	2.3	1.7	2.8	1.5	1.2	1.8	5.6	3.5	8.3
2008	0.8	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.6	2.1	1.4	3.2
45-54									
1998	2.1	1.4	2.7	1.4	0.9	1.7	5.5	3.3	8.3
2008	0.7	0.5	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.5	1.8	1.1	2.7
55-64									
1998	2.7	1.8	3.5	1.8	1.1	2.5	8.7	5.6	12.9
2008	0.9	0.6	1.1	0.6	0.4	0.7	2.6	1.7	3.8
65+									
1998	2.9	2.0	3.9	2.3	1.6	3.1	9.0	6.4	13.0
2008	1.0	0.8	1.3	0.8	0.6	1.0	3.4	2.3	4.9

Source: NIS (2009a: Table 5.4).

For those employed the Census asked follow-up questions about employment status. Table 6.4 presents the findings for employed persons between the ages of 15 and 59. The two largest categories are self-employed (own account worker) and unpaid family worker, followed by paid employee. During 1998-2008 the self employed category has declined by about 6 percentage points and the paid employed category has increased by about the same amount.

The pattern of employment status is quite different when broken down by sex. As might be expected, males are more concentrated in self employment and females are more concentrated in unpaid family employment. The proportion of males in paid employment is also more than twice that for females.

When the data are broken down by residence we see a much higher concentration in paid employment in the urban population compared to the rural, and a much lower concentration in unpaid family work. Moreover the gender gap regarding percent in paid employment and in self employment has narrowed during 1998-2008 although more than one-in-five employed females (21.1 percent) are still recorded as unpaid family workers.

Table 6.4 Employment status (percent) of employed persons 15-59 years old by sex and residence, Cambodia 1998 and 2008

Employment status	1998			2008		
	BS	M	F	BS	M	F
Rural + urban						
Employer	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1
Paid employee	13.0	19.8	6.7	18.3	21.8	6.7
Own account worker	44.3	59.8	29.9	37.6	52.2	29.9
Unpaid family worker	42.2	19.7	63.3	44.0	25.8	63.3
Other	0.3	0.5	0.1	<0.1	0.1	0.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.1	100.1	100.1
Rural						
Employer	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Paid employee	7.2	12.2	2.8	10.4	13.0	7.9
Own account worker	44.5	64.2	27.2	38.8	56.7	22.3
Unpaid family worker	48.0	22.9	69.9	50.7	30.1	69.7
Other	0.3	0.5	0.1	<0.1	0.1	<0.1
Total	100.1	99.9	100.1	100.0	100.0	100.0
Urban						
Employer	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3
Paid employee	43.1	51.9	31.4	53.0	57.0	48.7
Own account worker	43.6	41.0	47.1	32.2	34.2	29.8
Unpaid family worker	12.4	6.0	20.9	14.4	8.4	21.1
Other	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0

Source: Based on data from NIS (2009a: Table 5.7). Note: Not all totals add to 100.0 percent because of rounding errors.

6.3 Sectors of Employment

Table 6.5 shows the primary sector of the economy dominates employment, accounting for a little more than three quarters of employed persons in 1998 (77.5 percent) and a little less in 2008 (72.3 percent). By 2008 the tertiary sector accounts for almost 20 percent (19.2 percent) of employment, and the secondary close to 10 percent (8.5 percent).

There are significant differences by gender, however, especially when we look at the rural and urban populations separately. In the urban population the tertiary sector dominates, accounting for about 60 percent of employment: a little above this level for males (64.3 percent) and a little below for females (56.6 percent).

In the case of urban secondary employment the percent is higher for females in 2008 (28.9 percent) than for males (22.1 percent), reflecting the significant growth of the garment industry since 1998. In fact the increase from 1998 to 2008 in the percent of urban employed females employed in the secondary sector from 15.8 to 28.9 percent is the largest increase in percentage points recorded in the table. Although in total there are more males employed in urban areas than females (651,092 compared to 581,772) there are now in absolute numbers more females than males employed in the urban secondary sector.

Table 6.5 Percent distribution of employed persons (5 years and over) by primary, secondary and tertiary sector, by sex and residence, Cambodia 1998 and 2008

Sector and year	Total population			Rural population			Urban population		
	BS	M	F	BS	M	F	BS	M	F
Primary									
1998	77.5	71.7	83.1	88.2	83.8	92.1	20.1	17.6	23.5
2008	72.3	69.4	75.1	84.9	82.6	87.0	14.0	13.6	14.6
Secondary									
1998	4.2	5.0	3.5	2.0	2.5	1.6	16.2	16.5	15.8
2008	8.5	8.1	9.0	4.9	4.7	5.1	25.3	22.1	28.9
Tertiary									
1998	18.2	23.3	13.4	9.8	13.7	6.3	63.7	65.9	60.7
2008	19.2	22.6	15.9	10.2	12.7	7.9	60.7	64.3	56.6
Total									
1998	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
2008	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1

Source: NIS (2009a: Table 5.12). Note: Column totals do not all add to 100.0 percent because of rounding errors.

6.4 Final Remarks

Cambodia's labour force is growing in size, and, in terms of its educational characteristics, it is improving in "quality" as well. Agriculture still dominates the economy, but less so with time as the country develops. It is important to continue to monitor these economic changes from the point of view of their impact on gender equity: other studies suggest their impact is mixed, but in a supportive policy environment they have the potential to drive social change and strengthen women's empowerment (MOWA 2008: 21-41).