

**Why are Girls Not in School ?
Perceptions, Realities and Contradictions in Changing Cambodia**

“Boys have more rights than girls; parents don’t give heavy work to boys. Our brothers go to school; girls are not allowed because they have lots of housework to do”.

“ When parents are too poor, daughters should stop going to school because they can help in housework and in earning income. The boys can continue their schooling because they cannot do housework compared to girls. They cannot do a lot of work”.

“Daughters should always be around the kitchen”

“Girls are not as clever as boys”

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the views and perceptions of local stakeholders on issues on girls' education. Local stakeholders consist of provincial/district education officials, school authorities and teachers, parents of girls of in and out of school, and girls who are in and out of school. Using mainly qualitative research techniques such as focus group discussion and case study, it hopes to gain better insights of the local understanding of the problematic situation of *access* and *equity* in education opportunities faced by Cambodian girls. Six provinces were included in the study: Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom, Banteay Meanchey, Kratie, Siem Riep and Ratanakiri. These provinces represent distinct geographic variation (urban, rural and remote) in Cambodia and presence of education programme intervention. These are expected to have important implications to girls' access to schooling opportunities.

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with approximately 242 respondents across 5 types of interview groups in the 6 selected provinces. Case studies were written about life histories of selected respondents highlighting experiences and obstacles of poor girls in their desire to obtain an education. The data collection was undertaken by two research teams covering 3 provinces each in a period of approximately two weeks on July- August 2001. Discussion interviews would take about 1.5 -2.0 hours for each group of respondents. Data consist of numerous quoted responses in Khmer language of all respondents on the pre-determined FGD guide questions that were later translated and edited in English. Tallies were then made to determine patterns of responses on similar questions, especially on reasons for high dropout rates of girls compared to boys, and on beliefs and attitudes related to girls' education. Possible action solutions to address issues on girls' education were also elicited.

The research findings show an overwhelming pattern of responses across all types of respondents indicating housework, sibling care, farm work and earning income as predominant reasons why girls do not attend school or would drop-out from school in highly significant rates compared to boys. It confirms that constraining gender socialization and rigid ideas of gender roles in the household division of labour combined with parental perceptions of benefits on girls' education and socio-economic and geographic disadvantages result to marked gender imbalances in the education outcomes in Cambodia which significantly favour males more than females. Other related reasons given were inaccessible distance of the school from home, security risks on girls when they would travel far away from home to school, late entry of girls in school, marriage, and illness in the family where girls are asked to discontinue schooling to take care of a sick relative. In the school system, three factors were found to significantly determine girls' attendance and continued stay in school: (1) adequate school facilities such as classrooms and water and sanitation facilities; (2) quality of interaction between teachers and students/girls, and among students themselves; and (3) quality of teaching and relevance of the curriculum.

Poverty seems to be the rationale for adhering to gender traditions and restricting access of girls to school by letting them stay at home, and also a compelling reason to defy these same traditions by allowing them to leave the home and travel far away to earn income in the name of family survival.

While majority of the respondents believe that boys and girls have equal rights to education and support the idea that women should actively participate with men in the economic sphere and contribute to household income, they also reveal a non-questioning attitude that housework and childcare remain to be the exclusive responsibility of women and girls. This poses a tremendous challenge and burden to women in their desire to develop their full potentials as individuals. As Cambodia modernizes and with no substantive changes in attitudes on gender hierarchies and arrangements in the household, opportunities for education and advancement for women would be problematic.

Policy and action recommendations call for equal important attention to principles of gender equity along with poverty issues in improving access and equity in education opportunities in Cambodia. There is a need to strengthen the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) commitment and capacity to systematically integrate gender concepts in education planning, implementation and monitoring. It also calls to immediately put in place affirmative measures that will addresses socio-economic, cultural and geographic disadvantages of girls' access to education and women's representation in the education management and delivery services at all levels. This should be supported with a massive multi-media campaign to promote women's role in society and girls' equal access to education directly targeting parents, communities and schools.

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1. Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the local stakeholders' views and perceptions about the issues on girls' education in Cambodia. Local stakeholders is defined in this study as comprising of education officials in the provincial, district and school levels, school teachers, parents of girls who are in and out of school, and the girls who are in and out of school. It mainly focuses on their understanding of the problematic situation of *access* and *equity* in education opportunities faced by Cambodian girls, and the possible steps to address these problems. The study thus seeks three specific objectives:

- 1) To describe the views, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes on girls' education;
- 2) To identify the key issues and challenges in addressing gender equity issues in basic education in Cambodia; and
- 3) Present programme and policy recommendations to promote girls' education.

2. Research Methodology

Qualitative research techniques particularly focus group discussion (FGD) and case study were used to collect information about the insights and views of local stakeholders on the situation and problems of girls' equal access to education. FGD guide questions were designed for each type of target respondent. (Annex 2) A pre-test of the research instrument was then conducted in two nearby provinces: Kompong Speu (UNICEF programme area) and Kandal (CARE programme area). Issues and areas for improvement on the FGD questions were noted and were taken into account in the final design of the FGD instrument.

Six provinces were selected based on two criteria, namely: (1) geographical representativeness: urban, rural and remote; and (2) presence of education programme intervention. As such, 6 provinces were identified and classified as follows:

Table 1: The Study Sites

	Urban	Rural	Remote
Programme Areas	Kompong Cham (KAPE)	Kompong Thom (UNICEF)	Banteay Meanchey (UNICEF)
Non-Programme Areas	Siem Riep	Kratie	Ratanakiri (largely populated by ethnic minorities)

In the course of the data collection, however, it was found that the chosen study areas do not neatly fit their identified geographic categories. The provinces would often exhibit diverse levels of urban/rural/remote characteristics across its area of coverage. For example, the province of Kompong Cham, showed that certain areas can be urban in character, and other areas can be

classified as rural or remote. The other study provinces also exhibited such spectrum of geographic diversity. This is, however, with the exception of Ratanakiri province, where there is a proportionately high percentage of ethnic minority groups largely located in remote mountainous areas.

Five types of respondents were identified to be included in the study, namely: (1) local education officials and school authorities; (2) parents of girls-in-school; (3) parents of girls out-of-school; (3) parents of girls-in-school; (4) girls-in-school; and (5) girls out-of-school. (Table 2)

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Provinces

Province Type of Respondents	Kompong Cham	Siem Riep	Kratie	Kompong Thom	Banteay Meanchey	Ratanakiri	Total
Local Education Officials/ LCSC Chiefs, PTAs, Teachers	12	14	8	19	16	15	84
Parents of Girls-in-School	7	4	9	7	7	5	39
Parents of Girls-out-of-School	17	6	7	2	9	6	47
Girls-in-School	4	10	7	5	10	9	45
Girls-out-of-School	7	4	-	2	7	7	27
Total	47	38	31	35	49	42	242

A seven-person research team divided into two groups undertook the data collection. (Annex 1) Each group visited three provinces over a period of two weeks: *Group 1*: Kompong Thom, Siem Riep and Banteay Meanchey, and *Group 2*: Kompong Cham, Kratie and Ratanakiri.

Documentary data consist of numerous quoted responses in Khmer language of all respondents on the FGD guide questions that were later translated and edited in English. Tallies were then made to determine patterns of responses on similar questions, especially on reasons for high drop-out rates of girls compared to boys, and on beliefs and attitudes related to girls' education. Possible action solutions to address issues on girls' education were also elicited.

3. Findings of the Focus Group Discussions

This section presents the responses in ranked order (from the most common answer to the least mentioned) of the different target groups of the study. It particularly highlights actual “quotes and statements” made by the respondents in describing their views and understanding about the problematic situation of girls’ access to schooling opportunities. In doing so, it is hoped that we can obtain better insights of local stakeholders’ perspectives on girls’ education, which can, in turn, help in designing practical actions that suit specific local contexts.

The Views of Local Education Officials

When provincial and district education officials were queried why is there a high drop-out rate of girls in school, most of the responses focused on the following interrelated issues:

- Girls are burdened with housework and find it difficult to combine it with regular schooling

“They are expected to help their mothers in housework, child care and the work in the field. Household responsibilities increase as they grow older and affect school attendance and performance. They will become discouraged and later drop-out from school”.

- School is inaccessible: poor roads, no transport and too far away from the village

“Junior high schools are too far way from the village. It is located in the town. There is no accommodation for girls and they do not have bicycles”. (Banteay Meanchey)

“Schools in the villages are incomplete. They only have primary schools and higher schooling is too far away.” (Siem Riep)

- Security risks

“Bandits threaten the safety of girls in travelling to and from school” (Kompong Cham)

“Parents are afraid of sending their daughters to study in a faraway school because of risks of kidnapping and rape. They think authorities are never able to solve this problem” (Siem Riep)

“Parents are afraid of kidnapping and rape that may be committed against their daughters due to drug abuse, especially when they have to travel far from home in going to school”(Banteay Meanchey).

- Parents do not see the benefits and importance of education especially for their daughters

“The oldest daughter is usually asked to stop her schooling because she has a responsibility to help parents in various work within and outside the home.”

“Girls will become mothers and housewives and will not need much education. Education will be more relevant for boys as they will become heads of their households. Education can give them skills to earn income and support their families.”

“Even if women have high education, it is not a guarantee to get good jobs or that they will

have opportunities to rise to high and important positions. Education is thus not really relevant for girls.”

"Parents do not need education for their children because they need to have rice. If the children will go to school, we need to eat rice; if they do not go to school, we still need to eat rice".

- Culture and traditions/ Early marriage

"Parents would discontinue the schooling of their daughters for marriage." (Siem Riep)

"The Cambodian culture restricts girls to travel away from home. If she goes away far way from home her reputation will not be good". (Siem Riep and Banteay Meanchey)

"People from cultural minorities do not see the relevance and importance of education for girls". (Kompong Thom)

- Parents are too poor to send all children to school

"When parents are too poor, daughters should stop going to school because they can help in housework and in earning income. The boys can continue their schooling as they are not as capable in housework compared to girls. They cannot do a lot of work".

- Girls start school at a late age compared to boys.

"They start between the ages of 9 to 11. When they are in Grade 4 or 5, they reach their adolescence and will become shy and will stop going to school or their parents will stop their schooling"(Kompong Thom)

- The school environment is not girl-friendly; lack of good teachers and school facilities. There are no adequate water and toilet facilities especially for girls.

"Classrooms are overcrowded and girls do not like crowded group seating. They become shy"

"Teachers give more attention to boys than girls. They also never give master class position to girls". (Banteay Meanchey)

"Some teachers are not well qualified. Parents thus do not see the worth of investing for their daughter's schooling" (Banteay Meanchey)

"Many parents feel that there are not enough good teachers for their daughters. Classrooms are not enough and are often overcrowded. Thus they do not feel secure of letting their daughters be in overcrowded classrooms."(Kompong Thom)

"The schools lack latrines for girls"(Kompong Thom and Siem Riep))

- Girls would stop going to school to help parents earn income. Sometimes, parents would ask their daughters to discontinue school to work and earn an income.

"Many girls would drop-out from school to work in garment factories in Phnom Penh. Sometimes parents would ask the village chief to tamper the age records of their daughters to increase their ages to 18 so that they can be eligible for factory employment". (Kompong Thom)

“Parents directly benefit from their daughter’s income and don’t feel that education is important for her” (Kompong Cham)

“Many girls do not go to school or would drop-out from school because they have to earn money selling souvenirs to tourists in the Angkor temples or to hire out their labour in construction work. Sometimes, because of poverty, parents would push or traffic their daughters to the sex trade” (Siem Riep)

- Girls have low self-image.

“They do not see and understand how important they are. They think they are not clever enough, and cannot study further like boys”. (Kompong Thom)

Do you have ideas or suggestions on how to solve the problem?

- Conduct multi-media and community campaigns targeting parents about the role of women in society and the importance of educating girls.
- Improve teachers’ living conditions.
- Provide assistance and scholarships to needy girls like providing school uniforms, school materials. Provide bicycles to poor girls.
- Provide scholarships to highland people, especially to girls.
- Establish vocational courses in the lower secondary school and include relevant life skills. School curriculum should be flexible and should suit the situation and needs of the students.
- Encourage local authorities and community leaders to be actively involved in education.
- Build dormitories for lower secondary students, and for primary school students’ sharing/boarding arrangement with a teacher’s house can be explored. Build these dormitories near the schools.
- Build more complete schools in villages. Provide high school education in the village.
- Provide gender awareness trainings to provincial and local education officials and staff. Integrate gender concepts in curriculum. Teach girls about the value of their roles and contributions as girls/women and to know about their rights.
- Recruit local teachers in communities. Provide incentives for teachers to work in rural and remote areas.
- Establish mobile schools to reach inaccessible areas; support should be given to teachers involved in mobile schools.

Who do you think should be primarily responsible and involved in promoting girls’ equal access to education?

- Parents
- Government and the Ministry of Education
- Teachers
- NGOs
- Local Cluster School Committees

Do you think boys and girls should have equal rights to education?

- Yes

”Women have important roles in the family on providing guidance and education to children. She is also responsible for the management of family finances. A family with mother with high education fare better compared to those mothers with low education. There is a Khmer proverb: Su salabba kom ov sabal me (A father can die but a family will hardly survive without a mother)”(Banteay Meanchey)

”Women have important roles in child care and child rearing. They are the mother of the world” (Kompong Thom)

- No

”Girls have less opportunities once they are married”(Kratie)

”Girls are so vulnerable; they have to deal with problems of their security and other sources of trouble”(Kratie)

What is your idea of a good school?

- Have sufficient facilities, equipment and materials
- Have good teachers (qualified and well trained)
- Have good relations with the community and students
- Have full-day teaching and good school performance (high enrollment, and progression rates, low drop-out and repetition rates)
- Have good school rules and disciplined students

What is your idea of good school management?

- Have ability to prepare good school plan; has adequate information and data
- Community is involved and participation in education of children
- School Director is highly educated
- School staff is professional and committed to their work
- Students are disciplined
- Have good monitoring of teachers and students’ performance

The Views of the School Authorities: Local Cluster School Committee Chiefs, School Principals, Teachers

What do you think are the reasons why there is a high drop-out rate of girls?

School is inaccessible; it is too far.

"Parents of children who live 5 km. away from school cannot provide transportation for their daughters" (Kratie).

"Primary school in the village has only Grades 1 and 2. Secondary school is too far away" (Kompong Thom)

- Girls need to help in housework, sibling care and earn income

"When girls become 10 years old, parents need them to help in farming, market trading and to do housework. They are also need to take care of younger siblings" (Kompong Cham)

"Parents would discontinue the schooling of girls to let them work in garment factories in Phnom Penh" (Kompong Thom)

"Families are big and girls help in housework and in farming activities" (Kratie)

"Girls are asked by their parents to stop schooling to look after their younger siblings, help in the housework and in the farming activities" (Kompong Thom)

"Some families have capital so they stop their daughters schooling to let them sell souvenirs in the Angkor temples" (Siem Riep)

- Culture and tradition / early marriage

"Parents would ask their daughters to stop schooling and get married" (Siem Riep)

"Some parents would marry off their young daughters because they think they can earn money from doing so. Her husband will be responsible to support the family and she need not be so educate" (Kompong Thom)

- Security risks

Parents don't feel safe about letting their daughters travel away from home. The road from the village to the school is not safe" (Kompong Thom)

- Parents are too poor

"Parents do not have money to buy bicycles for schooling" (Siem Riep)

"When girls do not have nice uniforms compared to friends and classmates because their parents are too poor, they feel ashamed and would decide not to go to school anymore" (Kompong Thom)

- Poor school facilities including sanitation facilities

"There is no toilet facilities in school for girls. This poses great inconvenience especially for adolescent girls" (Kompong Thom and Siem Riep)

- Late enrolment and early drop-out

"Girls would enter school at a late age and drop-out upon reaching puberty, after 3-4 years of schooling". (Siem Riep and Kompong Thom)

- Parents don't see the value of education for girls

"Parents think that it is not important for their daughters to go to school because they have never seen girls even with higher education get jobs after they graduate" (Kompong Thom)

"If parents have money to support the education of their children, they will support the son first because they think that studying is more important for the sons than for the daughters. Girls will do housework and will not need education" (Siem Riep)

- Other reasons

"Some girls who dropped-out would convince other girls to drop out as well" (Siem Riep)

Do you have ideas/ suggestions on how to solve this problem? What can be your role as education officials/ school authorities/teachers?

- Conduct campaign on the value of education / Meet with parents and explain the importance of education for their daughters

"Conduct campaign on importance of education, especially for girls, via PTA, mass media, posters and meeting" (Kratie)

"School directors with the cooperation of commune chiefs should take an active role in encouraging parents whose daughters are not in school" (Siem Riep)

- Provide assistance to girls' education

"Arrange for group travel and transport for girls so that they can go to school and go back home together. This would help ensure the safety of girls" (Kompong Thom)

- Schools should be well equipped

"Schools should have enough teachers and classrooms with enough desks and seats. Girls tend not to like overcrowded classrooms, especially when they have to share overcrowded seats with boys. They would become very shy and would be discouraged to attend school" (Kompong Thom)

"Schools should have adequate toilet facilities for girls and should have a well" (Kompong Thom)

Who do you think are primarily responsible for girls' access to education?

- Parents
- Teachers
- Officials (Government and Ministry of Education)

Do you think boys and girls should have equal rights to education?

- Yes (all respondents)

What is your idea of a good school?

- Have sufficient facilities, equipment and materials
- Have good rules and disciplined students

What is your idea of a good school management?

- Community is involved and participating in the education of the children
- Teachers are committed
- Have ability to prepare a good school plan

The Views of the Parents

1. Parents of Girls-in-School

Why do you send your daughters to school?

Most of the parents interviewed believe that life would improve and be better for their daughters if they go to school. The more education they have, the more secure is their future. It will guarantee them a better life than compared to that of their parents who have little or no education at all.

“When our daughters are educated, they can become good housewives and can make decisions in the family. They can find work and can function well in society”.

“We do not like our daughter to be like us, poor fisher folks - it is difficult to work and to always stay overnight in flooded forests of the Tonle Sap”.

“We want our daughter to be educated because we do not like that she will be looked down by her husband, and that she will not know any work and just be dependent on him.”

“We want our daughter to be knowledgeable and not to become easy victims of cheating. She would know how to calculate and she will have her own business.”

If given the opportunity, will you let your daughters pursue higher education?

All the respondents expressed that they would like their daughters to continue to higher education.

“More education means better job opportunities with high salaries. My daughters can be role models in our village” (Kompong Cham)

“Achieving higher education, my daughter will have higher self-esteem and respect in society”. (Kratie)

“When our daughter is well educated she will be able to solve her own problems; she can make decisions and can have a better life”. (Kompong Thom)

“If girls will have education, they will not become play things of men or become victims of trafficking and be cheated easily.” (Kompong Thom)

“The world should stop thinking that women are just for giving births and that they cannot do anything, and just be dependent on their husbands. The thinking that women cannot move around the stove should be changed”. (Kompong Thom)

“When the young generation of women are educated, family and society will have better conditions”.

How can you be helped or your daughters be helped so that they can continue schooling?

- Improve the living conditions of families (9 respondents)

“Helping us to improve our living conditions means promoting girls’ education” (Kompong

Cham)

"Sometimes we cannot sleep because we are thinking how we can feed our children. We need to earn more so that we can support our daughters' schooling"(Kompong Thom)

"We have to work harder and earn more so that we can feed our family and support the schooling of all our children"(Siem Riep)

- Encourage and support girls

"Teachers can help to encourage students, especially girls, by following them up when they are absent for a few days in school. Meet the parents or write them a letter"(Siem Riep)

"Girls should be encouraged to go to school. Fathers should earn enough income so that mothers can encourage their daughters to go to school"(Kratie)

"Teachers should encourage girls to come to learn, do remedial classes and follow-up when they are absent for many days"(Kompong Thom)

- Provide scholarships and assistance

"We hope the government can provide scholarships and dormitories for children of ethnic minorities"(Ratanakiri)

Government should help us stop the yearly school payments and with NGOs help stop the daily payment of 100 riels on official class time"(Kompong Thom).

Do you think that boys and girls have equal rights to education?

- No

"Boys should have more education than girls because men are more responsible for earning income for the family and finding honour for the family. Women are responsible for housework or earning incomes just near the home. They do not need a lot of education to do these work" (Siem Riep)

"Boys should have more rights to education because boys can travel to school and easily stay anywhere. It's different with girls. Tradition will not allow them to go away from home. Also, especially girls are good at housework than boys". (Banteay Meanchey)

"Some people believe that girls should not go far from home because no will check their behaviour"(Kompong Cham).

"Boys will become heads of families so they need more education"(Kratie)

"Boys have to be educated even if they work as soldiers or policemen. If they have education, it will be easy for them to climb to high positions"(Siem Riep)

- Yes

"In the future, Cambodia needs an educated population. As parents, we are aware that education is a stepping stone towards getting better income unlike the older generation who are limited to only doing manual work". (Kompong Cham)

"Learning knowledge is not only for boys but for girls as well. Women can do everything that men can do" (Banteay Meanchey)

"Education will help women because they are responsible for the care and education of the children, managing family finances, and share ideas and decisions about the family business" (Siem Riep)

2. Parents of Girls-out-of-School

What are the main reasons why you stopped the schooling of your daughter(s)? Or never sent them to school?

The most mentioned reasons why parents discontinued the schooling of their daughters or decide not to send them to school at all are as follows:

- **Poverty**

Parents are too poor and cannot afford to send all their children to school. Girls' schooling is perceived to be more expensive than that of boys. Girls need uniforms, nice clothes, and bicycles.

"We are very poor and we cannot support our daughter's schooling. We cannot pay for her uniforms, study materials, daily allowance and for her tutorial/private lessons" (Banteay Meanchey)

"We do not have enough money to send our daughters to school. Our rice harvest last season was not enough as there was drought and was attacked by pests and rats" (Kratie)

- **Girls are needed in house and farm work and for the care of their younger siblings.**

Especially when she is the oldest daughter she has to be primarily responsible in helping parents with housework (cooking, washing, collecting firewood, fetching water) and sibling care. She also has to help in feeding farm animals: pigs, chicken, etc.

"We prefer our daughters to be always around the kitchen; mothers depend on girls since they can help a lot with work". (Kompong Cham).

"We need our daughter to take care of their younger siblings because no one look after them when we go fishing" (Siem Riep)

"We urge our daughters to go to school but they are too busy taking care of cows, collecting firewood and taking care of their siblings" (Tam Poun mother, Ratanakiri)

- **Education is not important for girls.**

"We do not think that education can change our daughter's life. Education is not in our tradition. We do not really see the need of it. Our daughters think that it is better to have a

“back basket (kaphar)” to carry goods than a school bag”. (Tam Poun Mother, Ratanakiri)

”There is a school and a teacher but we do not really understand about education. The teacher is not so capable. Besides, we need our girls to help in the family”. (Tam Poun mother, Ratanakiri)

- School is inaccessible

”There is no transportation to school and the road is very bad. There is a problem of security when travelling from home and school. Rapes used to be common in the area”(Siem Riep)

”Secondary school is far from home. When my daughters would complete primary school there is no chance for them to continue to high school. They need bicycles to travel to school”. (Banteay Meanchey)

- Take care of sick family members.

Girls are asked to miss school over a long period in order to take care of a sick family member: mother or grandmother. Eventually, they would decide to drop-out from school because they cannot follow the lessons anymore.

”My daughter has to stop going to school for two months because her grandmother was seriously sick and she has to take care of her in Phnom Penh. Because of this, she missed her classes for such a long time and when she returned to school she became afraid and ashamed because she cannot follow the lessons anymore. After that she decided to stop going to school”(Banteay Meanchey)

”My daughter stopped going to school because we are poor and she has to take care of her sick grandmother”. (Kompong Thom)

- Help to Earn Income for the Family

”We cut wood for livelihood and our daughter has been working with us and earns 4,000 riels/day. She stopped going to school because she lost track of lessons and can no longer catch up with her classmates”. (Kompong Thom)

”We need our daughter to help earn income by hiring out her labour doing farm work and collecting firewood”. (Siem Riep)

The Views of the Girls

1. Girls In School

Why do you want to go to school? How important is school to you?

- Gain knowledge, have better opportunities and be able to find a good job
- Help our family and improve our standards of living
- Gain self-esteem and respect; learn about honesty, morality and discipline

What don't you like about school?

- Lack of discipline among students

"Some students are impolite; they do not pay attention to the teachers" (Kompong Thom)

"Some students are playing while classes are going on; some are fighting in school" (Siem Riep)

- Poor school building conditions, inadequate school facilities, no/ not enough toilet facilities

"The school building is dirty and old; no water and toilet facilities". (Siem Riep)

"The garden is not maintained; dirty latrines and well; classrooms are too warm; and animals enter the school and eat our crops". (Kompong Thom)

"Lack of student desks. We lack textbooks, school materials and equipment for science laboratory" (Ratanakiri)

- Not enough teachers/ good teachers

"Teachers don't come regularly or are always late" (Kompong Cham)

"Some teachers are mean" (Banteay Meanchey)

"We have to keep on paying for classes and other school expenses" (Ratanakiri)

- Incidences of stealing/sexual harassment

"There are boys who are like gangs who would sometimes harass girls" (Siem Riep)

"Boys are prejudiced against girls; boys and girls are not friendly to each other" (Ratanakiri)

"Boys use bad words; they threaten and fight with the girls. They like to harass the girls" (Kompong Cham)

- It is too far away from home and the road is very bad

Why are there many girls dropping out from school?

- Parents/ girls do not see the value of education

"Parents always say that daughters do not need to study so much, just learn how to read and write, because they will be only working around the kitchen and may not do anything"

better than kitchen work". (Siem Riep)

"Some girls whose parents have business would not be allowed to continue to go to high school and instead help in the business. Parents think that it is enough for their daughters to learn how to read, write and calculate - these are enough skills for doing business"(Kompong Thom)

"Some girls themselves don't want to go to school even when their parents can support them. They think studying is not relevant and important for them" (Kompong Thom)

- Girls are needed to help in housework and in the field

"Some girls are busy helping their parents in the rice field and they would be often absent from school. They will not be able to follow the lessons anymore, and then later just drop-out from school". (Kompong Thom and Banteay Meanchey)

"Parents would discontinue the schooling of their daughters to let them help in the housework, to care for their younger siblings, and to help in the rice field such as transplanting and harvesting the rice crop. Girls are believed to do this work better than boys. Parents thus continue to send their sons to school"(Kompong Thom)

- Poverty

"The family is too poor to send them to school. They lack school uniforms and school materials. They do not have a bicycle to ride to school"(Kompong Thom)

- Girls start school at a late age and then will drop-out upon reaching puberty

"Some girls enter school late (about 10 years old) and when they are in Grade 4 or 5, they become adolescent and would become shy. Then they just stop going to school"(Siem Riep)

- Girls want to earn income

"Some girls would leave school to work in garment factories in Phnom Penh or hire out their labour for cutting firewood or transplanting rice"(Kompong Thom)

"Some girls have friends who will persuade them to stop going to school and instead find employment and earn an income"(Ratanakiri)

- Girls would get married

"Parents would ask their daughters to stop schooling at Grade 6 or 7 to marry them off or sometimes the girls themselves would like to get married". (Ratanakiri)

What do you think should be done so that girls can continue to go to school?

The most common suggestion by far given by the respondents is to explain to the parents and girls themselves through community campaigns on the benefits and importance of education for girls. This is followed by providing assistance to the education of poor girls through scholarship programme by NGOs and the government, and adopting a school-based strategy where girls can support and encourage each other to stay in school.

- Explain the value of education for girls to the parents and to the girls themselves

"Explain to the parents of the girls who are out- of- school about the advantage of girls education and convince them to send them back to school"(Siem Riep)

"Conduct household campaign explaining directly to parents about the value and importance of educating girls"(Ratanakiri)

"There is a need to explain to the girls the importance and benefits of getting an education, and to convince them to stay in school"(Kompong Thom)

"Teachers should convince parents to send back their daughters to school" (Kompong Thom)

- Provide assistance to poor girls and their families

"Request assistance from NGOs for girls' scholarship and provide bicycles for girls who live more than 5 km. from school"(Ratanakiri)

"The Ministry of Education should provide support to poor students" (Siem Riep)

- Girls should encourage and support each other

"Girls in higher grades can organize a committee to support poor needy girls to stay in school"(Ratanakiri)

Should boys and girls have equal access to education? Is education important for girls as well?

- Majority of the respondents believed that it is equally important for boys and girls to go to school. The following reasons were given:

"Girls can do everything that boys can do; girls have equal rights with boys to education; living standards of the family will improve when girls have education; girls/women are partners of development, they need knowledge as well; women are mother of the world".

- Those who do not support the idea that boys and girls should have equal access to education reasoned out that:

"If the family is poor, girls should stop schooling and they can stay at home and help with housework; girls do not need much education, it is not so relevant for them.

Who do you think is primarily responsible so that all children, both boys and girls will get an education?

All of the girls interviewed stated that parents have the foremost responsibility to send all their children to school and enable both girls and boys to have equal access to education. Many of them believed that teachers play a significant role in encouraging girls to stay in school and be interested to have higher education.

Besides studying, what do you do?

Housework and sibling care were the overwhelming response to the above question. All of the girls indicated that they help in household chores like cleaning, cooking, washing the dishes, and looking after their younger brothers and sisters. A few of them are also engaged in selling or helping in the small business of their parents.

"During my free time, I help in selling fish cakes. Sometime I would miss school for 1 or 2 days to help sell fishcakes" (Banteay Meanchey)

2. Girls out of School

What are the main reasons why you stopped going to school? Or did not go to school at all?

- Need to help in household work and/or earn income for the family

"I need to help my mother with housework including fetching water and caring for my younger brothers and sisters. I also help in the farm". (Ratanakiri)

"My mother has a small business and I was absent many times to help her. I cannot follow the lessons and then I stopped going to school". (Kompong Thom)

"I need to help in fishing in exchange for rice; go to the rice fields and work with the family; do housework like cooking and fetching water" (Kompong Cham)

- School is too far

"Junior high school is far away from home about 10 km. I tried to save money to buy a bicycle in order that I can continue to go to school. Unfortunately my grandmother got sick so I have to spend this money to help in the treatment of my grandmother." (Siem Riep)

"The school is far from my home, about 2 kilometres. I walk to school and never come on time." (Siem Riep)

- Need to take care of a sick family member

"My mother got sick. I have to stay at home and look after her because nobody can take care of her." (Kompong Thom)

"My grandmother was ill. I need to stay at home to take care of her. I was absent many times and then I stopped going to school" (Kompong Thom)

- My family is too poor

"My parents are poor and we do not have money to buy bicycle, books and uniforms for my schooling" (Kompong Thom)

- Education is not important and relevant

"We have not heard anything about school; we see the school building but we do not know what is happening inside". (Ratanakiri)

"As an ethnic minority, we feel isolated and we do not feel that school is for us. I do not see how I can benefit from attending school". (Ratanakiri)

If given the opportunity, would you like to go back to school? Or would you like to go to school?

- Yes

"I really want to go back to school if I have a bicycle because I think I am still young and have little education. I still want to learn more knowledge and be able to help my family. I want to be a teacher in the primary school and I can have a salary to support my family". (Siem Riep)

"I would to be in school if there are female teachers who can speak Tampuan and Khmer languages. I would like to speak and read Khmer and English too; if the classes are held separately for boys and girls and that it would be in the village". (Ratanakiri)

- No

"I do not know what school is. I see some of my friends go to school. But most of us just stay at home". (Ratanakiri)

"I am ashamed to see my classmates who will be in higher grades now"(Kompong Thom)

What did you feel when you were told that you would stop going to school? Or would be able to go to school at all?

- *"I feel sorry for myself because I am still very young and will not have an opportunity to learn and be educated; I feel sorry and ashamed especially to my friends "(Siem Riep)*

How can girls like you be helped so that you can continue to go to school?

- Provide assistance to girls

"Assist us with school supplies, school uniforms; provide rice for 2 meals a day"(Kompong Cham)

"If we get support from organizations such as bicycles, uniforms and books"(Kompong Thom)

- Provide assistance to my family

"I can continue to go to school if my parents would have money to support my studies such as paying school fees, buying books, clothes and bicycle"(Kompong Thom and Siem Riep)

"Provide food for my mother"(Kompong Cham)

- Have a two shift class: one in the morning and one in the afternoon

"I can go to the afternoon class since in the morning I am busy with housework; I still help my

mother in the morning, she doesn't allow me to go to school" (Kompong Cham)

Do you think boys and girls have equal rights to education?

- Most of the respondents believed that boys have more rights than girls to education.

"Boys have more rights than girls; parents don't give heavy work to girls. Our brothers go to school; girls are not allowed because they have lots of housework to do" (Kompong Cham)

"Boys can travel easily. Girls can be kidnapped for trafficking". (Kompong Cham)

- Those who think that boys and girls have equal rights believe that "girls can do what boys can also do".

The table below presents an overview of the ranked responses of the target groups on what they think are the important reasons why girls drop-out from school or never attend school at all.

Table 3: Summary Ranking of Responses: Why There is a High Drop-out Rate of Girls in School?

Reasons/Responses	Provincial/ District Education Officials	LCSCs, School Directors, PTAs, Teachers	Parents of Girls out- of-school	Girls out- of-school	Girls in school
	<i>Frequency Ranking of Responses</i>				
● Girls are needed in housework, sibling care, and farm work	1	1	2	1	2
● School is too far away from home	1	1	4	2	–
● Take care of sick members of the family	-	-	5	3	
● Girls need to help earn income	6	1	6	1	5
● Parents do not see the value and importance of education for girls	2	5	3	5	1
● Culture and Tradition/ Marriage	2	2	-	-	3
● Security risks when travelling to school	3	3	6		6
● Parents are too poor	3	4	1	4	3
● Late enrolment / to start school	4	5	-	-	4
● Lack of good teachers: not paying attention to girls and their needs	-	-	6	-	-
● School environment and facilities are not girl-friendly: overcrowded classrooms	4	4	-	-	-
● No/lack water and toilet facilities	4	4			
● Girls have low self-image	7	-	-	-	-

Comparing the ranked responses of the various interview groups, the most commonly mentioned reasons why girls are not in school or would discontinue schooling are:

- 1- Girls are needed in housework, sibling care and farm work/ earn income
- 2 - School is inaccessible; it is too far away from home
- 3- Parents are too poor (poverty)
- 4- Parents do not see the value and importance of education for girls
- 5- Culture and Tradition / early marriage
- 6- Security risks
- 7- Late enrolment

4. Case Studies

Case Study 1

Ms. Eaim Sarean, 43 years old, completed only primary school. She had a heart attack and is mentally ill; in fact in 1979 she attempted suicide. She lives in Kampong Chroy village, Kandal province with her children and blind 55 year-old-husband. According to her, her family is poor because she spent a lot of money to have her husband's eyes operated on in 1994. She spent about 10 chi of gold.

Her children used to be 11 but only 3 daughters and 2 young sons are now alive. Her eldest daughter is 17 years old and dropped out during grade 3 and went to live with her grandmother in Phnom Penh. The second eldest daughter stopped going to school last year, at grade 5 in order to help her family earn income, take care of the younger siblings and do all the household chores. With her father's disability, she needs to help her mother.

Ms. Sarean and her husband think that their sons need education more than their daughter because they need to travel far to earn money. On the other hand, daughters stay at home and only do household related activities. It is impossible for her daughter to go back to school, she thinks, even with some assistance from an NGO. They need their daughter to earn income for the whole family.

Case Study 2

Heang Sokhem is 17 years old and lives with her grandfather in Tang Krosaing commune, Santouk district in Kompong Thom. She has two brothers and two sisters and as the eldest, acts as the head of the family. At present, their parents are working near Tonle Sap, Kompong Thom and will come back home in time for the rice planting season.

Sokhem started to go to school when she was 9 years old. Her parents did not allow her to go when she was 6 years old because she was so small, they feared she might fall in a canal. For several years, she simultaneously went to school, earned income for the family and took care of the family. She works during the transplanting and harvesting season and carries the soil needed to build roads. In this way, she was able to earn 4,000 riels a day and buy rice for the family. "Because my family is very poor, I work as a laborer to earn money to support my family, and to be able to buy my books and clothes for school," she said as she cried.

When she was in grade 7 her grandmother got sick. Because there was no one else, she had to absent herself from school to take care of her. Her repeated absences made her unable to follow the lessons and she decided to drop out. Anyway, she thought, she can't really go to junior high school because of the distance and her lack of bicycle.

Given the opportunity, she still wants to go to school since she likes studying and believes studying is important for the future. "I really want to continue studying because I do not want to become illiterate like my parents. I do not want to become a manual laborer and work hard every day in a rice farm. I want to work as a government official," she said. She added that although she might not become a government official, she will be able to read newspapers. In this way she can get information, raise the awareness the people in the village and in her small way, be able to contribute in the development of her country.

Case Study 3

The eldest of three, Vann Sineth is 16 years old and lives with her parents in Srah Srehng village, Nokor Thom commune in Siem Reap. Her mother sells fried beef in the market near their home and her father, a former soldier, works as a gardener in a hotel.

Sineth finished primary school and wants to go to junior high school. Unfortunately the school is 10 km away and she has no bicycle. She asked her parents to buy her even an old one but their income is so meager and sufficient only for food. Her parents and grandmother felt very sad for her. "My parents did not want me to stop going to school. My mother and grandmother cried when they heard that I asked for a bicycle to be able to continue studying," she said. For a time she saved in order to buy a bicycle but her grandmother fell sick and her money was spent for treating her grandmother.

She regrets not going to school because she is still so young and she badly wants to be a teacher. "If I were able to graduate from high school, I will study in the Teacher Training Center and become a primary school teacher. If I can not go to school, I want to be trained as a tailor," she said. She always imagines that if she were a teacher, she will get a good salary to support her family and be able to teacher her brother and sister. Her parents will be happy.

Case Study 4

Ms. Sheang Yean is 43 years old and became a widow when her husband was killed by robbers. She has five daughters aged 6 to 20. Her eldest got married and lives with her husband in Kampong Cham while the second daughter at 16 years of age, dropped out from school in grade 7 because of low income. The other three daughters are still in school, however, in grades 1, 3 and 6 in Thall Bek primary school.

Her family's main source of income is growing rice, taking in laundry, and sewing where she can earn 2,000 to 3,000 riels. She owns 1.5 hectares of rice land, two cows and a house with a tiled roof. The family works in the rice field and they do all the necessary plowing, harrowing, etc.

She said that she was lucky she has good and obedient daughters: they follow and are respectful of their parents' advice. "I'm committed to push my daughters to complete their schooling. I don't want them to become uneducated like me. Some people say that if parents are illiterate, their children will be too. I don't want that to happen and I don't want my daughters following my footsteps and becoming a farmer. I'm lucky because my daughters want to study so I know that they'll become educated and will have a better life than me. They'll make better decisions and will not become prey to exploitative men. I'm just afraid that if my daughters will be taken advantaged of, they will be limited to giving birth and wrongly depend on their husbands. I have never thought that daughters can't move around the stove and I hope that they will learn to think so too."

Case Study 5

Ms. Lam Sophea, 39 years old, is married to a 40 year-old policeman who has never provided support to his wife, son and daughter. Her son is 16 years old and in grade 7 while her 14 year-old-daughter is in grade 3. They live in Serei Sophane, Bantheay Meanchey. They have a difficult life because her husband is alcoholic and occasionally when drunk, he is violent towards his family.

Ms. Lam has to sell fish cake as a means of earning money for food and schooling of her children. Sometimes she has to ask her daughter for help when she is very busy or when is not feeling well. As a result, my daughter cannot keep up with the lessons. Her son on other hand regularly goes to school. She wants her children to complete their schooling but is unsure because of the family situation.

Case Study 6

Phath Lack is a small girl at 14 years old and has never been to school. She lives in Lo Peak, Kompong Siem, Kompong Cham. She has 7 brothers and sisters and the second child in the family. Among all of them, the only one who goes to school is a 12 year-old-brother who is in grade 1.

Lack is the eldest daughter and is the household head. Her mother was widowed when her father died from malaria.

Lack is very shy and speaks softly. "I want to go to school but I have no chance, my family is very poor," she said and looking elsewhere." Lack wants to go to school if she has the opportunity. She is requesting help in terms of school materials, a school bag, a uniform and food for two meals. "Morning around 9 am and evening around 5 pm," she said.

Case Study 7

Forty-two year-old Peng Vanny finished grade 3 under the old education system that is equivalent to grade 9 in the current system. After getting married in 1980, Vanny was not able to work because her husband did not allow her. However, since her husband fell ill, and became unemployed, she has worked very hard to earn money support the family. She sells fried banana along the road, and raises pigs and ducks.

Among her two sons and two daughters, one already finished secondary school and is in the Kompong Cham Teacher Training Center since 1999. Next year Ngan Vannaran, her daughter, will become a teacher in primary school. Every weekend, this 20-year-old daughter comes home and helps her with the animal raising work. Vanny gives her daughter 3 kilos of rice, dried fish, eggs, dry pork and 15,000 riels in cash. But Ngan will ask her mother to increase this amount to 20,000 by next year because she needs to travel and practice teaching.

Because Vanny knows the value of education, she is exerting all her efforts and pushing her daughter to graduate. She knows that her daughter will have a bright future if she can finish her studies, even if she marries late. "It doesn't matter if my daughter can't get a good job, I'm already very proud of her," she says.

Case Study 8

Mr. He Mary is 50 years old and although born at Quarter IV in Phnom Penh now resides in Kratie for over 30 years. He has been a teacher since 1968 and acted as the director of primary education in Kratie province. In the early '90s, he started getting involved in NGO work and worked for PASEC from 1993 to 1996; and for GTZ in 1997. He has been with SC UK since 1998 until the present. His belief that education is a foundation to a good society was reinforced by his work in development.

Mr. He has 2 daughters and 4 sons, two of whom became teachers like him. One daughter is studying to be a teacher and will finish at the university in Phnom Penh this year. In addition, she is also learning English and computers. She will probably not teach because she believes that she can earn more if she works for a Japanese company. Another daughter and one son are about to finish secondary school. His youngest son who is 16 years old, finished grade 9. Due to an accident, he lost a leg and Mr. He plans to turn him into a businessman.

Mr. He says, "I have strong belief that successful work comes up from the whole society - both women and men. One person can't be strong enough to achieve the goal, so I support that boys and girls must have equal access to education."

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Culture, Poverty and Change. The overwhelming response that girls' schooling is discontinued because she has a gender role to help in housework (including sibling care, farmwork, and contributing to family income) and that boys can continue to attend school because housework is not suitable for them as boys, indicates that there will be no substantive change in improving girls' access to education if the principles of gender equity will not be given equal important attention along with poverty and other social issues in improving education outcomes in Cambodia. There is a critical need, therefore, to systematically link gender and poverty issues in the analysis and development programming in education.

The findings of the research strongly confirm that constraining gender socialization in the family and parental perceptions towards the benefits of education for their daughters combined with socio-economic, cultural and geographic disadvantages result to marked gender imbalances in education outcomes in Cambodia which significantly favour males more than females. This is further challenged by the complex contradictions between cultural beliefs regarding girls/women's mobility and demands of survival faced by a stagnant and poverty-stricken agricultural household economy which characterizes majority of contemporary Cambodian rural households.

Accepted ideas of gender roles rigidly assign to females the tasks related to the care of the children and maintenance of the household. Cultural beliefs and traditions in allocating gender-based division of labour in a poor, subsistence agricultural household provides a convenient rationale to decide against equal access of girls to schooling: *"Girls would become mothers and housewives and will not need much education. Education will be more relevant for boys as they will become heads of their households. Education can give them skills to earn income and support families"*. These beliefs and biases are further reinforced by parental ideas of coping with poverty: *"When parents are too poor, daughters should stop going to school because they can help in housework and in earning income. The boys can continue their schooling because they cannot do housework like girls. They cannot do a lot of work"*

On the other hand, the need to overcome poverty poses significant questions to the gender socialization embodied in the Khmer culture. Parents and girls would defy gender traditions when girls would be allowed to leave home and travel far away to earn income for the family. *"Many girls would drop-out from school to work in garment factories in Phnom Penh. Sometimes parents would ask the village chief to tamper the age records of their daughters to increase their ages to 18 so that they can be eligible for factory employment"* (Education Official, Kompong Thom Province). This is in complete contradiction to the traditional idea: *"When women travel away from home, their reputation will not be good. We cannot let our daughter travel far to go to school"*.

While majority of the respondents believe that boys and girls have equal rights to education and support the idea that women should participate actively in the economic sphere and contribute to household income, this poses challenges to the non-questioning attitude that housework and child care are the exclusive responsibility of women and girls. As Cambodia modernizes, and with no substantive change in gender hierarchies and arrangements in the household, opportunities for girls advancement and to develop their full potentials as individuals through education would be problematic.

The stakes are high. Such contradictions between socio-economic reality and gender ideology result to an education system with skewed access and participation that markedly disadvantages girls. Gender stereotyping and discrimination against girls within the family combined with poverty appear to be a major factor in discouraging girls and restricting their equal access to education.

The School Environment. One important learning that flowed from the research findings are specific school factors that can significantly determine improved attendance and retention of girls in school. The first factor is adequate *school facilities* such as classrooms that can provide girls their fair share of social and physical space including separate toilet facilities. The second factor is the *quality of interaction in the learning process*: teacher-student interaction that encourages girls' participation and leadership, and student-student interaction that ensures their safety and self-esteem. The third school factor is *the quality and relevance of instruction (teaching and curriculum content)*: whether girls and their parents find worthwhile the investment for girls' education - they learn knowledge and skills (life and livelihood skills) that they can see clear benefits for their immediate future.

Action and Policy Recommendations:

A number of action and policy recommendations can be drawn from the research:

1. Equal important attention should be given to gender equity principles along with addressing poverty and geographic issues in improving access and equity to education. Culturally defined gender patterns should be viewed as adaptive, and can be acceptably changed to bring socio-economic benefits and advancement. Education will help make people more cognizant of the need for this cultural transformation: shift to values that recognizes the importance of equal education for girls. This calls for a massive multi-media campaign to promote women's role in society and girls' education directly targeting parents, communities and schools. A long-term positive impact can be guaranteed only if there is sustained economic growth that promotes equitable opportunities for the emerging educated class.
2. Corollary to the above, there is a need to enhance logistical and technical support to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) to raise gender awareness of officials and staff as well as improve gender capacity in programmes/projects. This will enable MoEYS better understanding of the issues and obstacles in promoting gender equity in education. This, in turn, will allow them to determine a range of mechanisms of addressing these gender issues/obstacles. Gender issues and concepts should be systematically integrated in education planning, implementation and monitoring. A gender policy and national action plan over a time frame can be drawn in order to systematically and effectively address the above gender gaps.
3. Implement affirmative measures to significantly reduce gender and social disparities in the education system. It should be adopt a sector wide approach that addresses issues in improving indicators in girls' education and women's representation in the education management and delivery services at all levels. This should involve the participation of NGOs with substantive experiences and knowledge on gender and education in the context of Cambodia
4. Give importance to gender issues and concepts in initiatives to improve school facilities, curriculum content, and quality of teaching in basic education. Teacher training on gender awareness and concepts should be integrated in project design.
5. Include provisions on gender discrimination in the planned education legislation and regulation for Cambodia.

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