Assessing the Impact of Women, Peace and Security Initiatives in Cambodia:

A Baseline Study

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AMPLIFY: Amplifying Women's Peace Actions in ASEAN

AMPLIFY is a five-year Women, Peace and Security (WPS) initiative that addresses the differential impacts of armed conflicts and human security threats on women in Southeast Asia by advancing their meaningful participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. AMPLIFY supports the implementation of ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action on WPS and focuses on Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar through policy development, civil society partnerships, and community-level peacebuilding. This initiative is funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

A Vegetable Seller at Market in Cambodia. AMPLIFY, June 2025

Executive Summary

In Southeast Asia and within the Greater Mekong insecurity results from both conflict and nontraditional sources, including land dispossession, migration, trafficking, gender-based violence (GBV), drug economies, and climate-related disasters. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, a normative framework established by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions, recognizes that men and women experience this insecurity differently, and that women's meaningful participation in preventing and responding to insecurity is vital to sustainable peace. ASEAN member states have committed to WPS principles through the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS (2022). However, this regional policy framework has yet to be implemented in community-level practice.

In Cambodia women sustain everyday security through mediation, caregiving, community mobilization, and informal monitoring. However, they remain systematically excluded from the formal institutions where security decisions are made. This flagship research study, conducted alongside The Amplifying Women's Peace Actions in ASEAN (AMPLIFY) program, provides community-level empirical evidence of how this exclusion operates across four provinces vulnerable to nontraditional security challenges. The report analyses what the marginalization of women in security decision-making means for efforts to establish and sustain more inclusive peace.

This report presents the first phase of a longitudinal study (baseline) conducted in Cambodia. It provides both the baseline for the program as well as new empirical evidence on how women and men experience insecurity at the community level. In doing so, it addresses a gap in regional WPS knowledge by examining community-level insecurity in two Greater Mekong countries that have received comparatively limited attention. The study aims to test and refine the AMPLIFY program's theory of change, which states that if women meaningfully engage in WPS actions, including through community-level participation and leadership, this will mitigate the harm of insecurity to women and ultimately lead to greater peace and security for the whole of the community.

FOUR KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDE THE ANALYSIS:

1. What are the main security challenges, and how are they experienced by men and women differently?
2. To what extent do women have knowledge and information to participate in and/or lead community responses to these security challenges?
3. To what extent are women confident in their ability to contribute to addressing security challenges?
4. What prevents women and men from participating in peace and security initiatives?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods, feminist ethical research design, integrating a large-N quantitative survey (n = 983 in Cambodia) with semi-structured key informant interviews conducted across purposively selected areas in Mondulkiri and Stung Treng provinces in Cambodia.

Combining quantitative analysis of survey data with qualitative analysis of interviews, the research aims to better understand how gender affects the experiences of, and responses to, insecurity in Cambodia. It investigates how women's and men's existing knowledge and confidence affect their individual and collective capacity to participate in and/or lead local peace and security responses.

The study identifies where AMPLIFY's theory of change is supported in practice, where implementation barriers persist, and where targeted policy or programmatic adjustments are needed. It offers actionable insights for all WPS practitioners and policymakers to strengthen WPS policies and programs and support efforts to increase women's security participation and leadership for the benefit of communities.

RESEARCH FINDINGS CAMBODIA

The study has four main research findings:

1. Gendered security challenges are widespread in Cambodia, exacerbated by structural economic pressures, traditional gender norms, and inequality:

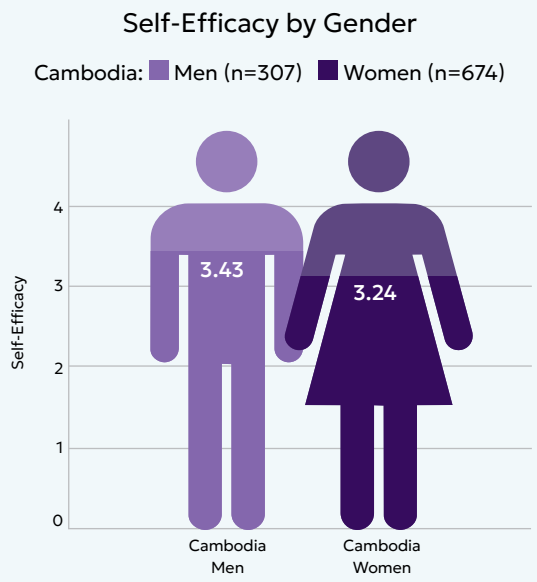
- Across the study sites, land and livelihood insecurity, drug and alcohol use, violence against women, migration and trafficking, and environmental hazards were the most salient security challenges.
- Women and men experience security threats differently: Women experience restricted mobility and disproportionate care and conflict resolution responsibilities. They absorb much of the impact of community insecurity by caring for family members affected by addiction, mediating household and community conflicts, and managing debt and food insecurity.
- Insecurities differentially affect specific groups due to age, ethnicity, livelihood, and geography. For example, in Cambodia, Indigenous women are more likely to experience land dispossession and forced relocation, undermining their livelihoods, cultural continuity, and community cohesion.

A Participant Writing at a Workshop in Cambodia. AMPLIFY, Oct 2025

2. There are systematic gender gaps affecting women's knowledge and confidence to address insecurity:

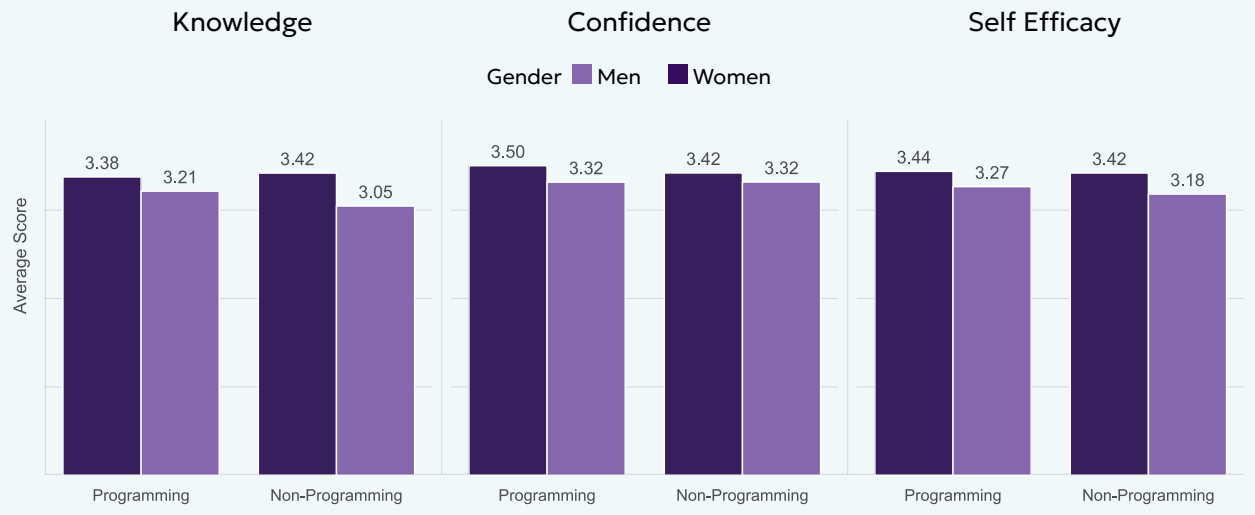
- There is overall moderate knowledge and confidence among women and men in how to respond to security challenges observed in the surveys conducted.
- Men consistently report higher perceived knowledge and confidence than women (see Figure 1).
- Gaps in women's self-reported knowledge scores are particularly evident in knowing how to ***prevent*** security challenges rather than in general awareness of risks.
- Ethnic minority women, women with lower education, older women, and women with low-income or care-based livelihoods reported the lowest knowledge levels.
- Legal and procedural knowledge is concentrated among village leaders, mediation committees, and local government representatives. Many women and youth rely on these intermediaries to navigate laws, reporting mechanisms, and authorities.
- Linguistic barriers to information marginalize Indigenous and ethnic minority women.
- Survey data show that Cambodian women in areas where WPS programming is taking place report higher levels of knowledge – particularly regarding prevention – than women in areas not receiving WPS programming. This indicates that locally embedded WPS programming may effectively address information and access to decision-making gaps (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Self-efficacy Scores by Gender



Market Street in Cambodia. AMPLIFY, Jun 2025

Figure 2. Average Confidence, Knowledge and Self-efficacy Scores by Gender in Programming and Non-programming Sites



3. Confidence levels are generally higher than knowledge levels, especially among men. Women are highly active in everyday security practices, but this does not necessarily translate to formal participation and leadership:

- Men consistently reported greater confidence in engaging with community and provincial security initiatives compared with women, who were more likely to express uncertainty or lack of confidence.
- Women are very active in everyday security practices where they mediate family disputes, mobilize communities, carry out early warning and risk monitoring, and provide care. But their participation often remains confined to supportive or advisory roles. Leadership and enforcement, particularly in “hard” security responses such as patrols, arrests, and engagement with higher authorities, are male-dominated.
- Younger women and men frequently articulate more egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles and leadership, but youth—particularly young women—remain structurally excluded from decision-making. This limits the translation of progressive norms into authority and governance structures.

4. Barriers to participation and leadership include unequal access to education and information, linguistic exclusion, heavy unpaid care burdens, and gendered power relations within households and community institutions:

- In Cambodia, women have higher levels of participation in community peace and security responses in locations that have received WPS programming. In those locations, NGO engagement is associated with stronger rights-based discourse and clearer leadership pathways. However, decision-making power over land, migration, drugs, and development remains concentrated in male-dominated institutions across all locations.

16 Days Campaign in Steung Treng, Cambodia. AMPLIFY, Mar 2026.

Recommendations for Women, Peace and Security policy and programming

Address gendered security challenges:

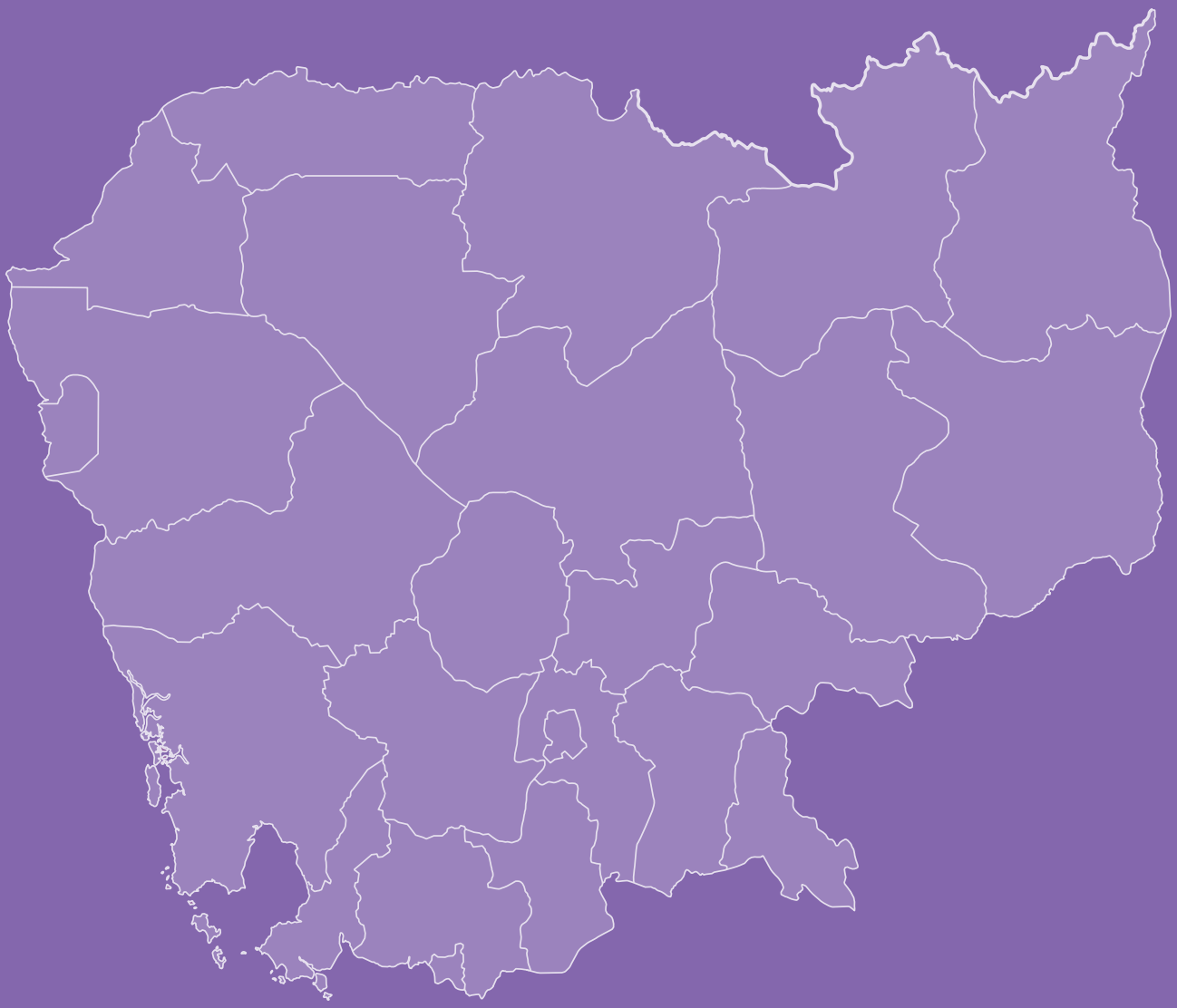
Programming must address both structural drivers and their gender-differentiated impacts, including through adopting survivor-centered protocols, referral pathways, and documentation processes; developing culturally grounded approaches to land dispossession and environmental insecurity; and strengthening prevention and response measures for emerging and evolving security threats.

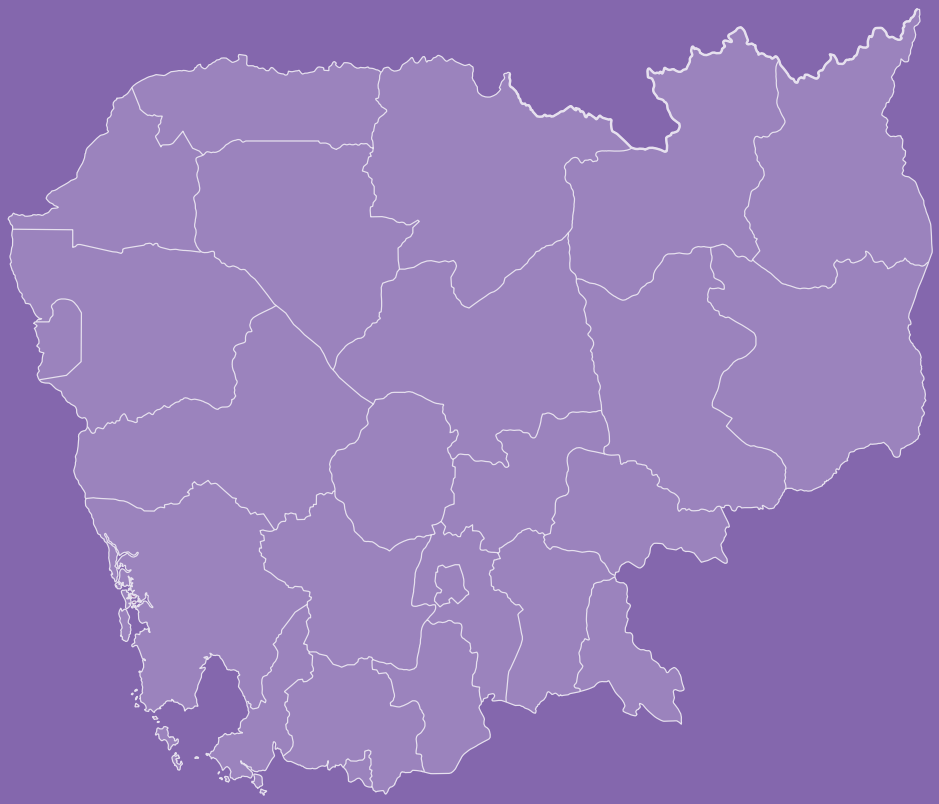
Invest in efforts to strengthen women's knowledge, confidence, and leadership:

Programming should include establishing collective leadership initiatives and early warning systems designed to encourage women's engagement.

Strengthen inclusive participation and responsiveness of governance structures.

Programming should enhance women's participation opportunities through strengthening representation pathways and inclusive practices for engagement, as well as supporting institutional positioning and recognition of mediation mechanisms, including through increased funding.





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