



# HER MONEY, HER POWER, HER FUTURE:

Advancing Financial Wellness for  
Women in Cambodia



## Financial Wellness for Women in Cambodia: Building Confidence, Independence and a Secure Future

Financial wellness is not simply about earning more money. It is about having the knowledge, confidence and practical ability to manage money today, withstand unexpected events and prepare for the future.

For women, financial wellness also means having a voice in household financial decisions, understanding personal and family assets, managing debt responsibly and maintaining a degree of financial independence throughout every stage of life.

These issues are especially important in Cambodia, where women are central to households, communities and the national economy. Cambodian women manage family budgets, operate farms and market stalls, work in factories and offices, support relatives and lead a substantial proportion of the country's micro and small businesses.

Yet economic participation does not automatically produce financial security.

A woman may operate a profitable business while having no personal savings. She may manage the household's daily expenses without knowing the family's total debt. She may make regular loan repayments but have no emergency fund, insurance or long-term retirement plan.

**Financial wellness is about closing that gap.**

## Begin by understanding your financial “why”

For one Cambodian woman, the goal may be to educate her children. For another, it may be to expand a market stall into a registered business. Others may want to purchase land, care for ageing parents, protect themselves against illness, leave an unhealthy relationship or prepare for a retirement in which they do not have to depend entirely on their children.

The objective is not necessarily to become exceptionally wealthy. It is to reach the financial targets that support the life each woman wants.

Once the “why” is understood, practical questions become easier to answer:

- How much should be saved?
- How much debt is affordable?
- What financial risks need to be protected?
- When should investment begin?
- What assets should be held personally or jointly?
- What income will be required later in life?

A financial plan becomes meaningful when it is connected to real-life goals rather than abstract financial terminology.



## Women's financial lives do not follow a straight line

Women frequently experience financial interruptions caused by childbirth, caregiving, family responsibilities, informal employment and periods away from paid work. These interruptions can reduce lifetime income, savings and retirement security. Women may also place the financial needs of children, spouses and parents ahead of their own for many years.

In Cambodia, this is particularly relevant because many women work in informal businesses or as contributing family workers. These forms of work may provide essential household income, but they often offer less predictable earnings and more limited access to formal social protection and retirement benefits.

Consider a woman who leaves paid employment to care for children or an elderly parent. Her household may continue functioning, but she may stop building her own savings, credit record and retirement security. If the family later experiences illness, separation, unemployment or the death of an income earner, she may discover that she has limited financial protection in her own name.

**Financial wellness** therefore requires planning across an entire life cycle, not only during periods of stable employment.

## Cambodian women are entrepreneurs ... but access is not the same as security

Women's World Banking reports that roughly 60% of Cambodian businesses are run by women, including approximately 62% of microbusinesses. Women are therefore not a small specialist segment of the economy. They are among its most important economic participants.

However, many women-owned enterprises remain small, informal and closely connected to household finances. Business revenue may be used immediately for food, education, healthcare, debt repayments and family obligations.

This creates several challenges:

- business and household money may not be separated;
- profits may be difficult to measure;
- cash flow may appear stronger than it really is;
- women may borrow personally for business purposes;
- family members may use loans taken out in a woman's name; and
- little money may remain for personal savings or long-term investment.

A woman can therefore be **commercially active** without **being financially well**.

For example, a Cambodian food vendor may generate cash every day but have no separate business account, no record of her true profit and no reserve for equipment failure or illness. A farmer may own productive assets but face seasonal income and climate-related uncertainty. A garment worker may receive a regular salary but send most of it to family members and retain little for emergencies or later life.

**Financial wellness** programs must recognise these different realities.



## Access to credit must be accompanied by financial capability

Cambodian women are major users of the formal credit system. The National Bank of Cambodia has previously reported that women represent approximately 60% of bank borrowers and 65% of microfinance borrowers.

Credit can help women establish businesses, purchase productive equipment, manage seasonal cash flow and invest in education or housing. However, credit produces lasting benefits only when the borrower understands its full cost, purpose and repayment obligations.

Women's World Banking research found that some Cambodian women preferred loans with easier application processes even when those loans carried higher interest costs. The research also identified cases in which women applied for credit that was ultimately used or repaid by another family member.

This is why financial wellness must include more than access to a loan. Women should understand:

- the difference between productive and consumption debt;
- interest rates and total repayment costs;
- late fees and penalty charges;
- how refinancing can extend indebtedness;
- the consequences of guaranteeing another person's loan;
- how loan repayments affect household cash flow;
- the importance of checking a credit report; and
- how personal borrowing affects future creditworthiness.

Responsible finance must involve both responsible lending and informed borrowing.

## Financial independence does not mean financial separation

Financial independence does not require women to exclude their spouses or families from financial decisions. It means having sufficient knowledge, access and authority to participate meaningfully in those decisions.

Every woman should understand:

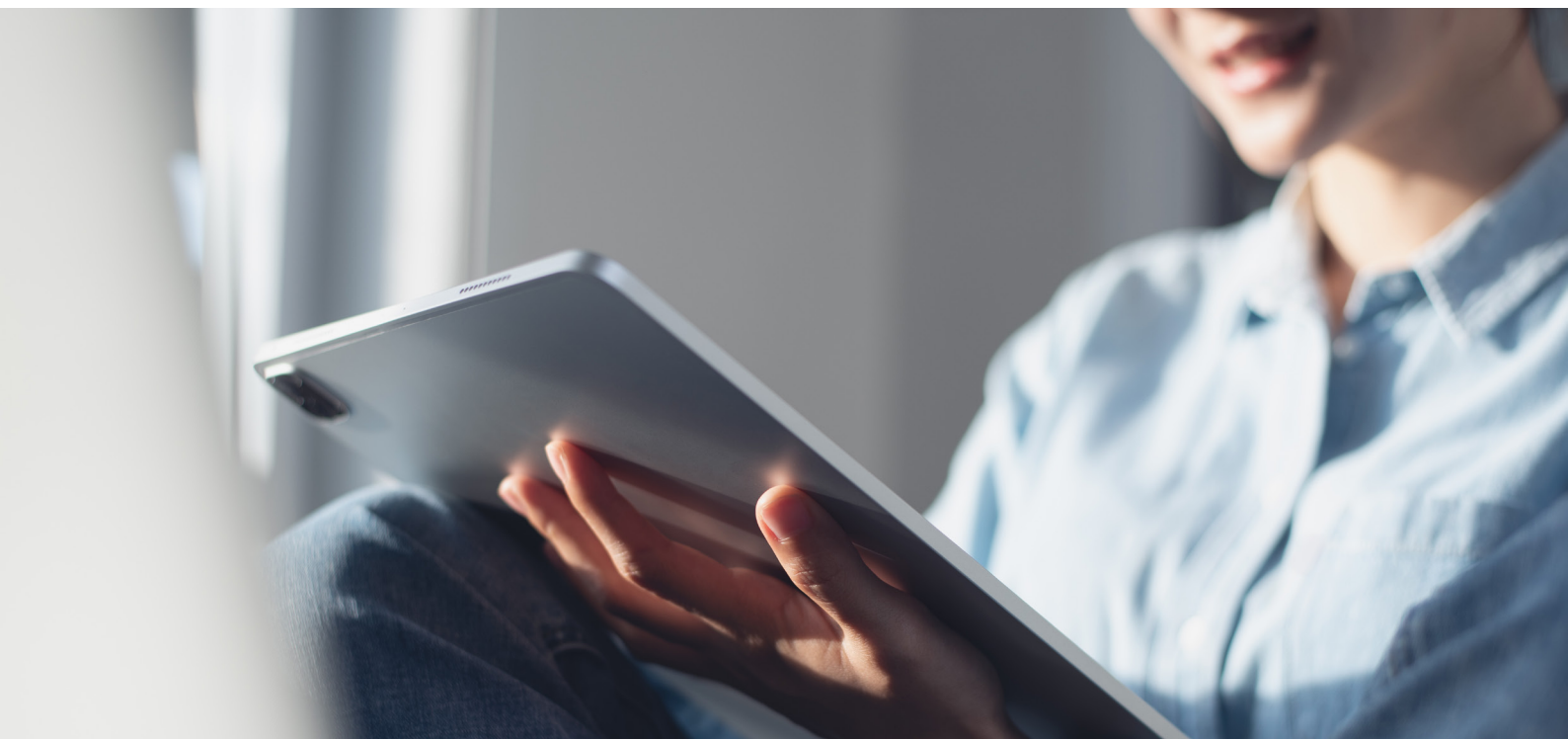
- what income enters the household;
- which debts the household owes;
- whose name appears on loans and guarantees;
- where savings are held;
- who legally owns land, property and business assets;
- what insurance or social protection exists; and
- what would happen financially following illness, death, disability or separation.

Women should also maintain access to some money in their own name.

This is not an act of distrust. It is prudent household risk management.

When both partners understand the family's financial position, decisions are less likely to be based on assumptions or hidden obligations. Open financial discussions can also prevent one person from carrying the entire emotional and practical burden of money management.

Many women find conversations about money uncomfortable or feel that finance is too complicated. But silence can create vulnerability. Talking about income, debt, property, savings and future goals should become a normal part of family life.



## Women can be disciplined long-term investors

Women can perform strongly as investors, partly because they may trade less frequently, take a longer-term approach and remain calmer during periods of market volatility.

The important distinction is not that women are naturally risk-averse. Many are better described as **risk-aware**.

This quality can be a major financial strength. Successful long-term investing usually requires patience, diversification, discipline and the ability to avoid emotional decisions.

However, many women delay investing because they believe they must first become financial experts or accumulate a large amount of money.

Waiting can itself become a risk.

Even modest and regular savings can build financial security over time. A woman does not need to begin with complicated investments. She can start by:

1. establishing a basic emergency fund;
2. repaying expensive or unproductive debt;
3. setting a regular savings target;
4. understanding simple, regulated financial products;
5. diversifying rather than placing everything into one asset; and
6. gradually developing a long-term investment and retirement plan.

The first objective is not to chase high returns. It is to build good habits and protect against avoidable losses.

## The foundations of financial wellness

For Cambodian women, a practical financial wellness framework should contain several connected elements.

### 1. Financial visibility

A woman should know what she earns, spends, owns and owes. A simple written or digital budget can create immediate clarity.

### 2. Emergency resilience

Unexpected healthcare expenses, business interruption, crop losses or family emergencies should not automatically require high-cost borrowing. Even a small emergency reserve can reduce vulnerability.

### 3. Responsible debt management

Borrowing should be linked to an identified purpose and a realistic repayment source. A loan should improve future financial capacity rather than simply postpone an existing problem.

### 4. Protection

Women should understand available health, life, accident, property and business insurance, as well as social-protection entitlements. Protection is an important part of wealth preservation.



## 5. Business capability

Women entrepreneurs need bookkeeping, cash-flow forecasting, digital skills, business registration support and access to finance based on business viability, not solely traditional collateral.

## 6. Long-term savings and investment

Women should begin planning for later life before retirement appears close. Longer-term security should not depend entirely on children, relatives or the sale of a family asset.

## 7. Digital and fraud awareness

As Cambodia's digital financial system expands, women must be able to recognise scams, protect passwords and personal information, verify payment requests and understand the risks of unregulated investments.

## A wider Mekong-region priority

The need for stronger financial wellness is not unique to Cambodia.

In Laos, women entrepreneurs and rural households continue to benefit from expanding financial access, but geographic, technical and financial-capability barriers remain. In Vietnam, financial institutions and development organisations are directing more capital towards women-owned businesses, although access to finance and opportunities to scale remain important issues.

Myanmar presents a more difficult environment. Continuing political, humanitarian and economic instability has increased the importance of basic income security, emergency savings, livelihood support and women's economic autonomy.

The circumstances of the four countries are different, but several priorities are shared: accessible financial education, responsible credit, digital inclusion, business capability, protection against shocks and greater participation by women in financial decisions.

Cambodia is particularly well positioned to lead this regional discussion because women already play such a significant role in entrepreneurship and household financial management.

## What Cambodia can do next

Financial wellness for women should become a coordinated national effort involving government agencies, banks, microfinance institutions, employers, business associations, schools and community organisations.

A practical Cambodian initiative could include:

- financial education in Khmer and local community formats;
- training specifically designed for women entrepreneurs;
- workplace programs for factory and salaried employees;
- simple savings and retirement-planning tools;
- responsible-debt and credit-report education;
- digital-security and fraud-awareness training;
- mentorship and business-development networks;
- products designed for seasonal and irregular incomes;
- alternative credit assessments for women without conventional collateral; and
- financial-health check-ups at different life stages.



Education should also be practical. Women need tools they can use immediately; simple budgets, cash-flow templates, loan calculators, savings targets and questions to ask financial institutions.

Cambodia's National Financial Inclusion Strategy recognised that access must be accompanied by consumer empowerment, protection, transparency and greater use of formal savings. The next stage should move beyond measuring whether women can access financial services and examine whether those services are genuinely improving their financial health.

## Financial wellness creates choice

A financially well woman is better equipped to make decisions for herself, her family and her business.

She can respond to emergencies without immediately falling into unsustainable debt. She can negotiate financial products more confidently. She can invest in her children while preserving some security for herself. She can expand a business, withstand income interruptions and prepare for later life.

Most importantly, **financial wellness creates choice.**

It gives women greater freedom to decide where to work, how to manage a business, when to invest, how to respond to adversity and what kind of future they want.

Cambodian women already demonstrate extraordinary resilience, commercial ability and commitment to their families and communities. The task now is to ensure that this economic contribution is converted into lasting financial security.

Women do not need to wait until they are wealthy, fully informed or free from every responsibility before taking control of their financial future. They can begin with one conversation, one budget, one savings account and one clear goal.

The best time to build financial wellness is not someday.

**It is today.**



### Enquiries:

**K H Wee-Oon**

Chief Research & Rating Officer

*Andersen in Cambodia*

E: [wee-oon.kwanghwee@kh.Andersen.com](mailto:wee-oon.kwanghwee@kh.Andersen.com)

Telegram: @KHWeeOon



ANDERSEN®