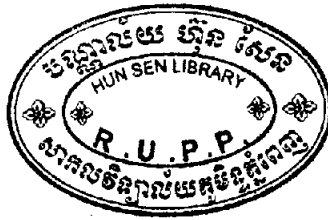


USING BOTH HANDS

WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA



ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK



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USING BOTH HANDS

WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER
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EDWARD B. FISKE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Cambodia has more women than men, and we must educate our girls as well as our boys. We have two hands, and if one hand is weak we can do nothing. The two hands must be strong. We must use both hands.

– Neth Dir, a 77-year old resident of Spean Dek Village in Kandal Province who is raising his three granddaughters.

FOREWORD

"Using Both Hands" is part of Technical Assistance Project No. 1889-CAM carried out by the Queensland Education Consortium of Australia for the Asian Development Bank. Its purpose is to examine the extent to which girls and women are participating in education in Cambodia and to suggest ways to enhance this participation.

A considerable body of literature exists on the overall situation of women in Cambodia, most of which includes some discussion of their participation in education. There is also a wealth of research on the role of women in education in other developing countries and the steps these countries have taken to narrow their "gender gap." As far as can be determined, the current study is the first to focus on the nature and causes of Cambodia's gender gap and to suggest ways of remedying it.

The study was conducted in August 1994. The investigators reviewed the relevant existing research literature and spoke with scholars and knowledgeable persons from local and international non-governmental organizations, UNICEF, and various representatives of the Cambodian government, including the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs. Nine days of field research was carried out in a suburban district of Phnom Penh and in the provinces of Kandal and Kratie by three staff members of Khmer Women's Voice Center. Interviews were conducted with more than 40 girls, heads of families, teachers, school directors and village leaders and others. The interviews centered around the questions of what leads Khmer girls either to drop out of school or to persist and what steps could be taken to encourage more of them to continue their education.

It is obvious that, given the limited time frame and resources available, the study will raise as many questions as it answers. Indeed, we hope that this is the case. Cambodia will reap large benefits if it succeeds in increasing the rate at which girls enroll and persist in primary and secondary schools and beyond. But this will not occur unless Cambodian leaders and the general public begin to recognize and debate the problem. We hope this study will spur this debate.

Since Cambodia is a predominantly rural country, the field work targeted rural villages of varying social and economic characteristics. Since the largest number of female dropouts occur during the first five years of schooling — and since this is the level at which the largest gains stand to be made — the research was concentrated on primary and, to a lesser extent, secondary schools. We hope that our efforts will inspire others to conduct additional research on women in urban settings, higher education, technical education and adult literacy.

A report such as this reflects the dedication and insights of many people. The investigators are grateful to the Asian Development Bank for initiating the project and to the Swedish International Development Authority for financing the study. Special thanks are in order to Ms. Shigeko Asher and Ms. Gudrun Forsberg. The Queensland Education Consortium supported the project under the guidance of Peter Maccoll. Special thanks to Stephen J. Duggan, the team leader, and Mike Ratcliffe, director of the sector review, for their constant support and encouragement. Care International of Cambodia generously offered training to the field research staff, and thanks are due to Graham Miller, Hanna Phan and Donna Williams. Valuable assistance came from the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs, especially from Keat Sukun, the secretary, and Chanthou Boua, Kou Ly Cheng and Im Run. Other persons who provided guidance and suggestions were Nick Bricknell, Anne Dykstra, Paul Gibbings, Bruce Hills, Judith Hushagen, Chhay Kim, Judy Ledgerwood, Sue Leonard, Vin McNamara, Mal Malhotra,

Eva Mysliwiec, Renee Pan, Cecile Roberts, Sam Seveyrath, Howard Thomas, Claire Thorne, Jandyala B. G. Tilak, Yos Thy, Nil Vanna, John Vijghen and Cathy Zimmerman.

Everyone involved in carrying out the study is grateful to the many Khmer villagers who generously contributed of their time and wisdom to the field research. Their candor was essential to the success of the project.

Finally, a special word must be said about the Khmer Women's Voice Center, the newly-established Khmer non-government organization that served as a local consultant to the study. Koy Vet, the director, was quick to understand the potential significance of the project and generously volunteered her organization's services. Suon Champu and Oum Ravy were intrepid travelers and skillful interviewers, and Young Vin, who worked on all aspects of the project and directed the field research, demonstrated enormous organizational skill, patience, analytical ability and good humor. These Khmer women, all former teachers, were constant reminders of the talent waiting to be tapped when Cambodia learns how to "use both hands."

Edward B. Fiske
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
August 1994

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every weekday morning 15-year old Le Seap watches her 14-year old brother Le Vet strap his book bag on his back and set off along the crest of a dike for the one-kilometer hike to primary school. Le Seap then turns in the other direction and, with a preschool brother in tow, walks to the nearby pond to attend to the ducks that supply her family with eggs. Three years ago Le Seap herself managed to squeeze in several months of primary school, but as the only girl among seven children, she was forced to drop out to help with household chores. She would like to resume schooling and has no illusions about the price she is paying. "Life will be very difficult if I cannot read," she said.

Cambodia has tens of thousands of girls like Le Seap. As a legacy of the civil wars of the last two decades, women make up a majority (54 percent) of the population of Cambodia, and they play an unusually important role in the economy and other areas of national life. One conspicuous exception is the area of education.

Girls enroll in preschools at exactly the same rate as boys; but they account for only 45 percent of the enrollment in primary schools, and the "gender gap" widens with each successive level of schooling. Females constitute only 40 percent of students in lower secondary schools, 25 percent in upper secondary schools and 15 percent in higher education. The cumulative effect of these disparities are devastating. The typical adult women in Cambodia has attended school for only 1.7 years, versus 2.3 years for adult men. An estimated 22 percent of adult women are literate compared to 48 percent for males.

The gender gap is deeply rooted in cultural and social traditions. Khmer society has never been a "patriarchal" society in the sense

that all financial and other power lay with men, but it is strongly hierarchical and men have greater status than women. At the same time, the family plays a central role in Cambodia, and women carry primary responsibility for its welfare. Thus women work at home, raising the children and managing household finances, while men work outside the home to earn money. Khmer girls begin to assume these roles at an early age.

Cambodian families place a high value on education, especially at the primary level, and they are eager to send their daughters as well as their sons to school. But these aspirations often conflict with economic and other practical necessities. There is virtually universal agreement that, if choices must be made, it is more important to educate sons, who will become heads of their own households, than it is to educate daughters.

Other obstacles to female enrollment and persistence in schooling are found in the Cambodian education system itself. Many students must travel long distances to schools, especially to secondary schools, and parents worry about their daughters' safety and reputations. Although the Cambodian Constitution calls for free primary and secondary education, the reality is otherwise. Parents make significant contributions to their children's schooling in the form of enrollment fees and payments for private tutoring, uniforms, transportation, notebooks and other school supplies. Parents are more willing to make these investments for sons than for daughters, and the opportunity costs of having a boy in school are lower than those for a girl.

A strong case can be made that Cambodia should make the narrowing of its educational gender gap a cornerstone of its development strategy. A substantial body of research has shown that investing in basic education is probably the single most effective step that any Third World country can take down the path to economic development and that education of girls has substantial non-economic payoffs. Women with even a few years of schooling are better agricultural producers and generate more income for their

families. Their families eat more nutritious meals. Educated mothers are more likely to engage in family planning, and the children that they do bear are more likely to survive infancy, avoid illness and do well in school.

Cambodia is a classic case of a country that stands to benefit from investment in the education of its girls. With a gross domestic product per capita of about US\$170, it is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has one of the highest birth rates in Asia, and life expectancy at birth is less than 50 years. Cambodia's under-five child mortality rate, which UNICEF statisticians view as the best single indicator of "the state of a nation's children," is 184 out of 1,000 children, which is slightly above average for the 35 "least developed" countries. Cambodian children are among the least likely in the region to receive immunization against preventable diseases.

Developing countries have taken a variety of steps to narrow their own educational gender gaps. Some have addressed cost obstacles by cutting school fees and providing scholarships to girls. Others have set up day care centers near schools to serve students' younger siblings, introduced flexible school hours so that schooling would not interfere with household chores and mounted public awareness campaigns to encourage families to educate their daughters. The experience of these countries demonstrates the need for a "package" of reforms that takes into account the distinct social context, problems and resources of the particular country involved. Thus, the first step toward designing such a package for Cambodia is to understand why Khmer girls drop out of school in the first place and what distinguishes them from peers who persist.

The field research for the study confirmed that Cambodians place a high value on education, and it revealed that the costs to families of sending children to school — both direct and opportunity — play the largest role in decisions to drop out. Distance to school is also a major factor, especially at the secondary level. Researchers found that the principal difference between dropouts and persisters

was the amount of encouragement that they received from their parents and the willingness of parents to find ways to solve economic problems without requiring their daughters to withdraw from school. Respondents were asked to suggest steps that the government and others could take to increase female enrollment and persistence in education. The most frequent suggestions were to subsidize the direct costs of education — providing free school supplies was a popular idea — and to increase physical access to schools by locating them closer to the villages, providing transportation or opening dormitories or boarding schools.

How can Cambodia narrow its educational gender gap? Clearly, initiative and leadership must come from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), but it would seem that there are plenty of willing allies. These include the newly-established Secretariat for Women's Affairs (SWA) as well as the plethora of Khmer non-government organizations (NGOs) and women's organizations that have been established within the last year or two. Foreign NGOs and international organizations such as UNICEF have a strong interest in promoting "women in development" issues and should be a ready source of support, including financial.

A logical first step would be a consciousness-raising campaign to educate Cambodians about the nature of the gender gap and the benefits that the country stands to realize by narrowing this gap. Seminars for senior policy makers in MoEYS and SWA are suggested as well as the use of radio, television, videos and other mass media for a public awareness campaign aimed at the citizenry as a whole.

Much could be accomplished at relatively little cost by scrutinizing current and proposed school reform efforts through the prism of how they will affect girls and women. Many of the programs organized by MoEYS — the campaign against corruption, higher salaries for teachers, efforts to reduce the number of students who repeat grades, curriculum reform, programs to promote access in rural areas — are likely to have a positive impact on girls.

Several steps could be carried out by MoEYS at the national, provincial and local levels to address the cost of schooling. These range from simple policy changes, such as eliminating uniforms, to more ambitious programs to subsidize the cost of school materials for poor students, provide scholarships to secondary schools, build dormitories and establish boarding schools. One possibility would be to develop a village-level mechanism to rationalize the payments that parents now make for enrollment fees, private tutoring and other fees. Other steps could be taken to address other obstacles to the schooling of girls, including day care centers, more flexible school schedules and providing schools with latrines and wells. A task force is proposed to make specific recommendations for such programs.

A program to narrow the gender gap in Cambodia need not be costly. Any program that reduces the number of female repeaters and dropouts will increase the internal efficiency of a system that everyone acknowledges is enormously wasteful. Since many of the strategies for narrowing the gender gap yield other social gains, the costs could be shared. Factor in the economic gains from a better trained workforce and the savings involved in having a healthier, better fed population and a lower fertility rate, and it is likely that the long-term gains would far exceed the costs.

Khmer women have been remarkably strong and resilient. They sustained Cambodia during the early 1980's when many persons thought that it would disappear as a separate nation. The country needs them now, but it needs them to be educated. No country can achieve the developmental goals that Cambodia has set for itself while writing off the talents of one-half of its population. As Neth Din said, Cambodia needs "both hands," and both hands must be strong.

TWO GIRLS

Meet On Sok Nay and Sar Samphaos

On Sok Nay is a 14-year old Khmer girl with a thoughtful, timid manner who lives in the farming village of Phum Thom in Kandal Province. She entered primary school four years ago with hopes of becoming a teacher, but when her 20-year old sister married and left home, leaving her as the oldest daughter, she decided on her own to leave school. "My mother had nobody to help her in the field," she explained.

The On family's economic problems began several years ago when Sok Nay's father, On Ngan, who is now 58 years old, contracted a chronic illness while serving in the national guard along Cambodia's border with Thailand. He is still too weak to work — though Sok Nay said that he sometimes "tries to climb up palm trees to get the juice" — and his 36-year old wife, Van Ry, supports the family by growing vegetables, raising pigs and other animals, fishing for prawns and hiring herself out as a day laborer during the planting and harvesting seasons.

On Ngan received five years of schooling in a Buddhist wat, but in keeping with family attitudes toward girls at the time Van Ry never learned to read and write. They sought education for their children because, as Van Ry told an interviewer, "knowledge is wealth for life." All of Sok Nay's three grown brothers as well as her married sister completed primary school, and one brother had a year of lower secondary school. While in school Sok Nay liked mathematics and literature, but her academic performance suffered because she was frequently absent for several days at a time when she was needed to help out in the home. Sok Nay's father resisted her decision to drop out because "ignorant people cannot earn a good liv-

ing,” but her mother went along. “We have no choice,” she told her daughter.

Sok Nay says she feels “very ashamed” at having abandoned her education and heads in the other direction when she sees her former classmates approaching her on the street. At night she sometimes reads textbooks, hoping that she might be able to return to school in the fall, but she has now lowered her career expectations from teaching to running a stall in the village market. “People who have knowledge can do everything,” she said. “But I think I will not be able to do as I want.”

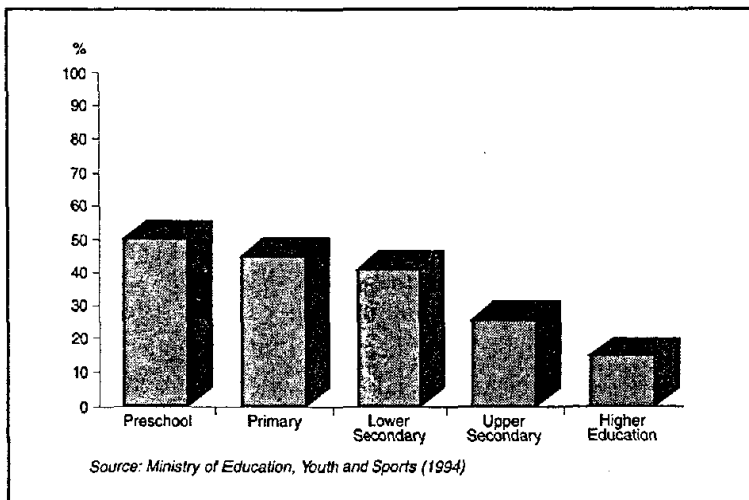
Sar Samphaos, who is 15, lives in Spean Dek, another farming village in Kandal Province with a population of about 550 families. Residents grow rice and maize as cash crops and enjoy fruit from trees planted in their front yards. Samphaos’ parents were divorced and abandoned their children, so she and her two younger sisters live with their grandparents. The family supports itself by gathering firewood and selling products from the family garden. Every day before school Samphaos carries water, cleans the house and prepares a meal for her grandparents.

Less than half of the residents of Spean Dek village can read and write, and most girls drop out of school by grade three or grade four, most boys after grade five. Samphaos, however, went all the way through primary school, and this fall she will begin traveling to the secondary school. Her 12-year old sister has now completed three years of studying, and the six-year old is just starting. Despite her duties at home Samphaos has rarely been absent from school, even during planting season. She expects to get married but also to maintain a job outside the home in order to “have a bright future.” She wants to be able to read a newspaper and to know what is going on in the world. The family has been spending 110,000 riels (US\$44) a year on Samphaos’ schooling, including 15,000 riels (US\$6) for uniforms and an equal amount for private tutoring. Samphaos has not yet figured out how she will get a bicycle to make the six-kilometer trip to secondary school in the fall.

Neth Din, the 77-year old grandfather, is a large man who, like most of his contemporaries in the late 1930's, received three years of schooling in a wat. He was greatly saddened by the divorce of the girls' parents, and, despite the advancing age of himself and his wife, who is uneducated, he has devoted himself to the education of his three granddaughters. He would like to see them all go to the university but fears that a lower secondary education may be all that he will be able to afford. "I am old, and I am afraid that I will not have money for them to study." He sees education as the best gift that he can bequeath to his granddaughters. "I have no fortune to give them, but I can support them in their studies."

The stories of these two Khmer girls tell volumes about the situation of women in education in Cambodia, starting with the fact that there are more On Sok Nays who drop out of school than there are Sar Samphaoses who persist. Girls are equally represented with boys at the preschool level; but they account for only 45 percent of the enrollment in primary schools, and the proportion declines with each successive level of schooling. In higher education females make up only 15 percent.

Figure 1.1: Enrolment of Girls by Level of Schooling



Why do so many Khmer girls drop out of school? What can be done to change the situation? These are the central questions discussed in the chapters that follow. Chapter 2 sets the context by describing the social and cultural values that underlie the situation of girls and women in education in Cambodia. Chapter 3 looks at the extent and nature of the resulting gender gap, and Chapter 4 summarizes the field research on why girls and their families make the choices they do. Chapter 5 examines the case for mounting a major campaign to narrow the gender gap. Chapter 6 offers some suggestions on how to do this.

There is another lesson to be gleaned from the stories of On Sok Nay and Sar Samphaos, and it has to do with one of the central issues facing Cambodian society today: its capacity for hope. The pages that follow contain a wealth of statistical and other factual information. But behind every piece of data are human beings struggling to make a success of their individual and collective lives. This report will make the point that most decisions by girls and their families to drop out of school involve economic reasons. Yet the finances of Samphaos' family were not all that different from those of Sok Nay's. Sok Nay feels deep anguish about her decision to drop out of school. By contrast Samphaos is full of expectations at the brave new world that will be opened to her through schooling. The difference lies in the values and expectations of the two families.

Universal education is central to the building of high expectations for Cambodia as a nation, and universal education begins with individual students. Neth Din, who has sacrificed much in order to offer learning to Samphaos and her two younger sisters, articulated this connection between their individual struggles and those of the new nation. Near the end of his interview with the field researcher he commented, "Cambodia has more women than men, and we must educate our girls as well as our boys. We have two hands, and if one hand is weak, we can do nothing. The two hands must be strong. We must use both hands."

WOMEN IN CAMBODIA:

The Social and Cultural Context

Women make up a substantial majority of the population in Cambodia. There has been no census since 1962, and statistics are notably imprecise. But current estimates are that Cambodia now has an overall population of 9.3 million persons, of whom 54 percent are females. Nearly half of Cambodians are 15 years old or younger, and, since they are equally divided among boys and girls, this means that women make up 57 percent of the above-15 population. Among older Cambodians the proportion most likely surpasses 60 percent.

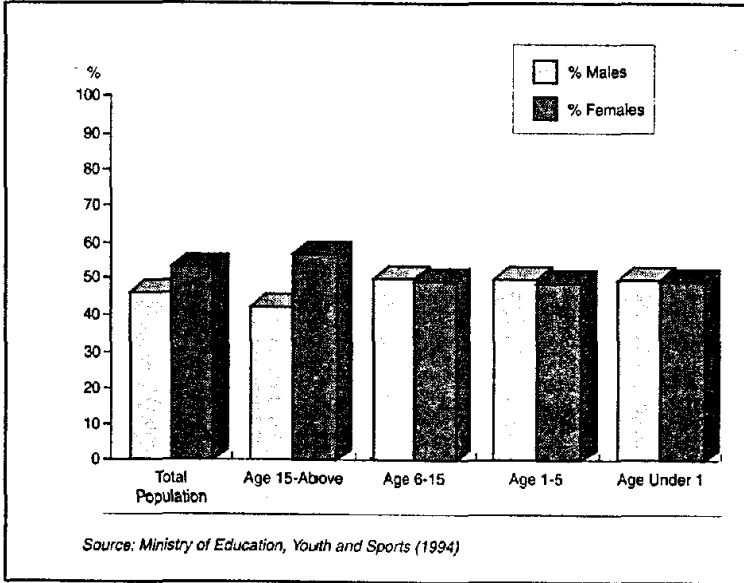
Cambodia's female majority is largely a result of the civil wars of the last quarter century and the hardships that Cambodians faced during the reign of terror from April 1975 to January 1979 when the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia and attempted to build a "peasant society." Ledgerwood (1992) noted that "more women than men survived the traumas" of this period. "Women are better able to survive conditions of severe malnutrition," she said. "Fewer women were targeted for execution because of connections to the old regime, and fewer women were killed in battles." When Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia and established the People's Republic of Kampuchea it was estimated that females constituted 65 percent of the Cambodian population.

An abnormally high proportion of Cambodian households are headed by women. Sonnois (1990) estimates the overall figure at 30 to 35 percent but adds that in some villages the proportion reaches half to three-quarters. As in other countries, women heads of household in Cambodia are for the most part poor, their members suffer disproportionately from health and nutritional problems, and older children, especially daughters, do not go to school. Female heads



of households in rural areas face are at a special disadvantage because they must contract with men for plowing and then repay at a disadvantageous rate--a full day of transplanting or harvesting for a half day's work with equipment and animals.

Figure 2.1: Population of Cambodia by Gender



Centrality of the Family

The woman's place in Cambodian society is closely tied to the family. Marrying, keeping house, having children and rearing them to be respectable adults is the function of women in Khmer society, a function seen as grounded in nature itself. A woman need not look beyond the home to find fulfillment. Indeed, a woman not completely devoted to family is viewed as an incomplete woman.

The heavy responsibilities that women bear in the family start at an early age. Girls handle chores such as hauling water and care for younger brothers and sisters. There is a well-understood division of labor. Women work at home for the welfare of the family,

Cambodia as a Hierarchical Society

Social scientists have frequently pointed out that, unlike other countries in the region, Cambodia has never been a "patriarchal" society where virtually all power lay with men. Ebihara (1977) cites the chronicles of early travelers to the famous temples at Angkor Wat that depicted women as occupying major roles. "A Chinese envoy to Angkor in the thirteenth century speaks of women holding posts as court astronomers and astrologers, judges and palace guards, and notes further that women were skilled at commercial activities, given considerable freedom and mobility from an early age, and granted prerogatives in dress that were not allowed to males." Cambodian society operates under a bilateral kinship system whereby relatives of the wife are considered full members of the new extended family. After marriage many Khmer couples express a preference for living with the family of the bride.

At the same time Khmer society is organized in a hierarchical fashion that governs all relationships, including those of men and women. Ledgerwood (1992) notes that the importance of hierarchy can be seen in the nature of the Khmer language. "Pronouns are not neutral but express the status of the speaker and the person addressed," she writes. "When Khmer first meet a new person, they will try to avoid the use of pronouns until they have ascertained the status of the new person relative to themselves. Then they can begin to have normal conversations."

Ledgerwood sees this "system of conceptions of status" as rooted in Buddhist ideas of merit and karma. "A person's level in society is a product of their activities in previous lifetimes, and their activities in this life will similarly effect subsequent incarnations," she writes. Ebihara adds that "Buddhism considers females to be inferior to males, and to be born a woman indicates that one had accumulated only a limited amount of merit in the previous incarnation." Women are not permitted to become monks, and there is no comparable order of nuns.

Thus women in Cambodia have lower status than men. They are protected and respected, but they are subordinate. It is important that women not appear to be "bigger" than men or occupy positions where they have control over men. A 1994 study by Care concluded that "men feel that they are invincible and that they have rights and freedoms greater than women in Cambodia today." The report added, "To a great extent women appear to accept this situation."

This sense of hierarchy showed up frequently in field research for the current report when Khmers were asked about the appropriate level of education for women. In rural villages, where education for the most part meant primary school, virtually everyone thought that girls should be well-educated, if only because they would be better able to help their husbands. "Men want their wives to help them in business and other activities," said the father of a girl dropout in Kratie. Elsewhere, respondents agreed that girls who went on to secondary school would be in a position to find a better husband, but many offered caveats that it was dangerous for the girl to have more education than the husband. "It is not good for a girl to have more schooling than her husband because men always feel themselves better than women," said the school director in Kos Kor Village. "When the wife offers advice, there will be a problem."

Proper Behavior

Although women as a gender have lower status than males, there are plenty of opportunities for women to enhance their status in Cambodian society, and there are prescribed means for doing so. "Women demonstrate their high status through proper behavior," said Ledgerwood (1992). "This includes proper comportment and correct actions. Women are to walk slowly and softly, be so quiet in their movements that one cannot hear the sound of their silk skirt rustling. While she is shy and must be protected, before marriage ideally never leaving the company of her relatives, she is also

industrious. Women must know how to run a household and control its finances. She must act as an advisor to her husband as well as be his servant."

This high regard for proper behavior was frequently reflected in our interviews. Respondents expressed fear that daughters might offend the traditions of Khmer culture and bring dishonor to their family through secret love relationships, by remaining single or by not having a wedding recognized by neighbors and the parents on both sides. Asked which girls should go on to further education, several respondents said that it should be those who are clever, who study hard and who exhibit proper behavior. "If we send girls with bad behavior," said the school director in Kbal Domrey, "they will offend our culture and bring trouble to their parents."

Ledgerwood (1990) says that it is virtually impossible to overemphasize the "extreme importance" that Khmers place on "the virginity of the girl at marriage, on proper wedding arrangements being made by the parents, and on marriage as a lifelong commitment." Maintaining the purity of a girl until a suitable husband is found is a major priority for parents, and lost honor is virtually impossible to regain. The Care study (1994) quotes a single young middle class woman who told interviewers, "The men look like gold. When it drops in mud, we can clean it, but the women look like white clothes; when it drops in mud we cannot clean it to be white again."

On the other hand, male adventures are taken fairly lightly. Visiting of Vietnamese and other prostitutes by Khmer men is widespread, and researchers have found that married Khmer women frequently view this as preferable to having their husbands take on a second wife. The assumption that men are by nature lustful and that this lust must be assuaged is widely accepted. Preserving the women's place and promoting proper behavior means that there is big emphasis on the physical supervision of girls, and, in ways that remind one of the story of Adam and Even, even knowledge can be dangerous. A traditional fear, no longer widespread, is that

if girls get too much education, “they will be able to write love letters.” (No one seemed to worry that an educated boy would be able to write love letters or that an educated girls would be able to read them.)

All of these characteristics of Khmer society have consequences for girls and women and education. The fact that women constitute a majority of the population and exercise important roles in the overall economy and families means that they need all the education that they can get. Other social forces — the fact that girls must not be “bigger” than men and that they must be protected and shielded — places constraints on their role in education.

It is to this role that we now turn.

THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS AND WOMEN IN CAMBODIA

“I want to go to every school in Cambodia.”

- Sokun, who rides her bicycle 3 hours a day to and from lower secondary school in Siem Reap and wants to be a teacher or a doctor.

The education system in Cambodia consists of 200 kindergartens, 4,700 primary schools, 350 lower secondary and 89 upper secondary schools. They employ 66,000 teachers and administrators and serve 2.8 million students, 1.6 million of whom are in primary school. In addition, there is the University of Phnom Penh, with six faculties, as well as four professional schools and a new university at Prey Veng. Education receives only 7.6 percent of recurrent public expenditures, which is half the average of least developed countries, and a relatively small 40 percent of this goes to primary education.

Schools in Cambodia are still recovering from the fact that they were shut down entirely during the Khmer Rouge period. Cambodian leaders did a remarkable job of re-starting the education system in the early 1980's, but the persistence of economic and other problems, exacerbated by Cambodia's isolation from the rest of the world until the Paris Peace Accords of 1991, has left a legacy of structural problems.

Many of the teachers who were recruited and given short-term training courses during the 1980's are seriously underqualified. The curriculum is abstract and disjointed, and there is a severe shortage of textbooks and other teaching materials. Khmer primary students typically receive from 450 to 500 hours of instruction a year, which is half the international standard, and the overall quality of the

program suffers accordingly. A 1994 UNICEF study of Khmer literature and mathematics in primary school found that students had only a 40 percent grasp of the content of these subjects and that this figure stayed constant even as students reached higher grades. The study found that student performance varied widely around the country. Urban students performed at roughly 1.5 times the rate of rural peers and two to three times the rate of minority group students.

Fortunately, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has begun planning to address these problems, and numerous outside donors, some with long experience in Cambodia, have expressed a willingness to help. Several problems that they have identified as priority issues warrant comment.

Access to Education

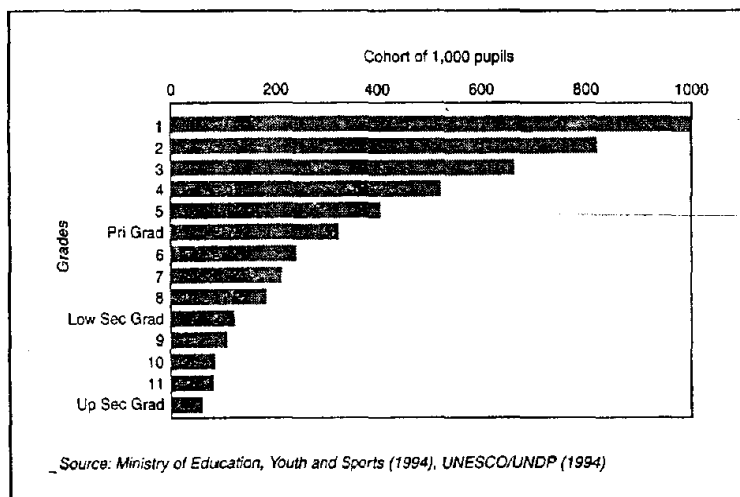
The National Seminar Education for All in July 1993 identified limited access to schooling as a "critical issue for Cambodia." Primary school enrollment totals 82.7 percent of school-age children. Since up to one-fifth of primary students are overage, however, the actual percentage of school-age children in school is much lower. UNESCO/UNDP says that it is likely that one in three primary-age students in Cambodia is not in school. Enrollment rates also vary widely, from as high as 92 percent in the cities and towns of the lowlands to 50 percent or lower in remote and mountainous areas.

Wastage

Problems of initial enrollment are compounded by two other striking characteristics of schools in Cambodia. First, the dropout rate in Cambodian is such that only 400 of every 1000 students who start out in first grade complete all five years, and only 320 actually graduate from primary school. Approximately 80 persist to the end of lower secondary school and 60 to the end of upper sec-

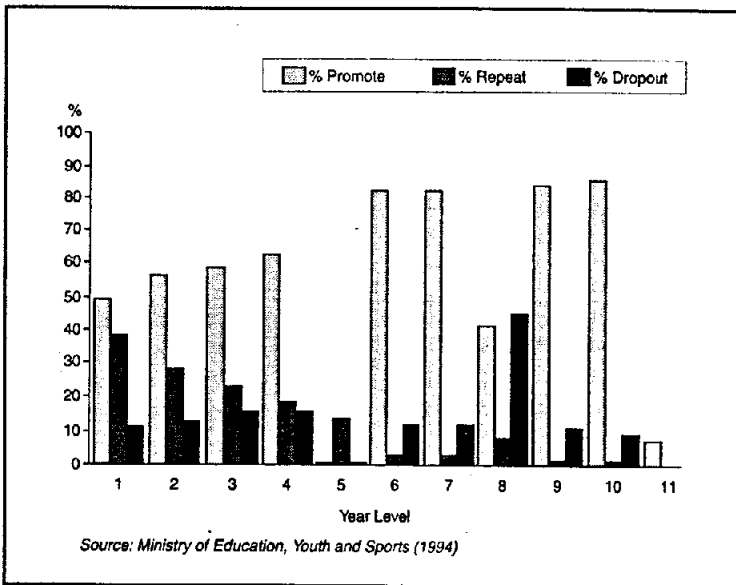
ondary school. The dropout rate increases with each year of schooling, rising from 11.5 percent following grade one to 16.7 percent after grade four. It is estimated that only 3,350 students have graduated from higher education in the last 12 years.

Figure 3.1
Cohort Progression of Khmer Students



Secondly, an abnormally high number of students in Cambodian schools stay in the same grade for more than one year, especially in grades one and two. On average, roughly one in four primary students and one in ten of secondary students at any given time are repeaters. The largest amount of repetition occurs in the first two grades, and, in contrast to the pattern with dropouts, the proportion of repeaters declines with each year of schooling, dropping from 39.1 percent in grade one to 14.4 percent in grade five.

Table 3.2
Progression Rates of Cambodian Students by Grade



The cost of having such a high number of repeaters is enormous. The Asian Development Bank estimated that serving repeaters requires 10,000 additional teachers, and 5,000 additional classrooms, or 20 percent of existing stock. Repetition means bigger classes and fewer education materials per pupil. For students and their families it means another year of foregone income and experience in the labor market. The Bank put the annual economic cost of repeaters at roughly US\$3 million to the government and US\$25 million to parents.

If one looks at the cumulative effects of the dropout and repetition rates, the amount of “wastage” in Cambodian primary schools becomes clear. UNESCO/UNDP calculated that it takes 15 pupil years of education to produce one primary school graduate. In terms of producing primary school graduates, the system is operating at one-third efficiency.

Distance to Schools

One obstacle to universal access to education in Cambodia is the distance that many students must travel to school. International experience shows that for primary students a distance of five to six square kilometers is a threshold. The typical school in Cambodia serves between two and three villages, but in Kompong Speu the average school serves nearly six. As might be expected, provinces with the most village schools have the highest enrollment.

At the secondary level there are, on average, three schools per district, but averages are misleading. Only 11 of 21 provinces have two or more secondary schools within a 15-20 kilometer radius. Five provinces have one secondary school or less per 40-50 kilometer radius. Rattanakiri has a single combined lower-upper secondary school in the provincial; Mondulkiri has one lower secondary school for the entire province and no upper secondary school at all. Thus for many students the option of daily commuting to a secondary school does not exist.

User Fees

Article 68 of Cambodia's Constitution declares that "primary and secondary education should be provided free of charge to all citizens, but in practice parents bear most of the financial burden. Parents pay obligatory fees, varying by province, to enroll their children in primary and secondary schools. They also pay for books, transport and supplies, and in many areas they pay for private tutoring, which can run as much as 2000 riels (US\$0.80) per week per child.

On the basis of a survey of households, the Asian Development Bank concluded that while the government spends an average of 20,000 riels (US\$8) a year on each primary student, parents pay an average of 160,000 riels (US\$64) — or eight times that amount. This means that for all practical purposes Cambodia is operating a private, or at best semi-public, education system. These findings

are consistent with earlier research. UNESCO/UNDP put family expenses at 120,000 to 220,000 riels per student, and they were borne out in interviews in villages for this study. One 42-year old widow in Dangkor calculated that she spends more than 200,000 riels (US\$80) a year on her daughter's schooling, including 30,000 riels for uniforms. (See box entitled "Shared Aspirations" in Chapter 5).

Corruption

Corruption has been a significant problem in Cambodian schools. Education officials have routinely solicited payments ranging from a few hundred to several thousand dollars to assure passing grades on admissions tests for the various schools of higher education, with the rates varying according to the prestige of the particular faculty. Sous-table payments have also been common to teachers and administrators overseeing the exams given at the end of grades 5, 8 and 11, and school directors have been known to exact fees for services such as providing transcripts or admitting students to their schools.

Such practices undermine the overall quality of education in Cambodia. Wealth rather than merit has become the determining factor in promotion and other decisions, and corruption reduces the motivation for teachers to teach and students to learn. It has a disproportionate effect on female students because some parents are less willing to put out money for daughters than they are for sons.

Sanitary Facilities

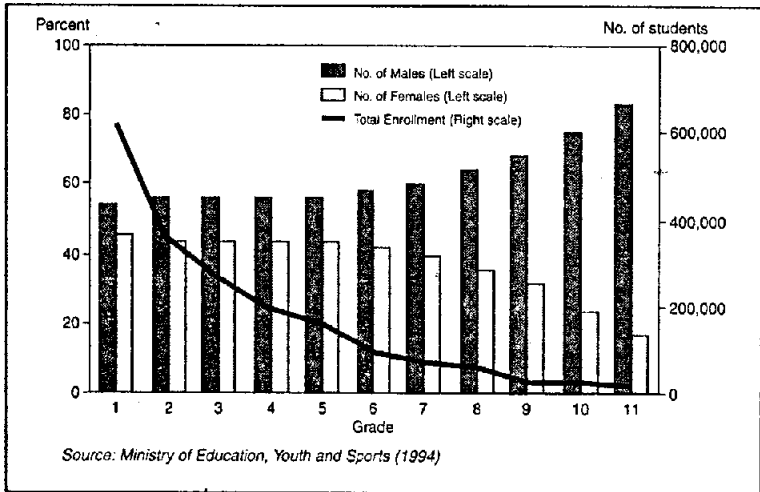
Very few schools in Cambodia have latrines and running water. This poses special problems for female students and teachers.

The Gender Gap

As already noted, the gender gap is alive and well in Cambodia. Girls are underrepresented in the school population at all levels

except kindergarten, and the rate of underrepresentation widens at each successive level of schooling. The data can be seen in the following table:

Figure 3.3
Primary and Secondary Enrollment by Gender - 1994



Strictly speaking, the term “gender gap” refers to the difference between male and female enrollment rates. There is no gender gap at the preschool level, where girls actually outnumber boys by a slight margin, but in primary school the proportion of boys exceeds that of girls by a margin of ten percentage points. This gap rises to 58 points at the upper secondary level and 70 points in higher education.

The nature and significance of the gender gap vary from level to level:

Preschool - Girls make up 51 percent of enrollment in preschool, and this is encouraging, especially since there is evidence that high enrollment of girls in preschools is associated with high enrollment of girls in grade one. Expansion of pre-schooling in some form could have the positive effect of giving parents the impetus to



enroll their young daughters in primary school. Given the fact that more than 12 percent of the population is under four years of age, the impact could be considerable. Unfortunately, the number of preschools has declined from a high of 689 in 1985-86 to 203 in 1993-94, and further expansion is not seen as a priority.

Primary school - The proportion of female enrollment in primary schools has been fairly constant, rising from 44.2 percent in 1988-89 to 44.8 percent in 1993-94. In absolute terms the number of girls rose from 588,783 to 727,060 during this period. One positive sign is that while girls enroll in primary school at lower rates than boys, the proportion of girls remains steady through the five grades. The challenge would seem to be to get girls to enroll in the first place.

Secondary - Girls are seriously underrepresented in secondary schools, and in sharp contrast to the pattern at the primary school level, the proportion declines from year to year. Underrepresentation of girls is particularly marked in grades 10 and 11, which are crucial years in terms of access to further education. Encouraging girls to persist at this point would have big effect on the number of girls entering teacher training.

Higher education - Girls account for 13.7 percent of overall enrollment in higher education and 15.1 percent of students at the University of Phnom Penh. The rate of participation varies widely, however, and girls tend to be underrepresented in the most prestigious faculties. For example, they account for less than one percent of students in law and economics.

Girls and Repetition

While it is obvious that girls drop out at a higher rate than boys, there is no accurate national data available on the question of whether girls repeat grades at a greater or lesser rate than boys. Informal impressions suggest that the pattern varies widely.

Interviewers for the current study contacted teachers and directors

from nine elementary schools in three provinces and found that four had more girl repeaters and four had more boys. In most cases the teachers and directors explained their particular situation in terms of the extent to which boys or girls were needed to work in the fields or at home. One teacher at a school with a preponderance of girl repeaters said that "girls have more work at home than boys," while the director of a school with the reverse pattern said that, since parents rely more on the help of boys, they do not have "enough time to study." Other explanations included suggestions that girls are less diligent about doing homework, that girls "forget quickly" and that boys "play games more than girls."

Regional variations - The geography of Cambodia varies considerably, from the flatlands along the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers to the mountainous areas of Rattanakiri and Mondulakiri Provinces in the northeast where Cambodian ethnic minorities are concentrated and live in relative isolation. Consequently the rate at which girls enroll in school varies substantially not only between urban and rural areas but from province to province. The proportion of girls in primary school ranges from a high of 48 percent in Preah Vihear and Kompong Thom to a low of 38 percent in Rattanakiri. Likewise enrollment rates for girls at the lower secondary level range from 48 percent at Ministry-run schools in Phnom Penh to 32 percent in Svay Rieng and Prey Veng. Rates at the upper secondary level range from 42 percent in Phnom Penh to 18 percent in Pursat.

Vocational training - Relatively few women have access to vocational training, most of which is devoted to traditionally male fields such as radio repair or electricity. Only ten percent of graduates of the Agriculture Institute are women.

Adult Literacy

The cumulative effects of the school-level gender gap on the adult population are devastating. The United Nations Development Programme estimated that the average adult woman in Cambodia

has had only 1.7 years of schooling versus 2.3 years for adult males. Little reliable data exists on adult literacy in the country, but the best guesses are that there are 1 million males and at least twice as many females, two to three million, who cannot read or write. Illiteracy is particularly widespread, and thus most destructive, among women who are single heads of households.

During the 1980's Cambodia embarked on two large-scale campaigns, each lasting three years, to promote adult literacy. Teachers, students, government workers, monks and others were recruited to offer literacy training in pagodas, schools, village offices and work places. They taught for six hour a week and received either rice or cash in return. In 1988, at the National Literacy Congress, the government claimed that illiteracy had been eliminated among adults in 14 provinces and municipalities and that the overall literacy rate for Cambodia had reached 93 percent among women aged 13 to 40 and men aged 13 to 45. Such figures, however, would appear to be based on enrollment rather than on demonstrated ability to read and write. The overall literacy rate is now estimated at 35 percent, 48 percent for males and 22 percent for females.

Academic Achievement

There is virtually no reliable data available on the relative academic performance of boys and girls in primary and secondary school in Cambodia. One such indicator would be the rate at which boys and girls pass the national examinations given at the end of grades five, eight and 11 in order to qualify for the next level of education. Perhaps significantly, MoEYS does not keep national statistics on how girls fare in relation to boys on this examination. Nor did UNICEF in its 1994 sampling of student achievement in primary schools distinguish between males and females.

Some random bits of data are available. In 1988 the Ministry reported that 84 percent of girls, but only 64 percent of males, passed the grade eight examination. But the pattern was reversed on that year's grade 11 examination, where 77 percent of boys, but only

22 percent of girls, were successful. Several explanations are possible. It may have to do with cost of bribes given to school officials to assure success on these examinations. Perhaps parents of girls are less willing to put out such money at the higher level. Likewise, it may have to do with the curriculum at the upper secondary level, which has a greater proportion of math and science. It is dangerous to read too much into such isolated number, if only because they frequently conflict with other data. Results of the 1994 grade five examination for students in the municipality of Phnom Penh showed the opposite pattern from the 1988 national data. Sixty-seven percent of males but only 37 percent of females passed this hurdle.

What does seem clear is that females are not emerging from the system with solid academic credentials at anywhere near the rate of males. This year the English & Education Project at Phnom Penh University administered examinations of English proficiency to 1,100 students with baccalaureates seeking admission to its Bachelor of Education program. The top 100 scorers were admitted. Of these, only two were females. The reasons are no doubt numerous. Relatively few girls complete 11th grade, and fewer still take the baccalaureate examination. Many of the examination-takers learned their English from private tutors rather than in school, and girls may have less access to such instruction either for financial reasons or because they cannot move about freely in the evenings. Whatever the reasons, though, the net result is that girls enjoy relatively few of the fruits of the Cambodian education system.

Teaching and Learning

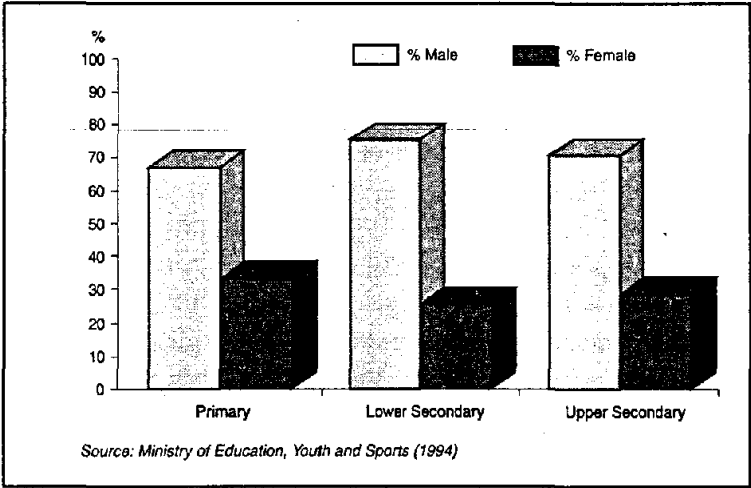
Schools in Cambodia are not geared to teaching girls. The lack of female teachers deprives girls of valuable role models. School schedules are inflexible and do not take into account the times when girls would be able to attend. The primary curriculum does not include much discussion of matters in which girls have a particularly strong interest, such as the family, health and nutrition, and

upper secondary schools place considerable emphasis on mathematics and science — subjects where girls are not expected to perform well.

The Gender Gap Among Teachers and Administrators

As already noted, teaching in Cambodia is not, as it is in many other countries, a “women’s” profession, even at the primary level. Women account for 14,463, or only 33 percent, of the 44,454 teachers and administrators in Cambodian primary schools. The pattern varies widely throughout the country. In Phnom Penh women make up a substantial majority, 60 percent, of teachers and 38 percent, of administrators. In no other province, however, do women account for more than 40 percent of teachers. The proportion of women is especially low in rural provinces. In Rattanakiri women account for only 13 percent of the primary teaching force, and only 2 of 75 administrators are female. Female teachers in such areas have some of the same problems of security and separation from families as girl students.

Figure 3.4
Proportions of Female Staff members



At the lower secondary level women account for 3,455 of the 13,621 teachers and administrators, or 25 percent. At the upper secondary level women account for 2,183 of 7,645 staff members, or 29 percent. Again, the rural and urban patterns are very different. In Phnom Penh women constitute 44 percent of the staff at the lower secondary level and 46 percent at the upper secondary level. In Rattanakiri only 4 of 23 staff members at the lower secondary level and 3 of 23 at the upper secondary level are women.

Unfortunately, it does not appear that the proportion of female staffing in Cambodian schools will be improving soon. Females constitute only about one-third of current students in the provincial teacher training colleges that supply primary schools with new teachers. The recent introduction of the requirement of 11 + 2 years of schooling for new teachers is also likely to have a negative affect on gender ratios. As already noted, girls make up only 17 percent of students in grade 11. There is a wide body of international research showing that girls tend to perform better under the guidance of female teachers, and research for this study showed that Khmer girls tend to agree. This is another piece of the case for narrowing the gender gap in Cambodia, which is the topic of the next chapter.

THE CASE FOR NARROWING THE GENDER GAP

*If you educate a man, you educate a person.
but if you educate a woman, you educate a family.*

*-Ruby Manikan
(Indian church leader)*

Cambodia is hardly alone in confronting a “gender gap.” In March 1990 delegates from more than 150 countries around the world, including Cambodia, convened in Jomtien, Thailand for the World Conference on Education for All. They learned that more than one-third of the world’s adults — and two-thirds of those in the poorest developing countries — are illiterate and cut off from the skills and new technologies that could improve their lives. Approximately 95 percent of illiterates are concentrated in developing countries, especially in South Asia and sub-Sahara Africa. The delegates also learned that the “knowledge gap” between developed and developing countries is widening and that, at current rates, the number of illiterates in the world could reach one billion by the year 2000. They made a commitment to pursue the goal of universal basic education by that year.

Delegates also took note of disparities between male and female enrollments. Two-thirds of the estimated 960 million illiterates in the world are women. As a general rule, approximately 75 percent of all school-age children — but only 60 percent of girls — attend school in developing countries. The gender discrepancy in schooling increases during the secondary school years, and by age 18 girls have received on average 4.4 years less education than boys. (UNICEF 1992)

The conference concluded that “there is now enough evidence to proclaim a global crisis in education for developing countries.” It also determined that the most effective way to address this crisis was to find ways of narrowing the gender gap.” Article 3.3 of the World Declaration on Education for All declared, “The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation.”

Research has shown that while the gender gap is virtually universal in developing countries, there are substantial rewards to be gained by narrowing the gap as much as possible. This evidence falls into two broad categories, economic and social:

Economic Benefits of Investing in Basic Education

Widespread basic education is a prerequisite for economic growth. This was as true in the past for developed countries — 80 percent of Americans were literate by the mid-19th century — as it has been for newly-developed countries such as Hong Kong, Korea and Singapore, all of which had reached near-universal primary school enrollments by 1965.

Investing in basic education pays off in several ways, starting with the fact that workers with at least a primary school education are more productive. This is especially true for subsistence farmers, for whom basic education increases the ability to use resources such as fertilizer, new types of seed and innovative irrigation procedures. Studies suggest that one-quarter to one-half of agricultural labor productivity differences between countries can be explained by differences in education levels.

Studies have shown that workers who have completed primary education earn about one-quarter more income than their uneducated peers, and those with a secondary education one-sixth more (Psacarapoulos 1985). Not surprisingly, the cumulative benefits of increased productivity and higher earnings have macro-economic

consequences. One study of 88 nations calculated that literacy gains of 20 to 30 percent boosted the gross domestic product by 8 to 16 percent. Researchers have also found out that the economic pay-offs of investing in basic education are highest in lower-income agricultural economies and those still in early stages of industrialization. The payoffs are most striking at the primary level and lower, but they are still significant, at the secondary level. The gains apply equally to the education of boys and girls.

Social Benefits of Investing in Education of Girls

In addition to the economic benefits that flow from enhanced basic education for both sexes, there are social benefits that come from investing in the basic education of girls. These fall into several broad categories:

- Educated women marry later, and they are more likely to space their children, breast feed and to have fewer children. Research indicates that an extra year of schooling reduces female fertility by 5 to 10 percent.
- The children of educated mothers survive infancy and childhood at a higher rate. Research suggests that each year of additional education for women translates into a 5 to 10 percent reduction in child mortality. Reduced infant mortality rates contribute to population control, since parents are likely to have fewer “provisional” children to care for them in old age if they are confident that the ones they already have will survive.
- Educated women know more about health and child care, and they are more likely to seek professional health services, make sure their children are vaccinated and adopt improved sanitation practices.
- Education apparently changes the mother’s preference for nutritious foods and increases her influence in decisions about the family diet.

- Children of educated mothers are more likely to succeed in school, more so than if only the father is educated. This effect is strongest on girls, who then pass this regard for the value of education on to their own children.

The reasons that the social payoffs from investment in the basic education of girls are greater than for boys are not difficult to determine. Parenting requires more time for women, who bear the children, breast feed them and assume primary responsibility for their health, nutrition, schooling and general welfare. Research has suggested that whereas men are likely to spend discretionary income on personal leisure, women are likely to put it into basic family needs such as food, clothing or school materials.

Implications for Cambodia

In light of the research described above, Cambodia would seem to be a classic example of a country that stands to reap enormous benefits from investing in basic education, especially for girls. Statistics published recently by UNICEF and others confirm that this is true.

The economy - With a gross domestic product per capita of around US\$170 per year, Cambodia is one of the world's poorest countries — roughly on a par with Nepal and Bhutan. With 80 to 85 percent of its population engaged in agriculture, the Cambodian government has made a priority of increasing and diversifying agricultural production. Improved primary education and adult literacy are prerequisites for achieving these goals. Since women make up a majority of farmers, educating girls and women is a crucial objective. The service sector accounts for 35 percent of GDP, mainly trading and services directed to a foreign clientele. Further development of this sector will require more skilled workers, including knowledge of foreign languages. Developing a literate, numerate and trainable workforce is also necessary for any future expansion of Cambodia's low industrial base.

Birth rate - Cambodia has one of Asia's highest birth rates: 39 per 1,000 persons in the population. This compares to rates of 21 in Thailand and 29 in Malaysia and Vietnam. Cambodian families were eager to have many children in the early 1980's, but economic conditions are now causing many to want to restrict family size. One sign of this is a substantial number of deaths relating to abortions.

Life expectancy - Cambodian life expectancy at birth is less than 50 years, which is substantially below the average of 63 years for the region of Southeast Asia and Oceania.

Child mortality - UNICEF statisticians regard the under-five mortality rate as the "single most important indicator of the state of a nation's children." In Cambodia 184 of every 1,000 children die by the time of their fifth birthday, which is slightly above the rate of 179 for the world's 35 "least developed" countries.

Infant mortality - The rate is 117 per thousand, which is twice that of the region and slightly higher than the rate of 114 for "least developed" countries. By comparison the rate is 27 in Thailand and 37 in Vietnam.

Immunization - Cambodia's children are among the least likely in the region to receive immunization against preventable diseases. Less than one-third of one-year olds are fully immunized against polio and measles as compared with slightly more than half in the "least developed" countries.

Family health - Cambodia has serious public health problems. Limited access to safe water (21 percent urban, 12 percent rural) and to adequate sanitation (65 percent urban, 33 percent rural) contribute to high prevalence of diarrhoea and other problems. Few villages, and hardly any schools, have adequate latrines. UNICEF proclaimed Cambodia as only one of three countries in the region without national plans to battle iodine deficiency, the leading cause of preventable mental retardation, by iodizing food-grade salt.

Nutrition - Little reliable information is available on nutrition throughout the country, but surveys in specific provinces show cause for concern. A 1990 study by the Ministry of Health in Rattanakiri Province found that more than 20 percent of school-aged children suffered from iodine deficiencies — four times the level designated by the World Health Organization as a significant health problem. Another study last year by the Ministry of Health and Helen Keller International found extensive night blindness and Vitamin A deficiency.

Literacy - The adult literacy rate is estimated at 35 percent, but the gender disparities — 48 percent for males, 22 percent for females — are among the highest in the region. Females read at less than half — 46 percent — the rate of males, a figure that compares with an average of 58 percent in the least developed countries. The comparable figures are 94 percent in Thailand, 83 percent in Vietnam and roughly 83 percent in Laos.

Other Reasons to Address the Gender Gap

In addition to these economic and social benefits, Cambodia has other reasons to seek ways to narrow the educational gender gap:

Equity - Article 31 of the country's new Constitution calls for "equality before the law" for women as well as for other groups that face discrimination, such as ethnic minorities. Article 65 declares, "The state shall protect and promote citizens' rights to quality education at all levels, and shall take all measures, step by step, to allow all citizens to receive this education." Providing girls with an education equivalent to that enjoyed by their brothers is a matter of justice and equity.

Democracy - Cambodia is the world's newest democracy, and to function it must have educated voters. The MoEYS has declared that increased access to primary schooling for all children is a national priority and that special emphasis will be placed on increas-

ing the involvement of girls. This policy makes sense, since a majority of the children out of school are female.

Human resources - Cambodia faces the challenge of building new institutions in every sector of national life, from politics and health to the military. To do so it must make maximum use of the talents of its entire citizenry. It cannot ignore the abilities of more than half the population.

Numerous developing countries have taken steps to narrow the gender gap. Nepal and Bangladesh addressed economic obstacles by cutting school fees and providing scholarships to girls. Guatemala set up day care centers near schools to take over the care of younger siblings. Pakistan provided schools in homes. India has introduced flexible school hours so that schooling would not interfere with household chores. Tanzania saw enrollment of girls jump when it trained more female teachers. China, mounted a successful public awareness campaign to encourage families to educate their daughters.

A compelling case can thus be made for investment in education for girls. The question is how to do this in a way that takes into account the distinct social context, problems and resources of Cambodia. This requires looking at the particular situation of girls and women in Cambodia.

Why Khmer Girls Drop Out of School

*“If my daughter went to school,
who would take care of the cow?”*

*- Kanjul, a mother of five in Troag Coong
village in Rattanakiri*

Field Research

In order to gain some insights into why Cambodian girls drop out of school at such high rates, nine days of field research was carried out in August 1994. The research was done by three female staff members of the Khmer Women's Voice Center who had been given two days of training in interviewing techniques.

As already mentioned in the Foreword, field research concentrated on rural villages of the type inhabited by more than four out of every five Cambodians. It also focussed on the primary and, to a lesser extent, secondary levels of education where most school leaving occurs.

Attitudes toward education in general and the schooling of girls in particular vary widely throughout Cambodia. As the political, economic and cultural center of the country, Phnom Penh is populated by citizens with a relatively high level of education and even higher expectations for their children, including their daughters. The city also has a much higher proportion of female teacher than rural areas.

The researchers conducted interviews in 15 villages in three areas. Dangkor is a suburban district of Phnom Penh, but it is primarily

rural and relatively few residents hold governmental or other professional jobs. Most families earn their living by rice farming or climbing palm trees to obtain the juice. Interviews were conducted in the villages of Prey Pring North and Taing Kasang. Kandal is a province adjacent to Phnom Penh with an economically diverse population. Many residents are prosperous traders, government workers and intellectuals. Farmers living near the river tend to do well growing rice and cultivating fruit trees and vegetables. Others living away from the river are less successful. Interviews were conducted in the villages of Prek Tun Lorp, Spean Dek, Phum Mouy, Khnong Prek, Peam Sala, Kos Kor, Bun Mok, Beng, Phum Thom and Sre Daun Toch. Finally, Kratie is a province located five hours up the Mekong River from Phnom Penh by fast boat. It is typical of most rural areas of Cambodia. Interviews were conducted in the villages of Ang Chagn, Da and Orrussey I.

A basic questionnaire was developed to determine the respondents' attitudes toward the education of girls and women and to elicit their views of how girls could be encouraged to enroll and persist in school. Specialized questionnaires were also administered to particular categories of respondents. Heads of families, for example were asked about family income and the cost of sending children to school. Dropouts were asked the reasons they stopped going to school, while persisters were asked how they came to stay. Parents of both dropouts and persisters were questioned on their attitudes toward their daughters' decisions. Teachers and school directors gave information on dropout and repetition rates in their schools and the relative performance of boys and girls in school, and village leaders were asked to comment on general conditions and problems in their village. In addition, a focus group was conducted in Kratie in which across-section of women commented on cultural and social attitudes toward the education of girls.

All in all, more than 40 persons were interviewed, including five heads of families with a daughter who had dropped out of school, five heads of families with a daughter still in school, four girl dropouts, four girl persisters, seven village leaders, two female teach-

ers, two male teachers, six school directors and three ordinary residents. Approximately one-third of the respondents were male: the village leaders, school directors and two teachers.

Attitudes Toward Education

Interviews revealed a universal belief that basic education was important to individuals and their families, to the village and to the development of Cambodia as a nation. There was also agreement that such education should be extended to girls as well as to boys. As one village leader said, "It is not fair for a girl to work hard in the fields and earn money only to benefit her brother."

Some respondents quoted traditional sayings such as "*a girl cannot turn away very far from the kitchen.*" But usually such references were brought up as a means of making the point that old prejudices are eroding. "The social idea is changing," said the head of the primary school in Spean Dek. "People want daughters and sons to have more knowledge. The idea of preventing girls from going to school because they are afraid that educated girls will write letter to boy friend are now abolished. Now they want their daughters to get to the university level if their daughters are capable and they have enough money to support them.

Respondents agreed that men no longer want wives who cannot read and write and that primary education enhances her value as a wife. "Men don't like women with low education," said one girl persister. One village leader agreed that the woman should get a primary education even if that means that she will be better educated than her husband. "Then she can help in educating the children, and she can manage the house well," he explained. Another village leader agreed that "if a husband is not clever, the educated woman can help."

Exceptions to this general reaction tended to come from older and poorer respondents and to reflect personal situations. A widow, herself illiterate, explained that she "had no choice" but to ask her

oldest daughter to drop out of school to help in the fields and added, "Education is not so important for girls. It is only necessary [for a girl] to read, write and calculate. Boys have to have more knowledge than girls for their future." Several respondents expressed a sense of fatalism. Since they were farmers, their children would be farmers. There was no reason to aspire to more education, because their lot was determined.

The interviewers quickly discovered that attitudes toward education are grounded in a strong sense of "Khmer tradition," and while changes are underway, they are gradual. Respondents spoke frequently of the importance of "honor" and "proper behavior" for girls. Education was frequently described as a way of enhancing the honor of the family and the village, and it must be carried out in a way that does not encourage "improper behavior." Because of this sense of honor and proper behavior, parents worry about sending girls far from home for school. Asked about which girls ought to be groomed for further education, a school director in Kbal Dorey answered, "Girls who like to study and have good behavior. If we send the girls with bad behavior maybe they will get in trouble with the culture and the parents."

Girls themselves are fully cognizant of the personal economic benefits that can come to them through education in the form of better jobs. They also saw education as means of empowerment in other ways. One suggested that a girl with a good education "can convince her husband to behave in a good way." In order to get a good husband a girl without a primary school education should be "either wealthy or beautiful." She is also at an advantage if she has "good behavior" and knows how to run a household. Indeed, said the mother of one girl student, "Some men pay only attention on women's good manners and behavior."

Nevertheless there was also virtually universal agreement that if choices must be made, it is more important to invest in the education of boys than of girls. The principal reason expressed was that males will be heads of families and must be equipped to get the

best possible jobs. The head of village of Da expressed the typical view. "If I have a son and a daughter and I have enough money, I should spend as much money on educating daughters as sons," he said. "But if I have only money for one child, I should send boys to school because boys have more possibility and opportunities. It is not fair to educate sons more than daughters if we have enough money." Respondents were also sensitive to practical educational realities. A policeman in Kratie noted that "boys have more possibility to travel further to study."

Major Causes of the Gender Gap in Cambodia

- Education of boys seen as more important
- Need for girls to work at home and in the fields
- Direct cost of fees, uniforms, supplies, etc.
- Distance to schools
- Corruption
- Lack of latrines and sanitary facilities
- Lack of female teachers and role models

Attitudes toward secondary education for girls were somewhat more diverse. People in cities and villages alike are aware of the benefits of education, and the prevailing attitude seemed to be that "more is better." But understanding was also shaped by their social class, their knowledge and their own circumstances. In the villages, where secondary education is rare, people do not think very much about the prospect. To them education means primary school. There was little opposition expressed to girls getting a secondary-level education. It simply was not on the radar screen.

Respondents were relaxed about situations in which a girl who might have liked to move on to secondary school was not able to do so because she failed the requisite or examination or other reasons. The possibility of living an honorable and successful life as a wife and mother was always in people's minds. An oft-quoted saying was, "If my daughter fails the chair, she'll pass the bed." This means, "If she cannot get into secondary school, then she can get married." A university education for girls was not a practical reality for most of those interviewed, but once again, the general view was that more education was better.

There was general agreement that education beyond the secondary level will affect when, or even whether, a girl will get married. Girls in Cambodia are considered "young single" until age of 18 and "old single" above 20. Once they reach the milestone of their 30th birthday, their prospects of finding a husband are considered virtually hopeless. Parents and girls alike pointed out that girls who persist in school through the higher levels will by definition be postponing marriage. Several persons commented that, in addition to the years of study, "it takes time to find a husband."

There was also a strong sense that education beyond the primary level narrows the field of potential husbands. While Khmer men want their wives to have a primary or secondary education, some are intimidated by a girl who has been to the university or beyond. One saying was frequently quoted: "Neak kra min hean, neak mean min mork" This means: "The poor don't dare, and the rich don't come." The policeman suggested that some men fear that they will be unable to dominate a well-educated wife, especially one with more education than himself. "If the wife has more knowledge, she can make decisions herself without consulting him, and the husband will be angry," he suggested. One man in Kratie said that if educated girl wants to get a husband, she must "oy day tewe boras." That is, she must "have a love relationship" on her own initiative rather than depend on her parents arranging a marriage for her.

The Cost of Educating Girls

The respondents confirmed what studies have shown about the “private” nature of education in Cambodia. Consistent with the research findings cited earlier, all families for whom financial information was obtained indicated that they spent well over 100,000 riels (US\$40) for school fees, uniforms, textbooks, school materials, transportation, snack money and other costs. This compares with the 20,000 riels (US\$8) spent by the government on the typical primary school student. There was also general agreement that it costs more to educate girls than it does boys, mainly because they need more clothes. “Girls need proper clothes, jewelry and other things more than boys,” said a woman in Prey Pring North.

Male Versus Female Teachers

Respondents varied widely in their views on whether it was better for girls to study with male teachers or female teachers. One school director suggested that girls perform better under the guidance of male teachers because they are “more severe in discipline,” and a teacher in Kratie commented, “I don’t use rude words with girls.” On the other hand, another school head confessed that he dealt less severely with girls than with boys. “If boys write something wrong, I ask them to copy it again 20 times,” he said. “For girls I ask only 10 times.” Girls themselves, however, generally said that they are more comfortable with female teachers, mainly because they empathize with them and feel less shy. “I prefer female teachers because we are the same sex, and she can better understand me,” said a dropout in Kratie. One 15-year old former student in Prey Pring North commented, “I like female teachers because I consider her like my mother, and male teachers are very severe.” Others suggested that female teachers take the responsibility to educate girls more seriously. “I learn more with woman teacher because she is very strict in discipline and teaching,” said one student.

Numerous school directors said that they preferred having male teachers because women are more likely to be absent because of

maternity leave or problems at home such as a sick child or husband. Male teachers are also less sensitive to security problems and can be recruited to help out with building repairs and other non-teaching chores.

Success in School

A few respondents expressed the view that boys are intrinsically more intelligent than girls, but there was general agreement among young people and adults alike that boys and girls prefer and perform better in different subjects. In general, boys were seen as more proficient in mathematics, girls in literature and in dictation. One school director suggested that "girls are better in memorizing and learning things by heart." Another one of his colleagues, however, took the view that "girls have short memories and forget quickly."

Why Girls Drop Out of School

Poverty - Researchers found that the three major reasons that girls drop out of school during the primary years are poverty, poverty and poverty. As already noted, most girls and their families strongly desire a primary school education. Many families, however, simply reach the point where they cannot afford to keep daughter in school. In many cases the girl is needed either to work in the fields or to take care of the household and younger siblings in order to free up the mother to engage in income-producing activities. In other cases families cite the direct costs of enrollment fees, textbooks and teaching materials. The typical pattern is that it is the oldest girl in the family who drops out. Younger daughters usually persist. As girls get older and reach the age of marriage, the temptations to abandon schooling increase. "If some boy asks for her hand, poor families have no choice but to marry their daughter," commented the village leader in Kbal Domrey.

In some cases it is the parents who make the decision. The widowed mother of a 15-year old dropout in Prey Pring North in-

formed her one day that she would have to leave school to take care of her younger siblings so that she could hire herself out as a day laborer." "My mother earns only enough for one day and with difficulty," the girl said. A 16-year old girl in Preak Back, studied for six years but then decided to drop out because "there was too much work at home." Her parents urged her to persist, but she stuck with her decision even though she fears that it will affect her prospects for marriage and success in business. "I fear that if a wife is ignorant, the husband will treat her bad," she commented.

On Becoming the Oldest Daughter

Vann Rin knows how poverty can become an obstacle to education. A 15-year old resident of the village of Phun Thom in Kandal Province, Rin enrolled in school because she "wanted to have knowledge." She attended school for five years and, after repeating twice, completed grade three.

Rin has three brothers and two sisters, and both of her parents have medical problems. She dropped out of school when an older sister died, leaving her as the oldest daughter. She herself made the decision to drop out because "I saw that my mother with a baby could not carry palm juice." She helps in the fields, takes care of the family oxen, cooks and makes sure that her siblings get off to school.

Rin feels sad that she was forced to abandon her education, especially when she thinks of her classmates still in school. "I feel lonely," she said. Perhaps, she added, she will be able to return next year. She is young and still has time.

The situation is different in more prosperous areas. The head of the primary school in the village of Spean Dek reported that while girls occasionally drop out of school because of illness, most persist through grade five and only leave school at that point if they fail the grade five school leaving examination. Girls occasionally

stay home from school to take care of younger siblings, he said, but this is not a reason for them to drop out of school entirely. Nor, he says, is money. The enrollment fee is only 1,000 riels (US\$0.40), and he waives the fee entirely for students from poor homes as well as for orphans and the children of soldiers. He said that girls work harder than boys.

At the secondary level economics continues to be a principal factor in girls leaving school. One 22-year old girl in attended Khauv Bun Sun lower secondary school in Kratie through grade 8 but failed the exam, as did all of the other students from her village. She made the decision herself not to try again because of financial reasons. "My parents have nine children," she said. "I'm the first one, so during my study I also work for a living. I don't have proper clothes to wear, no money to repair my bicycle and no money for school supplies. I was very depressed about failing the exam and felt very ashamed. I want to study further, but if I repeat the class, the study will cost money that my family cannot afford."

For the reasons discussed above, many poor families believe that a primary education is adequate for girls and that, once they have reached this level, their daughters should end their schooling, go to work and begin thinking about marriage. Some families also conclude that there is a declining rate of return on investment in education after the primary level or secondary level.

A secondary level education is required for jobs in teaching and other branches of government service, but the salaries for these positions are low. Their daughters might just as well drop out and go into the family business or become skillful vendors. The same logic applies to students continuing on to university.

Distance to school - Virtually everyone agreed that schools should be as close to students' homes as possible. Proximity is especially important for girls, since parents worry about their physical safety as well as their reputation. Most primary schools are within walk-

ing distance of children's homes, but, as described in Chapter 3, secondary school students must often travel considerable distances. Travel can be dangerous and takes time that could otherwise be used either for study or for helping with family chores.

Some girls are highly motivated to log many hours traveling. In other cases, however, the distance to school becomes a factor in dropping out. As one school director put it, "more girls drop out in lower secondary because the school is far from home, because there is no means of transportation and because it is very hard to travel in the rainy season." For some girls distance becomes the straw that breaks the camel's back. A teacher in Kratie said that some students complete five grades of primary school but do not take the primary school leaving exam because the examination-site is "too far to go."

Success in examinations - Since no overall data exists on the relative success of boys and girls in passing the examinations given at the end of grades five, eight and 11, it is difficult to assess the impact of these educational rites of passage on decisions to drop out. The village leader in Kbal Domrey suggested, "In general girls drop out more than boys when they fail the primary school leaving exam."

Corruption - It seems that parents are more likely either to pay bribes to pass examinations or to find ways of bucking the system with sons or with daughters. As one respondent put it, "Corruption in education and in finding a job discourages people in sending children to school."

Quality of instruction - Some parents expressed discouragement at what they see going on in schools. The complained, for example, that teachers often do not teach full days. Such beliefs dampen the willingness of students to make the sacrifices necessary to have their girls persist in schooling.

Feelings about dropping out

Without exception, none of the girls who dropped out of school felt good about abandoning their education. They understood not only the economic consequences of the decision but its potential impact on their marriage prospects. Many expressed a sense of shame and embarrassment.

Differences between Dropouts and Persisters

One important issue has to do with the differences between dropouts and persisters. Why do some girls abandon education while others persist? The differences go beyond economics, since the dropouts and persisters interviewed frequently shared similar economic circumstances.

The biggest factor seems to be parental support. A leit-motif that ran through interviews with girls who had persisted in school was that they came from homes where education was highly valued and where the parents were willing to do whatever was necessary to provide it to their children. (Recall the story of Sar Samphaos in Chapter 1). This was particularly true if one of the parents was a teacher. Parents who were government workers also seemed more eager than those who were businessmen to push the education of their daughters, but many farmers and fishermen were also prepared to invest in their daughters' education.

An example is Chap Saneug, who is 13. She comes from a family that makes its living through fishing and the gathering of firewood for sale. Her older sister completed upper secondary before getting married. She has both older and younger brothers, and all expect to go to secondary school. The parents expressed support and patience for their sons when they did not pass examinations the first time around. The only thing that would keep Saneug out of school, they said, would be "if she tried many times to pass exam and cannot."

Shared Aspirations

Phan Sareth is a 42-year old widow who supports herself and her 13-year daughter, Phan Chan Phala, by raising chickens, hiring herself out as a transplanter and working as a vendor at her daughter's school. The family lives in the suburbs of Phnom Penh in the village North Prey Pring, which is situated along a major route to the sea that is lined with palm trees. The houses are separated by rice fields.

The mother had six years of primary school, but she has far greater aspirations for her daughter, who recently passed her grade five leaving examination and will soon enter lower secondary school. She encourages Chan Phala in her ambition to study at the university and to become either an artist or a medical doctor. Before going to school each day Phan Phala, who has an alert manner and speaks with considerable eloquence, cleans the house. When she returns she helps with the cooking and the dishes before settling in to do her lessons. In the afternoons she is also studying English from a private teacher. "I want to be able to earn a good living for myself and my mother," she said.

Sareth, whose husband died of illness more than a decade ago, spends more than 200,000 riels (US\$80) a year on Phala's schooling, including 30,000 riels for uniforms and 10,000 for private tutoring. Such expenses strain the family budget, but Sareth is glad to make whatever sacrifice is necessary. "I think that everybody has to be educated because it's a bridge for the future and I don't want my daughter to be ignorant," she said. "My living is very hard, but I really don't want my daughter to leave school. I've very glad that she has stayed in school and proud that she has already passed the primary leaving examination. She will have a proper marriage because she has good behavior, and she can look after me in the future when I will be old. "

The attitudes of schools can also be important. At the Ang Chang school in Kratie the staff is very encouraging of girls. Indeed, more girls than boys are enrolled in every grade except grade five, where the number is even.

What Should Be Done to Encourage Girls to Stay in School?

Interviewers asked respondents open-ended questions about what might be done at the family, community, school and national level to get more girls to persist in school? They also solicited their reactions to remedies that have been tried elsewhere. Two suggestions dominated responses to the open-ended questions:

1. Subsidizing the direct costs of education - Virtually everyone agreed that the out of pocket expenses required to send a child to school constituted a major obstacle to girls continuing their education. Respondents were well aware of the fact that the government is strapped for funds. Nevertheless, almost everyone favored some system for providing notebooks, pencils and other school supplies, if only for children from the neediest families. A village leader and a second grade teacher in Kratie both said that they have already done exactly this out of their own pocket in order to encourage some girls from poor families to persist. Some thought that the government should provide free textbooks, but others did not regard this as a problem (possibly because teachers not routinely use them anyway).

Other steps can also be taken to reduce out of pocket costs. The secretary of the primary school at Da said that the school has eliminated uniforms. "Girls can come to school with any dress," he said. "I also allow them to use one copy book for two subjects in order to avoid spending too much money."

2. Reducing the distance to schools - Respondents suggested numerous ways of making schools more accessible. The ideal at the primary level is a school in each village, but even where this is impossible they favored having schools with all five grades within

walking distance. At the present time many local schools have only two or three grades.

As already mentioned, distance to secondary schools is a major concern. Several respondents suggested that if the distance cannot be reduced, then steps could be taken to provide transportation. One suggested supplying bicycles to poor girls. Although relatively few respondents volunteered the idea, virtually all were enthusiastic about the idea of boarding schools at the secondary level when it was suggested to them. As one village leader put it, "If we have boarding schools, then most families will send their daughters to study further." The appeal of boarding schools extended beyond physical proximity. Some viewed the controlled environment of a boarding school as a place that would foster "good behavior" as well as good education. One suggested that a boarding school would be a place where "students can help each other."

In addition to these two steps, respondents offered other suggestions and frequently had strong views on other proposed steps to increase the persistence rate of girls in Cambodian schools. Discussion centered on the following:

Locating day care centers near schools - Many people were unfamiliar with the concept of day care centers. Some agreed that having such centers near schools would be a good way to relieve girls of the need to take care of younger siblings and, in the process, serve female teachers. But other respondents were quick to point out that Khmer women are reluctant to entrust the care of children under the age of three to anyone outside the immediate family. As the village leader in Spean Dek put it, "I think my villagers don't need day care centers for the reason that they don't like to send their young children to day care centers." If day care centers are to be established, their purpose must be clearly explained and that they must be well run. Several respondents suggested that kindergarten is more important than day care and that any day care program should be located in the school and linked to kindergarten.

Recruiting more female teachers - As already noted, opinions are sharply divided over the relative benefits of male and female teachers. A village leader took the view that “female teachers understand girls more and have a gentle manner and good behavior.” While recruiting more female teachers was not a priority in the minds of most villagers interviewed, no one opposed the idea.

Providing latrines and running water - Most Cambodians are accustomed to schools that lack latrines and running water, and changing the situation is not a major priority. Virtually everyone favored the idea of latrines, mainly because they saw it as a way of cutting down on disease. Most respondents also liked the idea of having a source of water, not only for drinking but for purposes such as cleaning the school and having a flower or vegetable garden. Several people, however, said that it was easy for children to bring drinking water with them from home.

Public awareness campaign - Just about everyone thought that efforts to convince parents of the benefits of educating daughters would be worthwhile. Many said that responsibility for this should rest with village leaders; others put it on the shoulders of teachers, especially female teachers. Still others saw it as a government function.

Flexible school hours - The concept of adjusting the hours of instruction in school to accommodate the needs to do household work was universally popular. How to do this was a matter of some disagreement. Poor parents said that they favored double sessions under which some students would go to school in the morning and others in the afternoon. Among them was a 15-year old dropout in Prey Pring North, who commented, “I want girls to have free time in the morning to help the family and go to school in the afternoon.” As noted in Chapter 3, at least a third of primary schools in Cambodia, and virtually all in urban areas, operate with split shifts. Other respondents, however, feared that split shifts would cut down on the amount of instruction and lower the quality of education — thereby reducing parental motivation to keep their daughters in

school. Some also worried that students on double sessions would waste their free time on videos and games and other “destructive” activities.

Revision of textbooks - Gender bias in textbooks was not an issue in the minds of any of the respondents. A few wanted more textbooks on subjects of interest to girls, such as home economics or good manners. Many more wanted textbooks that were updated to get rid of “socialist ideology” and that would teach students about Cambodia’s new democratic government.

Scholarships and quotas for girls - Virtually everyone approved of the idea of the government setting up scholarships for girls and establishing quotas for enrollment in certain schools, including boarding schools. While no one seemed to be philosophically opposed to the targeting of girls, some respondents seemed to be saying that this should be done only up to the point of attracting equal numbers of girls and boys. One head teacher also warned that it would be difficult to overcome the tradition of “first come, first served.”

How could Cambodian leaders translate such suggestions into a program to increase the rate at which Khmer girls enroll and persist in education? That is the topic to which we now turn.

AGENDA FOR CHANGE

The previous chapters have documented the fact that girls are underrepresented in schools in Cambodia. They have also shown that the country has much to gain by finding ways to increase the rates at which girls enroll and persist in schooling, especially at the primary level. As described in Chapter 5, substantial literature exists on the policies and techniques that other developing countries have employed to narrow their gender gap. The experience of these countries suggests that a successful campaign should be:

A Package - Narrowing the gender gap is complex process for which there are no magic bullets. A successful program will inevitably involve a package of strategies.

Cambodia-specific - While the experience of other countries is valuable, every country has its own particular problems and resources. A successful program must grow out of the special conditions of Cambodia. Among the relevant special conditions in Cambodia are the rural nature of the nation and its economy, the heavy reliance of the school system on private funding and the fact that MoEYS has recently begun developing and implementing a master plan to address the fundamental structural problems of the system.

Following are some suggestions for a package of strategies to narrow the gender gap in Cambodia based on research literature, the results of the village interviews and discussions with educators and other Khmer leaders.

Step 1. Consciousness-Raising

A precondition for narrowing the gender gap in Cambodia is general recognition that there is a problem. Leaders and the public at large must come to understand the rewards to be realized by increasing the level of learning among a group that makes up more than half the country's population. Two steps are suggested:

Seminars for senior members of MoEYS - A series of seminars could be arranged to brief policy makers on the extent and nature of the gender gap in Cambodia, research from other countries and possible courses of action. These seminars could be organized in cooperation with the Secretariat for Women's Affairs (SWA) and with experts on women's issues from NGO's or other agencies. Outside funding should be readily available. Seminars could also be arranged at the provincial and district levels.

A broad public awareness campaign - China and other developing countries have had great success with massive publicity campaigns aimed at convincing parents to enroll their daughters in school and to keep them there. Like the seminars for policy makers, such a campaign should stress the importance not only to families but to the country in getting more girls into school. As with the seminars for leaders, MoEYS could work closely with SWA. The campaign should make use of radio, television, videos and other new technologies as well as traditional means such as posters and dramatic presentations. It should be carried out in partnership with opinion leaders of all kinds — political and religious leaders, entertainers, professional organizations, women's groups, etc. It would be useful to set some numerical targets, such as universal primary education and 40 percent of all girls in secondary school by the year 2000.

Step 2. Monitoring Current Reforms

MoEYS is already engaged in a number of reform activities that, if successful, will increase the rate at which girls enroll and persist in school.

The Ministry has identified increased access to primary and secondary education as a major priority. Within this broad policy objective it has targeted girls and members of minority ethnic groups. In its January 1994 policy document listing priorities for action (UNESCO/UNDP), it noted that "repetition is common in primary schools, especially at lower grade levels, and drop-out is high, especially among girls." Proposed actions to promote access included the building of 250 dormitories, providing school lunches and other incentives to minority-group families to send their children, especially girls, to school and expanding existing women's literacy training programs.

Many Ministry programs are likely to have substantial, and in some cases differential, positive impact on the enrollment of girls. These include the campaign against corruption and the overall effort to improve the quality of instruction. Such efforts should be applauded and supported by all groups interested in enhancing the education of women in Cambodia.

Other steps being planned by MoEYS, however, could have negative effects. For example, there is a need to downsize the Ministry staff by encouraging some teachers to retire and of shifting administrative personnel to classroom duty. Such changes, while conducive to overall efficiency, could have the effect of decreasing the proportion of women in the classroom and thus of the number of female role models. Care should be taken to make sure that women are not made redundant at a higher rate than men. Similarly, the gradual expansion of secondary education, the establishment of career paths for professional staff, rationalization of pre-service teacher training and the reorganization of district and provincial education staffs, could have a negative effect on female participation. To avoid this, planned or existing inservice teacher training programs could set targets for female participation.

The best way to assure that existing Ministry initiatives serve the overall goal of enhancing female participation in education is to set up a regular body with the capability of conducting indepen-

dent research and publishing its findings. Every program the Ministry undertakes should be evaluated in terms of the likely effects on girls. Such scrutiny is now routine among international organizations concerned about the effect of their programs on women and on the environment. One possibility would be to lodge such a body within the Ministry, possibility as part of the proposed Directorate for Strategic Planning now being set up to coordinate the work of outside donor agencies with the Ministry's own master plan. Another option would be to set up an independent body with close ties to both the Ministry and SWA and to solicit the research and administrative support of a qualified NGO such as the Cambodia Development Resource Institute. Outside funding for such a project should be readily available.

Step 3. Addressing the Cost of Schooling

It is evident from the village interviews and from analysis of Cambodian society and its educational system that any program that seeks to enhance female participation in education in Cambodia must address the economic burden of poor families.

One of the curious characteristics about education is that those who make the investment in schooling are not necessarily the ones who reap the benefits. In Cambodia, to an extent greater than in most developing countries, the overwhelming financial burden for primary and secondary education is borne not by the government but by individual families. (See Chapter 3).

From the point of view of the family, the return on such an investment in the education of boys is readily apparent. Educated boys will get better jobs and earn more money and be in a better position to support their parents in their old age. The payoff for girls, however, can be remote and uncertain. Girls face more obstacles to employment than boys, and when they marry the fruits of their learning will be enjoyed by another family. Thus from the point of view of the family, having a girl drop out of school makes good

micro-economic sense. What works to the perceived benefit of the individual family, however, turns out to be bad for Cambodia, which has a big economic and social stake in educating its girls. The challenge is thus to shift some of the economic cost of educating girls to the principal beneficiary of that education. This can be done in three ways:

Lowering the direct costs to families of education girls - Some direct costs, such as school uniforms, can be eliminated by policy changes alone. A more significant move would be either to provide school supplies free of charge or to offer such supplies at public expense to poor students. Given the fact that government funds for supplies are still sharply constrained, a useful interim step would be to develop a village-level mechanism to rationalize the payments that parents now make on an ad hoc basis for services such as private tutoring and in response to fund raising appeals. Committees consisting of parents, educators and village leaders could be formed to collect such monies and distribute them to in ways that would benefit the community as a whole. These committees would be authorized to waive fees for poor students.

Providing financial supplements - Government scholarships could be provided to girls to encourage their enrollment in secondary schools. The targeting of girls would be justified by the benefits that society reaps from their education.

Minimizing the opportunity costs - Broad economic reforms, most beyond the immediate control of MoEYS, should be encouraged as a way of increasing the likelihood that girls who remain in school will earn more money. These include efforts to end discrimination against women in the workplace and the liberalization of access to credit.

The problem of how to decrease the direct and opportunity costs of educating girls needs further study. Once again, outside funding should be available.

Step 4. Eliminate Gender Bias in Textbooks

Researchers in other developing countries have found evidence of gender bias in textbooks. This bias takes many forms, from stories that deal with topics of primary interest to boys to the consistent depiction of girls in traditional subservient roles.

No systematic study has been conducted of the content of Cambodian textbooks from the point of view of gender equity, and in some ways any such examination would have been beside the point. Cambodia is now in a process of rewriting all of its textbooks.

The rewriting process, however, offers a splendid opportunity not only to eliminate any potential gender bias in the new materials but to write and illustrate them in such a way that they will make a positive contribution to women's equity. MoEYS could do this by surveying the literature from other countries and developing criteria for bias-free teaching materials in Cambodia. Drafts of new textbooks could then be reviewed to make sure that they conform to these new standards. The SWA has expressed a willingness to assist in this process.

Step 5. New Educational Policies

Research and interviews for this report have suggested numerous other steps that could be taken by MoEYS to increase the rate at which girls enroll and persist in school in Cambodia. Some can be implemented by schools and villages on their own initiative. Others require action at the national level. Together these changes, or even some of these changes, would constitute the sort of package likely to improve the situation of girls in education in Cambodia.

Localizing the system - Evidence abounds that any efforts to build connections between schools and communities and to lessen the distance that girls must travel to school will have a positive impact on female enrollment. Possible steps include the following:

- Establish “basic education schools” in villages in sparsely populated areas. By offering up to nine years of continuous basic education on one site, these schools could attract the requisite critical mass of students.
- Experiment with multi-grade teaching. This would permit villages that now offer only two or three years of schooling to serve additional grades as well. The major obstacle would be the need to find or train teachers to handle this relatively sophisticated style of teaching.
- Emphasize clusters as a way of enhancing the quality of village schools.
- Experiment with distant learning, including correspondence schools.

Dormitories and boarding schools - Where localizing of instruction is not practical, the Ministry might consider building dormitories for girls adjacent to current secondary schools. A more ambitious approach would be to establish boarding schools at the secondary level on either a single-sex basis or with fixed quotas for girls. Such schools will not only increase secondary-level enrollment of girls but serve as a spur to primary education. When Rattanakiri Province closed down its boarding schools several years ago, a major result was a precipitous drop in primary school enrollment.

A related idea is to set up “Centers of Excellence” in each province that would admit the top one percent of students on a competitive basis. These schools, which should operate at the lower and upper secondary levels, would send out a signal that Cambodia cares about excellence in education.

Flexible schedules - Local schools can adjust their teaching hours to accommodate the schedules of girls who must work at home or

in the fields. Flexible scheduling can be achieved by redeploying current teachers and using existing facilities in innovative ways. Schedules would vary depending on conditions in various villages.

Establish day care centers - Local schools can set up day care centers, possibly attached to kindergartens, so that girls would be freed from the obligation to take care of younger siblings. Because day care is a new concept, care should be taken to assure community backing. Schools could also permit girls to bring younger siblings to class with them.

Build latrines and wells - Such facilities would address parental concerns about health and privacy. If planned and carried out with local cooperation, they need not be expensive.

Recruit more female teachers - Evidence abounds that having female teachers and role models has a positive effect on girls. Schools at all levels should make this a priority, and quotas should be established.

Adult literacy programs - Educational researchers have documented the impact of parental education on the schooling of children, and in some countries the educational attainments of parents is the single best predictor of how long children will persist in school. If these findings are relevant to Cambodia, it is clear that the large number of illiterate parents, especially mothers, in the population is a negative influence, especially on girls.

At the present time only a few thousand Cambodians are enrolled in adult literacy programs, and MoEYS might consider a substantial expansion of such efforts. Immediate priorities ought to be recent primary school dropouts, female heads of households and young women in the 16- to 25-year old range who are most likely to have young children. Experience shows that such programs are most effective when they are close to women's homes, provide day care and are linked to income-generating activities.

The Cost of Narrowing the Gender Gap

There is no need for Cambodia to reinvent the wheel. The successes and failures of other developing countries have yielded some valuable lessons about how to organize a campaign to increase the rate at which Khmer girls enroll and persist in primary school. One conspicuous missing element in the international literature, however, is information on the cost efficiency of various approaches.

Some steps, to be sure, would be costly. The construction and operation of boarding schools would require substantial investment, as would programs that seek to reduce the financial burden on families through scholarship, free textbooks and other subsidies. In general, however, a campaign to narrow the gender gap in Cambodian schools need not require a massive financial investment. As already pointed out, much can be achieved at minimal cost simply by keeping issues of women's equity in mind as planners go about doing their regular business.

Programs that succeed in increasing the rate at which girls persist in school will increase the internal efficiency of a school system that everyone acknowledges is enormously wasteful. Small village-based schools may not be cost-effective in terms of standard student-teacher ratios; but they are demonstrably more effective than large centralized educational factories, and up-front costs can be minimized through the use of multi-grade classrooms. Any program that succeeds in reducing the gender gap will also increase the rate at which students learn and reduce the number of repeaters and dropouts. Add to this the economic savings realized by a better trained workforce, reduced demand for health care and lower fertility, and it is likely that the gains from such a program far outweigh its costs. Since many of the programs known to be effective in narrowing the gender gap yield other social gains, the costs can be shared. Child care programs established to free girls from the burden of caring for younger siblings can also double as vehicles to promote children's health and nutrition and free women up to get better jobs and earn more income.

Any well-conceived campaign to increase the rate at which Cambodian girls enroll and persist in primary school would find willing allies. Achieving equity for women is a major priority of most major international organizations, and funding should be readily attainable. Moreover, numerous Cambodian women's groups were organized at the time of the election in 1993 to promote human rights, and many of them have now shifted their attention to working on women's issues within the context of integrated community development programs. In a paper prepared for the March 1994 meeting of the International Committee for Reconstruction of Cambodia in Tokyo leaders of Khmer women's organizations singled out "access to education" as their most important priority. The Cambodian women's leaders noted that at least 20 international agencies and 4 local NGO's have become involved in women's advocacy activities, many education-related.

A Final Word

Equalizing access to quality education for girls is a moral imperative if Cambodia is to join the ranks of democratic nations committed to equity for all citizens. It is also a practical necessity if it is to move down the road to economic and social development. Happily, the narrowing of the gender gap in education is one of those rare public policy issues where a positive payoff is virtually assured and where success breeds success. Educating girls leads to a whole range of educational, economic and social benefits as surely as night follows day, and the biggest beneficiaries are succeeding generations.

Khmer women have been remarkably strong and resilient. During the early 1980's they kept the country in tact at when some leaders seriously thought that the days of Cambodia as a separate nation were numbered. The nation needs them now, but it also needs them to be educated. No country can achieve the developmental goals that Cambodia has set for itself while writing off the talents of one-half of its population. As Neth Din put it, Cambodia needs both hands, and both hands must be strong.

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