

Forum: UNESCO

Issue: Working towards improving access to education for children in Cambodia

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Introduction

Education is the key factor to the development of society. Nonetheless, access to education, especially in developing nations, is limited. Children deal with financial hardships, being required to work to support their families from an early age, an issue that is prevalent in countries such as Cambodia, where 30% of the population lives below the poverty line.

In Cambodia, children have the legal right to nine years of free education. However, some children categories have difficulties accessing quality education, and most children struggle with reaching certain educational stages. Only 4% of children who have a disability have completed lower secondary education. Cultural viewpoints that regard disabilities as "bad karma" and little to no understanding of disabilities have prevented this disadvantaged category from accessing proper education.

Moreover, children situated in rural areas are more likely to be migratory and be kept apart from school due to the long distances they have to cover. Cambodia's economy is one of the fastest-growing ones in Asia, but that does not imply that children are well protected under these circumstances. Estimations show that almost 300,000 children are subject to child labour; children need to perform endangering tasks to help their families who have financial difficulties.

What is more, child marriage is also a frequent event in Cambodia, with 23% of women confessing to having been married before the age of 18, which again, contributes to the lack of education in the country. Children in Cambodia have additional practical obstacles to education, such as poor transportation, restricted access to aids to learning, or a shortage of instructors who can meet their needs. Even while girls frequently outperform boys in terms of academic performance, advancement, and completion rates, they nevertheless face barriers to receiving a complete education. In order to support their families, girls leave school more frequently than boys do, and girls with less education are typically more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking.

Cambodia's government currently spends only 2% of the GDP of the country on education, funds that are insufficient for the development of the educational infrastructure, such as building educational institutions or implementing aiding facilities for children with disabilities. The Ministry of Education in Cambodia presents the following completion data for school levels:

- Grades 1 - 6, 80%;
- Grades 7 - 9, 43%,
- Grades 10 - 12, less than 20%.

Term Definitions

Child Labour

Child labour is the term used to describe the exploitation of children through any sort of work that robs them of their youth, prevents them from attending regular school, and is detrimental to their mental, physical, social, and moral development.

Right to Identity

Identity rights include having a name, a nationality, being registered at birth, and having proof through a birth certificate. An identity integrates a child into society, awarding them essential social services and judicial protection.

Intergenerational Poverty

Intergenerational poverty (IGP), sometimes known as the "Cycle of Poverty," is defined as poverty that continues from one generation to the next. Minority and disadvantaged groups are particularly affected by intergenerational poverty.

It means that the lack of opportunities, due to the financial situation that the parent has, will further affect future children in the family. A system designed to treat situational poverty, like creating labour, and not the systems contributing to their predicament traps too many people in poverty. Despite the fact that our system is well-intentioned, it frequently does more harm than good.

Ethnic minority

A group of individuals who are different from the majority group in a society—in terms of ethnicity, nationality, or culture—is referred to as an ethnic minority. Because they are a minority, they may have social, economic, and political disadvantages.

WASH facilities

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene is referred to as WASH. WASH facilities in schools are those that offer students and staff access to clean water, working restrooms, and handwashing stations in an effort to foster healthy and sanitary surroundings. All users'

health, convenience, and dignity are to be improved, and the entire educational experience is to be improved as well.

Background Information

Historical Context

Cambodia was under French rule between 1863 and 1953, a period in which Cambodia's infrastructure grew steadily, mainly with the help of agriculture. When the country gained its independence on November 9, 1953, Cambodia became a kingdom until 1955, when the king, Sihanouk, abdicated to pursue a political career.

Later on, Sihanouk breaks ties with the United States and lets North Vietnamese troops set bases in Cambodia to fight the US-backed government in South Vietnam. In 1969, the US began secret bombing of North Vietnamese troops *on Cambodian land*, which implicitly destroyed the country's infrastructure.



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Between 1975 and 1989 Cambodia suffered from a period of instability, being ruled by the communist party, which led to a genocide - a period that led to the death of at least 1.7 million people, including a considerable number of teachers.

Resources

Starting with the 21st century, Cambodian authorities started implementing slightly higher percentages of their governmental budget to education (from 1.6% of GDP in 2007, to 2.6% of GDP in 2010). However, around 80% is accounted for by paying salaries, which leaves insufficient funds to develop amenities and school infrastructure.

There are several issues concerning financial resources in the educational system in Cambodia, according to UNESCO's Institute for Educational Planning:

- Low educator salaries (US\$10-15 per month);

- The allotment of funds depends on availability rather than on actual needs;
- Local funding is lacking, the country basing its educational system mainly on foreign aid and NGOs (school construction, textbooks, teacher training etc.);
- Uncertain budget transparency correlated to staff expenditure;
- No knowledge of real unit cost of education expenditure per student per level of instruction;
- The lack of monitoring of budget allotment, which concludes to large differences between the approved and actual budgets;
- Teachers are concentrated in urban areas and mostly physically absent in rural areas.

Gender Disparity, Poverty, and Low Participation

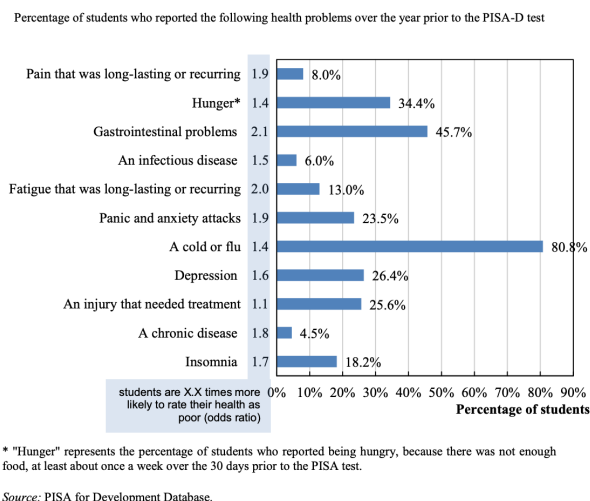
The ratio of boys to girls graduating from secondary school was 4:3 in 2008, and even though, statistically, the rate of girls attending school has increased, there is still enough progress to be made.

With areas where poverty rates reach more than 57%, most families do not afford to send their children to school. Nearly 20% of 5 to 9-year-old Cambodian children work. The rates then increase to 47% for kids between the ages of 10 and 14 and 34% for kids between the ages of 15 and 17. Only 45% of children who are working and between the ages of 5 and 17 have the opportunity to go to school.

Around 90% of pupils finished elementary school in 2007, but only 35% continued on to lower secondary education, and only 15% went on to upper secondary education and beyond. This resulted in almost 3.1 million children, or 85% of those aged 15 to 24, not attending any postsecondary institution. The predicament is considerably worse when it comes to technical and vocational education, where the percentage of students enrolled who are between the ages of 14 and 20 barely exceeds 2% of this demographic group. The lack of vocational training results in a society that is not skilled enough to develop infrastructure, and work in more demanding jobs, deepening the continuity of the ongoing cycle.

The majority of Cambodians are unable to communicate in English, the common language used in the commercial industries, due to the low enrollment rates of 40% at the secondary level and 5% at the university level.

The overall impossibility of children to access education is also affected by multiple health issues, with over 34% of Cambodian students aged 15 stating that they feel hungry due to not having enough food. There are also high rates of fatigue (13%), depression (26.4%), and insomnia (18.2%) among children, which can also be linked to the rates of child labour.



Educational Corruption

The educational system in Cambodia is not exempt from corruption, which affects most of its institutions. Even though there is a growing understanding of the value of education and how it directly connects to employability, many people still only go to school to get diplomas. There isn't much motivation to learn new things or work harder. Not all people of Cambodia are capable of doing duties that are stated in their paper credentials, and the quality of education in that country is still under question.

Due to bribes and the disproportionate degree of difficulty of examinations given in schools, pass rates there are not consistent. In addition, the Ministry of Education must lower the average passing score in order to raise student graduation rates.

Countries and Organisations Involved

The French Republic

After eight decades of French colonial rule, just a small portion of Cambodia's eligible pupils were enrolled in French schools by 1944. On the basis of this data, a number of academics contend that the French purposely limited educational opportunities for Cambodians in order to seize and subsequently hold onto power in the colony.

In essence, French educational growth in colonial Cambodia may be viewed as a series of initiatives to comprehend, combat, and integrate Cambodians into a "modern" educational system that supported the colonial endeavour. (See Historical Context)

Vietnam

The larger region has become unstable due to the Vietnam War combat. The nearby country of Cambodia was involved in the fighting. The US air force blasted it in an effort to halt communists in North Vietnam. This has led to the destruction of Cambodian infrastructure and schools.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

ASEAN, alongside Cambridge Partnership for Education, is working towards recovering learning after the impediment of COVID-19, and the rebuilding of education within its member states, including Cambodia.

Free trade in products, services, capital, and skilled labour were made possible by the ASEAN community. Cambodia, one of the least developed nations of the region, faces both potential and problems as a result of ASEAN integration. The comparatively cheap salaries in Cambodia will probably draw more international investment. The Cambodian workforce will face difficult hurdles as a result of having to compete for employment with their international counterparts, nonetheless, due to the free movement of labour.

Many students in Cambodia have already stated their concern that they won't be able to find employment after graduation. Their apprehension is justified. According to a 2013 ILO study of 500 businesses, more than half of the enterprises were dissatisfied with the work of their employees.

Timeline of Events

- 1975** Khmer Rouge obtained power in Cambodia, not only closing schools but also destroying their buildings. Some schools were even transformed into prisons, like Tuol Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh.
- 1973** In order to help the ascent of pro-Western Lon Nol as the country's leader between 1970 and 1973, the United States bombed a large portion of Cambodia's countryside and meddled in Cambodian politics. The Khmer Rouge utilised American activities to enlist supporters and as justification for the terrible measures they implemented while in power.
- 1979** Between 75% and 90% of the teachers were killed, as a result of the **genocide** (Apr 17, 1975 – Jan 7, 1979) that was led by the Cambodian Communist Party. Young people were rigidly indoctrinated, but literacy was neglected. An entire generation of Cambodian children grew up illiterate, with an illiteracy rate in Cambodia of 40%.
- 1989** The Vietnamese forces leave. Hun Sen gives up socialism in an effort to lure foreign investment. The State of Cambodia is the new name for the nation. The state religion is once again Buddhism.
- 1991** A peace agreement is signed in Paris. Representatives of the various groups in Cambodia briefly share power with a UN transitional administration. Sihanouk ascends to the presidency.
- 2002** First multi-party local elections, first step to the democratisation of Cambodia.
- 2017** The Supreme Court dissolves the Cambodia National Rescue Party, the country's only significant opposition party.
- 2018** Cambodia introduces lèse-majesté law, which makes it a criminal offence to defame or insult the king.

Relevant UN Treaties/Resolutions

The Law of Education (NS/RKM/1207/032 of 2007)

The Law on Education of the Kingdom of Cambodia, which was adopted in 2007, outlines the framework for education in Cambodia. The law covers a range of topics related to education, including:

The right to education	The law states that all Cambodian citizens have the right to education, and that the government has a responsibility to ensure that this right is protected.
Education system	The law outlines the structure of the education system in Cambodia, including the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government and educational institutions.
Curriculum	The law states that the curriculum in Cambodia should be developed in accordance with international standards and should aim to promote the development of students' knowledge, skills, and values.
Teacher education	The law states that all teachers in Cambodia should be qualified and trained in accordance with international standards, and that teacher education should be a priority for the government.
Access to education	The law states that the government should take measures to ensure that all Cambodian children have access to education, particularly those in disadvantaged and remote areas.
Language of instruction	The law states that the official language of instruction in Cambodia is Khmer, but also encourages the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years of education.
Private Education	The law allows private education institutions to operate and sets out the rules and regulations they have to follow.
Inspections and evaluations	The law states that the government should carry out regular inspections and evaluations of the education system in order to ensure that it is meeting the needs of students and society.
Penalties	The law also includes penalties for individuals or institutions that violate education laws and regulations.

Overall, the Law on Education of 2007 aims to improve the quality and accessibility of education in Cambodia and to ensure that the education system is in line with international standards.

Previous Attempts to Solve Issue

There have been several past attempts to improve Cambodia's educational system:

The Education for All (EFA) initiative

This initiative, launched by the Cambodian government in 2000, aimed to improve access to education and the quality of education in the country. The initiative included the construction of new schools, the training of teachers, and the development of a new curriculum.

The Basic Education Equivalency Program (BEEP)

Launched in 2005, BEEP aimed to provide a second chance for out-of-school children and youth to catch up with their peers by providing them with basic education.

The Education Sector Support Program (ESSP)

This program, launched in 2008, aimed to improve the quality of education in Cambodia by providing teacher training, constructing new schools, and developing new curricula.

The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2014-2023

This plan aims to improve the quality of education in Cambodia by focusing on the improvement of teacher quality, infrastructure, and the development of relevant curricula and materials.

The Education for Development (E4D) program

The program, funded by the Australian government, aims to increase access to quality education for children in Cambodia, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, by providing teacher training, infrastructure support and materials.

The Second Education Sector Support Program (ESSP-II)

This program aims to improve the quality of education in Cambodia by focusing on teacher training, the development of new curricula, and the construction of new schools.

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

This program was launched in 2013 to improve the quality of education by providing education in the mother tongue, it aims to help students understand the concept better before moving to a second language.

UNICEF Initiatives

1. Supporting the government's efforts to improve the quality of basic education, with a focus on increasing enrollment and retention rates in primary schools.
2. Providing training and resources to teachers to improve their teaching skills and knowledge.
3. Improving access to education for marginalised and disadvantaged children, such as those living in remote areas, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minority groups.
4. Promoting inclusive and equitable education for all children through programs that address gender and other forms of discrimination.

Possible Solutions

Some potential solutions to improve Cambodia's educational system include increasing government funding for education, implementing teacher training programs to improve the quality of instruction, and incorporating technology into the classroom to enhance learning opportunities. Additionally, providing access to education for children in rural and underprivileged areas, and ensuring that curriculums are relevant to students' needs and future careers could also be beneficial. Improving the quality of infrastructure and providing necessary resources such as textbooks and other materials would also help. Another important step is to provide education in the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years, it will help the student to understand the concept better before moving to a second language.

There also exists a language barrier in the implementation of the accessibility of education in Cambodia: the official language of instruction in Cambodia is Khmer, which is not the mother tongue of many students, particularly those in ethnic minority communities, which may affect their ability to understand and grasp the subjects.

Still, There are a number of strategies that can be implemented to improve access to education in Cambodia:

1. Building more schools: Constructing additional schools, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas, can help to increase access to education for children who would otherwise not have the opportunity to attend school.
2. Providing scholarships and financial assistance: Offering scholarships and financial assistance to families who cannot afford to send their children to school can help to increase access to education.
3. Offering flexible school schedules: Implementing flexible school schedules, such as evening classes or weekend classes, can help to accommodate the needs of working families and increase access to education for children who might otherwise be unable to attend school.

4. Increasing transportation access: Improving transportation infrastructure, such as building roads and bridges, can help to make it easier for children in rural areas to get to school.
5. Implementing distance learning programs: Utilizing technology such as online courses or radio and television programs can help to increase access to education for children who live in remote areas.
6. Providing education in the mother tongue: Providing education in the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years can help to increase access to education for ethnic minority children who may not speak Khmer, the official language of instruction.
7. Encourage community involvement: Encouraging communities to take an active role in education, such as through the establishment of community schools or parent-teacher associations, can help to increase access to education for children who might otherwise be left out.

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