



## WDE Commentary No. 8

### “Women and Digital Innovation”

**The WDE Policy Dialogue**  
**Episode 8: “Women and Digital Innovation”**  
29th October 2021, 9 AM- 10 AM via Zoom and Facebook Live

**Honourary Guest Speaker**  
**Ms. RODIONOVA Nataly**  
Managing Director of IT Academy STEP Cambodia and Founder of Sisters of Code

**Honourary Guest Speaker**  
**Ms. Channé Suy Lan**  
Managing Director of InSTEDD iLab Southeast Asia

**Moderator**  
**Ms. Hay Seangmey**  
Programme Coordinator of Women's Digital Entrepreneurship

**Co-organisers**  
Woomentum, AVI, Khmer Enterprise

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**Pong Pich:** *Programme Assistant of Women’s Digital Entrepreneurship (WDE)*

The 8<sup>th</sup> episode of the WDE Policy Dialogue entitled “Women in Digital Innovation” was moderated by Ms Hay Seangmey on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021. She was joined by two distinguished speakers, Ms Rodionova Nataly, Managing Director of IT Academy STEP Cambodia and Founder of Sisters of Code, and Ms Channé Suy Lan, Managing Director of InSTEDD iLab Southeast Asia.

This episode covered the definition of digital innovation, the adoption of digital innovation in Cambodia, and the public and private sectors’ efforts to promote digital innovation. In addition, it discussed the obstacles and offered solutions for women-owned Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in implementing digital innovation.

Ms Channé defined digital innovation as the use of digital technology in business sectors to enhance cost and process and achieve scale and performance. She explained that every industry, from education to health, has adapted digital innovation to connect the whole world.

In addition, Ms Rodionova stated that digital innovation is a problem-solving method that provides better solutions to existing problems. She was impressed by Cambodian digital innovation development progress such as ABA mobile app, Grab, or Nham24. Even in the provinces, the adoption of digital innovation is rising there. That shows how fast Cambodian people have embraced opportunities and are open-minded to adopt digital technologies.

Regarding the obstacles hindering SMEs’ adoption of digital innovation, Ms Channé mentioned the lack of digital skills, innovation cost, and further support from the government. She elaborated that the

challenges we currently face are the deprivation of human resources in the digital skills to fulfil the need in the sector. Another challenge is the innovation cost, which the companies need to consume digital components, and it is quite costly. The last one is the support from the government. Even though the government is trying to improve digital innovation in Cambodia, a gap lengthens the adoption of digital innovation in Cambodia.

From Ms Rodionova’s observation of education and digital skills development, she has defined several levels of digital skills. The first level is basic digital literacy skills such as setting up email, using digital tools, using word, excel, and searching the Internet. The second level is the middle level, such as how to be more proficient in doing office work or manufacturing, operating machines, and robots. Finally, she is concerned about the capacity of software developers and scientists to solve complex innovation solutions.

Regarding what the private and governmental sectors have done to promote digital innovation in the Kingdom, Ms Rodionova stressed that digital innovation development would require some risks, and it is not always convenient for business owners and managers to open their minds to those challenges. Moreover, Ms Rodionova stated that Cambodia had prioritised digital innovation and economy at the top of the national agenda. For example, there is a new digital development strategy for up to 2030. Moreover, many governmental agencies are creating an ecosystem that helps develop and enhance digital development in Cambodia. For example, there was the ICT Award Final, Digital Cambodia, Barcamp and others.

Similarly, Ms Channé mentioned that Internet connectivity has increased from 360 to 400 million users just between 2019 to 2021. She stated that this is a window of opportunity for small business sectors to connect with the world during the Covid-19. With Internet capacity, small businesses can expand their business transactions through online platforms with the digital technology ecosystem such as delivery, banking payment. Furthermore, Ms Channé mentioned that the government across ministries started embracing digital innovation to solve the problems in the last five years. She raised an example of how well the government handled the pandemic. Furthermore, she works hand in hand with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and other institutions to introduce a computer science curriculum into the Cambodian education system.

In another part of the dialogue, the moderator focused on women's role in contributing to digital innovation in Cambodia. Ms Channé noticed that many successful women are contributing their efforts to the growth of the Cambodian economy. Therefore, women's demand in the digital sector is needed to develop digital innovation in Cambodia. Moreover, she highlighted that the digital sector has higher gender equality than other sectors. This kind of problem is happening in Cambodia, but it is occurring in the whole world.

Ms Rodionova stated that even though ten per cent of female students choose a technology-related major in Cambodia,

only one-third of them would take a career in this field due to family commitment and society's attitudes. Suppose female representation does not increase decision-making positions and transforms public perception towards women in the digital sector; in that case, government strategics and the private sector's decision will not reflect Cambodian women's needs.

Finally, the guest speakers offered advice to Cambodian women entrepreneurs on how to improve their innovative skills and grow their firms. Ms Channé proposed that entrepreneurs participate in local and global networks created by the public and private sectors constructively. Women entrepreneurs will benefit from the network since they will have more possibilities and assistance. Similarly, Ms Rodionova encourages female entrepreneurs to become more involved in the digital ecosystem by embracing growth and courageous mindsets, seeking creative solutions, pursuing lifelong learning, and developing a company culture that supports innovations to strengthen their positions.

To sum up, there are efforts made by the government and digital sectors to develop digital innovation in Cambodia, such as creating workshops and training for female students and women-owned SMEs. Even though there are existing challenges, female SMEs owners have to learn how to think innovatively about those challenges. With these innovative solutions, they will be able to adopt digital innovation in Cambodia.