

Build4People

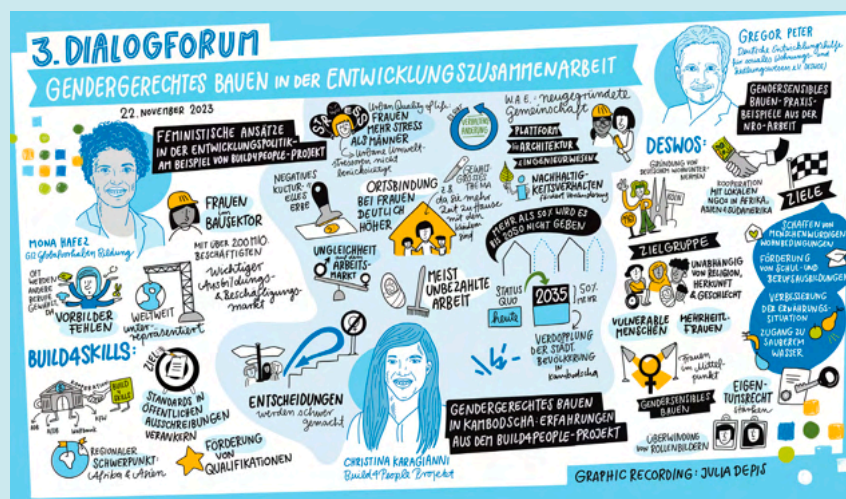
Gender-Equitable Building in Cambodia: Experiences From the Build4People Project

Introduction

On November 22nd 2023, the Build4People Project was presented during a conference on the topic of “Gender-Equitable Building in Development Cooperation” at the seat of the German Ministry of International Cooperation (BMZ) in Berlin, Germany.

Following Build4People's transdisciplinary research approach, our presentation titled "Gender-Equitable Building in Cambodia: Experiences from the Build4People Project" had been jointly prepared by the Build4People consortium leader Dr Michael Waibel (Hamburg University), Dr Anke Blöbaum (Magdeburg University), leader of the Build4People Work Package "Behaviour Change", and by Christina Karagianni (Technical School of Applied Sciences, Lübeck), research associate of the Build4People Work Package "Sustainable Building".

Among other topics, we presented a gendered analysis of our survey results on the urban quality of life of residents in Phnom Penh, where it was found that the subjective quality of life is significantly lower for women compared to men and they also seem to feel more burdened by environmental factors. This might be explained by the fact that they spend less time at work or outside of



Graphical Summary of Build4People's presentation (Source: Edited from BMZ).

their neighbourhood. Furthermore, the general stress is probably also affected by multiple burdens due to responsibility for family, household, and work, and coping with environmental stressors might require so much energy that the general stress level increases.

In addition to the standardised survey, we also conducted focus group interviews with residents in Phnom Penh within our last year's Build4People Ecocity Transition Lab—another good-practice example of Build4People's cross-cutting, transdisciplinary approach that brings together a diverse group of multi-stakeholders to create an innovative atmosphere for joint exchange, to communicate, and to promote alternative visions of urban sustainability on the neighbourhood level, beyond business-as-usual. Groups responses to the question of whether they as women have special demands on their living situation. Here, the finding of insecurity was confirmed once again; in addition, there were also suggestions regarding leisure opportunities, like the desire to be able to do something for

themselves during childcare hours.

Following the survey and focus group findings, and given that in Cambodia the traditional understanding of gender roles is still much more present than in Germany, and women appear to be more dependent than men on the planning and design of the urban living environment, we wondered how the current gender bias in planning can be countered in such a context.

To answer this question, we conducted an explorative survey among our contacts in Phnom Penh and included in our presentation the thoughts and perspectives of women from the construction sector on their role in architecture and engineering, and how they think it can be supported not only within the sector but also in the built urban environment. Most of them wished to remain anonymous, but the comments we gathered represent a wide age range and come both from academia and the private sector. From this small sample we saw that, on the one hand, women in the sector have a clear understanding of their



strengths and how they can be further supported, but also that the glass ceiling is present and visible to them.

On the other hand, Ms. Leakhena Setha, an architect herself, is very cautious about women voicing criticism of discrimination in their workplace. Her quote shows apparent discomfort with gender quotas, and her belief that competence will be enough to overcome any hurdles comes in contrast with the admittance that she has indeed “in rare cases” faced gender-related discrimination herself. This statement may indicate that there is still a lack of awareness of structural discrimination in Cambodia’s construction sector that needs to be further investigated.

Although not sufficient to reach concrete conclusions, this first exploratory study already gives an overview of women’s aspirations in this sector, and it is a first step towards making their voices heard.

Women in Architecture and Engineering (W.A.E.): A New Group Promoting Women Empowerment in the Construction Sector in Phnom Penh and Cambodia

During our presentation we introduced the newly formed Women in Architecture and Engineering (W.A.E.) group, an initiative that was “born” during one of our workshops on Inclusive and Sustainable Design. This community emerged from the collective desire to create a supportive environment that encourages women’s participation in these fields, fosters talent, and is driven by a commitment to break down barriers and create a more inclusive, di-

verse future in architecture and engineering in Cambodia.

The Build4People project supports such processes of transformational change towards urban sustainability (like the Sustainable Building Arena presented in the previous edition of SURE Solutions) and gender equality in the construction sector, and we consider the formation and support of this group to be one of our project’s great achievements.

One of the first ideas of the group is to organise a competition with accompanying seminars and exhibitions about inclusive street design and mobility in Phnom Penh, and we are in close discussions with them in order to support them. Moreover, Christina Karagianni, a member of our team, is also a member of the advisory board of the group, where she is providing input on issues related to gender-mainstreaming, sustainability and building design. Together, they authored a chapter on this exact topic in the upcoming Build4People publication, titled “Transformation Handbook for Sustainable Housing and Urban Quality of Life.”

Conclusion

From a scientific viewpoint, our presentation served to highlight the need for research on gender-related behaviour constraints instead of a simple dichotomous view on gender-differences.

Specifically, reflecting on our own work, we need to analyse the spatial and structural gender-specific barriers in more depth overall.

In conclusion, we have to say that applying gender analysis in the con-

text of our presentation preparation increased our gender-based sensitivity even further with regard to Build4People’s upcoming project activities. Our team members sincerely commit to support the active participation of women, girls, and all genders in our work and research.

Christina Karagianni, Anke Blöbaum & Michael Waibel

CHARMS

Moving Forward: The CHARMS Partnership with KMITL Takes Shape

What began in late 2023 as an ambitious collaboration between the CHARMS project and King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Lat Krabang (KMITL) in Thailand, has now evolved into a dynamic partnership with promising outcomes. As we reach mid-2025, this alliance is already bearing fruit and opening doors to even broader initiatives in sustainable construction and urban development, such as the establishment of a competence center for bio-based building materials in the implementation phase set to start by the end of 2025.

About KMITL: A Leading Hub for Technology and Sustainable Innovation

King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL) is one of Thailand’s most respected technical universities. Established