



# Financial Literacy Evaluation Annual Report 2024



CSO4G: CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE  
AND GREEN GROWTH IN CAMBODIA

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# Key Acronyms

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- CSO4G** - Civil Society Organisations for Good Governance and Green Growth in Cambodia
- AC** - Agricultural Cooperative
- SHF** - Small Holder Farmer
- SHG** - Self Help Group
- Fin Lit** - Financial Literacy
- DFL** - Digital Financial Literacy
- OECD** - The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- INFE** - The International Network on Financial Education

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## Executive Summary

The overall objective of the Civil Society Organisations for Good Governance and Green Growth (CSO4G) project, funded by the European Union, is to contribute to an inclusive, participatory, empowered and independent civil society and democratic space in order to increase smallholder farmers' resilience to socio-economic challenges in Cambodia. **Working within a four member consortium, CUFA is responsible for one specific objective (A1.4): strengthen the financial literacy of Small-Holder Farmers (SHF) at the Self-Help Group (SHG) level**, to be conducted within a two year delivery period (2024-2025).

Our evaluation aim is to test whether through planned training-of-trainers (2024) and workshop activities (2025), CUFA can strengthen the financial literacy of SHFs enrolled in SHGs. This first report represents the baseline assessment for CUFA's activities, and has been informed by an audit process conducted in early 2024. It will be followed next year by a post-implementation assessment, scheduled to take place around August/September 2025.

The 2024 fieldwork engaged with 71 respondents (60 women and 11 men including 2 people living with a disability): 36 (32 women) in Key Informant Interviews (KII) and 35 (24 women) in six Focus Group Discussion (FGDs). The evaluation aimed to engage at least 70% women in line with wider agricultural cooperative (AC) participation rates, and achieved a sample size of 84% women. Ages ranged from 18-29 to 60+ with the 30-39 band most prevalent.

At a generalisable level, there is an observable gap in financial knowledge and capacity between most of the FGD participants (who were often trainers, SHG leaders or committee members) compared to the KII respondents (who were SHG members). This encapsulates the primary challenge for Cufa's implementation focus next year in terms of enabling the effective transfer of skills and knowledge from capacitated trainers and supportive committee members throughout the SHGs. There is also a clear gender disparity with men having a statistically significant higher average level (14.1) of financial literacy than women (9.6), noting the overall sample average of 10.1.

Importantly, we will aim to engage the same participants in the 2025 evaluation process for longitudinal consistency, but we do not expect identical samples given migration and attrition.

## Key Findings

1. All KII respondents reported formal or informal saving behaviours. Saving occurs in three main areas: at home, ACs/SHGs and in bank accounts. However, bank accounts are more often used to access salaries and manage debt rather than save, representing an important opportunity to build on the financial practices of SHFs engaged with formal institutions.
2. The average KII Fin Lit Score was 10/20. Overall, there was a good level of financial literacy knowledge (78% average), but lower levels in digital financial literacy (50%), financial literacy attitudes (50%) and behaviours (37%). Representing a clear opportunity to develop existing knowledge into positive behaviours. This is neatly demonstrated in the data with 25/36 KII participants having savings goals yet, only 11/36 actively saving.
3. Concerningly, nearly all (35/36) participants reported financial stress. Nearly half (44%) reported that they had to borrow money for basic living expenses in the last year, a clear indicator of challenges to their financial wellbeing. Respondents expressed understanding and knowledge of the importance of savings and risks to income, particularly in the case of medical emergencies. However, not many had the capacity to manage financially, and coping strategies were centered around borrowing from family or friends.
4. There is a growing level of digital literacy within ACs, with nearly all participants accessing the internet from their phones. However, access and knowledge of online financial tools is gendered, and reflective of the higher financial literacy of male salary earners.

## Program Learnings

1. ACs with a full time staff member appear to be functioning better than those reliant on voluntary committee members for administration.
2. Through flooding, inconsistent seasons, and heat, climate change is damaging SHF livelihoods and a key risk factor for ACs.
3. Social connections play an important role when AC members are financially struggling, either as an informal financial security net through a system of support, or contributing to financial exclusion through negative stigma depending on the AC.
4. AC leaders and committee members displayed higher financial literacy than other members, especially in financial management and online

tools. Many AC's have previously run financial management and budgeting workshops which have had a positive impact on member's knowledge. Participants perceive that AC membership is as much about access to support and training as it is for financial benefit.

5. Many ACs are mainly functioning as savings groups with little collective agricultural activities on display. With most AC members exclusively operating as small holder farmers. Some ACs have had incidents of fraud resulting in a lasting lack of trust of committee leadership. Financial management systems, transparency and governance remain huge challenges for all ACs.
6. Every AC appears to have made an important purchase aimed at strengthening their value chain which is underutilised. For example a solar powered coolroom (Chi Kreang), a car, trucks (Boribou, Taing Kork), warehouse (Boribou). While all ACs have an office space and collection centre, these are only used occasionally. Further, purchased assets have not been used at all or at best have been hired out, showing a distinct lack of planning.

**More generally, the report recommends that CUFA considers several adjustments in terms of how workshops are managed to ensure effective delivery, as follows:**

- The two KII respondents with a physical impairment were less digitally literate and financially included, therefore with an estimated 5% of AC members living with a physical impairment, workshop planning needs to be mindful of access and inclusion. Content and delivery of workshops should also take into consideration the significant number of responses reporting a degree of difficulty 'remembering and concentrating'. This is especially relevant as CSO4G has not yet conducted a GESI analysis as planned.
- To maximise reach to SHFs, workshops should be delivered in ACs according to the number of SHGs. This is a better metric for engaged AC members as many ACs have inactive members who have moved for work.
- Workshops should seek to build on existing use of passbooks and savings ledgers in ACs rather than seek to implement new tracking practices. Further, workshops should practically explain the terms and conditions of common formal loan providers using real contracts where possible and also explain the differences to loans provided by the AC.

## Context

### Project Objectives

**The overall objective** is to contribute to an inclusive, participatory, empowered and independent civil society and democratic space in order to increase small-holder farmers' resilience to socio-economic challenges in Cambodia. This will be pursued in 3 thematic areas:

- 1) Increase local Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) capacity,**
- 2) Promote meaningful and structural participation, and**
- 3) Promote a conducive environment**

CSO4G's aim is to strengthen the capacity, participation, and environment of farmers' organisations to function as independent actors of good governance and development, leading to the promotion of socio-economic rights of small-holder farmers in Cambodia.

**CUFA's specific objective is (A1.4) to: Strengthen the financial literacy of SHF at SHG level.** Stronger financial literacy will enable ACs to develop long-term strategic approaches to finance and improve business prospects, through awareness and understanding of the broad range of available financial instruments; and policy/ market environment. CUFA trainers will work with AC leaders to build capacity on finance issues, acquire skills (including digital skills) for accounting and financial and risk planning, improve internal and external communication. Efforts also aim to improve the quality of SHFs business plans and investment projects, especially dealing with for the riskier segments of the market eg. short term private microfinance and taking on bad debt. Training should be tailored to the needs and financial literacy levels of different target self help groups, and actively include people who are underserved by financial markets, such as women, youth, minorities, and people living with disability.

### Audit Findings

In early 2024 an audit was conducted by CUFA project officers in the three provinces targeted by CSO4G. Data collection was conducted through the administration of a questionnaire (annex 2) in Khmer utilising Kobo toolbox.

Two respondents, a committee member and a SHG member, from each AC were asked a series of questions adapted from the OECD/INFE Core Competencies Framework on Financial Literacy for MSME (annex 1). Auditors broadened the framework to include digital literacy to better align with the program objectives.



CUFA expects that through the facilitating of financial literacy training delivered in SHG workshops by trained AC leaders that the levels of SHF financial literacy will increase at SHG level. CUFA engaged with AC members and sought to test their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in regard to competencies in 5 key areas: Choice and use of Financial Services, Financing the Business, Understanding Risk, Financial Landscape, and Digital Literacy. The audit also assessed each AC on; savings, budgeting, risk management, assets and liabilities and loans in order to accurately target training for each AC.

The audit found a low level of understanding across a broad range of financial literacy topics, but the only people with real depth of knowledge appear to be the AC committee members. The challenge for CUFA will be to select the right trainers and build on existing knowledge to level up AC financial literacy within the context of self help groups. The key training area identified by the audit will be understanding loans and the inherent risks of members defaulting which will be important for all ACs as most AC members look to obtain loans from the AC. Better understanding of loans and governance around loan practice will benefit members and the AC.

**Choice and use of Financial Services** was good, with most members saving and turning to the AC for loans. However, setting SHFs up with bank accounts provides an opportunity as many still save money at home. In regard to **Financing the Business** AC members appear very reliant on the services offered by the AC itself, thus training on assets and liabilities, capital and investing will be important.

There was a moderate **Understanding of Risk** with rising costs noted by many ACs, thus training on how to measure operating costs and business planning or SWOT analysis will be useful for SHFs. Most respondents identified the other key challenges as: climate/ weather, and membership issues. Importantly, respondents understood the risks of members defaulting on loans, and with the bad debt issues apparent in the Cambodian agricultural sector, training on loans will be a vital part of the training material CUFAs will help ACs develop.

Loans and external support from NGOs were seen as the key business development opportunities for ACs demonstrating a poor understanding of the broader **Financial Landscape**. There was a mixed level of **Digital Literacy**, with some ACs utilising digital bookkeeping tools. However there was a clear age divide and as the majority of AC members are older people, developing digital literacy in a relevant manner will be an important challenge for AC leaders.

# AC Snapshot

## Siem Reap

### Kantrang Balang Raksmeay Satrey Samaky

Kantrang Balang Raksmeay Satrey Samaky (KBRSS) was formed in 2015. The AC has 315 AC members, is located in Prasat Bakang and has intermittent internet access. Some members of the AC have previously had some financial literacy training delivered by the AC and Codec. The AC shares profits annually and most often members save money at home and do not use e-banking. The AC members are primarily farmers and focusing on vegetables or chicken raising and the AC helps with financial services, technical support and agricultural supplies. The nearest market is 3.5 kms.



### Audit Financial Knowledge Indicators:

- Good understanding of savings
- Limited understanding of budgeting
- Limited understanding of a business plan
- Some understanding of assets and liabilities
- Some understanding of loans

## Sattrey Phuokphal Meanchey

Sattrey Phoukphal Meanchy (SPM) was formed in 2016. The AC has 400 members and 20 SHGs and is located in the Chi Kreng district. Some AC members have had financial literacy training delivered by Heifer and Banji. Some members save at home or with the AC and most take loans from the AC. Few AC members use E-banking with some understanding of transfers and payments. While the AC has intermittent internet access some members use digital tools for business and marketing purposes. The AC focuses on vegetable farming and chicken raising, the nearest market is 2 kms.

### Audit Financial Knowledge Indicators:

- Some understanding of savings
- Some understanding of budgeting
- Some understanding of a business plan
- Some understanding of assets and liabilities
- Good understanding of loans

## Kampong Thom

### Chraneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat

Chraneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat (CSPA), in Taing Kork, was formed in 2017 and now has 530 members and 27 SHGs. Some members have had financial literacy training with Codec and Heifer. Most members save money in SHGs and take loans from the AC. While only a few members use E-banking. The AC has regular internet access but no digital tools were reported as used for business and marketing purposes. The AC grows rice, vegetables and raises chickens. The nearest market is 5 kms away.





### **Audit Financial Knowledge Indicators:**

- Limited understanding of savings
- Limited understanding of budgeting
- Limited understanding of a business plan
- Limited understanding of assets and liabilities
- Limited understanding of loans

### **Chamnaleu Rekchamroeun**

Chamnaleu Rekchamroeun (CR) in Stueng district was formed in 2015. The AC focuses on providing rice seed and drinking water to its 873 members as well as financial services delivered through its 36 SHGs. Some AC members have had financial literacy training with Codec. Most members save money and obtain loans with the AC. The AC has intermittent internet access with only a few members of the AC using E-banking. Mobile phones, Telegram and Facebook are used for business and marketing purposes.

### **Indicative AC Financial Literacy Practical Knowledge:**

- No understanding of savings
- No understanding of budgeting
- Limited understanding of a business plan
- No understanding of assets and liabilities
- Limited understanding of loans

## **Kampong Chhnang**

### **Toekhout Meanchey Kdey Sangkhim**

Toekhout Meanchey Kdey Sangkhim (TMKS) is located in Rolea Pea district. The AC is comprised of 552 members, across 13 villages. Some AC members have participated in financial literacy training with Adaryda. Most members save money and usually save and take loans from the AC. The AC has regular internet access but only a few members of the AC use E-banking, usually younger members. Mobile phones and the Chomka App are used for business and marketing purposes. The AC supports irrigation practices, chicken and egg marketing and supplies for farmers, the nearest market is 17 kms away.



### **Indicative AC Financial Literacy Practical Knowledge:**

- Some understanding of savings
- Some understanding of budgeting
- Some understanding of a business plan
- Some understanding of assets and liabilities
- Some understanding of loans

### **Melom Samaki Rong Rerng**

Melom Samaki Rong Rerng (MSRR) was formed in 2021. The AC is located in Bouribou district, with the nearest market 7 kms away. Some AC members have had financial literacy training delivered internally. The AC is made up of 300 households and focuses on marketing produce, growing vegetables, chicken raising and also offers a market stall and mini mart. Some members save in their SHGs (of which there are 20) and take loans from the AC. The AC has regular internet access, yet few AC members use E-banking and most report low digital literacy.

### **Indicative AC Financial Literacy Practical Knowledge:**

- Some understanding of savings
- Limited understanding of budgeting
- Some understanding of a business plan
- Some understanding of assets and liabilities
- Good understanding of loans

## Methodology

The CSO4G financial literacy evaluation will be conducted in September 2024 and August/ September 2025 and employ a mixed-methods approach to triangulate findings across sources through a combination of household level interviews and small group discussions. The objective is to test whether through planned training of trainer and workshop activities CUFA can strengthen the financial literacy of smallholder farmers (SHF), within self help groups (SHG). To do this 2 samples will be taken, 1 pre-intervention in 2024 will provide a baseline assessment of the financial literacy of SMF enrolled in SHGs. The 2024 fieldwork consisted of 36 key informant interviews, 32 women, 4 men, (KII) and 6 focus group discussions (24 women, 11 men) for a total of 71 respondents. **The evaluation aims to engage 70% women to be reflective of wider AC participation and achieved 84% in the baseline study.** Importantly, we will aim to contact the same participants in 2025, however with migration and attrition we do not expect identical samples.

Table 1 Participation

AC	Province	FGD Participants	Female (FGD)	Male (FGD)	KII Participants	Female (KII)	Male (KII)
Satrey Phoukphal Manchey	Siem Reap	6	5	1	6	6	
Katrang Balang Raksmeay Samaky	Siem Reap	4	1	3	6	6	
Chamnaleu Rekchamroeun	Kampong Thom	6	2	4	6	6	
Chroneang SPA	Kampong Thom	6	6		6	6	
Melum Samaki	Kampong Chhnang	6	4	2	6	4	2
Toechnut Manchey	Kampong Chhnang	7	6	1	6	4	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>35</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>4</b>

# CUFA's Cambodian SHF Fin Lit Framework

Evaluation criteria are derived from the OECD/INFE Core Competencies Framework on Financial Literacy for MSMEs and AFI digital financial literacy toolkit.

## Core competencies:

### 1. Choice and use of financial services

- a. Basic payment and deposit services
- b. Saving

### 2. Financing the business

- a. Financial and business management and planning
- b. Registration, taxes and other legal requirements
- c. Keeping records and accounting
- d. Financial management

### 3. Risk

- a. Personal risks
- b. Business risks

### 4. Financial landscape

- a. External influences
- b. Financial protection for ACs
- c. Financial information, education and advice

### 5. Digital Literacy

- a. Access to internet
- b. Understanding digital transactions

## Key Informant Interviews

The KII draws on the OECD/ INFE financial literacy survey for small and medium enterprise, which has been contextualised to better fit the realities of rural ACs. The survey scores responses on financial knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and provides a score on overall financial literacy. CUFA's version has also been augmented with questions dealing with financial wellbeing (4 indicators of financial stress), 3 questions on digital financial literacy, and one asking for a comparative self reflection on financial knowledge. Impairment will be assessed through use of the Washington Group - Short Set of questions. In each of the 6 target ACs there will be 6 KIIs conducted.

Evaluators will score KII participants overall financial literacy out of 20. This will reflect 4 marks on financial knowledge, 5 marks on financial attitude, 8 marks on financial behaviours, and 3 marks on digital financial literacy. Regression analysis was used to check the interaction of the different thematic areas to overall score to ensure a useful and balanced outcome. The small differences between the coefficients suggest that all factors have relatively similar contributions to predicting the financial literacy score. P-values < 0.05, meaning they are statistically significant predictors of overall Financial Literacy Score.

**Coefficients:**

- **KNO (Knowledge)** : Coefficient = 3.9
- **ATT (Attitude)** : Coefficient = 2.4
- **BEH (Behavior)** : Coefficient = 2.4
- **DFL (Digital Fin Lit)** : Coefficient = 2.5

**Table 2 Fin Lit Scorecard Breakdown**

	# questions	Score breakdown
Behaviour Qs	14	8
Attitude Qs	10	5
Knowledge Qs	4	4
DFL Qs	3	3
Stress Qs	4	
<b>Total Score</b>		<b>20</b>

**Table 3 KII Questionnaire and Financial Literacy Assessment Guide**

Demographic Questions		Note: questions will be asked in Khmer. Complete copy of questionnaire available in annex.
<b>Answered by enumerator</b>		
1	Province	
2	AC	
3	Year	
<b>Answered by participant</b>		
4	Name	



5	Consent	
5.1	SHG Member? If no - stop now.	
6	Age	
7	Gender	
<b>WG-SS Questions</b>		For analysis the cut off point for disability will be: self report of “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all”.
8	Do you have any difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, some difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, a lot of difficulty.</li> <li>• Cannot do at all.</li> </ul>
9	Do you have any difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, some difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, a lot of difficulty.</li> <li>• Cannot do at all.</li> </ul>
10	Do you have any difficulty walking, or climbing steps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, some difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, a lot of difficulty.</li> <li>• Cannot do at all.</li> </ul>
11	Do you have any difficulty remembering or concentrating?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, some difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, a lot of difficulty.</li> <li>• Cannot do at all.</li> </ul>
12	Do you have difficulty with self-care such as: washing all over or dressing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, some difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, a lot of difficulty.</li> <li>• Cannot do at all.</li> </ul>
13	In Khmer, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, some difficulty.</li> <li>• Yes, a lot of difficulty.</li> <li>• Cannot do at all.</li> </ul>
<b>At home do you?</b>		Questions 14-17 relate to budgeting and income management. Score 0.5 for behaviour for each yes to Q14-17
14	Keep track of your income? Y/N/U	CC2
15	Keep track of your spending	CC1
16	Put aside money for bills? Y/N/U	CC1
17	Use a banking app or money management tool to keep track of your outgoings	CC5

	<b>Please answer yes or no. In the last 12m have you?</b>	Normal financial behaviours score 0.5 for fin lit behaviour if yes to any question 18-21
18	Saved cash at home	CC1
19	Deposited money into a bank account	CC1
20	Given money to family to save on your behalf	CC2
21	Saved money in the AC or SHG	CC2
22	Payed or received money with a QR code	CC5 Score 1 for digital financial literacy for a positive response.
23	How do you personally access the internet?	CC5 Score 1 for digital financial literacy for a positive response.
24	If you had an emergency expense tomorrow of 500USD are you able to pay, without asking friends or family to help?	Financial shock, emergency or contingency planning. Score 1 on financial stress for negative response. CC4
	Yes	
	No	
	Unsure	
	DNA	
25	Do you have a savings goal?	Score 1 for knowledge and 1 attitude for positive response. CC1
	Yes	
	No	
	Unsure	
	DNA	
26	If yes - what actions have you taken to achieve this goal?	Score 1 for attitude and 1 for behaviour for a positive response CC1
	Increased saving amount	
	Savings plan	
	Reduce spending	
	New income source	
	Other	

27	In the past 12m have you had to borrow money to cover basic living expenses	Covering living expenses, financial wellbeing. Score 1 on financial stress for a positive response. CC2
	Yes	
	No	
<b>For the following questions please tell me if you have heard of or currently have a:</b>		Knowledge and understanding of the financial landscape. Score 1 for knowledge if 2+ "heard of" responses and score 1 for behaviors if 1+ "have" responses CC4
28	Bank Loan	
29	Mortgage	
30	Savings account with a bank	
31	Micro-finance loan	
32	Digital payment app on your phone	
33	Insurance	
34	Loan from NGO	
35	Bank Card	
36	Credit Card	
37	What influences you when making a financial decision such as: taking a loan or buying a new motorbike? Let the participant answer and then prompt "any others?"	Understanding financial landscape and risk. If 1 positive source score 0.5 for att and behaviors. If 2+ different positive sources of information are sought score 1 for attitude and 1 for behaviors CC3, CC4
a	Guidance from another AC/ SHG member	Positive
b	Information from an advert about this specific product	Nil
c	A recommendation from friends or family	Positive
d	A recommendation from people you do not know (such as social media)	Nil
e	Information provided by staff of the financial product provider (in person, online or over the phone)	Positive
f	Some other type of information	As assessed

<p><b>In the next section please tell me if you completely agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2) or completely disagree (1)</b></p>		<p>Personal financial beliefs and practices, score 0.25 for a positive response.</p> <p>Note there are questions phrased with both positive and negative valency to mitigate against people sticking to positive or negative responses.</p> <p>The desired response will be coded as correct for completely agree/ agree or completely disagree/ disagree.</p>
38	I find it more satisfying to spend money than to save it for the long term	0.25 -ve behaviour
39	I am prepared to risk some of my own money when saving or making an investment	0.25 +ve attitude
40	I am satisfied with my present financial situation	0.25 +ve attitude
41	I keep a close watch on my financial affairs	0.25 +ve behaviour
42	My financial situation limits my ability to do everything i want to do	0.5 -ve attitude
43	I set long term financial goals and strive to achieve them	0.5 +ve behaviour
44	I believe that money in a bank will be safe even if the bank fails	0.25 -ve attitude
45	I have too much debt	0.25 -ve attitude
46	If I borrow money I have a responsibility to pay it back	0.25 +ve attitude
47	I tend to worry about paying my normal living expenses	Stress
48	I am concerned that my money won't last	0.25 -ve attitude
49	I am living day to day	Stress
50	It is easy to pay with a QR code	Score 1 for digital financial literacy for a positive response
<p><b>Practical questions</b></p>		Score 1 for knowledge for a correct response on 51 and 52

51	Imagine that five brothers are given a gift of riel 100,000 . If the brothers decide to share the money equally, how much does each one get?	20,000 riel
52	You lend riel 10,000 to a friend one evening and he gives you riel 10,000 back the next day. How much interest has he paid on this loan?	No interest
53	What would you rate your overall knowledge of financial matters compared with other AC members?	Above, Same, Below

## Focus Group Discussions

The evaluation conducted one focus group discussion (FGD), of 4-7 people, in six target ACs. No age targets were set for the FGDs. FGD discussion participants included committee members, SHG leaders and SHG members who have not been previously interviewed in the KIIs. The facilitator asked all questions in Khmer and utilise up to 2 pre-prepared prompts to clarify or expand if required. Field notes were taken and the FGDs were recorded and later transcribed into English. Full FGD questions available below in Table 3.

The FGD questionnaire is designed to evaluate existing knowledge among AC members and to inform future financial training, catering for the specific needs of different groups. However, we acknowledge that the experiences, outcomes and knowledge of specific demographics are unique to place and person and we only assume some commonality of broad themes. FGD gathered information on **gender and age** trends regarding the core competencies of financial literacy such as spending and saving. These competencies have been categorized in the same manner as the KII for consistency as; financial knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Questions 1, 4, 6, 8 will be used to analyse any differentiation regarding long-term compared to short-term mentality towards spending and saving money, which may be influenced by gender, age or familial situation.

**Gender** is expected to be a theme which influences choice and use of financial services, attitude and behaviour related to risk and saving, and business planning. Questions 1, 4, 6, 7, 8 will be used to analyse mentality towards spending and saving money, and the means used to manage finances. These may be influenced by gender regarding familial situation and position, business activities, inclusion in economic activities and training, and access to and control over services such as online banking.

The age of participants will also be analysed to inform themes within age groups. Through questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10 FGDs aim to identify themes relating to digital literacy, mentality towards savings, use of financial services and understanding of the financial landscape. Factors which may influence responses include; life stage and familial position, historical factors, engagement with support services such as the AC, and exposure to digital services.

The **past financial training, time period and involvement in AC activities** may be a factor influencing financial knowledge, business and risk planning, and understanding of the financial landscape. This will be analysed through questions 2, 3, supplemented by questions 1, 5, 6, 10.

Another theme that may arise is the impact of **the location of the AC**, relating to provinces and proximity to cities, on understanding of financial services and aligned behaviours. Questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 can be analysed to explore this theme.

Themes related to **support networks** in financial stress will be assessed through questions 5, 7, 8. This is explored in terms of impact of AC membership, financial coping strategies and financial influences.

**Table 4 Focus Group Discussion Prompts**

#	Prompt	Core Competency
<b>1</b>	<b>Do you think money and savings are important?</b>	CC1
1.1	How and where do you save money?	Saving behaviours
1.2	Why do you save?	Age, gender, differences levels of understanding of both risk and business planning.
1.3	Do you track your savings?	Bookkeeping
<b>2</b>	<b>How do you earn money with the AC?</b>	CC2
2.1	How long have you been engaged with the AC?	CC2 Is this a indicator for success / stability
2.2	How has this impacted your income?	CC2 Potential for case study
<b>3</b>	<b>Where or from whom have you learned about finances?</b>	CC1 AC, SHG, NGO? Was it a reason for joining?
3.1	Notes on training	
3.2	Who or what influences your day to day financial decision making?	CC1 Fin landscape

<b>4</b>	<b>Who has a bank account in your family?</b>	CC1/ CC4 Landscape and digital literacy How does this relate to different demographics
4.1	Notes on Financial Inclusion	
4.2	How do they/ you access the bank account?	CC4
4.4	What are the reasons for not having a bank account?	
<b>5</b>	<b>Who has paid off a loan or has outstanding debt?</b>	CC2/ CC3
5.1	Source of loan	CC4 Wellbeing indicator here
5.3	Repayment Plan	
5.4	Holders of multiple loans	
<b>6</b>	<b>Who has tried to reduce their bills or spending?</b>	CC2
6.1	How?	
<b>7</b>	<b>Does anyone use their phone to buy or sell?</b>	CC4/ CC5
7.1	Other business related use of technology?	
7.2	Reasons for not using	CC5
<b>8</b>	<b>If you or a family member had to go to hospital for a few days could you afford it?</b>	CC3
8.1	Who would you ask to help out financially?	CC3 Positive or negative coping Strategies
<b>9</b>	<b>What could happen to reduce the amount of money you make?</b>	CC3
<b>10</b>	<b>Has anyone experienced a scam or a scam telegram message?</b>	CC3 Effects of Age
10.1	What happened?	CC3
10.2	How do you tell something is a scam?	

Note some questions are left blank eg. 5.2 with spaces left in the data collection tool for notes on specific actions or behaviour. Follow up questions (all those with a decimal) are optional and will only be asked if more detail is required. Importantly, facilitators were instructed not to follow up on debt (Q5) if people appear uncomfortable discussing this in a public setting.

## Findings

Overall there were 71 respondents (60 women, 11 men, 2 people living with a disability), 36 in KII (32 women), 35 (28 women) in FGD. Ages ranged from 18 to 60+ with the 40-49 range most common. There was a clear gap in financial knowledge and capacity between most of the FGD participants who were often trainers, SHG leaders or committee members to the KII respondents who were SHG members. This effectively encapsulates the development problem as the key challenge for our work next year will be supporting the skills and knowledge transfer from capacitated trainers throughout the SHGs.

### KII Descriptive Analysis

The KIIs aimed to include a range of perspectives from different groups in society, particularly marginalised groups such as women and people living with disabilities. Overall, 36 participants were interviewed, which included 32 women. Two people living with disability were identified using the Washington Group Short Set questions in KIIs, which is 5% of the sample and in line with the participation rate noted in Heifer's recent study (Baseline Evaluation Study Report 2024). There was a broad range of ages however 30-39 (13) and 40-49 (12) were the most common, with four participants aged between 18-29 and two over 60, see figure 1 below for gender and age breakdown. Six people from each AC were interviewed. It is important to note that the men included in the surveys were all from Kampong Chhnang, three from Melom Samaki Rong Rereng AC and one from Toekhout Meanchey Kdey Sangkhim AC, thus gender disaggregated data may be skewed.

**Concerningly, nearly all (35/36) participants reported financial stress (see figure 2).** With only 7/36 respondents reporting that they could manage a large emergency expense. **Nearly half (44%) reported that they had to borrow money for basic living expenses** in the last year, a clear indicator of challenges to their financial wellbeing. Debt is a huge concern for ACs. Many Cambodian farmers have had to sell their farms to service debt and often get into trouble repaying loans after putting up land as collateral (CAO 2023). While over half (19/36) of the respondents reported having a bank loan, two had a loan from an NGO, and a third (13/36) had a mortgage. Only 10 respondents were satisfied with their present financial situation. Further, nearly all participants agreed or completely agreed (34 people) that their finances prevented them from doing things that they wanted to do. Similarly nearly all respondents worried about their normal living expenses. Only four people felt secure and that their money would last and **more than half felt that they were living "day to day"**.



Figure 1 KII Age/ Gender Breakdown

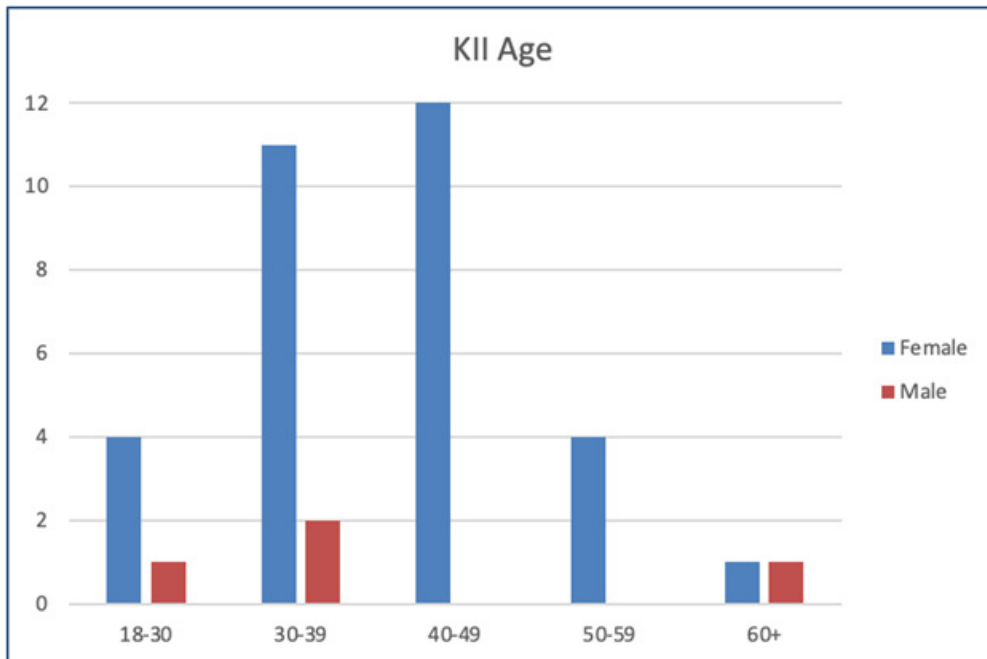
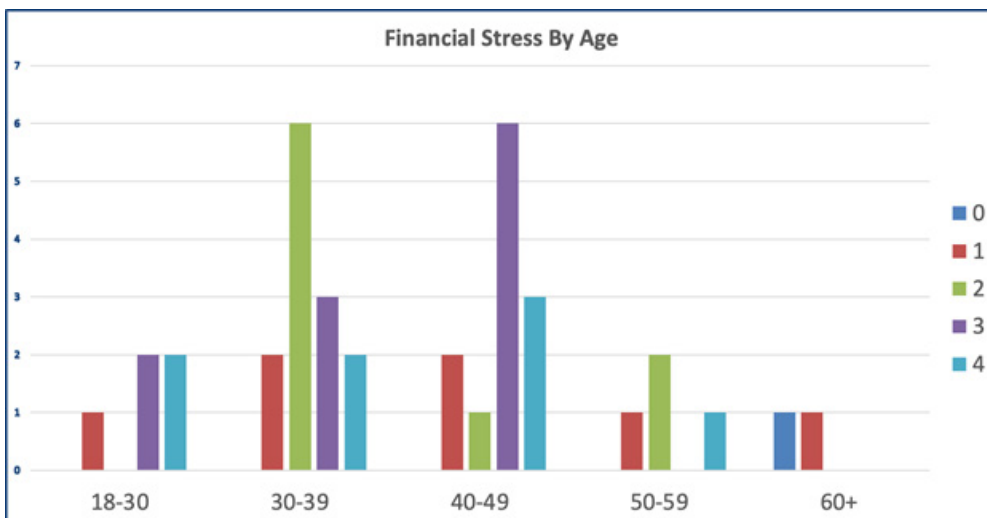


Figure 2 Number of Financial Stress Indicator Responses by Age



Overall the KIIs demonstrate an existing level of financial literacy among AC members. With an **average fin lit score of 10** and ranging from 3.75 to 16.25, see Figure 3 below. This will be the key comparison for the evaluation in 2025. There is variance across the sample in regard to knowledge, attitude, behaviour and digital literacy indicators, supplemented by questions on financial stress. There appears to be a solid understanding of savings and financial management, which has been cultivated through membership in the AC, interaction with family and friends and to a lesser extent education.

**Figure 3 KII Fin Lit Score**

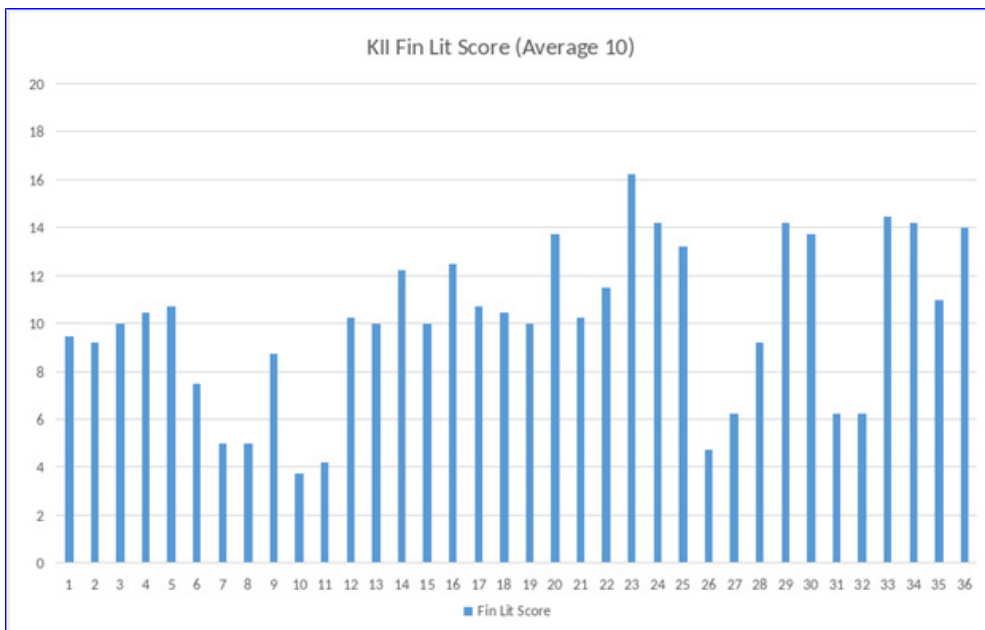


Figure 4 breaks down average Fin Lit score by AC revealed a clear leader: Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat in Kampong Thom (12.66) while Siem Reap’s Kantreang Balang Raksmev Satrey Sammaky is well behind the other AC’s (6.1). This will provide interesting comparative analysis in 2025.

## AC Comparison

Comparison between the provinces and ACs reflects differing levels of financial literacy with respect to knowledge, behaviour, attitude, digital literacy and stress. Kamong Thom’s Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat showed the highest level (12.66) of financial literacy following the scoring system on responses in the KII (figure 4). ACs in Siem Reap scored lower than the other 2 provinces, with Kantrang Balang Raksmev Satrey Samaky AC showing the lowest level (6.16) of financial literacy.

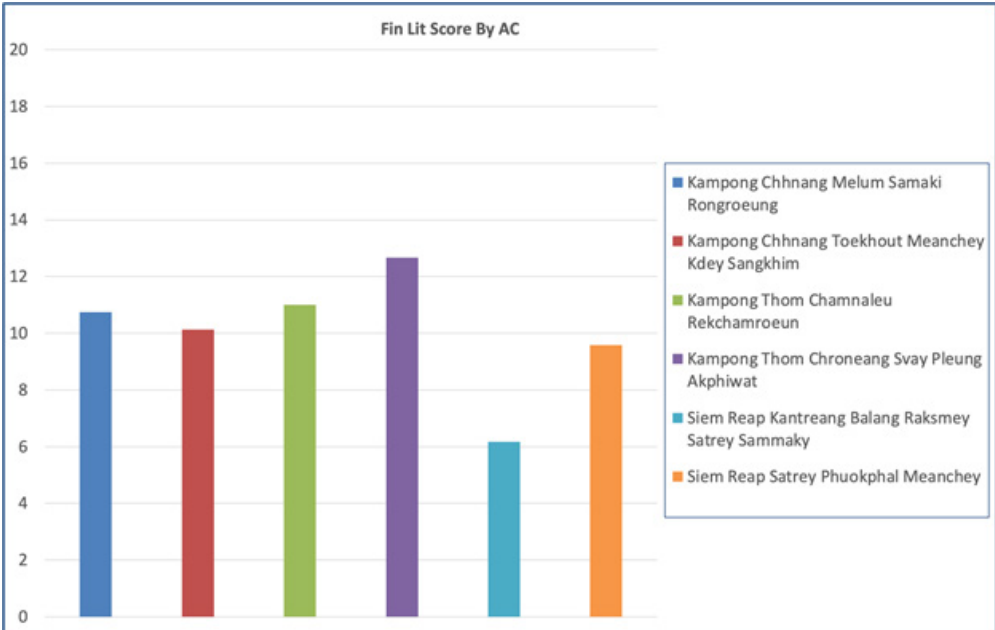
Respondent’s self-reflection of financial knowledge compared to other members correlates with the financial literacy scoring as no one from Kampong Thom rated their level of knowledge as worse than others, compared to 72% of people from Siem Reap believed they had worse financial knowledge than other members. Interestingly, other factors such as having a savings goal also reflected overall financial literacy scoring between ACs.

Of the 12 respondents who did not have a savings goal, 8 were from Siem Reap, making up two thirds of participants from Siem Reap ACs. Only 1 respondent from Siem Reap Kantrang Balang Raksmev Satrey Samaky AC had a savings goal.

Comparatively, of those that did have a savings goal, the largest percentage (33%) were from Kampong Chhang Melom Samaki Rong Rerng AC, which scored 3<sup>rd</sup> in terms of overall financial literacy level, and all of these respondents had taken action to achieve this goal.

Digital literacy as reflected through the KII questionnaire was lower in Siem Reap ACs compared to other provinces. No respondents from either ACs in Siem Reap used a banking app, or a QR code to buy or sell. Additionally, the only 2 respondents who stated they did not use the internet were from Siem Reap.

Figure 4 Fin Lit Score by AC



### DFL

**Digital financial literacy** indicators were driven by use and access to digital tools such as online banking, use of QR codes and access to the internet. The average digital literacy score is 1.47 out of 3 (50%). Analysis of members’ knowledge and skills of online tools, compared to which tools are relevant to member’s interests and uses will be important to inform which training priorities. Less than a third of respondents (10) used an online banking or money management tool, and nine reported they have an app which deals with money on their phone. However, only six people have a bank savings account and two have deposited money into the bank. This raises questions as to how online banking and apps are being used and for what purposes. Only 11 respondents used QR code payments and less than a

third felt comfortable using a QR code. Overall, a level of digital literacy was evident: almost all respondents used their phone to access the internet with only two reporting not using the internet, both of whom were women (one had a physical impairment). Neither of the people identified as living with a disability used a banking app or money management tool, or QR codes. Ease of using QR code correlates with the person answering positively to using QR code. Kantreang Balang Raksmeay Satreay Sannakay also trails on digital financial literacy as shown in Figure 5. Unsurprisingly, DFL average score reduced as people got older, with 18-30 the highest ranked and 30-39 a close second.

Figure 5 DFL by Province and AC

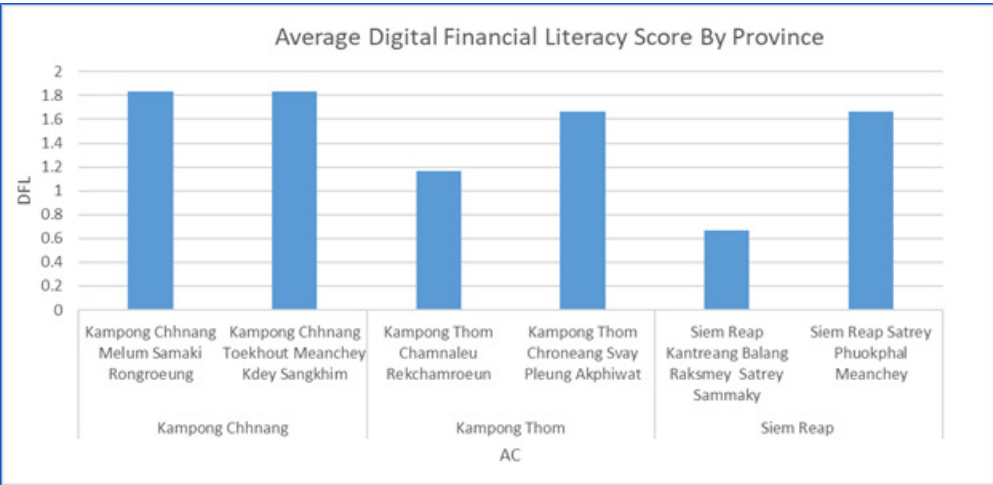


Figure 6 DFL by Age Range

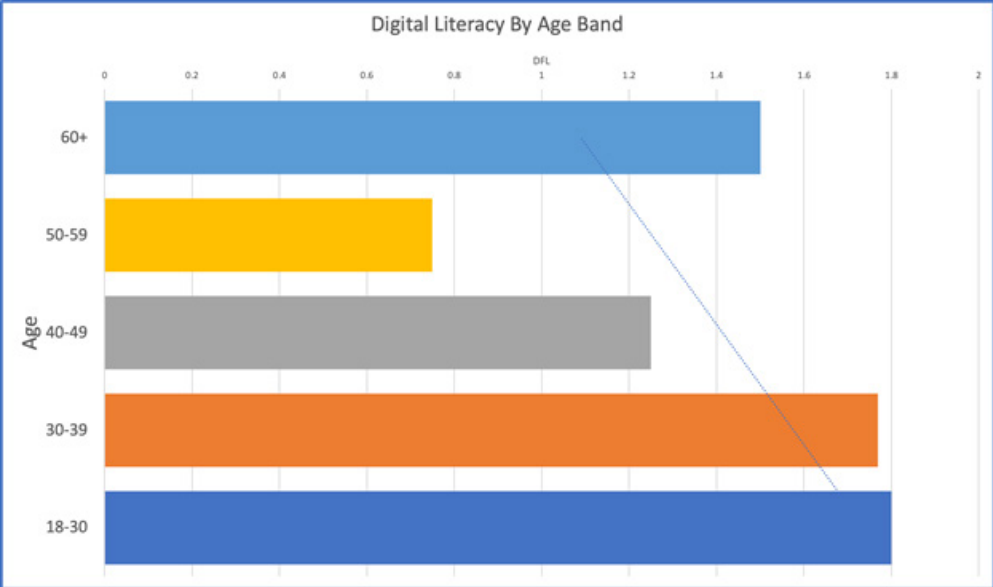
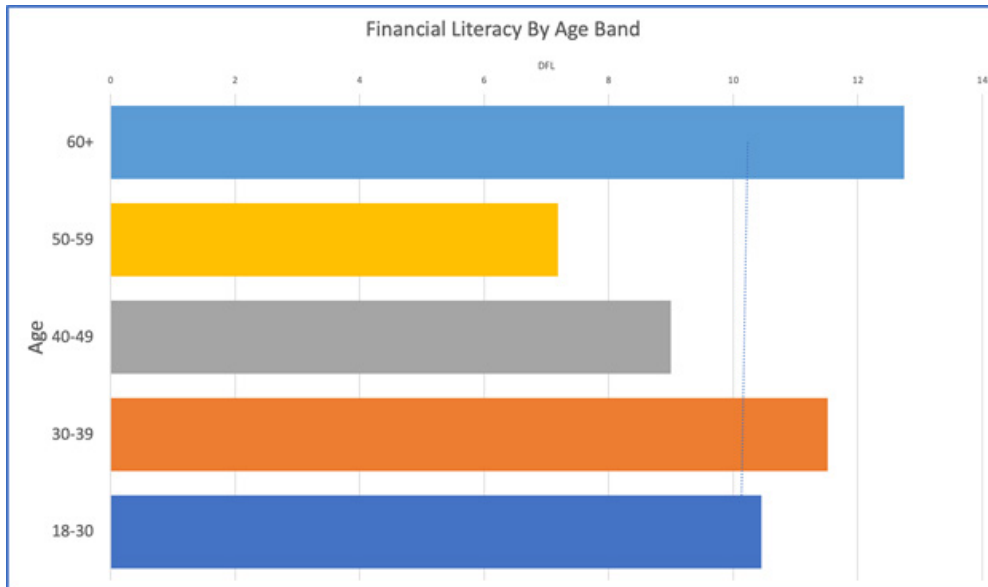


Figure 7 Financial Literacy by Age



Breaking down financial literacy by age revealed a relatively consistent picture with a slight uptick in average as shown in figure 7. The figure reflects 2 key observed trends, one is better access to education for younger generations in comparison to the older generation who suffered through the Khmer Rouge regime. Secondly, Cufa’s work in community financial literacy education has revealed that it is often older people, such as grandparents who stay at home caring for children, that have time to attend training sessions delivered by NGOs or ACs, while those working full time often do not have the time to attend.

**Men have a higher average level (14.1) of financial literacy than women (9.6) noting the overall sample average of 10.1** as shown in figure 8. An unpaired T test shows a P value of 0.0001 suggesting statistical significance.

Figure 8 Financial Literacy by Gender

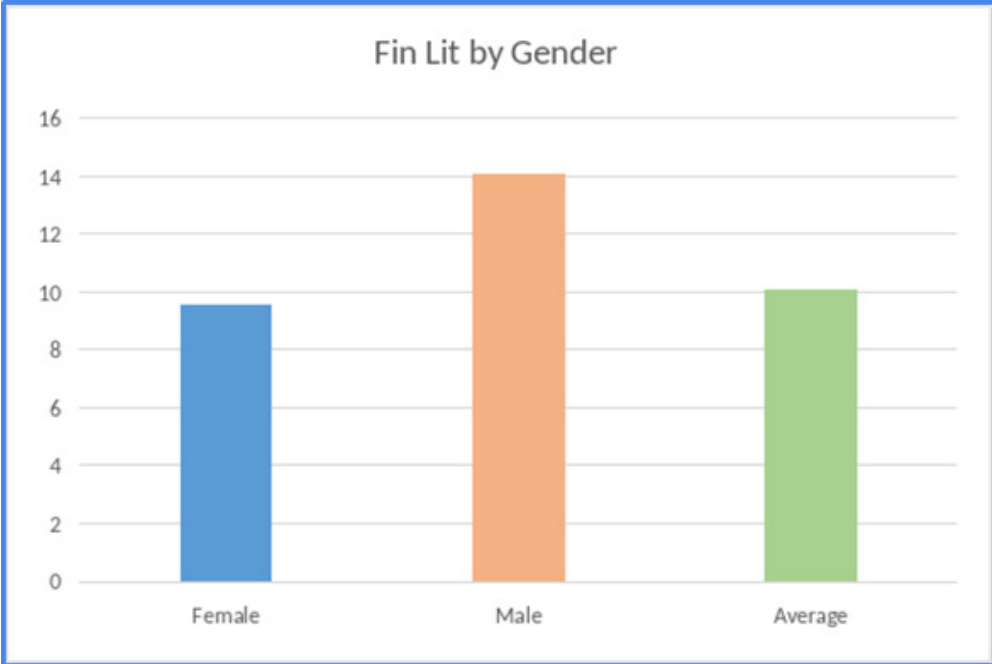
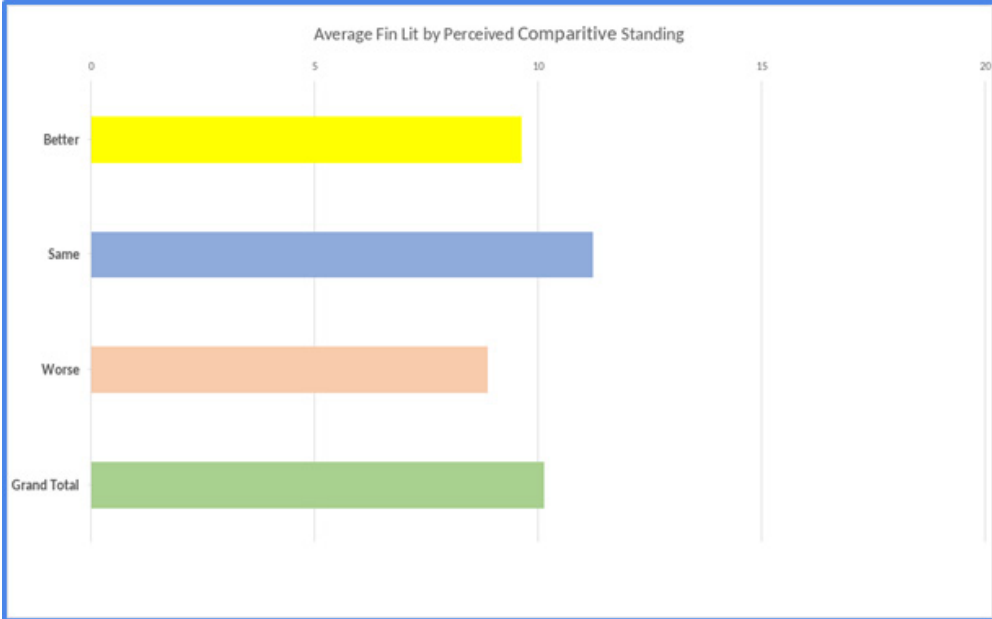


Figure 9 Average Fin Lit by Self Rating



Interestingly those who rated themselves as better than their peers actually scored below the average. Those who rated themselves as worse correctly assessed themselves. While those who rated themselves as the same actually fared better than average as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 10 Average Fin Lit Score Achievement

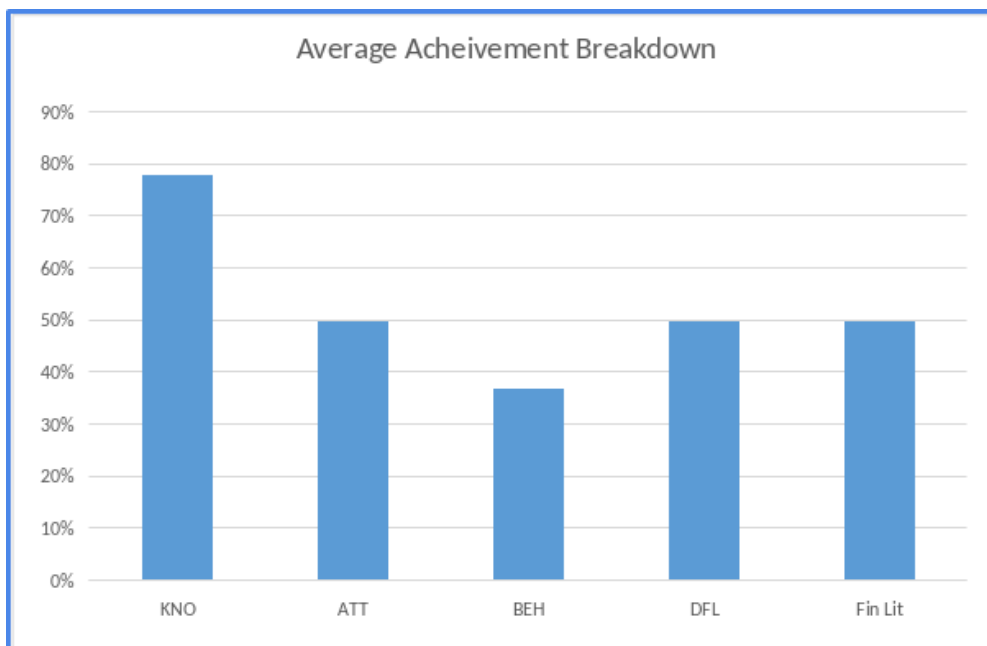


Figure 10 describes the key learning opportunities for Cufa’s year 2 workshops. With a high level of knowledge on display the key areas to focus on will be attitudes, behaviours and digital financial literacy. **Through the trainer-led development of a more positive outlook on financial matters, sharing successful strategies and working to entrench better habits, financial literacy training can have a great impact on SHFs and hopefully begin to mitigate some of the negative coping mechanisms and reports of financial stress.**

Saving practices varied with formal and informal practices, 11 respondents saved cash at home, and while eight people reported having a bank account, only two were actively saving money in a bank. While 25/36 had savings goals only 11/36 were actively saving. Interestingly, people over 50 did not report saving practices. Seven people had a bank card and five had a credit card, however this included people who answered they did not have a bank account. Only two people who had a bank account also reported they had a bank or credit card. **All participants reported saving money** either in a self help group or with the AC. While less than half (15) said they kept a close watch on their financial affairs. AC savings practices are not homogeneous, some are well managed and offer a passbook allowing members to easily track savings, others have a looser approach. Further some offer monthly savings and while others only offer an annual stakeholder buy-in. However, all ACs offered an annual dividend. Importantly, **two thirds (24/36) reported having a savings goal.** This is a vital step in moving from financial literacy knowledge and into positive attitudes and behaviours and will be an important element to analyse post intervention. However, a follow up question revealed less than a quarter set long term goals and strove to achieve them.

## KII Knowledge

As the audit revealed a strong level of knowledge in ACs the evaluation has placed less emphasis on financial literacy knowledge, with only 4 questions. Existing **financial knowledge** was assessed through questions relating to financial concepts such as savings goals, knowledge of the financial landscape, and numerical ability. The average knowledge score was the strongest of the 4 areas at 3.15 (78%). The majority of respondents had knowledge of all financial institutions mentioned (Q28-36); only 7 respondents answered “unsure/ prefer not to say” to one or more of the options. However, how this knowledge translates into informed understanding and related behaviours, such as debt management, is an important factor to include in future financial training. Insurance is an emerging industry in Cambodia with a number of companies now offering crop insurance, currently only 4 participants have some kind of insurance. Numerical ability was demonstrated by nearly all participants as only 3 participants answered incorrectly to questions involving financial calculations.

## KII Attitudes

**Financial attitudes** were assessed through attitudes towards money management such as savings and investments, financial influences and institutions, and reflections on personal financial situations. The average attitude score was 2.5 out of 5 possible points (50%). A level of distrust in the banks was reported by 20/36 participants, including 75% of youth. 4 respondents stated to never take a loan, which corresponded with behaviour as none of these respondents had a loan from any institution included. Additionally, less than half of participants (15/36) were prepared to risk their own money for savings or investments. Only 10 respondents were satisfied with their present financial situation. Further, **nearly all participants (34) agreed or completely agreed that their finances prevented them from doing things that they wanted to do.** When asked to assess their financial literacy compared to other AC members, 14 said their level was worse, 18 the same, 4 better than others.

## KII Behaviours

**Financial behaviours** reflected some knowledge and attitudes, whilst also shaping others through experience for example with financial institutions. Behaviours had an average score of 3 out of a possible 8 (37%) and represents the key area to strengthen. Behaviours reflected income and spending management, actions taken towards savings and goals and use of financial institutions. In terms of **financial management** only three people kept track of their spending, while eight put money aside for bills. However, 15 people said they kept a close watch on their financial affairs. Further 10 used a phone application to help manage their finances. **When making a financial decision, advice from friends or family was most trusted**



**overall and reported by 52%.** Interestingly 30% of KII respondents reported saving money at home, a vastly different figure compared to the 1.8% reported in Heifer's baseline (Baseline Evaluation Study Report 2024).

## FGD Descriptive Analysis

35 people participated in the six focus group discussions, 24 women and 11 men. Women are well represented in leadership roles and made up the majority of participants in every FGD except that at Chamnaleu Rekchamroeun in Kampong Thom. **Many ACs are functioning more as savings groups than agricultural cooperative, with very little collective agricultural activities on display. With most members exclusively operating as small holder farmers and selling to middlemen. The AC is the main source of savings for most respondents. 2 ACs have had major incidents of fraud resulting in a lasting lack of trust of committee leadership.** AC members earn money from profit share, monthly or yearly interest, and dividends. Yet, financial management systems, transparency and governance remain huge challenges for ACs run by voluntary committee members with competing priorities.

Every AC appears to have an important purchase aimed at strengthening their value chain which is underutilised. Further, many of these purchases have not been used at all or at best have been hired out, showing a distinct lack of planning. From field visits key examples include a solar powered coolroom (Chi Kreang), multiple cars and trucks (Boribou, Taing Kork), warehouse (Boribou). While all ACs have an office space these areas are only utilised by ACs with full time staff members. Similarly, all ACs have room to collect and store produce, but the areas are not utilised. It was very clear that a key element for the more successful ACs was having a full time staff member. Concerningly there were reports of AC members who were encouraged to take on debt to help develop the AC, with negative consequences for themselves. For example a \$2200 loan to build a chicken coop reported by an AC member in Satrei Phuokphal Meanchey, which without adequate livelihood training has become a bad debt. Many, older people displayed a level of resistance to any kind of digital communication or services.

## FGD Knowledge

The AC was a key source of financial knowledge for all groups, with 5/6 groups also referring to training delivered by NGOs. However, the impact of the numerous past training by NGOs was noted as limited by most FGDs. It was made clear that past training had not resulted in behavioral change for most FGDs participants. The main savings goal mentioned was often to buy a house or realigned as reducing spending to manage debt. Informal sources of training were also discussed as highly influential for respondents. Most FGD participants (agreed on in 5/6 FGDs)

stated family or friends was a key source of financial knowledge, including learning between parents and children or modeling based on the success of other members and friends. Family was discussed as having the biggest influence on day to day financial decisions, with ACs second most discussed. The role of the AC in building knowledge is perhaps best described by this participant:

***“I gained basic financial knowledge from community-based workshops organised by the cooperative. Over time, practical experience working with the cooperative and discussions with fellow members have deepened my understanding. I’ve also benefited from advice and training sessions provided by the cooperative’s management”***

- Chamnaleu Rekchamroeun FGD.

Education was also a factor, with some participants learning from other people who had a higher level of education. While one older participant reported learning from her children. Respondents identified climatic factors, market instability, loan defaulting and health as the key risks which could impact them. For many of these ACs the realities of climate change are already clear: with shifting seasons, extended hot and dry weather, and serious flooding all reported. Whilst some FGDs displayed a good understanding of financial management such as budgeting, others reflected limited understanding of loan processes and banking.

## FGD Attitude

Nearly all respondents believed money and savings to be important with responses sometimes qualified by health or family. There was a clear understanding that money was required to engage in social and financial processes and that savings were needed to build lives and livelihoods. There were many reasons given for saving money, with all groups discussing future medical costs, and half stating children’s health and education as a main motive. 4 groups included purchase wants as a reason to save. Often saving was aligned with paying off debt.

***“Money is really important because I have a loan and need money to pay back the loan”*** Mrs Phoun Sokha, Kantrang Balang Reaksmey Satre Samaky

Four groups referred to other benefits from the AC including access to cheaper products, selling produce and assistance such as with chicken raising and a greenhouse. Most groups reflected the training opportunities from AC as assets. The reported perceived benefits of AC membership in FGDs aligned with the figures (65% access to financial resources, 53% skill training and capacity) in Heifer’s baseline study (Baseline Evaluation Study Report 2024).

There was a clear understanding that AC membership was useful for learning and opportunities, but not lucrative nor a better option than selling directly to middlemen.

***“Saving money is important but we don’t have money to save because our income is less and all income has to be spent for daily living cost and payback to the bank.”***

Mr Meas, AC Kantrang Balang Reaksmey Satrey Samaky

## FGD Behaviour

Saving cash at home or savings in a SHG (3/6) were the most common savings behaviour reported with less saving with the AC or a bank. Two groups reported having bank accounts but did not use the bank for saving purposes, only to access salaries. Notably, one group reflected that none in the group currently tracked their savings, however they had previously tracked savings. There was a sound understanding of the importance of tracking savings for family, health, education, emergency and business reasons. Three groups discussed using a passbook and two used ledgers to track members’ savings with ACs having different levels of governance and support for savings practices. **Therefore building on the use of a passbook and savings tracking practices in ACs provides a clear opportunity for workshop training in 2025.**

***“Yes, record in pass books for tracking if we save with SHGs. But for saving at home, not recording”*** participant, Melum Samaki FGD.

Most people had a bank account in their family, however use and understanding varied. One group reported only visiting the bank to manage their bank account and one only online banking with all others doing both. Reasons for not having a bank account included attitudinal, knowledge based, and gendered. Specifically women in the FGD often commented that as their husband had a salary he had the bank account and dealt with the bank.

***“All expenses are realized on my husband’s salary”***

Kantrang Balang Reaksmey Satrey Samaky FGD.

***“... does not have a bank account because she lacks the knowledge to use one, although her husband does”***

Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat FGD.

Members in every group identified that they had a loan with a bank, with half also taking loans from the AC. Loans from the AC were discussed as low interest options.

Bad experiences with loans included interpersonal conflict with private loans, risk of domestic violence, struggling to repay loans (heightened by loss in produce), and unethical banking practice. **Banks and microfinance were reported as making it very easy to obtain a loan**, but not explaining the terms well or making it easy to repay loans. Four groups reflected on how they managed loans and demonstrated an understanding of payment plans, while some participants mentioned that learning how to repay a loan has helped them develop better financial habits. One group recognised managing loans as a method of cutting down spending. Four groups reflected that they have tried to reduce bills or spending. Cutting purchasing of wants and focusing on needs was a consistent theme across respondents with other strategies including new incomes, growing food at home, and sharing strategies.

## Digital Financial Literacy

Most groups discussed using their phone for business, however confidence in use differed with AC leaders reflecting high confidence and older members showing less digital literacy and interest. Reasons for not using their phones for business included access (internet), applicability (locals use cash, not the right product), knowledge and gendered (husband does instead). A number of FGD participants stood out innovative entrepreneurial applications of digital literacy.

***“...can post and sell vegetables on Facebook”***

Participant, Melum Samaki FGD.

***“It’s good to use a phone for transferring quickly and easily but when we go to some place where people don’t use a bank app we have to bring cash with us for buying some products from farmers. It’s easy to (use) digital (methods) in urban areas”***

Mr Tork Sokha, Kantrang Balang Reaksmey Satrey Samaky.

Those that use online tools such as banking or QR code reported finding it easy. In comparison, lack of knowledge is often discussed as a reason to not use online tools. Only one group had not experienced online scams and most could identify a scam. Common scams included prizes and investments and family accident calls, signifying that scammers use common tactics which may be easier to identify.

Respondents from Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat AC reflected a low level of digital financial literacy, excluding the AC leader and a young trainer. Few knew how to use their phone to buy or sell, and also had a limited understanding of using bank accounts, opting to go in person to the banks.

## Financial Stress

When asked about having money available for a medical emergency there was only one group where most reported that they had the capital. A few mentioned they had national insurance for them and their families which substantially reduces medical costs. For most participants coping strategies were centered around borrowing from family or selling an asset. In terms of coping strategies and reducing expenses, spending less on wants and growing food at home was common across all focus groups.

***“Only me think of how to spend every day. The electricity can not decrease but food or vegetables are easy to decrease. We can grow it by ourselves”***

Mrs Taing, Satrei Phouphal Manchei FGD.

## Thematic Analysis

### Gender

Gendered control over finances and financial decisions was reflected across several themes. Financial decisions were commonly discussed as family decisions, yet primarily that of the husband, with only one woman from the group was the key decision maker over day to day financial decisions. Significantly a risk of domestic violence was stated for respondents from Satrei Phuokphal Meanchei in Chikreng if a loan was taken without discussing with family, reflecting gendered control over financial decisions in the household. Yet, in discussion women identified an important role in family financial influence by teaching their children. An example of how even if women deal with household purchases men still retain influence:

***“I’ve learned from my husband; after we got married, he often asked me where the money was going and why (we) spend a lot, this made me realise I needed to keep track of our finances, so now I can show him my tracking notes when he asks.”*** Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat FGD

While the following neatly describes the male view of a woman’s role in family finances:

***“Women are good at allocating money for spending or negotiating the price at the market”*** Mr Voeurn, Satrei Phoukphal Meanchei FGD.

While within families women or girls who want to further their education often need to support themselves:

***“She needed to earn money for her education since her family had many children and couldn’t provide support”*** Participant, Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat FGD.

KII Data shows that half of men put money aside for bills, compared to only 18% of female respondents. Interestingly, **all male respondents had a savings goal**, compared to 62% of female respondents.

A gendered comparison between the two ACs in Siem Reap reflected some trends which could be related to the demographic in each group with Satrey PM having a majority of female respondents compared to a majority of male respondents in Kantrang BRS. A difference is seen in use of bank accounts with none stating they use the bank to save in Satrey PM (only used for business) compared to respondents only stating the bank as the only means to save in Kantrang BRS. Additionally online banking was only referred to in Kantrang BRS as a means to access the bank account and only some in Satrey PM used their phone for business compared to most in Kantrang BRS.

Gendered differences are also seen in how respondents cut spending. Reducing purchase wants was consistent across strategies; male respondents mainly discussed reducing spending on holidays, going to parties and drinking. In comparison, female respondents mainly discussed reducing purchase wants such as clothes or self-care, including one woman who stated:

***“I reduce all not important materials or personal care. Just make sure we have enough money for daily food and kids school and payback to the bank”*** Mrs Phoun Sokha, Satrey Phuokphal Meanchey FGD.

Digital literacy in the KII showed a gendered difference with the majority of men having higher levels than women. The majority of male respondents used a banking app and found it easy to use QR codes, and all used a QR code and had access to the internet. In comparison less than 20% of women used a banking app, or QR code payments. Additionally, the 2 respondents who did not use the internet were female. In the FGDs **the reasons female participants did not use digital financial tools was often that they did not have the knowledge or skills**. For example, female respondents from expressed **she was scared of using a bank account as it would make her spend too much online, and another expressing that she didn’t understand how bank transactions worked:**

***“I don’t understand the cash with me so how money runs to another person”*** Mrs Kunthea, Satrey Phuckphal Meanchey FGD.

A number of factors could be explored here including knowledge and access to digital banking tools, participation in the informal economy, or other gendered reasons informing what training is most relevant to women compared to men in terms of money management. Gender relations was included in discussions regarding use of financial tools such as having a bank account and using their phone for business purposes. Although all groups indicated that the majority of participants had a bank account in the family, one respondent commented that she didn't have the skills to have a bank account, but her husband had one. Similarly, one participant's reason for not using their phone for business purposes was as the husband does.

## Age

Only two respondents were 60 years or older in the KIIs. However overall responses differentiated by age range reflect a number of trends in attitude about money and financial wellbeing. **Interestingly, two 60+ respondents were not concerned that their money would not last, whereas 88% of all other respondents (30/34) answered that this was a concern.** Additionally, the two 60+ respondents answered 'neutral' and also agreed to being satisfied with their current financial situation, making up 20% of all respondents who were satisfied, despite only representing 5% of the total sample. Through both KIIs (figure 6) and FGDs (question 7) it is clear that older participants are less digitally literate. Finally, **in comparison to more than half the sample being worried about living costs, both 60+ respondents answered neutral to this question.** This data indicates a potential difference in mentality among older members about money long term and content with their financial situation. This attitudinal difference of older people aligned with the responses in the FGDs, with older participants (those nearly retired or winding down) more accepting of their situation compared with younger participants. However, further testing of a larger sample is needed.

Respondents classified as youth (18-30), within the KIIs presented few trends. Although digital knowledge was high among youth, reflected in Figure 6, digital use and attitudes were not consistent across responses. Although more digitally literate, a lack of trust in institutions was shown, half were cautious about taking on debt and 75% saved cash at home. While none of the youth respondents found it difficult to use a QR code, only half (2/4) stated they used QR codes or a banking app. Again this reflects access and utility of digital transactions in rural areas. A point of difference among youth responses is in influence over financial decisions. Overall respondents stated advice from family and friends was influential, whereas only 1 youth stated the same. Across the sample, family was identified as a key source of financial knowledge and influence, including one respondent stating that they had learned from their children. School was a greater influence on financial decision making for younger participants than for older participants.

## Impairment

Two respondents from the KIIs identified as living with a disability due through use of the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. People living with a disability were not explicitly identified, nor were questions relating specifically to disability included in the FGDs, however the KIIs deliver important insight in regard to delivery of workshops in 2025. Both women living with a disability scored 0 for digital financial literacy, neither using a banking app, or QR codes, and one woman stating she doesn't use the internet. Both respondents answered they were in debt, however stress and mentality about their financial situation differed. Interestingly, a total of 16 respondents across all three provinces, answered they had some level of difficulty remembering or concentrating, presenting an important consideration for the delivery of future workshops. Further difficulty remembering and concentrating was identified across all youth interviewed.

## The Role of the AC

Membership with the AC was reflected by all respondents as having a significant impact on financial knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours in FGDs and KIIs. Participants discussed that past training delivered by NGOs have been influential in building financial literacy skills and that they understood the AC had an important role in connecting people to learning opportunities. Participants stated information on current financial practices and regulations as useful for external trainers to include. This demonstrates a baseline level of understanding from previous workshops and applicability of future workshops.

***“We are now clear about our goal and plan for saving after I learn from CUFA”*** Mrs Taing, Satrey Phuokphal Meanchey FGD.

***“I am really happy with all AC activities, meetings or training”***  
Mr Tork Sokha, Kantrang Balang Reaksmey Satrey Samaky FGD.

***“After AC partners provide training on how important saving is, we see money in our saving record book and see the interest that encourages us to keep saving money with a group”***  
Mr Voeurn, Satrey Phuckphal Meanchey FGD.

In the FGDs, around half the respondents noted their income had increased, the main impact on financial situations was in using SHGs to save money. **It was clear that the AC was seen as beneficial through access to profit share, dividends and low interest loans.** All discussions reflected neutral or positive changes to their income since being involved with the AC. Workshops run within the AC and



SHGs were reflected as influential on member's financial management such as budgeting skills and financial knowledge. Program staff and trainers should therefore look to draw on the ACs existing community knowledge in regard to workshop delivery. Additionally, The AC leaders showed strong financial management skills relating to monitoring transactions and expenses. For many SHGs leaders, there is a ledger for tracking all transactions related to their members' savings. The risks posed by loan defaulting is well understood across ACs, however some ACs were better than others in finding out about the financial situation of SHFs applying for loans. The following excerpts demonstrate how broadly AC committees understand what they should be doing (financial literacy knowledge) but do not always do it (financial literacy behaviour).

***“So for example, for any member, it is really dangerous if they don't have a clear goal. Dangerous for any member when borrowing the money before we allow them to take a loan. We need to study about their income or what the purpose of taking a loan is and when to pay it back”***

Committee Member, Melum Samaki FGD.

***“...sometimes when we provide loans, we do not study income and expenses”*** Committee Member, Melum Samaki FGD.

FGDs revealed an interesting theme of modelling, with many AC members reporting that they signed up and started saving with SHGs without a real understanding of the benefits, they were just copying or doing what their friends or neighbors did. Later they began to learn about savings and the benefits of the self help groups.

Initially skeptical about the necessity of saving within the SHG, she preferred to keep her money in cash, believing the small interest rate was insufficient. However, after receiving guidance from the group's leadership, she recognized the advantages of saving, leading her to increase her contributions from 10,000 Riels to 60,000 Riels. This shift not only improved her savings but also encouraged her to adopt better financial habits. Excerpt from Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat AC FGD.

However, some discussions included caution of financial monitoring, such as the risk of not tracking money with the AC and accountability issues.

***“For me I focus on Community, Do the AC running well and responsible. If I trust AC I will invest or save money with AC”***

Mr. Voeurn, Satre Phuckphal Meanchey FGD.

When assessing the role of the AC and members on the financial situation and literacy of other members in the FGDs, the relation between members and financial situations was a major factor in terms of social inclusion and support. In some FGDs (Chamnaleu Rekchamroeun AC) the AC was reflected as holding an important role through providing an informal financial security net between members. This reflects strong community connections as members support each other such as when harvests are poor or through times of personal emergencies. In comparison, a different conception of financial strain and social relations is seen in other ACs (Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat AC). Rather than social connections providing a security network, financial strain is discussed as having negative social impact such as isolation.

## Formal and Informal Financial Institutions

Participant's experience with banks was reflected as informing distrust towards the bank among respondents in the KIIs. Five out of the eight people who have a bank savings account distrust the bank with their money. Overall, over a third of respondents in the KIIs expressed some distrust of banks, most of whom have a bank loan. It was clear that both banks and microfinance made it easy to access loans, however often the terms and conditions attached were not explained well. Most participants of FGDs reported that bank staff came to their homes to help them open accounts, but after that they had to travel to the bank to conduct transactions. There were also reports of Heifer encouraging AC members to take on loans to help push the AC forward. One concerning example from Siem Reap, an AC member obtained a loan of \$2200 to build a chicken hutch but lacked the skills to make the new asset work for her.

Unethical banking practices were discussed among FGD respondents for instance one respondent from discussed that despite having the funds to repay, she has been unable to do so for three months because the bank only prioritizes collecting the monthly interest rate. A common theme from the FGDs was that both banks and microfinance organisations made accessing loans very easy, even coming to peoples houses to sort out paperwork, terms and conditions were not explained well.

***“The money that we deposit does not earn any interest, they are solely maintained for the bank to deduct loan interest payments”***

FGD participant, Chroneang Svay Pleung Akphiwat

Informed understanding of loans and repayments from financial institutions such as banks is a key area for training in workshops in 2025. Most participants had a loan,

and only a few had plans on how to repay their loans. Additionally, the FGD from Melum Samaki Rongroeng reflected that some members only obtained bank accounts to access a loan.

Many respondents discussed private loans between family and friends, especially as a coping strategy in times of hardship for example in the case of a medical emergency. This includes 16/36 respondents from the KII answering they had borrowed money from family and friends in the last six months. However, private loans were also discussed as a source of conflict. For example, one respondent reported that a neighbor failed to repay a loan. While indebtedness as a cause for family conflict was also discussed.

***“I see some people borrow money without discussing it with their family and they have problems or divorce”***

Mr Voeurn, Satrei Phuokphal Meanchey.

## **Risk Factors to Business and Financial Situation**

A strong understanding of risks to business and future financial situations was expressed through both FGDs and KIIs. This was shown through both knowledge of factors that could decrease income sources and concern for future expenses such as medical emergencies. There is however a clear and compounding climate change vulnerability with loss of crops impacting ability to repay loans may push farmers further into debt and potentially selling land. Climate change effects were different across the 6 target ACs, but included flooding, heat, too much or too little rainfall and unusual or irregular seasons. Additionally, having to sell assets to pay emergency costs such as medical bills will compound financial stress, with only seven people from KIIs stating they could afford medical costs and less with insurance. Savings for medical costs was discussed as a driving factor of savings in FGDs.

# Annex 1

<https://www.oecd.org/finance/financial-education/OECD-INFE-core-competencies-framework-on-financial-literacy-for-MSMEs.pdf>

# Annex 2

[CSO4G Audit Form 2024.pdf](#)

# Annex 3

[CSO4G Evaluation KII.pdf](#)

# Annex 4

[CSO4G Eval FGD .pdf](#)



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