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CAMBODIAN EDUCATION

TOWARDS MODERNITY

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PREFACE

THIS REPORT summarises a major research project completed at the University of Sydney (Australia) in 1997. The project, entitled 'Tradition and Modernity Enmeshed: The Educational Crisis in Cambodia, 1953-1997', presented an examination of the link between education, development and the state in Cambodia since independence. A critical inclusion in the thesis was the attention paid to questions of culture.

This summary report extracts from the original research those issues requested by Mr Bruno Lefevre. In particular, the report focuses on:

- Trends explaining current educational policies, and;
- Conclusions on the understanding of culture with the emphasis on breaking those trends and bringing in modernity.

In respect of these requirements, the report comprises three main sections. The first deals with Cambodia's current policies in education; the second is concerned with the legacy of the past in influencing the contemporary educational environment; and the third addresses Cambodia's prospects for modernity in and through education.

Unlike the study upon which it is based, the report does not attempt to present a coherent historical narrative - although historical themes are addressed. Readers with an interest in the links between events and documents referred to in this report, or in the wider social environment with which the education system has interacted, are advised to consult the extensive text of the original report.

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1 CURRENT POLICIES IN EDUCATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

(i) CAMBODIA'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY PRIORITIES were summed up by the Minister of Education, Ung Huot, at the UNESCO sponsored National Education Seminar in January 1994:

- ◊ *universalising nine years of basic general education, and developing new opportunities of functional literacy...for the people who have no access to the formal system;*
 - ◊ *modernising and improving the quality of the educational system, through effective reform, in order to respond appropriately to the present and future socio-economic requirements of the country;*
 - ◊ *linking training development with the requirements of both employers and workers*
- (Ung Huot, 1994)*

(ii) The policy context supporting the priorities, which had been steadily taking shape since 1991, had been influenced by several significant (and often interrelated) factors and events. These included: in 1991, the *Education for All* conference and the signing of peace accords by Cambodia's warring factions; in 1992, the formation of the International Committee on the Reconstruction of Cambodia (ICORC); in 1993, the Constitution promulgated shortly after elections; and in 1994, the National Education Seminar which ratified *Rebuilding Quality Education and Training*, and the Asian Development Bank's *Education Sector Study*. These events, and the reports which stemmed from them (discussed below - section 1.2), were all influential in the formulation and overall orientation of the *Basic Education Investment Plan (1995-2000)* which, through the *Public Investment Programme - PIP (1996-1998)*, was to be incorporated into Cambodia's *First Socioeconomic Development Plan, 1996-2000*.

(iii) The *Plan* re-affirmed the broad development objectives previously spelled out in the *National Programme to Rehabilitate and Development Cambodia (NPRD)*. Based on the market-oriented principles that the government performs the roles of "strategist" and "manager" of development, and that the government is a "partner" of the private sector, the NPRD had attempted to define Cambodia's short term (18 months) and medium term (3 years) rehabilitation and development strategy. The strategy embraced six "mutually-reinforcing and interdependent" fields of operation:

- ◊ *Create a legal and institutional environment conducive to fostering the emergence of a strong private sector;*
- ◊ *Achieve the stabilisation and structural adjustment of the economy through macro-economic controls; Develop the human resources base...with a view to strengthening...the private sector;*
- ◊ *Rehabilitate and build up physical infrastructure and public facilities...in order to support investment;*
- ◊ *Open the country to international trade and private foreign investment in order to integrate into the regional and world economies;*
- ◊ *Achieve rural development and the sustainable management of natural resources and the environment.*

(Royal Government, 1995, pp. 2-5)

(iv) It is the underlying themes of these "fields of operation" - market-based economic reform, a powerful private sector, overcoming institutional restraints, capacity building, and economic diversification and regionalisation - that underscore both Cambodia's commitment to development and the education policy framework supporting that commitment.

1.2 FRAMEWORK

(i) Cambodia's educational policy framework, at least in relation to basic education, focuses on three broad programmes: (1) quality improvement; (2) equitable access; (3) strengthening planning and management (see Table 1.1A below):

Table 1.1A: Basic Education Investment Plan, 1995-2000

Prog.	Details
	Quality Improvement
A	Instructional Materials Development
B	Teacher Development
	Equitable Access
A	Model School Effectiveness
B	Building Rehabilitation and Expansion
C	Literacy and Complementary Schooling
	Planning and Management
A	Operational Planning Capacity
B	Management Development
C	Investment Management and Coordination
D	Policy Studies and Training

(Source: MOEYS, 1994)

- (ii) The policy framework, reflecting the régime's commitment to development, had the potential to make a positive contribution to addressing the educational crisis that had beset the system for over three decades. In one respect, the framework engaged the qualitative concerns that all previous Cambodian régimes had failed to address. Moreover, the framework addressed the question of the relevance of the system to its beneficiaries, the nation's students and the nation's social and economic well-being.
- (iii) In order to fully understand the nature of the policy framework, the ideology underlying it, and its relationship to Cambodia's overall development priorities, we need to take account of those factors and events mentioned above [1.1(ii)].

1.3 BACKGROUND: INFLUENCES ON POLICY

1.3.1 EDUCATION FOR ALL (1991)

- (i) The Final Report of *Cambodia's National Conference on Education for All* (1991), a response to UNESCO's international *Education for All* conference at Jomtien, in March 1990, was the last significant education statement by the State of Cambodia (SOC). It also represented the debut of Cambodian education before an international audience, ending almost thirteen years of international isolation. The conference was held less than a month after the SOC and its three resistance rivals had agreed, in principle, to a comprehensive United Nations sponsored political settlement of the Cambodian crisis, and less than two months before both the October 1991 official signing of the Paris Peace Agreements.
- (ii) The Final Report of the conference demonstrates the extent to which the socialist ideals which had underpinned (at least officially) the Cambodian state since 1979 had been abandoned. In their speeches before the Conference, both Yus Son and Hun Sen, the Minister of Education and the Prime Minister respectively, addressed the policies adopted by the PRK government in order to rebuild the education system after the Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge) period. The most discernible feature of both speeches is what the two leaders failed to address. Marxism and Leninism, arguably the cornerstone of the rebuilding effort, were not mentioned. Gone too, were references to creating a "new socialist man" and to "constructing and defending" the fatherland. Instead, Hun Sen addressed the "need to lighten the government's burden, together with the assistance of international organisations, and to permit the opening of private schools." There was a recognition of the "need to make urgent reform of the curriculum of general education at all levels," to "improve teacher competencies" and to strengthen educational quality and the management capacity of the Ministry. The Conference signalled Cambodia's official commitment - no doubt encouraged by the presence of major multilateral donors - to the issues of quality, access and equity that are at the core of present educational policies.

1.3.2 PARIS PEACE ACCORDS (OCTOBER 1991)

- (i) While the *Education for All* conference signalled Cambodia's debut before an international audience, it was the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements which affirmed the commitment of the international community to Cambodia's future development. In respect of education, the noteworthy element of the Paris Peace Agreements was the 'Declaration on the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia' (United Nations, 1994, p. 148). The declaration called for the "advancement of the Cambodian people," and for "economic aid to benefit all areas of Cambodia." In essence, as a final component of the Agreements, the declaration facilitated Cambodia's return to the fold of development assistance from the Western world, particularly from multilateral and international financial institutions, and from bilateral assistance arrangements. Stemming from the declaration was the 1992 Ministerial Conference on the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia (MCRRC) at Tokyo. The most important outcome of the conference was the establishment of the International Committee on the Reconstruction of Cambodia (ICORC).

1.3.3 ICORC

- (i) ICORC was established as a forum for the exchange of views between donors and the Cambodian government (United Nations, 1995, pp. 197-8). The Committee was to "enable the Government of Cambodia to put its views before the contributors" and to "enable the contributors to consult with and advise the Cambodian authorities on development requirements."
- (ii) The MCRRC Tokyo conference also provided an indication of the nature of the "advice", or the agenda for rehabilitation and reconstruction, that was to emanate from ICORC. The concluding declaration of the conference made explicit the issues "for the development of Cambodia's economy in the future":

- ◇ *International financial institutions [World Bank, IMF and ADB] stressed the importance of market-based reforms in Cambodia to increasing output in major sectors of the economy...*
- ◇ *There remain fundamental institutional and policy-related constraints to further economic progress...*
- ◇ *We stress our resolve...to extend appropriate assistance...to Cambodia...that ensure[s] and strengthen[s] Cambodia's own capacity to sustain its development...*
- ◇ *We are hopeful that...Cambodia can expand and diversify its external trade and investment relationships, so that it will be integrated into the dynamic economic development of the Asia-Pacific region and of the world.*

(United Nations, 1995, p. 197)

1.3.4 CONSTITUTION OF KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA (1993)

- (i) Articles 65, 66, 67, and 68 of the Cambodian constitution stipulate that "the state shall protect ... citizen's rights to quality education," that the state "shall guarantee the principles of educational freedom and equality," that "the state shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools," and that "citizens shall receive education for at least nine years" (Jennar, 1995).
- (ii) The central theme of the educational provisions in the constitution was the relationship between educational quality and the quantitative provision of education. While the government maintained a commitment to educational quality (article 65), it expressed a determination to expand educational provision both horizontally (increasing enrolments at all levels of education - access) and vertically (facilitating nine years of education for all students - equity).

1.3.5 NATIONAL EDUCATION SEMINAR

- (i) The principal purpose of the National Education Seminar, which took account of *Education for All* and the constitution, was to ratify the *Rebuilding Quality Education and Training* programme prepared by the Ministry of Education in partnership with a team of international experts (led by UNESCO). The Seminar aimed to review and adopt 19 programmes, from which stemmed 73 priority actions, which were to form the basis of a draft plan for the development of education that could be presented at the March 1994 ICORC meeting. Like both the recommendations of the *Education for All* report and the

educational provisions in the constitution, the programmes and priority actions reviewed and adopted by the Seminar concerned themselves with questions of access, quality and relevance.

1.3.6 EDUCATION SECTOR REVIEW

- (i) The Asian Development Bank's *Education Sector Review* aimed to assist the government in devising "effective and realistic education and training policies, strategies and financing mechanisms for the period 1994-2000 and beyond" (ADB, 1994a, p. 1). The four volumes of the *Review* represented arguably the only detailed and comprehensive, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, review of the education sector in Cambodia conducted since independence.
- (ii) A prominent element of the *Review* related to the nature of its core recommendations. The evidence clearly demonstrates the link between these recommendations and the development models promoted (often imposed) on the developing world by major development agencies. The *Review* identified five central themes in education that were then articulated as broad policy objectives (ADB, 1994b, p. 227):
 1. Quality revitalisation;
 2. Selective expansion of access to education;
 3. Enhancing cost efficiency in education;
 4. Additional mobilisation of resources;
 5. Institutional strengthening.
- (iii) The outcome of the *Review* was the medium term development strategy, *Indicative Policy and Strategic Directions 1994-2000* (ADB, 1994c), which in many respects reflected the policy advice provided to Cambodia by international agencies over the previous forty years. These measures included increasing the hours of instruction to accord with international norms, reducing the number of under-qualified teachers, Khmerising instruction (in higher education), emphasising the qualitative improvement of the system, and simplifying the curriculum to foster greater relevance. Other measures reflected the market-oriented ideological tone of contemporary development perspectives. The *Review* recommended, for example, a performance based scale of salary incrementation, down-sizing of the education service through redeployment, departure and retraining schemes, the commercialisation of selective education support services, merit driven matriculation examinations, privatisation of schooling in selected urban areas, the introduction of student charges in higher education, business sponsorship of higher education faculties, and the introduction of short-term contracts for future staff employed by the Ministry.

1.3.7 COMMENT

- (i) There are three themes which dominate Cambodia's current educational policy context and its background. The first is the very substantial role of the international community, and international organisations, in shaping the orientation of the contemporary educational framework. Not only did the international community orchestrate the commitment to development (along market-oriented lines) which underpins the ideological orientation of the contemporary Cambodian state, but through the influence of international organisations, it is also largely responsible for the development of the educational policies (again along market-oriented lines) which support that commitment.
- (ii) A second theme of the policy context - the overall structure of which culminated in the *Basic Education Investment Plan* - is its consistency and its focus on Cambodia's long-standing and firmly entrenched educational problems. At all points of the development of the current policy framework - *Education for All*, the constitution, the National Education Seminar, and the *Education Sector Review* - there has been a concern with questions of educational quality, with expanding equity and access, and with addressing questions of relevance.
- (iii) The final theme dominating the current policy context is the very substantial gap between "official" educational policies and those policies which are realised in practice. It is a gulf that, since 1994, has continually undermined educational development, and which is central to the concerns addressed by this report. In short, **those charged with the development of Cambodian education have been unable to cope with the principles of modern government and institutional management upon which the "official" educational policy framework is predicated.** Instead, in a scenario which echoes the problems of the past (see section 2), a traditional system of governance and administration, based on culturally entrenched notions of hierarchy and power, pervades contemporary education. The outcome

of this conflict between tradition and modernity, in respect of contemporary educational practice, is illustrated below.

1.4 EMERGING TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY POLICY

- (i) The manner in which the educational policy framework has unfolded in Cambodia since 1994 has not occurred in a social vacuum. Political development since the 1993 elections has been increasingly characterised by a breakdown in the "rule of law", considered pivotal to the rehabilitation and reconstruction process. The limitations imposed on development by increasing 'lawlessness' have been exacerbated by the constraints of an ideologically opposed coalition government, by allegations of human rights abuses, by a return to the political factionalism which has so often characterised Cambodian politics and, in July 1997, a return to the exercise of power through the barrel of a gun.
- (ii) Central to human resources development, and therefore at the core of the country's development aspirations, the education system was afforded considerable attention by the government in its quest to 'rehabilitate and reconstruct' Cambodia. The contemporary political climate, which has absorbed very few, if any, of the ideas of modern governance implanted by the expensive United Nations (UNTAC) operation, has seen the modern planning process associated with the international community's active involvement in Cambodia's educational development continually undermined by conditions tied to Cambodian culture: a nostalgia for the past, traditional patterns of authority, and traditional conceptions of leadership.
- (iii) These patterns are clearly evident in relation to questions of educational finance, educational planning, and the relationship between educational quality and quantity.

1.4.1 INADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL FINANCE

- (i) In May 1994, the Cambodia's Minister of Finance signed a preliminary International Monetary Fund (IMF) Structural Adjustment Agreement which tied the government to increasing the national budget for education. The two Prime Ministers, Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen, signalled the government's adherence to this direction by promoting the intention "to increase the budgetary share for education from around 9 percent in 1994 to at least 15 percent by the year 2000."
- (ii) At ICORC in 1995, the World Bank had warned that "budgetary shortfalls constrain improvements to the education system, and the low quality and lack of relevance of education lead to ... inadequate achievement" (World Bank, 1995, p. 74). The government remained defiant, reiterating in the 1996 *Socio-Economic Development Plan* its commitment "to allocate a minimum of 15 percent of the total budget to education" (Royal Government, 1995). The reality, unfortunately, is that the government has failed to honour its intention (and therefore its IMF agreement).
- (iii) In addressing the National Higher Education Taskforce in December 1996, Keat Chhon, the Minister in charge of Rehabilitation and Development, finally admitted the government's policy failure: "The national budget for the education sector as a whole over the past four years has remained at less than 10% of [budget expenditure]. 1994: 9.63%; 1995: 8.93%; 1996: 8.97% [expected]; and 1997: 9.69% [expected]. Given these figures, the goal of reaching from 12% to 15% of the budget in the year 2000 *will not be achieved* (Keat, 1996, p. 3; emphasis added).
- (iv) While the budget disbursements were no doubt influenced by the government's failure to raise enough revenue, it is disturbing to note that in the 1997 budget, the Ministry of the Interior (a CPP stronghold) received a 32 percent budget increase, while the budget for Ministry of Defence, reduced in 1997, was again increased in 1998.
- (v) The outcome of the poor budgetary allocation to education is that the culture of corruption which pervades the education sector will continue to flourish. **While they continue to be denied an adequate salary, and while their profession is continually undervalued, Cambodia's teachers and educational officials have no choice but to supplement their meagre incomes with the funds they are able to raise through petty corruption** (informal fees, selling exam papers, etc). The overall effect of the corruption is to further diminish the already alarming state of educational quality and, through the informal fees charged, to deny access to education to the nation's most disadvantaged students.

1.4.2 EXPEDIENCE IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

- (i) In December 1994, Cambodia's co-Prime Ministers asserted "the Government's determination to address the human resources development needs of the country in a systematic yet dynamic fashion" (MOEYS, 1994, p. i). This section addresses the government's commitment to a 'systematic' planning approach through a case study of the rationalisation of the public service. The rationalisation was considered by major multilateral donors to be a critical plank in the government's attempts to liberalise the economy, and was therefore crucial to the nation's post-elections development plans.
- (ii) The Cambodian government's 1994 agreement with the IMF included a commitment to reduce the size of Cambodia's civil service by 20 percent by 1997. In terms of education, the agreement recognised that graduates of Cambodian universities would no longer be guaranteed automatic recruitment into the civil service, an arrangement that was ratified with the passing of the Common Statute by the National Assembly in 1994.
- (iii) By the end of that year (1994), the government had decided it could not afford to reduce the educational corps. Instead, it was announced that efficiency would be increased by transferring to school-based positions many of the education ministry's office administrators who were also qualified teachers. The policy change, embraced by the Ministry of Education and by the Council of Ministers, implied that few teachers would need to be recruited in the immediate future as the need for qualified staff could be achieved through internal rationalisation.
- (iv) By the time the University of Phnom Penh's 1995 class attended their graduation ceremony, the government (specifically, the two Prime Ministers) had reversed the direction of policy. On one count, instead of requiring students to find their own employment in the open-market, both Prime Ministers - in order to generate immediate political goodwill - guaranteed the students employment with the government. Moreover, Hun Sen advised the Ministry of Education that the graduates would spend a year at the Faculty of Pedagogy where they would be trained as upper secondary school teachers. The decision was made in spite of an over-supply of upper secondary school teachers, and without the knowledge of the Faculty of Pedagogy, which was without the resources, curriculum or facilities to deal with such a large intake of students. The move also clearly contravened the rationalisation agreement with the IMF.
- (v) The example of the rationalisation agreement, mirrored elsewhere (the collapse of the PIP, for example), demonstrates quite explicitly how **the government's stated educational policies exist at the whim of the political inclinations of those in positions of authority, whose ultimate priority is not sustainable educational development, but the reinforcement of their legitimacy and power.** The effect of these traditional hierarchical notions of power and leadership on effective policy formulation and implementation serve to undermine all serious attempts at systematic educational development.

1.4.3 EDUCATIONAL QUANTITY OVER QUALITY

- (i) Article 68 of the constitution states both that "the state shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools" and that "citizens shall receive education for at least nine years" (Jennar, 1995, p. 19). In order to achieve the guarantees provided for in the constitution, the government's educational policies embraced as a medium term objective the expansion by one year of primary education, providing a school system of 12 years based on a 6+3+3 model (primary, lower and upper secondary).
- (ii) Taking into the consideration the parlous state of educational quality in Cambodia, the ADB's *Education Sector Review* addressed the question of quantitative educational expansion. In respect of the government's objective of achieving 9 years of basic education, it noted: "The mission proposes a *gradual* approach to introducing six years of primary schooling, starting a grade six class around the year 2000. Any acceleration of the process ... would leave insufficient time to finalise new curriculum frameworks, textbooks and staff development programmes.... *The key objective of ensuring that quantitative gains do not sacrifice quality improvements would be in jeopardy*" (ADB, 1994b, p. 103; emphasis added).

- (iii) Despite the advice, the government decided to introduce 6 years of primary education in 1996. In seeking to understand why the sound technical advice of the ADB *Review* was rejected, it should be noted that the qualitative educational problems that preceded the decision had not been addressed. Likewise, secondary education had not been rationalised or reorganised in order to cope with the reforms in primary education. In essence, the decision had been made to pursue a politically attractive programme of educational provision in favour of addressing long-standing qualitative educational concerns, of which the government was quite aware.
- (iv) Similar decisions, which consciously elevated quantitative concerns over those related to educational quality, had been made by both Prime Ministers in their respective attempts to enhance their personal legitimacy, and that of the parties which they controlled. In 1995, for example, the government had announced, allegedly in the interest of promoting equity, the ambition to set up more institutes of higher education throughout the country. The announcement was coupled with the many references to school inauguration ceremonies presided over by Hun Sen which have become a frequent occurrence in the Cambodian media. The motive behind the inaugurations, like that in relation to expanding higher education, has clearly been an effort to secure legitimacy through the distribution of largesse.
- (v) The effect of the unregulated educational expansion has been to narrow the options of the Ministry of Education in its efforts to reorientate and improve educational quality. On one count, the financial capacity of the Ministry to affect the necessary changes, especially when considered in the light of the government's poor record of budgetary commitment to the education sector, is significantly diminished. On a second count, the orientation towards quantitative expansion, to the detriment of qualitative improvement, has reduced the planning options of the Ministry of Education in relation to the realisation of qualitative improvements. The current state of the quality of the education system provides testament to the severity of this problem, and testifies to the magnitude of the task facing the government, at the level of both the Ministry of Education and that of the national leaders, if improvements in educational quality are to become a serious policy concern.

2 THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

- (i) In reflecting on Cambodia's contemporary educational problems - inadequate finance and planning, and poor quality - there is a tendency to look no further than the destructive legacy of the Khmer Rouge years. The very convincing argument is that because so many people were killed between 1975 and 1979, or fled Cambodia in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, the country has been forced to contend with a deficient human resource base. The legacy of this deficiency, the argument goes, is an incapacity on the part of the Cambodian government to meet the many technical demands of modern governance and administration.
- (ii) The implication of the 'Khmer Rouge destruction' argument is that pre-revolutionary Cambodia was not encumbered by these same human resource deficiencies, and that development prospects were therefore so much better. While the legacy of the Khmer Rouge and its aftermath can not (and should not) be undermined, the historical record unequivocally establishes that Cambodia's educational problems are far more deep-seeded than arguments in favour of technical incapacity imply.

2.1 COLONIALISM

- (i) The colonial legacy in Cambodian education was not the erection of an educational infrastructure. The statistics of the colonial educational development illustrate French reluctance to implement a serious programme of educational development. Rather, the colonial legacy was the importation of the Western idea of a formal school system, its haphazard implementation, and the undermining of its traditional, religious counterpart. The primary effect of colonialism on Cambodian understanding of education was that it introduced the idea that education could lead to upward social mobility. It was this realisation that led to unprecedented demand for access to education in the years which immediately followed independence.

2.2 THE SIHANOUK YEARS (1953-1970)

- (i) Often portrayed as the 'golden era' of development in Cambodia, the Sihanouk era was characterised by a chronic educational crisis. It was a crisis characterised by three central themes. The first was that educational policies, focused on quantitative educational expansion, were often economically unaffordable and were concentrated on the very small 'modern sector' of the economy (to the detriment of rural needs). The second was that policies as implemented often differed markedly from those actually formulated. While the government continually reiterated an official policy which called for tempering rates of educational expansion, the statistics demonstrate exponential expansion of infrastructure and enrolments for a period spanning more than fifteen years. The third theme of the crisis was the forces that were at work in developing and implementing policies. At all times during the period, Prince (now King) Norodom Sihanouk played dominant a role in promoting an educational agenda, at odds with official policies, which focussed almost exclusively on the quantitative aspects of education. Sihanouk's agenda, because of his status in the hierarchy of power, always took precedent over the aspirations of those below him. The result, by 1970, was an education system which, despite often laudable policies, was beset by a massive qualitative crisis.

2.3 THE KHMER REPUBLIC (1970-1975)

- (i) Education in Lon Nol's Khmer Republic, and in those areas of Cambodia controlled by the Khmer Rouge, was overwhelmingly overshadowed by the debilitating effects of the civil war which raged through the period. The fundamental educational failure on the side of the Republic was a complete reluctance to address the historical legacies of the system alluded to above. On the Khmer Rouge side, Westernised education had been rejected, and was therefore deliberately subverted by the alternative régime. In both cases, questions of political ideology and legitimacy were given precedent over educational needs.

2.4 DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA (1953-1970)

- (i) The DK régime was provided with a great opportunity to address Cambodia's educational crisis. In many respects, the notions of self reliance and self mastery, which underpinned the rhetoric of the régime's leaders, were compatible with the changes necessary in order to address the symptom's of the crisis which had characterised the 1960s and 1970s. Self reliance represented a justification for eliminating the education system's blinded replication of the French school education system, and could therefore have served to move the Cambodian education system further in the direction of meeting Cambodia's social and economic needs and, in turn, addressing the problems of educational quality in terms of those needs. That the régime failed is a function of the extremity and brutality of its leaders, whose pursuit of a social and political ideal debased, devalued and eventually disregarded those people it was to supposedly benefit.

2.5 PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KAMPUCHEA/STATE OF CAMBODIA

- (i) Staffed by survivors of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol régime's, the PRK's failure to address and eliminate a crisis in education was, in the first instance, the legacy of the unparalleled educational chaos inherited from the Khmer Rouge. A second factor contributing to the crisis was Cambodia's international isolation, which resulted in the country being denied desperately needed development assistance. A final factor was the régime's attempt to reconstruct the shattered nation-state, which resulted in both unchecked quantitative expansion and irrelevance in terms of educational curricula.

2.6 ENDURING THEMES

- (i) If we fuse the régimes of Cambodia's past with the régime of the present - examining continuities rather than changes - we can see several enduring educational themes. We can also see, through the

permanence of these themes, that Cambodia's contemporary failure to modernise education is not merely the result of the legacy of the Khmer Rouge, but a function of more entrenched factors.

2.6.1 PLANNING ISSUES

- (i) Central to the educational failures are issues of planning. Cambodia's educational policies, history demonstrates, are negotiated and contested at several levels, each serving to subvert policy formulation, introducing 'ad-hocery' into the rational planning framework often associated with modern development perspectives.

Politicisation of Policy Formulation and Implementation

- (ii) The primary form of policy subversion is through overt political interference in the policy formulation and implementation processes. While it is recognised that political interference in administration is a reality of governance throughout the world, its frequency and intensity in Cambodia merits it worthy of considerable attention.
- (iii) The effects of political interference are magnified in Cambodia because of the dominance of the country's hierarchical political culture. The notions of patronage and clientship which sustained the precolonial Cambodian polity have been transferred onto a national stage by all of those in positions of hierarchy in Cambodia since independence. While they generally recognise and are aware of the wider economic and social benefits of an educated population, those with power have preferred to use education as a commodity which can be distributed among the population. The result is a focus on quantitative educational issues and, because of the hierarchy, an unwillingness on the part of those 'below' those with power to question their often irrational and illogical decisions and policy backflips.

Form over Substance

- (iv) The pursuit of form over substance was a principal feature of the education system pursued in Cambodia during the *Sangkum* period of Sihanouk. For the then Prince, educational expansion had represented a key to legitimising his Buddhist socialist state, and reinforcing his indispensability as the nation's leader. In the political climate of contemporary Cambodia a similar theme has emerged. Schools and classrooms are often built haphazardly throughout the country as objects of political largesse where their distribution is determined by political, rather than technical criteria. The use of these schools and classrooms as centres of learning is regarded, by those who initiate their construction, as only a secondary consideration.

Ignorance of Technical Advice

- (v) Underpinning both the political interference and pursuit of form over substance which are at the core of problems in educational planning is an incapacity to properly observe technical advice. Since independence, Cambodia's leaders, and the Ministry of Education, have been provided with a plethora of advice on how best to align education with the country's aspirations for modernisation. This advice, although almost always embraced in educational policies, has been acted upon only where it has not interfered with the traditional notions of leadership and political culture which have characterised the Cambodian state.

2.6.2 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ISSUES

- (i) The legacies of the subverted planning process are many of the problems which have, historically, been features of Cambodian education. The simple fact is that despite educational policies which have often sought to address educational problems either directly or indirectly, education in Cambodia continues (in practice) to be characterised by irrelevant curricula, inadequately trained and poorly motivated teachers, and massive deficiencies in infrastructure, facilities and resources.

2.7 THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

- (i) Cambodia's education system has been caught between the imperatives associated with the development aspirations of different régimes, and the traditional political culture which has sustained them. On one hand, Cambodia's leaders, with the notable exception of Pol Pot, have

considered the education system an essential institution through which to realise their perspective on Cambodia's development. On the other hand, these leaders, including Pol Pot, have embraced educational provision as a key to promoting and ensuring their personal legitimacy, and that of the régimes over which they have presided. Put simply, the provision of formal education in Cambodia has been embraced to build a nation-state which looks modern, yet is concerned almost exclusively with sustaining the key tenets of the traditional polity, where leadership is associated with power, and where the nature of the state is perceived to be a function of that power.

- (ii) These contradictory expectations for education have served to generate its major problems. **While all of Cambodia's political régimes have acknowledged the importance of the country's agricultural development, none has re-oriented education in order to address this sector and its needs.** Instead, successive Cambodian governments have relied upon the expansion of a Westernised educational model in order to bring about social change. The expansion of this model has not been pursued in accordance with expert advice or ministerial imperatives, each of which have encouraged educational reorientation in favour of rural needs and the tempering of 'modernist' educational expansion. The rapid expansion of a Westernised educational model in Cambodia has been a function of the weight of the past: a desire by those in positions of power to secure legitimacy among the populace, and an unwillingness by those charged with educational policy formulation to contradict the imperatives of those with higher status in the traditional hierarchy.

3 PROSPECTS FOR MODERNITY

- (i) It is a central contention that the **modernisation of Cambodian education is dependent on the realisation of a major cultural shift in the practice of educational management** - from the current system, based on an almost feudal exercise of power, to a system which not only endorses, but also embraces modern methods of institutional management. It would be a system which formulates, implements and evaluates policies in accordance with rational and universally recognised and applied parameters of action, and which gives due regard to modern management apparatuses such as budgets, contracts (international agreements), and planning.
- (ii) Such a shift will not emerge as the result of short (or even medium) term development assistance programmes. **Institutional change, or modernisation - as the expensive failures of UNTAC's intervention in Cambodia's political culture continue to poignantly demonstrate - should be a long-term development priority.** Inserting clauses about respect for modern institutional governance in national constitutions, development plans, or development assistance agreements will do nothing to change a system which has evolved over more than a millennium. It is Cambodia's next generation of educational leaders who should be the targets of long-term Human Resource Development programmes aimed at gradually affecting this cultural shift.
- (iii) Having cast an eye to the future, and to long-term responses to the firmly entrenched problems of Cambodia's culture of educational management, there is much that can be done in the short-term in order to promote modernity through education.

Limit Interactions with the politicised Central Ministry

- (iv) While the Central ministry remains the hub of educational politics in Cambodia, and is therefore at the core of policy subversion, donors should endeavour - except in circumstances where technical capacity building among ministerial officers is a central project priority - to limit their interactions with the central Ministry. While it could be argued that such an approach contravenes the ethics of development assistance, it can be easily countered by the argument that development assistance should benefit those most in need - the very people which statistics indicate are ignored by the Central education ministry.
- (v) The 1997 national budget, for example, provided for a 6.1 percent increase in recurrent expenditure to the education sector. Given that in excess of 83 percent of the total recurrent expenditure on education is devoted to salaries and operating expenses, with over 76 percent of this amount absorbed by the three central ministry departments, the portion of the 6.1 percent allocated specifically to education was

almost entirely absorbed by salary increases to those working in the central ministries. An examination of the growth in the education sector's recurrent budget between 1994 and 1997 reveals that while total recurrent expenditure on education increased by over 265 percent in four years, the recurrent allocation for provincial educational authorities increased by only 14 percent (McNamara, 1997). Given that central departments cater to only 3 percent of students (in higher education), and that the funding for the education of the majority of the nation's students is disbursed by provincial authorities, the 1997 budget provides salient evidence that those most in need are being denied an equitable slice of the education pie.

- (vi) In addition to avoiding overt politicisation, the decentralisation of development assistance in favour of specific geographic locations would also serve to promote educational equity. Given the realities of the scenario presented above, it seems that education at present is unlikely to contribute to development and modernisation outside Phnom Penh. It is a scenario increasingly evident in relation to higher education, where the overwhelming majority of students - even at the Royal University of Agriculture - come from the capital. A focus on development assistance to specific schools and school clusters may serve to reduce what is a very conspicuous disparity between the modernisation of rural and urban Cambodia.

Imposing Strict Conditionality

- (vii) A brief survey of the overall policy framework in contemporary Cambodian education clearly reveals a proclivity towards the modernity of the so-called New World Order. Certainly, there is little doubt that the education policy framework is directed at Cambodia's development within the context of an emerging global market. Despite the framework, there is little evidence to suggest positive development or change in the direction of realising the objectives of the policy framework. As demonstrated above, the failure in this regard is not a function of flawed policies. Instead, it is the product of a planning culture which is prone to radically overturning or dispensing with policies in the name of immediate political expedience.
- (viii) Given Cambodia's current reliance on international organisations, the organisations are in a very powerful position to affect desirable social change. (Arguments in favour of cultural imperialism can be quickly dismissed with the assertion that such social change would align with the aspirations of the vast majority of the country's impoverished population). Keeping in mind the very conspicuous willingness to neglect the advice of those organisations, a system of strict conditionality in relation to the disbursement of development assistance would be entirely appropriate. Such a system would need to be supported by a willingness to enforce conditions with clearly articulated sanctions (for example, the temporary/permanent suspension of programmes). While such a system may cause short-term pain and disruption, it may serve to send a very clear message to the administration, and therefore avoid many of the pitfalls which, on a national scale, have been played out in the contempt for the political changes which were to be supposedly ushered in by UNTAC.
- (ix) Where those within the current system, almost totally reliant for their legitimacy on a traditional system of power relations, are forced to choose between change (bringing in modernity) and maintaining the status quo, Cambodian history indicates that they will choose the status quo (as indeed, Cambodian culture leads them to believe they are entitled to do). That the aspirations of the people who would benefit from a programme of positive social change are often neglected has not (and does not) appear to be a particularly important consideration. At the very least, strict conditionality would prevent those in positions of power from distributing illegitimate and frequently ill-conceived largesse with other people's money (in this case, the money of the international community).

Short-term Funding

- (x) Many of Cambodia's precolonial monarchs only maintained their positions because of foreign support. Sihanouk's régime was supported, in terms of policy and administration, by a vast contingent of foreign experts and advisers, while Lon Nol's régime was prevented from absolute collapse only by the United States. Dependency, and a willingness to maintain the ties of dependency, clearly has a well-established history in Cambodia. Unfortunately, history tells us that dependency rarely leads to modernity.
- (xi) Many expatriates working in Cambodia are perplexed at the Cambodian willingness to remain dependent on the money and expertise of foreign governments and international organisations. In the

interest of Cambodia's sustainable progress towards modernity, these ties of dependency should not be encouraged. In addition to programmes which concentrate on the development of indigenous Cambodian capacity, donors should force Cambodians to take control, as rapidly as is practicably possible, of development programmes, and should establish firm parameters for winding down programme funding.

Channel Household Contributions

- (xii) At present, despite the denials of several officials, all Cambodian households make a very significant contribution to the education of their children. While these contributions are, technically, unconstitutional, they are a critical element of the contemporary educational landscape. The fundamental flaw with the contributions, apart from exceptional cases, is that they are administered on an ad-hoc basis by poorly remunerated teachers who need salary supplements in order to survive.
- (xiii) Given that a basic obstruction to the achievement of modernity in and through education is a lack of funds, a logical step would be to establish community-based systems that would take responsibility for the administration and distribution of household educational contributions. In this way, scholarship funds could be established for those within communities who are most in need, while the status of the teaching profession would be raised within the community.

Changing the Culture of Instruction

- (xiv) Cambodia's hierarchical culture is reinforced at the level of the black-box of the education system, the school, through the nature of interactions between students and teachers. Through poetic codes of conduct (*chbab*), proverbs, and through the legacy of education which was traditionally presided over by the monastic order, Cambodian culture reinforces a strictly hierarchical, generally one-sided relationship between teachers and their students - teachers talk while students listen.
- (xv) In order to encourage a generational shift in the culture of educational management (and, on a wider scale, towards a culture which embraces democratic ideals), there is a need for students to be socialised in a context which presents alternative power structures. Such structures could be modelled through an alternative culture of classroom instruction, where rote learning based on the unquestioned authority of the teacher is gradually replaced by instruction by a teacher who serves as a facilitator - where students are taught to solve problems, and where there are genuine attempts to negotiate consensual outcomes. It is at this level, where the school serves as a primary socialising agent, that the necessary long-term shifts in Cambodian culture can be gradually enacted in order to promote modernity.

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