



**A Gender Perspective on Equality and Equity  
in the Tech-Sector in Cambodia**

**Position Paper for the Ideathon in Cambodia**

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# **A Gender Perspective on Equality and Equity in the Tech-Sector in Cambodia**

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AN INCLUSIVE  
TECHNOLOGY SECTOR IN CAMBODIA

Learnings from the Ideathon in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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# 1. Introduction and Background

In Cambodia's dynamic technology sector, the Gender Equality and Equity Ideathon was a catalyst for progress and a platform for networking, sharing and developing visions for the future of this industry with various stakeholders. This initiative was dedicated to empowering women in the technology sector and advocating for gender parity and equality. Driven by the diverse challenges faced by women in the sector and inspired by the efforts of numerous organisations and individuals working to promote diversity and inclusion, the Ideathon facilitated the coming together of various stakeholders to exchange ideas and foster collaboration. It fostered collaboration and was an ideal response to Cambodia's quest for equality and equity in the technology sector. The Ideathon was a call to action to recognise and remove barriers that prevent the engagement of underrepresented groups, particularly women, in the technology industry. By promoting collaborative initiatives and innovative solutions, the Phnom Penh event aimed to create a future where the Cambodian tech sector thrives through inclusivity and equality, ensuring that the benefits of technological innovation are accessible to all.

To address the need for more equality and equity in the tech sector in Cambodia, the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) and the Digital Transformation Center (DTC) Cambodia, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) organised an Ideathon on 27 October 2023 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The Ideathon focused on examining the gender perspective in the technology sector, particularly the challenges faced by women in rural areas and young women attending university or pursuing a career in the technology sector after graduation. These young women often have limited access to digital infrastructure, digital education and devices, as well as the necessary skills. The ideathon aimed to foster a shared understanding of the diverse perspectives, opportunities, and challenges that women encounter in the tech field. In addition, strategies and measures were identified to overcome these challenges and to promote equality and justice in the Cambodian technology sector. Following an interactive discussion roundtable, various organisations and dedicated women from within the field conducted workshops, showcasing their methods, ideas, or experiences in the tech sector to inspire aspirants.

The event was organised as part of the Women\* in Tech project, implemented by the HIIG and funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

## 2. Findings

The ideathon in Cambodia brought together 52 representatives from academia, business, civil society, government, and NGOs on 27 October 2023, in Phnom Penh. The event started with a welcome note from H. E. Kry Nallis, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and a keynote from Prof. Dr. Jeanette Hofmann, research director at HIIG. Following the introductions of HIIG and DTC Cambodia, the event focussed on an interactive discussion and featured insightful workshops from organisations and female representatives in the tech field, including Natalja Rodionova, founder of [Sisters of Code](#), Sokuntepy Chriv, project coordinator at Sisters of Code, Voneat Pen, chapter ambassador of [Technovation](#) Cambodia, Ratanatepy Narin, founder and club president of [Teen 4 Tech](#), Menghorng Kao, co-founder of Ladies in Tech & STEMUNITY, Sereyvathana Aing, social goods specialist at [Tech for Kids Academy](#), and Kim Tol Tan, [Women Shaping Cambodia](#).

Throughout the engaging discussion groups, participants directed their attention towards the promises, perils, and challenges intertwined with a gender perspective on the tech sector. In the conclusion of the dialogue, the groups summarised their shared insights, identifying key measures that capture the main points of the conversation.

### 2.1 Fostering Inclusive Education in Cambodia's Tech Sector

In Cambodia's rapidly developing technology sector, the education system faces a number of challenges that are significant barriers to the realisation of gender equality. The lack of IT-related subjects in the (school) curriculum is a major barrier to students pursuing technology-focused careers. Without a basic understanding of technology, the number of future female tech professionals remains limited, restricting their potential contribution to the industry. Additionally, limited access to personal digital devices prevents students from fully engaging in networking and collaboration efforts, constraining not only their technological development, but also their active participation in this dynamic industry. Access to technology-related degree programmes also requires good English and mathematical skills, which are often inadequately taught, which further increases the educational gap. Furthermore, gender stereotypes perpetuated by teachers and faculty, especially in male-dominated schools as well as university classes and courses, create a hostile environment for aspiring female professionals in the field, worsen gender inequalities.

However, strategic solutions are within reach. Proactive measures, such as early engagement with technology in primary school, can stimulate pupils' interest and enthusiasm to ensure that they are well acquainted with technological concepts from an early age. The inclusion of IT in the curriculum is of utmost importance to emphasise digital skills beyond specific IT professions and highlight their broader impact on different sectors.

Looking at the private sector, increasing the capacity and accessibility of coding clubs and tech-related initiatives is crucial for enhancing the learning experience, providing students with hands-on experiences and practical skills vital for navigating the dynamic tech industry. Initiatives like [Sisters of Code](#) play a pivotal role in fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, showcasing the importance of promoting such programmes that teach coding basics in schools. By addressing these educational challenges through early exposure, inclusive curricula, capacity building, and targeted initiatives, Cambodia can pave the way for a more equitable and thriving tech sector, where opportunities are accessible to all, irrespective of gender or background.

## **2.2 Changing Stereotypes and Cultivating Parental Support for Inclusive Tech Engagement in Cambodia**

In order to break down stereotypes and promote parental support for inclusive technological participation in Cambodia, it is necessary to take into account deeply rooted cultural values and the persistence of gender biases. In Cambodian culture, where the respect and honour of parents is a very high priority for all children, parental guidance has a great influence on the wishes and decisions of young women. However, certain elements within this culture, such as discriminatory proverbs, perpetuate harmful stereotypes and limit career aspirations. In order to combat these stereotypes and encourage young women to pursue a tech career, it is important to create female role models and the opportunity to exchange ideas with them. Additionally, scholarship opportunities that provide laptops can make tech education more accessible, promoting gender equity in the field.

Engaging parents in supporting their daughters' tech careers is vital. Coaching programmes and career fairs can help parents understand the benefits of these careers and actively support their children's aspirations. Furthermore, advertisements showcasing girls excelling in tech studies and securing reputable tech jobs can inspire more girls to consider such careers, fostering diversity in Cambodia's tech industry.

In addition, it is important to educate and train boys and men on women's rights to support girls and women in all aspects of life. Mentorship programmes and open dialogues with all genders about gender-specific challenges can further help to create a more inclusive tech landscape in Cambodia. Through these concerted efforts, Cambodia can pave the way for a future generation of empowered and supported female expertise in technology.

## **2.3 Advancing Gender Equality in Cambodia's Tech Careers**

There are still gender-specific obstacles in Cambodia's tech industry that make it considerably more difficult for women to advance in this field. Financial, educational and leadership barriers

often prevent women from progressing and limit their full potential in careers in tech. The absence of equal opportunities, particularly in leadership positions, contributes to a persistent gender gap, limiting the diverse representation crucial for a thriving industry. Cultural expectations, including the belief that women need to be married to succeed in their job, further compound these challenges, shaping societal attitudes towards women in the profession.

Proactive measures are essential to promote gender equality in technical professions. Promoting entrepreneurship is proving to be a key strategy, as women often progress faster in their career ambitions when they work in their own businesses. Providing financial education and support is crucial to bridge the gender pay gap, ensuring fair compensation and promoting financial independence for women in the tech sector. Culturally tailored awareness campaigns are essential to challenge traditional expectations and showcase the diverse career paths available within the tech industry. Additionally, establishing mentorship programs can play a pivotal role in addressing gender-related challenges, providing women with guidance, support, and a pathway to overcome obstacles in their careers in tech. Through these concerted efforts, Cambodia can make progress towards a more inclusive and equitable tech industry where every individual, regardless of gender, can thrive and contribute to innovation.

## **2.4 Empowering Women in Rural Areas**

Reaching young women in rural areas and encouraging them to pursue careers in the tech field requires a multifaceted approach. Organising programmes that enable these women to visit technology companies and raising awareness among parents and the community about employment opportunities in the technology sector is essential. Training teachers to promote tech careers can bridge the gap between students and their parents' expectations. Tackling the widespread stereotype that questions the capability of women in technical professions in rural communities is also key.

Female role models in leadership positions, community centres with internet access, and computers are significant for tech education in rural areas. Internet access, online training, and scholarships for schools and Universities in the cities can break down barriers. In addition, it is important to consider the establishment of women's dormitories at schools and universities to ensure that these young women can be safely accommodated in the cities. Collaborating with the Ministry to reach girls in rural areas and educating them about basic skills in cyber security and online harassment is essential. Involving parents and the community as agents of change is crucial. Improving internet connectivity and computer access is fundamental for tech education in rural areas.

Strategic solutions are necessary to overcome these challenges and bridge the gap between urban and rural areas. Awareness programmes involving visits to tech companies can create understanding and enthusiasm about tech opportunities in rural areas. Training teachers to

advocate for tech jobs and effectively communicate their benefits to parents and the community is vital for changing perceptions. The establishment of scholarships and female dormitories at schools and universities in the larger cities can considerably facilitate their access to technical training. Online campaigns that showcase female leaders and provide insights into tech careers can inspire and guide young aspiring people in rural areas, fostering a more inclusive and diverse tech landscape in Cambodia.

# 3. Conclusion

The Cambodian technology sector faces a number of complex challenges in the area of gender equality and inclusion. These obstacles range from educational barriers to deep-rooted cultural stereotypes, particularly affecting women in rural areas. Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that combines compulsory education with financial support, workplace reforms and improved infrastructure tailored to women's needs. The discourse underscored education's transformative power in breaking down gender barriers and confronting societal norms. Stakeholders of the Ideathon advocated for proactive measures, including expanding access to laptops to nurture digital literacy. The empowerment of women through specific workshops and financial support was highlighted as a key issue, recognising the crucial role played by measures specifically targeting women in rural areas.

Addressing educational gaps by introducing IT-related subjects in the curriculum, promoting early engagement with technology, and expanding coding clubs and tech-related initiatives is essential. These measures can ensure that students, regardless of gender, have the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the dynamic tech sector.

Furthermore, the need to break down stereotypes and encourage parental support can't be stressed enough. Initiatives aimed at creating female role models, providing scholarships and engaging parents through coaching programmes and career fairs are crucial when it comes to changing perceptions and motivating young women to pursue a career in technology.

Additionally, promoting gender equality in tech careers requires financial support, entrepreneurial opportunities and targeted awareness-raising campaigns. Mentorship programmes can provide invaluable advice and support to women struggling with issues rooting in gender discrimination in the tech sector.

Finally, empowering rural women in the Cambodian tech landscape requires a multi-faceted approach that includes community outreach, teacher training, expanded internet access, scholarship programmes and mentorship initiatives. Bridging the rural-urban divide remains central to ensuring that women from all backgrounds have the opportunity to compete in the tech industry.

The Ideathon in Phnom Penh serves as a call to action, challenging Cambodia to implement these strategic solutions and pave the way for a technology sector that is both inclusive and diverse, and where gender equality becomes a tangible reality. In doing so, Cambodia will lay the foundation for a future where technology thrives on a foundation of equality and equity, ensuring that the fruits of innovation are accessible to all, ultimately leading the country to a better and more prosperous future.



# 4. Key Action Points

Key calls for action from the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue:

## Strategies for Promoting Inclusive Tech Education:

- **Integrate IT-Focused Subjects in School Curriculum:**
  - Advocate for the inclusion of IT-focused subjects in the school curriculum to provide foundational exposure to technology for all students.
- **Early Exposure to Technology:**
  - Implement initiatives, similar to Sisters of Code, to expose students to technology from an early age, fostering interest and enthusiasm.
- **Address Language and Math Proficiency Gaps:**
  - Tackle language and maths proficiency gaps by enhancing the teaching of these skills, ensuring a level playing field for students entering tech-related courses.
- **Inclusive Curricula and Capacity Building:**
  - Develop inclusive curricula that emphasise the broader impact of tech skills and promote capacity-building initiatives for students, enhancing their learning experience.
- **Challenge Gender Stereotypes in Education:**
  - Implement informal education programs on women's rights and equality from early childhood to challenge gender stereotypes in educational settings.

## Promoting Inclusivity and Gender Equality in Cambodia's Tech Ecosystem:

- **Increase Access to Private Devices:**
  - Work towards improving access to private devices for students to encourage active participation in networking and collaborative efforts.
- **Awareness Campaigns to Challenge Stereotypes:**
  - Launch awareness campaigns targeting societal attitudes, challenging stereotypes, and emphasising the importance of diversity in the tech sector.
- **Mentorship Programs for Women in Tech:**
  - Establish mentorship programs to support and guide women navigating challenges in the tech industry, creating a network of encouragement.
- **Foster Open Dialogue on Gender Inequalities:**
  - Promote a culture of openness and dialogue about gender-related challenges within educational and professional settings to dismantle stereotypes.

## **Bridging the Rural-Urban Tech Divide in Cambodia:**

- **Awareness Programs for Rural Areas:**
  - Implement awareness programs, including visits to tech companies, to create understanding and enthusiasm about tech opportunities in rural areas.
- **Scholarships and Dormitories for Girls in Rural Areas:**
  - Introduce scholarships and dormitories targeting girls in rural areas to facilitate their access to tech education and overcome infrastructure challenges.
- **Teacher Advocacy for Tech Jobs:**
  - Train teachers to advocate for tech jobs, effectively communicating their benefits to parents and the community, thereby changing perceptions.

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## **About the Project**

Funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Women in Tech knowledge transfer project aims to strengthen the equal rights of women worldwide through networking and expertise, as well as to create new spaces of opportunity and co-design. During the entire transfer process, there will be a continuous exchange with respective local and international stakeholders. The results are prepared in such a way that they can be used by a broad target group and are available in the long term.

## **About the Institute**

The Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) is the first institute in Germany that studies the development of the Internet from a social perspective. Aiming at better understanding the digitalisation of all spheres of life, the HIIG has established an understanding that emphasises the integration of digital innovations into social processes.

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