

Education and Gender in Contemporary Cambodia

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Abstract

Cambodia is in the process of rebuilding its education system, effectively shattered since the Khmer Rouge regime. Progress has been made over the last decade with the assistance of international agencies, but there is still considerable improvement needed, particularly in the areas of quality of education and gender equality. This paper will examine the current state of education in Cambodia, with a focus on girls' education. Barriers that affect attainability and quality of education for girls, including constraints on education and later career attainment are explored. Actors who have the greatest influence on girls attaining education are considered. This paper provides an argument for a different, cooperative approach between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and external actors to advance educational quality and opportunities for women in Cambodia.

Keywords: Cambodia, gender, education, MoEYS

1. Introduction

After over 30 years (since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime), the loss of so many educated people remains one of the largest obstacles Cambodia has had to overcome. Every Cambodian leader and politician, save Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot, has stated that a good education is essential to the development of the nation, but these same leaders have "left the institutions without skilled leaders, given inadequate salaries to teachers, and put an inordinate financial strain on poor families who send their children to school" (Escamilla, 2011). In addition, these leaders have been woefully slow in including girls in more than just the most basic schooling. While giving lip service to women's empowerment (including education), Cambodian leaders continue to bemoan that they do not have enough money to implement gender equity programs in spite of the fact that such programs have been legally sanctioned at the insistence of Western patrons (Kusakabe, 2005).

2. Current State of Education

Basic compulsory education under the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) consists of 9 years, broken up into primary school (grades 1-6) and lower secondary (grades 7-9). Not compulsory, but strongly encouraged, are pre-school and upper secondary (grades 10-12). In the 2012/2013 school year, MoEYS oversaw a total of 1,333 urban schools, up from 1,239 in 2011-12, with a total enrolment population of 584,455 students from pre-school through upper secondary. Of this total population, 278,998 (48%) were girls. Rural schools numbered 10,037, up from 9,807 in 2011-12, with a total enrolment population of 2,540,685 students from preschool through upper secondary. Of this total population, 1,206,027 (47%) were girls (MoEYS, 2013a). These data indicate that enrolments are on the rise in public schools throughout Cambodia, and that girls represent just under half the enrolments in both rural and urban environments. As enrolment rates do not provide an accurate picture of successful completion at different grade levels, MoEYS provides completion data at grades 6, 9 and 12. Gender parity at all three graduation levels is reasonably equal, but the completion numbers drop with each graduation marker for both males and females, particularly in rural areas (MoEYS, 2013b). In addition to data collected on public schools, MoEYS collects and maintains some data on a small percentage of non-formal primary and secondary schools registered with the Cambodian government that are run and financially supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

According to MoEYS, there were 310 NGO-run "informal" schools in the 2011-12 school year that taught comparable classes to the public schools. Of this number, 192 of them were upper secondary schools. Altogether, a total of 13,826 students, of which 4,682 were female, were recorded (MoEYS, 2013a). Female enrolment at NGO-run schools (34%) is less than in government-run schools (48%), but these statistics may not be fully representative since MoEYS collects data only on government-registered NGO schools.

2.1 Expansion and Advancement

According to MoEYS, expansion of education is the top priority in the education reform agenda (Chinnh et al, page 117), as opposed to quality of education. Reasonable advancements in expansion have been made since the early 2000's. In 2003, only 1.8% of the nation's GDP was allotted to education, but by 2009, due largely to international pressure, that figure had risen to 3.09% (UNESCO, 2013). Highly important to the government are the incentives that come along with the push for Cambodia to expand availability of education for all. Such incentives include a partnership between MoEYS and UNICEF, cash grants through the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP) and the Priority Action Program (formed to reduce educational costs for poor Cambodian families) (Tan, 2007). In addition, by following World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO guidelines, Cambodia receives considerable additional aid dollars. Unfortunately, the World Bank's strategy of providing funds to Cambodia's educational sector for expansion while providing only minimal requirements for improvements in the related areas of institutional capacity, educational quality and gender parity, has not worked particularly well (Chansopheak, 2009).

In 2003, MoEYS became involved in UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) program, with a goal for all children and youth to have equal access to education by 2015. In addition to this involvement, MoEYS instituted the Education Strategic Plan (2006-2010) which encompassed four priority education policies to fulfill by 2015: "(1) Ensure equitable access to education, with a target for all children to be completing primary schooling by 2010 and completing all basic schooling by 2015, including the elimination of gender inequality in both urban and rural areas, (2) providing scholarships for children from poor families, (3) getting drop-outs back in school, and (4) increasing teachers' salaries and school operational budgets." (Education Strategic Plan, 2005). They also hoped to recruit teacher trainees from rural areas and provide incentives for them to return to teach after completing their training.

Visible improvements made since 2003 by MoEYS have mostly been a result of the work of active NGOs and pressure applied by outside governments and donor partners - such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank. Between the years 2005-2010, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank spent close to \$73 million on education in Cambodia (Tan, 2007). External donors have helped to rebuild over 6000 schools and have trained thousands of teachers. This outside support has resulted in decreased gender gaps in school attendance, abolishment of school fees, provision of scholarships, financial incentives for teachers, special student needs programs, expansion of preschool and kindergarten programs, and new schools being built (Hattori, 2009). In addition, Cambodia was added to the Education For All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative Fund, which provided \$57.4 million in 2002 (Hattori, 2009). Much of this influx of aid was in response to the founding of the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), which was established in 2001 by the Cambodian government to advance the coordination between development partners (DPs) and MoEYS.

While some progress in the state of public education has been made, there are still huge problems to overcome. There is a serious lack of materials, equipment and infrastructure. Many of the new school "buildings" that MoEYS counts as completed in their reports are temporary structures, with dirt floors, few desks and few to no materials. To get to these ill-equipped schools, many children have to travel by foot or bike for 5 miles or more, often leading to high absenteeism and resulting in high repetition rates. This is very troublesome for girls, who are socially more constrained than boys in terms of traveling.

Traveling long distances to get to lower and upper secondary schools, which are usually far apart can be a significant impediment. Girls having to walk further distances alone due to no means of transportation can be dangerous - or misconstrued (Johnson-Welch, 2010). Those girls (and boys) from impoverished families who do stay in school almost always work part time as well, and frequent absenteeism and compromised health is a common result. Even though the government has touted the fact it offers scholarships to children from poor families, in reality the amount provided is not enough to make up for the children not working (Tan, 2007).

According to UNICEF, the majority of girls living in rural communities drop out of school due to severe poverty and end up caring for younger siblings, work alongside their parents in the rice fields, or travel to urban centers to find work in factories (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2012).

2.2. Foreign Intervention and Gender Policy

In response to these problems, international agencies formed a team with representatives of MoEYS in 2009 to address concerns in quality, capacity building, teacher training, and lack of gender equity and equality. Funding for this initiative, called the Enhancing Education Quality Project (EEQP), was primarily provided by the Asian Development Bank. At the onset, it was noted that while Cambodia had made progress in many areas (however meager and limited in scope), absolutely no progress had been made in the area of gender mainstreaming. In the Executive Summary of the EEQP final report, the team stated "Some difficulties have been encountered with delay implementation such as gender mainstreaming, which cannot proceed until a MoEYS gender policy is developed" (MoEYS, 2010).

At the end of the year-long planning session, there had been a number of accomplishments. A national assessment policy was created and a 5-year teacher training program was laid out, as was a plan to improve current teachers' skills in the classroom through in-service training. School management and network improvements were addressed, and new textbooks were ordered. In the area of curriculum, however, problems were encountered when the lack of the existence of a Cambodian national consultant to work with the International Consultant resulted in "some difficulties for the latter" (MoEYS, 2010). A new curriculum was eventually created, based on Singapore's best educational practices, but remained gender insensitive. To date, this curriculum is unfulfilled and not universally used by the public school system, in spite of government promises to train teachers in the practices.

When it came to gender mainstreaming, the responsibility for the development of a gender policy was shifted from one agency to the next, without complete resolution (MoEYS, 2010). After much foot dragging, gender equality goals were addressed in an educational sector development plan including goals for improving quality of education, providing stronger links between school and the "work world," a focus on girls' attainment of basic education and plans to reach out to parents to convince them of the importance of girls' participation and completion through the upper secondary level. To date, published status of implementation of these goals in the annual report on the Ministry's performance are almost universally categorized as "Has not yet been implemented" (MoEYS, 2013b).

Official records indicate that international pressure has been applied to MoEYS to address the serious gender inequalities that pervade Cambodian society and that are mirrored and reinforced in the classroom. Every MoEYS document that keeps record of attendance and completion statistics contains a separation of figures by gender, and also a gender parity index. There are equality laws in place, as well as quality specifications suggested for future curriculum enhancement, but there has been little actual implementation effort, save a campaign to encourage more women to become teachers and for girls to complete upper secondary education (Miske et al, 2010).

In the midst of all of this turmoil is the plight of girl's education, which, in spite of rules going on the books and international pressure, has received little actual attention by Cambodia's government. There are a number of reasons for this including cultural constraints and traditions, poverty, lack of parental/community support and non-investment by government entities and school personnel.

2.3. Public School Personnel

MoEYS' salaries for teachers are abysmally low. Sources cite full time teachers in rural schools will make approximately \$50 per month. Teachers in the urban areas make around \$100 per month (educationpolicypolicytalk.com, 2013). This is much less than what NGO schools typically pay and what other professional positions pay. Low teacher pay has led to the common practice of teachers taking bribes in the classroom. A teacher will withhold information from lessons and then charge for "tutoring" after school where the lesson will be explained. Many poor families cannot pay this charge, which leads to a higher failure rate of the poorer children (Agosta, 2009). As a result of this and teachers' overall lack of qualifications, parents have developed low expectations of their children's education, complaining about a lack of discipline and professionalism among their children's teachers (Chansopheak, 2009). Low teacher salaries also contribute to a lack of people interested in the education field. For those who do aspire to be teachers, training at state-run teacher's colleges remains poor, with these institutions routinely manufacturing unqualified educators.

This has resulted in teacher-centered classrooms where students copy from books and perform rote memorization and few activities to make a class for young children engaging (Marshall, 2009).

In addition to the lack of qualified teachers, there is also a lack of qualified school administrators. A number of administrators end up in their positions due to political patronage or family connections (Chinnh et al, 2009). The number of Cambodian women in these positions has been traditionally low. For example, during the 2012-13 school year, out of 5,180 public school administrators (both urban and rural), only 26% were female (MoEYS, 2013a).

2.4. Quality in Schools

While Cambodia has made significant strides in terms of expanding enrolments, and even in completion of education for both girls and boys, the quality of Cambodia's education system and its overall disregard for gender mainstreaming in the classroom at all levels is disappointing (Chansopheak, 2009). Teachers tend to be ill-trained and not up to date on student-centered teaching methods or on gender-equitable teaching. Texts tend to reinforce traditional gender role models, school facilities tend to be under-maintained and lacking in many basic needs, and curriculum fails to prepare students to enter the working world upon graduation. Improvement in quality, transparency, and accountability in schools is difficult, again due to the system of patronage embedded in Cambodian society and the necessity of reporting up the ladder. A quality evaluation system does not exist for hiring school personnel, resulting in female candidates being passed over for less qualified male candidates (Chinnh et al, 2009). Evaluating teacher effectiveness at the local level is difficult, and because many administrators and teachers receive the job because of patronage, there is little accountability (Tan, 2008). When school personnel cannot be fairly evaluated based upon their skills and abilities, it dampens the desire to improve performance in the classroom - especially when very low and irregular disbursement of pay is involved and no effort is made to alter cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

Textbooks past the primary level do not represent concepts of "gender equality and social inclusion especially in line with the policies of the education reform" (Velasco, 2004). Though there is indication that with donor partner intervention, some changes may be forthcoming, the most recent textbooks do not yet reflect gender fairness or equality. The standard cultural norms are adhered to, showing men as doctors, lawyers, engineers and managers and women portrayed as weavers, housekeepers, mothers, and shop attendants. When questioned about the lack of adherence to written policy, curriculum "specialists" (most of whom were male and lacked appropriate training and knowledge to write curriculum) responded that the people of Cambodia were not ready to face gender equality and that the texts would be too shocking for them (Velasco, 2004).

3. Cultural Constraints and Attitudes

Cambodia's cultural norms are one of the root causes of women's inability to move ahead in school, the workplace, and in politics. Both spoken and unspoken rules regarding a woman's place in the social structure of Cambodia are extremely rigid and unyielding (Escamilla, 2011). Traditionally, women are considered to be under the protection of their husbands or families, and are expected to defer to the wishes and judgments of the men in the household. The only concession in this seems to be that Cambodian women are generally expected to manage the household finances at all levels of society (Imam, 2010).

In addition, hierarchical and patronage roles are embedded in every part of the culture, and have been since the great kings of Angkor. Gender roles in Cambodia are very structured. Men are considered higher on the hierarchical and spiritual ladders than women. Following the Buddhist belief of reincarnation, women have traditionally hoped to live a good life as a woman so they may be reincarnated as a man (Escamilla, 2011). There are traditional codes of conduct for both men and women, but the code for men, the ChdapProh, has few rules and even fewer consequences for the transgression of those rules.

The traditional codes of conduct for women, found in the Chdap Sri, are much more specific and focus heavily on behaviors, since in Cambodian society a woman carries the honor of her family. She will lose face of herself, her family and her community if she behaves in ways that are considered inappropriate by society (Imam, 2010). Expectations of the Chdap Sri are that a woman should be demure, respectful of husband and parents, and caring, which while admirable are seldom associated with success in business or education.

Communities, especially rural ones, are not supportive of gender equality, whether it is in the workplace, the home or the school.

On top of prescribed cultural roles, there is a prevalent attitude in Cambodia that women are not as intelligent as men, and therefore girls cannot learn as well as boys. There is also the attitude that girls lack the motivation to do well in school and that this lack of motivation carries on into adult life. This attitude is shared by parents, teachers, and, sadly, the children themselves. Teachers, particularly male ones, tend to favor boys in the classroom, calling on them for answers and not engaging the female students in any meaningful way. In some schools, it is reported female students are expected to clean the classrooms upon their initial arrival at school before classes begin, thus reinforcing their traditional role in society and being treated with condescension in the classroom (Miske et al, 2010).

In spite of these setbacks, girls routinely score higher on graduation exams. However, because of Cambodia's entrenched system of hierarchy and patronage, promotion based on merit is unlikely once girls graduate from upper secondary school, unless they come from families that have wealth or social standing. Again, the opportunities for girls/women, even with an education, are few (Tan, 2007).

4. Poverty and Opportunity

As MoEYS statistics show, the large majority of children out of school reside in rural areas, and most of these children are girls. There are an alarming number of disparities and inequalities between regions throughout the country and between socio-economic groups (Hattori, 2009). The most significant poverty can be found in the rural areas, and even for children attending school, there is large absenteeism due to parents' need for the children to work at home (Velasco, 2004).

In rural areas it is very difficult to find strong female role models. There are few female teachers throughout the country and even fewer in rural schools, so there is typically no encouragement from educators for girls to further their education past the primary level. In addition, in both rural and urban schools, there are even fewer women in managerial positions due to lack of professional qualifications and education and, as previously mentioned, patronage issues (Velasco, 2004).

As rural women are culturally constrained by attitudes and rules and their place on the hierarchical ladder, urban women with upper secondary and tertiary educations can also fail to gain equality in the work or political sectors. This is true for both position and salary (Aikman et al, 2007). Elite women, who are better connected, will typically run up against a wall when attempting to be promoted or face resistance from family regarding continuing to work once they marry. There is less economic incentive for women since women formally employed in businesses in Cambodia make an estimated 30% less than men working the same job (Johnson-Welch, 2010).

Women who have only obtained a primary education face the excuse from prospective employers that they are "unqualified" due to their low level of education and lack of professional qualifications. This, combined with cultural constraints, makes it very difficult for girls with only a primary school education to have any upward career mobility.

With little education, women who want or need to work are faced with leaving the safety and protection of home at sometimes a fairly young age to work as domestic workers in the city or in garment factories. Either means of employment can involve poor working conditions, low pay and possible exploitation (Johnson-Welch, 2010). Garment factories run by global companies hire a great many young women from the country each year. All employment is informal, and there are no protections for the young women who work in them. Pay is low as the demand for employment requiring little training or education is high (Derks, 2008).

5. Actors in Public Education

The Cambodian government has come under fire for its historical lack of support of gender equality policies, and therefore, has included a number of laws specifying gender equality during the past 15 years. Signing something into law is where it has stopped. In the hierarchical and male-dominated government, lawmakers have a history of referring to cultural norms as being a possible stumbling block. They occasionally pass a relevant law, but these lack enforcement (Aikman et al, 2007). Implementation of laws require funding, and in today's neoliberal atmosphere, it is difficult to find many governments, including Cambodia's, that are willing to spend large amounts of money on gender issues.

Even though there has been some international pressure by organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO to promote educational opportunity for girls, there are doubts on the international front as to whether MoEYS has the "capacity to absorb and digest new global concepts and funds, to formulate responsive policies and strategies, to implement its policies and strategies as cited in its Educational Strategic Plans" (Chinnh et al, 2009). Not only is the implementation of gender equity in schools going against centuries of tradition, but Cambodia is rife with corruption which leads to even further inability to progress in gender mainstreaming. In 2013, Cambodia ranked at 160 out of 175 on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International, 2013). Given Cambodia's very high corruption rating, it is not surprising that it is extremely difficult to accomplish goals and maintain high standards for a majority of the people, including in the educational sphere. It is highly unlikely that Cambodia would have come as far as it has in improvements in school enrolments if it had not been for the major support of international donors and development partners to increase access to education for women and highly marginalized sections of society (Chhinh et al, 2009).

Parents play a significant role in Cambodian education, but this role is often counter to the goals of improved access to education and gender equality in education. Sadly, because high quality education for either boys or girls is not the norm, some parents will tend to believe educational quality goes hand in hand with the existence of a school building. Parents may accept that their children are benefitting from a sound education simply because they are in a building labeled as a school, regardless of the quality of the educator (Miske et al, 2010). Some parents (many of whom are illiterate) may be reluctant to question the quality of the facilities and even more reluctant to question the quality of instruction. With their lack of education, these parents are considered to be lower in the hierarchy of Cambodian society than formally educated school personnel. To question one's superiors is not acceptable and will cause loss of face to all involved (Nguon, 2012).

Many other parents may believe that their child's time in school is essentially wasted. Among their complaints have been the lack of discipline and teacher professionalism, along with lack of practicality in the curriculum for both boys and girls, though many assert that any knowledge will be advantageous to a boy - less so to a girl (Chansopheak, 2009).

Parents are in a position to encourage girls in completing their basic education through the upper secondary level, though it is less common in rural areas for parents to give their support to girls' education past the primary level (hence the huge disparity in enrolment and completion figures past the primary level). Where parents within a community have come together in support of their daughters obtaining higher levels of education, completion levels have gone up.

Parent/community/school committees have formed in some villages and not only did attendance of both male and female students go up, but passing grades on exams also improved, as well as active and positive teacher interaction with students (Nguon, 2012).

Religious leaders who could play a role in promoting equality, especially as many monks are teachers and administrators in NGO schools, frequently will refer to culturally accepted norms as reasons not encourage girls in school or hire of female teachers.

6. Possible Solutions

As of 2014, and after billions of dollars in foreign aid have been funneled into Cambodian education, MoEYS' hierarchical top-down approach to improving education does not seem to be working as well as it should. Entrenched cultural mores and poverty throughout the country (especially in rural areas) plus corruption and patronage at all levels have mired attempts to stimulate significant change. In reviewing the literature on improving education in Cambodia, it is disheartening to see that the majority of solutions being offered by specialists in the education and development field continue to focus on working with the top level of MoEYS and the national government. This approach has been successful in pressuring the Cambodian government to build schools, create laws regarding gender parity, hire more teachers, and initiate a small number of other programs. It has done little to assist in either gender equality or quality of education, including gender-sensitive curriculum. It appears unlikely to that a strictly topdown approach will ever be successful in this country.

There is hope for a combination of bottom-up approaches utilizing NGOs, local teachers, school administrators and the community.

It is possible that quality of education in Cambodia can be improved through collaboration and be an agent of change in slowly modifying the position women hold in Cambodian society, in the workplace, politics, and in their relation to husbands and families.

One way that is proving moderately successful in improving education for both boys and girls, while at the same time modeling gender equality, is through the many foreign NGO – run (informal) schools operated outside the realm of the state and who typically provide quality education for the students. Their presence in the community can raise awareness and knowledge and encourage an entire community to improve itself. The informal schools do not use government-approved curriculum and tend to be the most popular among overseas donors due to the poor state capacity exhibited by the Cambodian government/ministries. Donors are also swayed by NGO's proven success at both reaching geographically marginalized children and their influence in the human rights and gender rights sectors through the relationships they create in villages (Escamilla, 2011). Many NGOs attract children by offering incentives that the government typically does not offer, such as meals, free uniforms, bikes for transportation, materials, rice for families and even Christmas gifts if the NGO is Christian-based (Agosta, 2009).

6.1 Don Bosco Schools

There are examples of highly successful NGO-run schools, where students are taught not only basic education, but also health, nutrition and vocational skills. The Don Bosco Foundation, a branch of the Catholic Church, runs 5 schools in Cambodia, and 3 of these are run by Salesian nuns for girls only. Like many private schools elsewhere in the world, the Don Bosco schools take a holistic approach to education and so provide a balanced approach of teaching intellectual knowledge (including vocational skills that are linked to internships outside the school), leadership and interpersonal skills, along with learning to care for one's health (both physical and spiritual), and personality development and empowerment. They even include classes in self-esteem. This is especially helpful for the female students, and a study of Don Bosco graduates has shown that many have gone on to be agents of change in their communities (Escamilla, 2011). A drawback of the Don Bosco schools is the very fact that they are segregated. In a country where overall gender equality is low, both boys and girls need the opportunity to open their minds to new ways of viewing gender roles and expectations.

The Don Bosco Schools and others like them have a great appeal for Cambodians as they include a spiritual and moral element not taught in the public schools. The pagoda schools popular prior to the advent of the French Protectorate taught morality, spirituality and placed greater emphasis on moral development than intellectual development. Parents who see the moral element in a school have been shown to be more supportive of their children (both boys and girls) attending (Eng, 2013).

On the downside, NGOs that operate outside of government regulation tend to only answer to their overseas donors and thus base curriculum and projects on overseas donors' desires. As these schools teach a curriculum that is not government approved, they have different procedures, formats, work plans, and they use different criteria for testing. Also, many NGO schools tend to focus on the "immediate" so as to show instant progress rather than the long term, mostly in an effort to keep donor dollars coming in (Hattori, 2009). Furthermore, without coordination among NGOs, a long term, across the board, systematic educational program is lacking.

In some cases, NGOs assist government schools already in place. They provide materials, uniforms, supplies, and volunteers to enhance lessons, particularly in the area of foreign language - which is not a requirement of a Cambodian education (Escamilla, 2009).

6.2. Caring For Cambodia

One example is an American NGO in that works directly with the local teachers and administrators of MoEYS to improve government-run schools called Caring For Cambodia (CFC). CFC currently oversees and assists 21 schools, 12 of which are pre-schools. They operate 5 primary schools, 2 lower secondary and 2 upper secondary educational facilities. They work with MoEYS through the provincial level in Siem Reap. Initially, MoEYS kept a tight rein over CFC school operations, but over time they have given more control to CFC to perform duties such as hiring, firing and training teachers. CFC invests time, energy and funding towards teacher training, which is of the utmost importance, frequently sending teachers at CFC-sponsored schools to Singapore to learn up-to-date teaching models. They also import teachers and administrators to CFC schools to present workshops on varying topics. They ensure that there are qualified female teachers at every school to provide strong role models for female students (caringforcambodia.org, 2014).

CFC has shown diligence in clearing every detail with the ministry before implementation as they have always made it clear that their objective was to create model schools for an "optimum government education" (caringforcambodia.org, 2014). In other words, they desire to build capacity. They are working towards this model being sustainable, with an exit plan once goals have been met. CFC does not use curriculum that is specifically gender sensitive, but teachers have been trained in gender mainstreaming theory and technique. Gender parity, as well as gender inclusion, is strived for. All students are encouraged to engage in student-centered learning and participate in conversations on an equal basis. Students' work is displayed on the walls showing students' goals for the future, including female students' desires in becoming doctors, politicians and even airline pilots.

CFC has forged partnerships with Cambodian businesses, providing internships and specialized training for Cambodian boys and girls. An outreach program has been set up to involve parents in their children's learning, with a special focus on keeping girls in school through the upper secondary level. Their success in graduating CFC students who move on to tertiary education and steady employment has earned them recognition by the Cambodian government, including the Golden Hand Award, which is the highest honor a non-Cambodian may receive for outstanding service to the community (caringforcambodia.org, 2014).

A drawback that CFC faces is donor impatience. With the focus on long-term, capacity-building activities such as teacher and administrator training, overseas donors tend to grow restless, seeking immediate results they can see on paper or in photographs. However, it is this type of bottom-up capacity building exercise that includes donors and MoEYS actors alike that is likely to increase the number of educated people in Cambodia and begin the reduction of the poverty cycle currently in place. Until a shift occurs in donors' need for instant gratification, capacitybuilding projects are likely to encounter funding problems.

7. Conclusion

The state of education in Cambodia today is fairly poor, in spite of government and international efforts to increase the number of schools, school enrolment, completion rates, and gender parity and equality. Due to an entrenched system of hierarchy and patronage, as well as traditional cultural expectations on gender roles, women remain relegated to second place behind men in education, formal employment and class. The top-down approach to solving these inequalities by the government has not been successful thus far.

Quality in public schools remains a thorn in MoEYS' side. Until issues such as infrastructure and teacher training and pay are addressed, only limited advances in education will be seen. Expansion of educational facilities without improvements in quality does not serve the country or the individuals who live within its' borders. An education becomes less relevant if it is not going to help a woman in her future. Therefore, the outcomes of education, which tend to be both culturally and hierarchically dictated, need to be addressed, as do people's attitudes about women's place and abilities.

Based on small successes, a bottom-up approach aided by foreign agencies in building state capacity in education appears be the most viable way to increase gender equality in Cambodia's educational system and beyond. As a younger generation learns to let go of some of the entrenched gender roles and expectations and takes over positions held in local, provincial and national government, re-evaluations can take place. Women will become more accepted in currently non-traditional means of employment, systems of hierarchy may begin to break down a little, and poverty will lessen.

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