EXPLORING CHILDREN’S WORK INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN RURAL CAMBODIA

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Applied Science

Deakin University

May, 2014
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ABSTRACT

Complex and interrelated obstacles influence children’s school attendance in rural Cambodia: among them, child labour is prominent. Most existing research concerning child labour in Cambodia, and its influence on school attendance, is quantitative. This ethnography takes a different approach by examining multi-faceted social, cultural and financial influences on children’s work involvement and school attendance in Banteay Meanchey and Svay Rieng Provinces. Using semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and researcher observations, it explores the lived experiences of children in grades 5 to 8, as well as parents, teachers, principals and key informants, to gain insight into the confounding issues surrounding child labour and education.

Findings indicate that children’s participation in education is heavily influenced by household composition, available learning hours, family financial strain, limited resources, risks of school dropout during transition from primary to lower secondary school and the failure of education to lead to employment. Themes that emerge from data are analysed and validated through the lenses of social exclusion theory and migrant social network theory. Children’s experience of social exclusion from the Cambodian education system, and limited community engagement in school management, has adverse effects on children’s educational attainment. Consequently, socially-excluded children drop out of school to work during the rice harvest season and are attracted to join social networks to find unskilled work opportunities in urban centres.

Children’s right to complete formal education in rural Cambodia is jeopardised when they are faced with the aforementioned interrelated obstacles. Key education policies have not been effectively implemented to ensure that Cambodian children receive nine years of free quality education. Additionally, migration and child labour policies do not have adequate regulatory systems operating to protect children working in heavily unregulated agricultural sectors and migrating into unknown situations where they face risks of verbal or physical abuse and labour exploitation. Unsuccessful attempts to decentralise the education system have led to the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport [MoEYS] maintaining majority control and political authority over the education system. Consequently, rural communities are disempowered and excluded from participating in the governance of education in Cambodia.

Therefore, recommendations from the findings of this research include improving education and child labour policy reform, to ensure that children’s engagement in labour does not negatively impact their school attendance, and developing and implementing initiatives and interventions, such as social accountability and performance monitoring systems, to address issues of child work involvement and
access to education. Given the paucity of qualitative inquiry, further research—through a qualitative social health and wellbeing lens—should be conducted at the local level regarding children's school attendance and quality of education. This will provide greater understanding of the multi-faceted hindrances children encounter regarding their education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. i

Table of contents .................................................................................................................. iii

Index of Tables and Figures ................................................................................................. vi

Glossary of Terms ................................................................................................................ vii

Preface ................................................................................................................................. ix

CHAPTER 1 Introduction to children's education and work involvement in rural Cambodia .......... 1

1.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

1.2 Background ................................................................................................................. 1

1.3 Factors that influence children’s participation in education ............................................ 6

1.4 Child labour .............................................................................................................. 14

1.5 Theoretical perspectives ............................................................................................ 22

1.5.1 Social exclusion theory and application to the school setting ....................................... 22

1.5.2 Migration – theory and application to the school setting ............................................. 25

1.6 Rationale ................................................................................................................... 30

CHAPTER 2 Methodology .................................................................................................... 32

2.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 32

2.2 Ethnography as a qualitative research approach .......................................................... 33

2.3 Children’s participation in ethnographic research ...................................................... 33

2.4 Field research .......................................................................................................... 34

2.5 The researcher and research assistant ......................................................................... 35

2.6 Selection of study participants ................................................................................... 35

2.7 Informed consent ..................................................................................................... 37

2.8 Data collection ......................................................................................................... 40

2.9 Quality assurance ..................................................................................................... 45

2.10 Ethical implications ................................................................................................. 46

2.11 Data analysis .......................................................................................................... 47
Appendix 9: MoEYS Education Official and Education Advisors PLS .................................................. 130
Appendix 10: Parent/Guardian (Focus Group Discussion) PLS .......................................................... 132
Appendix 11: Parent/Guardian (Interview) PLS ................................................................................... 134
Appendix 12: Child participants PLS .................................................................................................. 136
Appendix 13: Teachers, School Principals, MoEYS Education Official, UNICEF Education Advisors and Parents or Guardians Consent form ..................................................................................... 138
Appendix 14: Parents/Guardians third party consent form ............................................................... 139
Appendix 15: Child participant (Focus Group Discussion) consent form ............................................. 140
Appendix 16: Child participant (In-depth Interview) consent form ....................................................... 141
Appendix 17: Revocation of consent form .......................................................................................... 142
Appendix 18: Parents/Guardian Revocation of consent form ............................................................. 143
Appendix 19: Demographic information ............................................................................................ 144
Appendix 20: ‘Perceptions of education’ concept map segment ............................................................ 166
Appendix 21: ‘Quality of education’ concept map segment ............................................................... 167
Appendix 22: ‘Families and their influence on children’s education’ concept map segment ................ 168
Appendix 23: ‘Children and their families engagement in work’ concept map segment .................... 169
Appendix 24: ‘Migration’ concept map segment .................................................................................. 170
Appendix 25: ‘Support provided for education’ and ‘Education system’ concept map segment ........ 171
Appendix 26: Full concept map .......................................................................................................... 172
INDEX OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Average Working Hours by Working Status, Age Group and Industry .............................................. 16
Table 2: Pilot Focus Group Discussions ......................................................................................................... 39
Table 3: Focus Group Discussions .................................................................................................................. 40
Table 4: Semi-structured in-depth interviews .................................................................................................. 43
Table 5: Teachers’ salaries ................................................................................................................................. 58

Figure 1: Evolution of Primary and Lower Secondary Net Enrolment Rate by Domain in Cambodia 2000-2009 ........................................................................................................................................ 18
## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANSA-EAP</td>
<td>Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>CDRI</td>
<td>Cambodia Development Research Institute</td>
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<td>CESSP</td>
<td>Cambodian Education Sector Support Project</td>
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<td>CIBT</td>
<td>Centre for British Teachers</td>
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<td>CFS</td>
<td>Child Friendly Schools</td>
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<td>CITA</td>
<td>Cambodian Independent Teachers’ Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMGD</td>
<td>Cambodian Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>CREATE</td>
<td>Consortium for Research on Educational Access Transitions and Equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDI</td>
<td>EFA Development Index</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EIC</td>
<td>Economic Institute of Cambodia</td>
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<td>ESP</td>
<td>Education Strategic Plan</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFAD</td>
<td>International Fund for Agricultural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>IIIEP</td>
<td>International Institute of Educational Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>IIPS</td>
<td>International Institute for Population Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>ISOFI</td>
<td>Inner Spaces Outer Faces Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAPE</td>
<td>Kampuchean Action for Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>KIND</td>
<td>Khmer Institute for National Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>KR</td>
<td>Khmer Rouge</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoEYS</td>
<td>Ministry of Education Youth and Sport</td>
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<td>MoFAIC</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation</td>
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<td>MoLVT</td>
<td>Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training</td>
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<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>NEP</td>
<td>NGO Education Partnership</td>
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<td>NER</td>
<td>Net Enrolment Rate</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<td>NIS</td>
<td>National Institute of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFMRP</td>
<td>Public Financial Management Reform Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRK</td>
<td>People’s Republic of Kampuchea</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>Riel</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>RGC</td>
<td>Royal Government of Cambodia</td>
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<tr>
<td>SERC</td>
<td>Social Environment Research Consultants</td>
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<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
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<td>SSCs</td>
<td>School Support Committees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNCRC</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollar</td>
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<tr>
<td>VSO</td>
<td>Voluntary Services Overseas</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Program</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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PREFACE

In a small Cambodian township 120 kilometres north-west of the Thailand and Cambodia border, a project manager for a local non-government organisation [NGO] raised concern that children were working during the rice harvest season instead of attending school regularly. This triggered a desire to develop a research project that would explore the factors influencing a child’s decision to work, other than attend school, during the rice harvest season.

This thesis is structured into four chapters. Chapter one is a critical review of literature on child labour and education, which reveals through a social health lens that children’s social and educational development is put at risk when their work involvement is prioritised over regular school attendance. The review highlights gaps in current child-labour and education-focused literature, which informed the development of this study.

Chapter two encompasses methodologies used during field research. Once field research began, it was evident that there were multi-faceted economic, social and cultural influences on children’s school attendance in rural Cambodia. Children’s participation in the annual rice harvest was only one determinant in a complex causal web that influenced children’s school attendance. Therefore, the exploration was broadened to allow participants freedom to explore issues relevant to them during semi-structured interviews and FGDs. Following field research, thematic analysis was conducted during data analysis, and emerging themes were analysed through the lenses of social exclusion theory and migrant social network theory.

Research findings are presented in chapter three, which explores Cambodian children’s experience of receiving education, teachers’ experience of teaching, the influence of children’s engagement in work activities and labour migration on school attendance and, finally, the effectiveness of education policy and interventions in rural Cambodia.

Chapter four presents the main arguments of the thesis, adding breadth and depth to current understanding of the complex obstacles that impact children’s school attendance in rural Cambodia. Recommendations are made for improvement to education policy reform, and the implementation of initiatives and interventions. The study’s limitations are acknowledged and followed by a conclusion.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction to children’s education and work involvement in rural Cambodia

1.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the historical and political factors that mould the Cambodian educational sector. The key considerations of the review are to assess the impact of children's work involvement on their educational attainment, and to examine the effectiveness of education policy and child labour legislation in Cambodia. We discuss the theoretical perspectives employed to critically assess children's experience of social exclusion from education, and the relationship of migrant social networks to children's participation in the unskilled workforce. There are noted gaps in literature, which underscore the need for this study and its rigorous approach.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Cambodian history, culture and education

Cambodia comprises 13.4 million people, with 80.5% of the population living in rural areas and 19.5% in urban areas (National Institute of Statistics [NIS] 2010). According to the Cambodian Development Research Institute [CDRI] (2009), 36% of the population are aged 10 to 24: thus Cambodia has the youngest population in Southeast Asia. Approximately 25% of the total population lives below the poverty line (CDRI 2009). Despite Cambodia being considered one of the poorest and least developed countries in Asia, it has achieved impressive economic growth over the last decade due to four key leading sectors: garment manufacturing, tourism, construction and agriculture (CDRI 2009). The Cambodian economy has undergone significant transformation, with the agriculture sector, mainly rice production, ranking behind services and industrial sectors (World Bank 2009). Agriculture has been growing at 4.4% over the past decade, driven by land expansion and productivity gain. Industry has been the fastest growth sector, from 17 to 30% of Gross Domestic Product [GDP] between 1998 and 2007 due to increases in manufacturing such as garment factories (World Bank 2009). The service sector has maintained a significant contribution to Cambodia’s economy at around 40% of GDP, due to trade and tourism, finance and telecoms and informal services (World Bank 2009). However, there is still social and economic marginalisation exacerbating political disenfranchisement (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2011a). According to UNESCO, corruption continues to permeate Cambodian society resulting in a culture of powerlessness in disadvantaged rural areas.
1.2.2 Historical influences on education in Cambodia

Decades of dictatorship and civil unrest have shaped the Cambodian education system. Cambodia was among the first nations in Asia to adopt religious concepts (Theravada Buddhism) and socio-political institutions to educate Cambodians (Dy 2004). Untrained Buddhist teachers integrated religious and cultural instructions such as cultural merit and basic literacy, while other subjects were regarded as secondary (Dy 2004). This traditional schooling system was implemented mainly for elite members of society, while rural communities, women and girls were excluded from education (Chandler 1998). However, during French colonisation of Cambodia (1863–1953), primary and secondary education, modelled on European styles, was formalised (Fergusson & Le Masson 1997). Although the ‘modern’ French schooling system helped provide girls with an education, Chandler (1991) found that the French neglected development of education policy in Cambodia. Clayton (1995) argued that this was due to a fear that education would empower Cambodians and reduce France’s grip over Cambodia.

Following independence from the French, during the reign of Prince Sihanouk (1950s–60s), efforts were made to enhance basic education opportunities, and teacher education, in all primary to tertiary institutions (Aryes 2000a). Dunnett (1993) and Deighton (1971) claim that there was noteworthy progress towards increasing the population’s access to education during the reign of Prince Sihanouk. Education in Cambodia reached its peak of development by the end of the 1960s, with reports of more than one million children enrolled in primary education as compared with about 0.6 million in 1960 and 0.13 million in 1950 (Deighton 1971). By then, teachers were honoured, well paid and respected (Dawson 2011). Ayres (2000a) argues, however, that the education system implemented during Prince Sihanouk’s regime was biased towards urban areas, and did not have nation-wide literacy-oriented education that would benefit rural Cambodia. Therefore, failure to prioritise basic education for all of Cambodia during the 1960s led to an inability to sustain the education system (Ayres 2000a).

Educational practices were severely impacted by the regional war between North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the United States (1956–57). Following over fifteen years of peace under the Sihanouk regime, Cambodia was then drawn into the Vietnam War in the early 1970s. Consequently, General Lon Nol seized control in a diplomatic coup d'état in March 1970, and declared the creation of the Khmer Republic with the backing of the United States. Political instability at this time led Lon Nol to reduce educational funding, and many schools were closed in rural areas (Dy 2004).

In April 1975 Cambodia was overtaken by the Khmer Rouge [KR] regime, which led the nation into revolutionary Maoist communism (Chandler 1991). The KR was a communist movement that aimed to create a classless society by forcing all members of society to be rural agricultural workers. They considered educated city dwellers were corrupted by western capitalist ideas. Therefore, there was
mass destruction of the education system: literacy education was eradicated beyond the lowest grade level, and the KR regime forced all Cambodian people to work in either collective farming or army camps (Chandler 1998). The 1975–79 death toll was estimated to be 1.671 to 1.871 million people—21 to 24% of the population—due to the genocide committed by the KR regime (Kiernan 2003). The KR regime was defeated in 1978, by which stage Cambodia had lost almost three-quarters of its educated population, including students, teacher, professionals and intellectuals (Dunnett 1993). The KR regime decimated the structural framework of education development and delivery, adversely impacting the intellectual capability of Cambodians. Its legacy may be seen in the failure of the current education system to deliver adequate education to urban and rural Cambodia (Ayres 2000a; Fergusson & Le Masson 1997).

Following the defeat of the KR regime, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea [PRK] came to power (1979–89), resulting in a time of international isolation for Cambodia. The PRK remained a socialist party, and was economically supported by communist Vietnam, which prioritised the re-establishment of education institutions. Although this period remained politically unstable, the PRK focused on primary and lower-secondary education by reopening all levels of schools in 6,000 educational institutions. As a result, enrolment numbers reached nearly one million in the early 1980s (Dunnett 1993). However, the PRK regime was primarily concerned with re-opening schools, rather than re-building foundations of an education system focused on quality (Dy & Ninomiya 2003). Cambodia had faced political conflicts and civil war for two decades, which crippled the process of developing the education system.

In 1991, all warring factions signed a Peace Accord in Paris, to put an end to internal conflict and consider national reconciliation with assistance from the international community. This led to a general election, organised and supervised by the United Nations [UN] in 1993, in order to establish a democratic government (Dy & Ninomiya 2003). After the general election, Hun Sen became Co-Prime Minister with Prince Norodom Ranariddh, and the Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC] was established. The international community—the World Health Organization [WHO], the World Red Cross, the UN Children’s Funds [UNICEF], UNESCO and other organisations—gave financial aid to rebuild the socio-economic system and improve quality of education. This included the UN Development Program [UNDP] project, the implementation of the Capacity Building for Education and Human Resources Sector Management, and the Rebuilding Quality Education and Training in Cambodia Program, which was ratified at the National Education Seminar in 1994 (Ayres 2000b). These aided Cambodia in establishing a national education policy, which was drawn up by MoEYS for the development of the country’s education and training system (MoEYS 1994).
UNESCO provided assistance in establishing policies for educational development through the Basic Education Strategic Plan, with the goal of eradicating illiteracy by the year 2000 (Dunnett 1993). Although the policies were well-designed, education experts questioned whether such targets could be attained by the year 2000 without necessary government funding (Dy 2004). Although the Cambodian minister of finances and minister for rehabilitation and development signed a preliminary International Monetary Fund [IMF] Structural Adjustment Agreement to increase budget for education, Aryes (2000a) reveals that administration had failed to channel all state revenues into the national budget; thus, the government was unable to achieve key education and financial goals. In 1994, the RGC signalled the government intention to increase the budgetary share for education from 9 to 15% by the year 2000. Instead, the education system’s share fell to 8.11% in 1997 from 11.83% in 1996 (Ayres 2000a). It is evident that development of the education system remained a secondary priority of Cambodia’s administration; before Hun Sen’s military take-over of the government in July 1997, the primary focus of his leadership turned to power (UNESCO 2011a). Therefore, quality of education in Cambodia remained in crisis, with schools poorly constructed and maintained, students learning in over-crowded classrooms, teacher hastily trained, and continuation of inadequate learning material (Ayres 2000b).

1.2.3 Cambodia’s education system – a contemporary position

Since the 1990s there have been significant improvements in education quality, due to NGO and donor assistance (Engel 2011). This includes government planning and development of the Education Strategic Plan [ESP] 2009–2013 (MoEYS 2010). The Cambodian education system consists of nine years of compulsory education, including six years of primary school (grades one to six: children ages 6–11), three years of lower secondary school (grades seven to nine: children ages 12–15), and three years of upper secondary school (grades ten to twelve: children ages 15–17) (MoEYS 2010). The Cambodian school year begins in early October and finishes in early July. The government observes up to 17 public holidays, ranging between one day and one week, which influence the school calendar (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [MoFAIC] 2013). The school holiday coincides with the rice transplantation season is from July to October. The ESP 2009–2013 puts forward three main educational policy areas:

a) ‘Ensuring Equitable Access to Education Services’ by building schools as close as possible to residences, reducing the number of incomplete primary schools, increasing operational budgets to schools, increasing supply of teachers, providing houses to teachers and building dormitories for students in disadvantaged areas, especially girls. Access will also be expanded for children in early childhood education, as well as those with disabilities and those from
minority groups. Ensuring community/private engagement in this process is crucial for long-term success’ (MoEYS 2010, p. 13).

b) ‘Improving the Quality and Efficiency of Education Services by increasing the provision of school instructional materials, libraries and laboratories, continuing to further develop the curriculum, increasing learning hours and providing scholarships to poor students, enhancing teaching and management capacities, strengthening teachers’ code of conduct, improving schools’ environment, expanding vocational orientation, increasing inspection of administration, finance and educational quality assurance’ (MoEYS 2010, p. 13).

c) ‘Institutional and Capacity Development for Educational Staff for Decentralization by restructuring working procedures, developing legislative instruments, and training education officers at all levels in technical skills. Continued emphasis on Public Financial Management Reform Program [PFMRP], internal audit systems, planning, monitoring and evaluation systems will enhance institutional development and increase capacity to manage these systems’ (MoEYS 2010, p. 13).

The ESP 2009–2013 places emphasis on implementing initiatives such as the Child Friendly Schools [CFS] policy (discussed in section 1.3.10) and standardised national learning assessments to track progress more effectively. Further, there are targets to improve curricula and material resources, and emphasis on addressing lower enrolment and completion rates at a district level (MoEYS 2010).

According to the International Institute of Educational Planning [IIEP] (2010), the state of education has seen marked improvements following the KR regime; nonetheless, the efficacy of the Cambodian education system remains low. Moreover, government policy implies that children have access to nine years of free compulsory education; yet this is not consistently enforced, nor accessible to all children (Piau 2009). There are significant challenges in relation to access and quality of education, especially in rural Cambodia, where many are marginalised due to poverty, ethnic minority status and gender (Reimer 2012, UNESCO 2011a). These challenges include children’s engagement in work activities (World Bank 2006a), schooling costs (NGO Education Partnership [NEP] 2007), a lack of family resources to support school attendance (Voluntary Services Overseas [VSO] 2010), severe shortages of qualified teachers and inadequate teaching pay and conditions (Reimer 2012).

Based on the MoEYS (2013) Education Indicators for 2012/2013, data shows that 69.5% of eligible children were in primary school, 15.5% in lower secondary school and 9.2% in upper secondary school. In urban Cambodia, 57% of eligible children were enrolled in primary schools, but only 20.2% of eligible children enrolled in lower secondary schools. In rural Cambodia, the percentages were 72.4% enrolled
in primary, going down to 16.4% in lower secondary. This suggests that many Cambodian children are not successfully transitioning from primary to lower secondary school.

1.3 Factors that influence children's participation in education

The international literature highlights many factors that may influence children's participation at school, including: household composition (Awan, Waqas & Aslam 2011); the cost of schooling (Ersado 2005; Ohba 2011); limited contact hours at school (Kana, Phoumin & Seiichi 2010); problems with the transition from primary to lower secondary school (Siddhu 2011); migration (International Organization for Migration [IOM] 2010); lack of resources (VSO 2010); teachers' poor job satisfaction (Cha & Cohen-Vogel 2011); teachers' low salaries (Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association [CITA] 2010); teacher absenteeism (Banerjee et al. 2012) and limited collaboration between local schools and community (Benveniste, Marshall & Caridad 2008).

1.3.1 Household composition influence on child labour and education attainment

Extensive quantitative literature addresses factors that influence children's schooling and their engagement in work (Ersado 2005; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay 2010; Ohba 2011). However, many of these studies are based on national demographic and education surveys conducted in the 1990s (Burke & Beegle 2004; Ersado 2005), highlighting necessity for up-to-date research that explores children's education and their involvement in paid and unpaid work. Nevertheless, these quantitative studies do provide insight into how children's demographic information influences children's schooling and their participation in work.

Ota and Moffatt's (2007) quantitative study in rural Andhra Pradesh, India, found that girls are less likely to attend school than boys; first-born children are less likely to go to school than subsequent children; and the likelihood of attending school appears to increase monotonically as birth order increases. Boockmann (2010) supports the finding that the age of siblings may have a significant impact on children's participation in work. Very young children generally constitute a burden to the family, which may lead to older children, typically girls, spending more time on housework and caring for younger children. Moreover, Awan, Waqas and Aslam (2011) concluded from their multiple indicator cluster questionnaires in Pakistan that absence of household head's education, large family size, low levels of income and less education of children all contributed to children's engagement in work. Additional international research supports this evidence, notably that parents' lower levels of education leads to their children leaving school at a young age and engaging in work (see research from Govinda & Bandyopadhyay 2010 [India]; Sabates, Fernandez & Ricardo 2010 [Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia]; Van et al. 2012 [Cambodia]).
1.3.2 Influence of schooling costs on children’s education attainment

The financial cost of sending children to school affects household decisions regarding schooling and labour participation (Ohba 2011). Direct costs of schooling for poor families involve tuition fees, school donations, book fees, uniform costs, transportation, supplies and private tutoring (Najeeb 2007). Cambodian literature claims that children’s education accounts for approximately two-thirds of financial burden in families (Right to Education 2006; World Bank 2006b). Additionally, informal education fees are charged by teachers and for schools exams, initial matriculation, extra classes and teacher support in Cambodia (Bray & Bunly 2005). Although the RGC tried to abolish informal payments in primary and lower secondary schools by 2008 (MoEYS 2005a), families’ informal fees payment to teachers and schools continues (NEP 2007).

Marshall and colleagues (2009) explored informal school fees in Cambodia involving 400 students (grade three) from 200 urban and rural schools. Students were interviewed about daily informal fees that they paid. Students said that fees for extra classes, exams and teacher support ranged between 5 to 11 cents (United States Dollar [USD]) per class. This may seem small at an individual level, but, when multiplied by 200 or more school days per year, these fees add substantial financial pressure to poor rural families. It should also be noted that data collected from children during interviews might have been deflated, as MoEYS personnel conducted the interviews, hence, students may have provided MoEYS interviewers with positive answers rather than objective information.

Kim and Rouse (2011) argue that there is no formal structure in place to monitor schools charging informal schools fees, or to achieve implementation of the policy to abolish them in Cambodia. One reason for this may be that education policy makers fail to recognise it as a significant issue. Kim (2007) reported that Cambodian education policy makers, and education advisors working with international agencies such as, UN agencies, consider the practice of charging informal school fees as necessary, as they supplement teachers’ low salaries, and are therefore not perceived as a form of corruption. The hidden financial burden of informal school fees is, however, a widespread problem throughout Cambodia.

Dawson (2009) and UNESCO (2011a) contend that levels of corruption throughout the Cambodian education sector must be taken into serious consideration, as corruption perpetuates the practice of charging informal fees. Teachers’ salaries are determined by the government. Dawson (2010) asserts that it is the intention of the RGC to keep teachers on low salaries, at the lower end of the professional hierarchy. Teachers are expected to pay bribes to principals, who in turn pay bribes to education officials further up the ladder. Therefore, students as young as six are learning that paying informal fees is accepted practice that will ensure they are not denied an education.
Moreover, during interviews and FGDs with parents, NEP (2007) found that one in four parents were unaware that their children were entitled to nine years of free basic education in Cambodia. Instead, they accepted informal fees as a necessary cost of their children’s education. The Economic Institute of Cambodia [EIC] (2006) revealed that corruption in the public education sector accounted for USD $37 million per year, resulting in about 55% of the total corruption in public services. This problem of perception is central to the importance of raising awareness about informal fees, especially when parents are unaware of their basic rights and are not demanding free access to education. Consequently, informal school fees and corruption impact families’ decision making to forfeit school for work.

1.3.3 Hours spent in school

Limited literature acknowledges that Cambodian children are not completing adequate learning hours, despite the ESP 2009–2013 aiming to increase learning hours (Kana, Phoumin and Seiichi 2010). Kana, Phoumin and Seiichi conducted 168 household surveys in four rural Cambodian villages, highlighting that around 90% of households relied on farming as a primary source of income. Importantly, findings also suggested that child labour did not have an effect on school attainment, whereby in these rural areas, primary school children attended the required four hours of school per day, either the morning or afternoon, and worked on average for two to three hours outside of school hours. The veracity of this research is in question, however, given that it was conducted during September, a time when children engage in limited agricultural work. Follow-up research in November—the peak rice harvest season, when children often engage in more work during school hours—may have demonstrated different results. Moreover, the findings of this study do not support the international literature, which shows a negative relationship between child labour and children’s school attainment (Gunnarsson, Orazem & Sanchez 2006 [Latin America] and Ray & Lancaster 2005 [Belize, Cambodia, Namibia, Panama, the Philippines, Portugal and Sri Lanka]).

Kim (2009) found that parents and school directors in Cambodia were not concerned if children missed school for up to two weeks during the rice harvest season, particularly if children missed school to attend ceremonies, or if schools were closed. It is commonly accepted in local communities that holidays, political rallies and various other events interfere with the school calendar year. However, Kim (2009, p. 36) suggested that ‘it is necessary to reconsider the assumption that child labour is inevitable and that combining work and schooling is the best way to ensure most children have access to basic education’. This should be seriously considered, especially as flexible school operations may worsen the problem of insufficient learning hours.
Sokhom (1998) concluded from a mixed-methods investigation that conflict between academic and agricultural calendar often resulted in children dropping out of school during key agricultural seasons in the north east of Cambodia. Rather than targeting insufficient school days in the school year, Sokhom (2004) suggested in a follow-up article that the school calendar should accommodate the farm production calendar to allow time off for farming. Consideration should be given to Sokhom’s studies and the potential for changes within the system, but there is need for up-to-date investigation into how the agricultural calendar impacts school attendance and sustainable school programming.

1.3.4 Transitioning from primary to lower secondary school

Limited international research explores children’s transition from primary to secondary school (Hunt 2008). This transition has been identified as a time when children often go missing from the education system (Suryadarma, Suryahadi & Sumarto 2006). There is no local empirical research that provides insight into children transitioning from primary to lower secondary school in Cambodia, therefore, this section draws on studies from countries with similar context to Cambodia. Miske and DeJaeghere (2008) concluded from their qualitative study among ethnic minority girls in Vietnam that transitioning from primary schools to lower secondary schools is a complex time for children as they are navigating early adolescence, forming identities, establishing relationship and developing social skills. Financial barriers, child labour, poor quality teaching and poor social experience at school also impact this transition.

Similarly, Siddhu (2011) conducted a longitudinal mixed-methods study on students, aged 10 to 17, and their transition from primary to secondary school in rural India. During the course of the year, households were revisited to record the transition status of the study sample. Of 695 sampled, 130 children did not transition into lower secondary school. The cost of secondary school, children’s eagerness to work and distance to school caused school dropout. Children who were older than their class peers were much less likely to successfully transition into secondary school (Siddhu 2011). Overall, there is limited research in resource-poor countries that investigates this issue of transition.

1.3.5 Migration and remittances in Cambodia

During children’s transition into adolescent independence, it is common for the oldest son in Cambodian families to be sent to work in Thailand and the oldest daughter sent to Phnom Penh to work in the garment sector (IOM 2010). Both children are responsible for remitting money home while parents care for household assets and younger siblings (IOM 2010). While little research has been conducted on remittances in Cambodia, Danlu’s (2012) research suggests there are 124,890 Cambodian migrant labourers working throughout Asia who are remitting 200 million US dollars a year.
Remittances from Khmer migrant workers enable families to financially support basic household needs such as food and education (CDRI 2007). Remittances can support children who stay behind to attend school, which increases incentive to attend and remain in school (De Haas 2005). However, there is evidence to suggest that when parents migrate then family left behind assume more household and agricultural work (Tong, Hem & Santos 2011). Even when children migrate with their parents to Thailand, they remain outside of the education system due to demand for child labour and limited financial resources (Jampaklay 2011).

Previous research has argued that if remittance from migration helps poor communities lead healthier lives and increases educational opportunities, then this may reduce the cycle of migration (Lopez Cordova 2005). However, in 2004 only 13% of rural households received remittances from migrant workers (World Bank 2006b). Moreover, out-migration has adverse outcomes on rural communities, such as agricultural labour shortages (Kang & Liv 2013; Tong, Hem & Santos 2011) and negatively influences children's school attendance (Jampaklay 2011). Nevertheless, Khmer youth are continuously faced with unemployment in rural Cambodia and are lured by attractive wages and unskilled employment opportunities in urban centres.

1.3.6 Teaching and learning resources

There are limited teaching and learning resources throughout Cambodia. This inhibits effective teaching and quality education (VSO 2010). The VSO study in five Cambodian provinces concluded that 76% of 144 teachers perceived limited materials as an obstacle to effective education. School directors complained about the complicated process involved in applying for education program funds, and funds were often not released early enough to order books for the new school year. This situation created a gap between supply and demand. There are also systemic problems regarding the distribution of free school textbooks, provided by UNICEF (VSO 2010). Many resources never arrive because they are sold in markets rather than distributed to schools (UNICEF 2012). The Khmer Institute for National Development [KIND] (2013) investigated textbook distribution while using the Public Expenditure Tracking System with 33 upper secondary schools in Cambodia. Their findings revealed that 23 upper secondary schools received their textbooks through Education District Offices instead of the Publishing and Distribution House, which lead to leakage and textbook losses. Donors are therefore reluctant to fund the provision of school textbooks when there are systemic distribution issues (VSO 2010). Moreover, there is little capacity to build evidence regarding textbook distribution throughout Cambodia, due to sensitivity associated with transparency and system errors (KIND 2013).
1.3.7 Teachers

Provision of quality education to children is a major consideration when analysing the causality of child labour (Jayaraj & Subramanian 2007). The exploration of teachers' experiences of teaching informs quality education delivery and its potential impact on children's decision-making to leave school. Teacher absenteeism is a serious obstacle to the delivery of quality education in many resource-poor countries (Das et al. 2005). However, there is limited empirical study of the relationship between teacher absenteeism and student learning outcomes. Nevertheless, Banerjee and colleagues (2012) provide evidence from 257 Pakistani primary schools that teacher absenteeism and poor quality education significantly influence student absenteeism. Furthermore, student absenteeism results in increased teacher absenteeism (Banerjee et al. 212). This cyclical pattern raises concerns, as children are susceptible to participation in work-related tasks if they are not at school.

Effective school management is deemed to be central to teachers' performance and motivation in Cambodia (Knight & MacLeod 2004). During interviews with teachers in rural Cambodia, 83% of respondents expressed their satisfaction in the quality of school leadership and human resource management (Ang et al. 2012). However, participating teachers were interviewed in their school grounds, which may have had an impact on their willingness to express honest—and perhaps negative—viewpoints about their supervisors. Conversely, a mixed-methods study that utilised questionnaires, interviews and FGDs involving 263 Cambodian teachers from five provinces (rural and urban) concluded that de-motivating factors were (in order): low salary, corruption and nepotism, poor leadership and a lack of opportunity to voice their concerns (Vantha, Shrestha & Lok-Van 2008). The causes of teacher dissatisfaction included: Cambodia's limited education budget; problems with transparency; low capacity in management and administration; insufficient leadership skills; and inadequate incentives (Vantha, Shrestha & Lok-Van 2008).

1.3.8 Teachers' salaries

Given issues of low remuneration for teaching, and a culture that normalises supplementary education outside of the curriculum, it is not surprising that there are a host of issues relating to teacher salary in Cambodia. According to CITA (2010), primary school teachers' salaries are at a base rate of USD $50 per month, as of 2010. However, there are a series of allowances paid to teachers for seniority, special incentives, family support and carrying out pedagogic functions, which may amount to an additional USD $20 per month. Lower secondary school teachers are paid a base rate of USD $75 per month, with the possibility of an additional USD $2 per month for overtime and remote school allowance. Upper secondary school teachers are paid USD $100 per month: these teachers earn a higher salary because they have university qualifications and provide more specialised teaching (CITA 2010). CITA argues
that teachers’ earnings are very low and leave teachers unable to afford basic necessities such as housing, food, medicines, and rent. In comparison, Cambodian garment industry workers’ base salary exceeds that of primary school teachers and levels out with lower secondary school teachers, which minimises the attractiveness of teaching as a profession (CITA 2010).

Inadequate pay is a complex issue that depends on national revenue and increases to the education budget (Nguon 2012). According to Purcell and colleagues (2010), the RGC spending on education throughout the 1990s was below 10% of the national budget, and 90% of the expenditure was on teachers’ and administrators’ salaries. Increasing the education budget would be a challenging task that would rely on improved administration capacity, greater income taxation or other sources (Bray & Bunly 2005). Additionally, MoEYS still relies on loans from the Asia Development Bank [ADB], community donations and support from national and international NGOs to fund the education system (Bray & Bunly 2005). However, rural schools are still poorly funded by the RGC (MoEYS 2005b). Nevertheless, MoEYS made an attempt to reform teachers’ salaries by announcing in 2008 that basic salaries would be increased by 15–20% annually (CITA 2011). Even though CITA (2011) acknowledges the effort by MoEYS to increase teacher salaries, CITA believes that teachers are entitled to USD $250 per month as a base salary. Traditionally, teachers received a significant amount of respect in Cambodian society (Ayres 2000b); today, however, the social position of teachers in Cambodia is not reflected in their monthly salary (Dawson 2009).

1.3.9 Teachers’ commitment to teaching

Teacher’s low salary has resulted in teachers seeking supplementary employment (Kampuchean Action for Primary Education [KAPE] 2008). During a mixed-methods study involving 386 Provincial Officers of Education, District Officials of Education, school directors and teachers from rural Cambodia, it was reported that 90% of teachers had additional sources of income, including: taxi runs, conducting tutorials, selling goods at schools, market-selling and farming (Ang et al. 2012). Benveniste, Marshall and Caridad (2008) argue that teachers are forced to take up additional income-generating activities due to insufficient salaries. KAPE and Knight and Macleod (2004) also found that teachers are regularly absent from their teaching duties due to prioritising in their supplementary incomes. These findings highlight the severity of inadequate teacher salaries, and the subsequent impact on education delivery throughout Cambodia.

1.3.10 School and community engagement

Community engagement and parent involvement is essential for social and educational integration in rural Cambodia (NEP 2011). As a part of CFS Policy (MoEYS 2007), parental engagement and
community partnership in local schools is a main dimension being considered in Cambodia. This refers to dimension five of CFS policy, which emphasises the importance of participation of children, families and communities in the running of their local school (MoEYS 2007). Ang and colleagues (2012) concluded from a mixed-methods study that parents appreciated and respected the work of teachers in rural schools, and teachers openly communicated with parents about their children’s educational progress. This study, however, only consulted teachers, and failed to give parents voice on community school engagement. In contrast, Benveniste, Marshall and Caridad (2008) concluded from their analysis of school surveys that parents and teachers had very little contact, and school support committees [SSCs] had limited parental representation. SSCs were established by MoEYS (2002) to create closer links among educational stakeholders at the level of individual schools. Knight and Macleod (2004) state that disconnection between teachers and parents in Cambodia will continue to grow if neither party is provided with specific information about their role and responsibility for achieving Education for All [EFA]. This will be discussed further in section 1.4.4.

Nguon (2011) investigated the role of SSCs in Cambodian primary schools. Based on interviews with 75 local stakeholders and surveys with 229 SSC members, 80% of SSC members said that they represent parents. However, Nguon sheds doubt on whether parents from low socio-economic status [SES] backgrounds have equal influence over decision-making processes alongside the relatively influential and educated persons in the SSC (including commune chiefs and village leaders). From a traditional Cambodian point of view, Pellini and Ayres (2007, p. 404) argue that ‘participation in governance had traditionally been discouraged, and citizens had been socialised to accept without question the decisions of their leaders’. This has led to constraints in the expression of personal views. During Pellini’s (2007, p. 153) exploration of community participation in the Cambodian education sector, it was concluded that there is ‘limited promotion of community participation in school based management and local governance’ because the education policy is still being heavily centralised instead of decentralised. Pellini (2007) only found evidence of decentralisation in the lower-level agencies, with the RGC maintaining majority control and political authority (Engel 2011). Moreover, Reimer (2012) conducted a qualitative feminist postcolonial inquiry to analyse how rural Cambodian communities and schools understood and implemented the CFS policy. Findings indicated that SSCs focused on raising financial and material support for schools instead of incorporating the “new” aims of SSCs including, “engagement with planning and representing parents’ interests” (Reimer 2012, p. 506). Additionally, in the case of one school included in the study, SSC members were community leaders, and many did not have children of their own attending the school.

Further evidence for limited community involvement in schools can be seen in the NEP’s (2011) mixed-methods study on community engagement and quality of education in rural Cambodia. Parents lacked
interest and time to discuss their children’s learning with teachers (NEP 2011). There was a shared perception between education stakeholders that parents had little understanding of the value and importance of education. Less than half of the parents surveyed indicated that they did not have time to attend school meetings due to their work and home commitments. Parents also believed that their children were receiving good quality education from competent teachers, who were considered the primary influence on their child’s education. This supports Shoraku’s (2008) analysis that Cambodian parents view their children’s education as the sole responsibility of the teacher and not the parent.

1.3.11 Summary

A considerable amount of international literature explores the reasons for a child’s lack of school attendance and non-enrolment (Alcáraz, Chiquiar & Salcedo 2012; Beegle, Dehejia & Gatti 2009; Devi & Roy 2008; Kana, Phoumin & Seiichi 2010; Postiglione, Jiao & Gyatso 2006). Results from international and Cambodia-based studies demonstrate that schooling attendance decision-making is complex, involving economic, social and cultural factors. These multifaceted determinants are heightened in a resource-poor country such as Cambodia, whose once well-respected school system was eroded during the KR regime. Cambodia now faces many hurdles in overcoming school dropout in primary and lower secondary school. The literature highlights inadequate teaching and learning materials, poor professional commitment from teachers resulting in a poor profile for educators, and children (particularly in rural regions) engaging in work as key areas of concern.

1.4 Child labour

Children’s participation in work is widespread in resource-poor countries. Child labour is defined by the International Labour Organization [ILO] Convention No. 138 (1973) on Minimum Age, and the ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) on Worst Forms of Child Labour, as work that harms children’s health and well-being and hinders their education development and future livelihoods. These definitions, which acknowledge three aspects of child labour, will be used as the reference points in this thesis. The ILO (2013) reported that approximately 168 million children aged 5 to 17 were involved in child labour worldwide. In the Asia Pacific Region, the absolute number of child labourers aged 5 to 14 has decreased from 122.3 million to almost 78 million in recent times; however, the region still has the highest number of children engaged in some form of child labour, including child trafficking, child domestic work, hazardous child labour, and child bonded labour (ILO 2006a, 2013). The ILO (2013) asserts that there is not enough being done by governments and agencies towards eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016: a goal agreed upon by the ILO tripartite constituents in the Global Action Plan.
In resource-poor countries, social factors such as low wages, declining household incomes and rising rates of unemployment appear to have an impact on children’s participation in the workforce (Ngao, Julius & David 2010). In such circumstances children are considered essential contributors to household incomes, leading to the alleviation of economic stressors (Devi & Roy 2008). Studies conducted in less-developed regions such as Latin America, Asia and Africa have concluded that there is a strong correlation between child labour and economic stressors such as lack of food (Jayaraj & Subramanian 2007; Ngao, Julius & David 2010).

Assumptions about what constitutes child labour are often misplaced. Edmonds (2008) asserts that only a minority of children are engaged in factory, mining or other market work. The majority of children in resource-poor countries who are neither enrolled at school nor employed in paid work are referred to as ‘idle’ children (Biggeri et al. 2003). These children are an important policy concern, because they are at risk of engaging in more hidden forms of child labour: family farming, household chores and family business (Jayaraj & Subramanian 2007). Despite limited research concerning ‘idle’ children, studies have increasingly focused on hidden forms of child labour (Ray & Lancaster 2005).

1.4.1 Child labour in agriculture

Hidden forms of child labour are often unaccounted for in employment statistics (Biggeri et al. 2003). Policy papers on youth employment have only focused largely on formal sector employment and neglected the agricultural sector (Van de Geest 2010). Nonetheless, according to the ILO (2010) Global Report which was under the follow-up of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 84.4% of working children aged 5 to 14 are engaged in agricultural work, with almost 70% of child labourers working as unpaid family labourers. The agriculture sector is considered one of the most hazardous industries for adults and children, and yet is potentially the least regulated for child labour worker protection (Miller 2012). Webbink, Smits and De Jong (2012) shed light on labour intensity in family farm work across 16 resource-poor countries, concluding that children’s work involvement increased if households had land and lived in rural areas. It appears that children are largely invisible unpaid labourers in small-scale family farms (Murray, Termine & Demeranville 2010).

1.4.2 Overview of child labour and the agricultural sector in Cambodia

The Agricultural sector has significantly transformed in Cambodia since 2004, growing at around 5% per annum due to large increases in rice export (UNDP 2013a). Approximately 70% of the Cambodian population rely on farming for income security (Gunjal et al. 2012). Agricultural growth has been driven by labour, land and productivity gains, with rice being the largest crop sub-sector and contributes to 26% of the agricultural sector’s GDP. Since 2008, the RGC development strategy has promoted the
agricultural sector, promoting improved paddy production and rice exports for reducing poverty, increasing income growth and improving national and household security (Gunjal et al. 2012, Yu & Diao 2011). Consequently, more than two-thirds of Cambodian youth work in agriculture (CDRI 2009). The World Bank (2006b) report stated that over 75% of Cambodian children between ages 15 and 17 commonly work with their families in the agricultural sector. The remaining 25% work in commerce, manufacturing and services. Children work in agriculture and other services for approximately 22 hours per week, compared to 23.5 hours spent studying per week. Table 1 shows that, in each age group, more children prioritise work in the agriculture sector ahead of combining work and study.

Table 1: Average Working Hours by Working Status, Age Group and Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>7-11 years</th>
<th>12-14 years</th>
<th>15-17 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work only</td>
<td>Work and study</td>
<td>Work only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although the World Bank study (2006b) had a qualitative component that explored child work, only parents’ responses were analysed, due to parental data being more complete than those of children. Children did, however, indicate being less involved in school, and more involved in work exclusive of school, than did the adults responding for them. A lack of rigour and triangulation in this study has therefore resulted in the omission of children’s perspectives. Additionally, the use of secondary quantitative data from 2001 is outdated, and fails to explore the context, reasoning and lived experiences of children who engage in work.

1.4.3 Child labour legislation

Numerous international conventions and laws aim to protect children from economic exploitation. Cambodia has ratified many of these conventions, including the ILO Convention No. 138 (1973) on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in 2006, the ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) on Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2006 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (1990) in 1992, which states that children should be protected from engaging in work that is likely to negatively interfere with their education. The Cambodia Labour Law (RGC 1997) allows children aged
12 to 15 to participate in light work, provided it is not hazardous to their physical or mental development and does not affect their school attendance or guidance programs (United States Department of Labor 2008). Cambodia has committed to implement these international conventions by protecting children’s rights and disseminating information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Save the Children 2012). The RGC has also enforced laws, policies and regulations relating to children’s rights.

1.4.4 Cambodia’s commitment to improving education

Cambodia has made progress in improving quality of education and minimising inequality of access to education. This is being achieved through realistic pro-poor national educational and development plans such as the EFA movement (UNICEF & UNESCO 2007) by implementing the EFA National Plan 2003–2015 (RGC 2002) which aims to meet the learning needs of all Cambodian children, youth and adults by 2015. The EFA goals also contribute to the pursuit of the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals [CMDGs] (RGC 2010a), which are adapted from the eight MDGs identified by the UN in 2000. The CMDGs specific to this study include Goal 1: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, particularly as CMDG1 addresses equity issues such as child labour (RGC 2010a). Goal 2 aims to achieve universal primary education and to accelerate progress in lower secondary education (RGC 2010a). Despite Cambodia’s commitment to achieving the CMDGs, VSO (2010) speculated that the Cambodian government might not reach its EFA targets by 2015, with Cambodia ranking 102 out of 127 countries on the EFA Development Index [EDI]. Nevertheless, the RGC has continued to implement the ESP 2009–2013 by ensuring that all Cambodian children and youth have access to education (MoEYS 2010). Additionally, The Primary Net Enrolment Rate [NER] in Cambodia from 2000–2009 is reportedly on track to achieve the 2015 CMDGs through improving access to education (Figure 1).
Figure 1: Evolution of Primary and Lower Secondary Net Enrolment Rate by Domain in Cambodia 2000–2009

Source: RGC (2010a).

There are 320,000 Cambodian children, out of 2.3 million aged 9 to 14 years, who are not attending school (NIS 2010). Figure 2 indicates that access to primary education has increased significantly from 2000 to 2009 throughout Cambodia. However, the NER in lower secondary school by domain illustrates a significant gap between rural, urban and remote areas from 2000–2009. Furthermore, since 2007 the NER in lower secondary school has been slowing down in growth, which has been attributed to slow progress rates of children transitioning from primary to lower secondary, and high levels of dropout in lower secondary.

Primary education dropout rates decreased from 8.8% in 2007/2008 to 8.3% in 2008/2009, nearly reaching the national target of 8% (CDRI 2009). In comparison, lower secondary dropout rates are exceedingly high at 22.2%, and have shown very little improvement over the years (UNESCO 2011b). Focusing in on the selected provinces for this study, Banteay Meanchey has a net attendance ratio in secondary school recording rate of 43.5%, with 49.1% in Svay Rieng Provinces (NIS 2010).
1.4.5 Gaps in Cambodian legislation and education policy

Despite significant efforts underway to achieve EFA and the CMDGs, there remain important gaps in legislation relating to child labour and education. Firstly, the Cambodia Labour Law (RGC 1997) has not been extended to informal sectors, yet the majority of child labour occurs in agricultural and domestic contexts. Secondly, Cambodia has not ratified the ILO Convention No. 10 on Minimum Age (Agriculture) (1923) even though many Cambodia children work in hazardous conditions including tobacco plantations, commercial rubber and fishing processing (Cruz & Ratana 2007). Overall, enforcement of child labour laws is a continual challenge facing the RGC.

Kim (2011) conducted interviews with 51 education policy makers, MoEYS government officials, UN education professionals and NGOs to explore Cambodian education policy and child labour. Findings revealed that MoEYS government officials and Cambodian aid agencies employees perceived child labour to be the responsibility of other ministries that work closely with local communities. A community-based approach to education has been widely promoted throughout Cambodia by NGO initiatives such as SSCs. This finding emphasises that Cambodian education policy-makers are shifting blame and adopting a passive approach to addressing child labour. This calls for urgent prioritisation of policy development regarding child labour in Cambodia, as it has been deemed to have adverse impacts on achieving universal basic education (MDG2).

1.4.6 Child labour and education

Children in disadvantaged communities commonly engage in several forms of unpaid or paid work while at school (Webbink, Smits & De Jong 2012). According to UNESCO (2011b) there were 67 million primary-school-aged children out of school, globally, in 2009. This is despite evidence that educational attainment is fundamental to development of economic growth and human capital (Basu & Tzannatos 2003). Once families prioritise children’s engagement in paid work over attending school, the likelihood of children acquiring sufficient skills and knowledge to undertake skilled employment decreases, which in turn contributes to the lack of economic growth in societies. Labour participation tends to have a negative effect on time spent in school (ILO 2004). However, many children in resource-poor countries take on occupations for which work experience is considered more important than formal education. Therefore, children who ‘learn by doing’ are acquiring skills they need for adulthood (Porter et al. 2010). Thus, children’s engagement in agricultural work may be considered an education by their parents (Cigno & Rosati 2005; Emerson & Souza 2007).

There is, however, qualitative international research to suggest that parents are aware of the negative implications for working children (Postiglione, Jiao & Gyatso 2006). A mixed-methods study involving
513 households in rural Tibet gave inconsistent reports from parents, children and teachers on the impact of children’s engagement in work on their education. Half of the parents interviewed claimed that their children’s engagement in farming tasks had little impact on school attendance, whereas three out of four students stated that tending to livestock influenced their schooling. Moreover, teachers and education officials stated that children’s household labour responsibilities contributed to school discontinuation (Postiglione, Jiao & Gyatso 2006). These findings emphasise the importance of giving children a voice in child-focused research, particularly if there is a likelihood that information is withheld (Czymoniewicz-Klippel 2009).

Beegle, Dehejia and Gatti (2009) argue, based on household surveys conducted in Vietnam, that in the long term, negative effects tend to dominate when a child engages in work instead of school. The short-term effects of children contributing to family income may lead to a positive return. From the age of 30 onwards, however, the foregone earnings attributed to lost time in school overrides any short-term gain (Beegle, Dehejia and Gatti 2009). This supports the argument that all forms of child labour negatively impact educational attainment for children, and minimise their opportunities to earn substantially higher wages later in life (Assaad, Levison, & Zibani 2010; Webbink, Smits & De Jong 2012).

1.4.7 Gaps in child labour and education knowledge

Recent international literature infers that issues associated with child labour lie within a poor education system (Hossain 2010). Failure to deliver quality education breeds a lack of parental confidence in the worth of education, and a preference for engaging children in unskilled work for additional household income. This section draws on studies from countries with similar context to Cambodia as there is limited local empirical research that provides insight into the association between child labour and the poor education system in Cambodia. During Hossain’s (2010, p. 15) mixed-methods analysis of the effects of a Primary Education Stipend Programme on attracting rural poor children into school in Bangladesh, findings suggested that government officials tended to associated child labour with poverty: ‘poor parents are forced to send their children to work to ensure household survival’. Hossain, however, challenges this perspective, questioning whether the cause for children’s work involvement and limited school attendance is actually due to poor-quality education, and associated low economic return. Therefore, children are being enticed to engage in unskilled work instead of continuing studies (Tariquzzaman & Hossain 2009). This challenges many education-focused government priorities in resource-poor countries that have a platform for increased access to education, designed to promote national development and poverty reduction (Hossain 2010). Instead of focusing solely on school access, further qualitative inquiry needs to be undertaken to understand how quality of education,
prevention of school dropouts and development of employment opportunities for high school graduates might influence children to remain in school.

A small number of emerging studies challenge the assumption that receiving an education automatically translates into skilled employment. Froerer (2012), for example, conducted an ethnographic study among marginalised girls in rural India, exploring their schooling experience and aspirations for the future. During initial interviews, the girls viewed education as an avenue for future job prospects and possible social mobility. Over time, however, their aspirations changed to align with their parents’ expectations. With limited social and economic capital and constraints of the labour market, completion of secondary school was seen as largely unattainable by most parents and girls. Consequently, many were withdrawn from school before, or upon completion of, grade five. The assumption that education is a liberating force is usually promoted by governments and NGO activists. Many children and their parents, however, do not experience the liberating force of education due to limited work opportunities, and are faced instead with economic and social conditions in which schooling is considered irrelevant (Froerer 2012). This calls for further investigation into limited employment opportunities upon graduation in resource-poor countries, and the subsequent effect on children’s school dropout.

Evidence suggests that there is limited understanding between local communities and international agencies (such as the ILO and UNICEF) on discourses surrounding education, policy and child labour (Nordtveit 2010). Nordtveit conducted case studies in Benin, Namibia and Swaziland and concluded that simplistic indicators of school attendance, such as student gender ratios or student school enrolment, are commonly adopted to assess the reality of education and child labour. Nordtveit further concluded that most community members regarded child labour as a normal socialisation issue and an unproblematic part of their culture. Therefore, local community members rejected western discourse regarding education and the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour. These findings highlight disconnect between international and local community discourse surrounding education and child labour. International agencies need to increase their qualitative-based research to further understanding complexities of community-based decision-making in this area.

1.4.8 Summary

Extensive research has been conducted internationally regarding factors that influence decisions for children to work (Edmonds & Pavcnik 2005; Froerer 2012). Many econometric studies, analysing data from national household surveys, have examined the incidence of children’s engagement in work and the relationship it has to certain social factors, including household income, school enrolment attendance rates and other social policy measures (Awan, Waqas & Aslam 2011; Soares, Kruger &
Berthelon 2012). A number of qualitative studies have investigated aspects of child labour, providing rich analysis of factors that influences child worker’s lives (Froerer 2012; Omonkhodion & Uchendu 2009; Postiglione, Jiao & Gyatso 2006). However, the number of qualitative studies exploring the context of child labour is exceedingly lower than the number of studies that rely on survey data. Child labour is multi-faceted and includes economic, social and cultural factors; further qualitative investigation into these influential factors is called for.

1.5 Theoretical perspectives

There are two theoretical perspectives that underpin this study:

a) Social exclusion theory

b) Migrant social network theory

Presented below is a critical analysis of international literature that relates to both theories. Findings from this study reveal that children’s social experience at school, and the common practice of migration for work, influenced children’s school attendance. Therefore, social exclusion theory and migrant social network theory are the most appropriate theories to provide a contextual lens for each point of the research process and analysis.

1.5.1 Social exclusion theory and application to the school setting

Social exclusion is a complex multi-dimensional process (Taket et al. 2009) that is ‘driven by unequal power relationships interacting across four main dimensions – economic, political, social and cultural – and at different levels including individual, household, group, community, country and global levels’ (Popay et al. 2008, p. 2). The concept social exclusion was first popularised in 1974 by René Lenoir who was then the Secretary of State for Social Action in the France Government. Lenoir defined individuals who were excluded as ‘mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem household, marginal, asocial persons, and other social misfits’ (Rawal 2007, p. 162). The literature that has continued on from Lenoir’s initiative and the social exclusion concept has received widespread attention with regards to its applicability and relevance in social policy analysis in poor resource countries (Rawal 2007).

Social exclusion occurs when individuals experience disadvantage and are unable to secure their rights to a basic standard of living or participate in major social and occupation institutions. Someone who experiences social exclusion may lack finances and other resources to gain access to health facilities, experience social participation, find paid employment or receive an education (Taket et al. 2009). All areas of social exclusion are inter-connected and cyclical (Brandsma 2001). An example of this would
be a child being excluded from education as a result of financial difficulty: this excludes the child's participation in learning activities, which may result in limited lifelong opportunities and lead to poorer psycho-social or health outcomes (Hickey & Du Toit 2007; Ziyauddin & Kasi 2007). Although children are entitled to universal rights articulated in the UN CRC (1990), many out-of-school children experience social exclusion in their communities and at school, which blocks ‘their membership in general society’ (Hossain 2005). Landman (2006) argues that social exclusion can be considered a form of rights violation if there is evidence of significant difference in treatment of people in economic, social and political realms. International research suggests that factors such as low learning levels, poor quality education (Geeves et al. 2002), repetition of grade levels (VSO 2010), absenteeism (Hossain 2010), engaging in unskilled work (Porter et al. 2010) and informal school fees causing family financial strain (Sann Chan et al. 2012) all contribute to children’s experience of social exclusion from education.

1.5.1.1 Education and social exclusion

There are few national studies that combine issues of social exclusion and education; interest is, however, growing, as socially excluded children are a targeted population for ensuring universal education. International literature has identified importance of social connectedness in children's school experience (Demaray & Malecki 2002; Phelps & Graham 2010; Van et al. 2012). Ivanauskiene (2012) conducted questionnaires with 105 teachers in three secondary schools in Lithuania to explore the social support for school children at risk of social exclusion. Results revealed that children were often at risk of social exclusion from school during their adolescent period, due to being unsociable, incommunicative and passive, and having learning problems. It was concluded that these children often came from at-risk or single parent families and received very little support from teachers. However, this study failed to include primary schools, which was a lost opportunity to assess whether primary-aged children were equally at risk of social exclusion. Furthermore, Ivanauskiene only provided quantitative evidence from teachers, and any insight into children’s own experiences was not presented.

Porter and colleagues (2010) conducted ethnographic research in two rural South African villages, examining young people’s experience of economic and political exclusion and its implications for their livelihood and formal education. This involved conducting interviews with people aged 9 to 18, their parents, teachers and other key informants. Porter and colleagues found that children were participating regularly in unpaid domestic and family farm labour, which contributed to household funds and school fees; such activity was, however, detrimental to their school attendance. This was despite parents and children regarding education as a route to family financial success. Nevertheless, these rural youth had limited education opportunities and were aspiring to escape to the city for better work opportunities, in spite of the scarce potential for escape. Porter and colleagues concluded that work
demands and long distances to school compromised young people’s opportunities to remain in formal education, where they could build social networks and potentially develop livelihood opportunities.

In the local Cambodian context, Sann Chan and colleagues (2012) explored social determinants of health and main barriers to health services access in four poor communities in Phnom Penh. Household surveys, interviews and FGDs were conducted with mothers, alongside interviews conducted with local authorities and health centre workers. It was found that the intersection of poor living conditions, low education and social and economic inequality with irregular low incomes was resulting in a cycle of disadvantage in the four communities. Single mothers and their children were most at risk of social exclusion due to absolute income poverty, which lead to limited education access and powerlessness. Community members contended that social exclusion started early for children when education put strain on daily family income and their social participation in the community. This study acknowledges that social exclusion from education is common in urban Cambodia. Nevertheless, it fails to explore this ever-expanding issue in rural Cambodia, where arguably children are at greater risk of social exclusion from education due to intensified limited access to resources.

VSO (2010) is tackling social exclusion from education in rural Cambodia by undertaking the Mainstreaming Inclusive Education Project (VSO 2005) in six provinces in Cambodia. This project works towards building technical and management capacity at the central, provincial, district and cluster school levels. During an evaluation, it was concluded that the project had been successful in the area of professional development for administrators and teachers (pre-service and in-service). This had a noteworthy positive impact on children’s access to schools, and reduction in repetition and dropout in grades six and seven, which is a high-risk time for due to transition from primary to lower secondary school (VSO 2010). Nonetheless, social exclusion from education persists as an issue throughout Cambodia, especially where children experience silent exclusion while still attending school.

1.5.1.2 Silent exclusion

In the case of silent exclusion (Lewin 2007), children continue the cycle of attending school despite being denied full educational opportunities. Silently excluded children struggle to gain literacy skills or learn the curriculum content, putting them at further risk of discontinuing their education (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay 2010). Research suggests that low learning levels (KAPE 2008), poor quality education (Geeves et al. 2002), repetition of grade levels and absenteeism all contribute to the beginning stages of silent exclusion (Consortium for Research on Educational Access Transitions and Equity [CREATE] 2011; Hunt 2008).
Some international literature erroneously categorises silently excluded children as ‘not interested in studies’ (International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS] 2000), instead of analysing a child’s social experience at school. An example of this comes from KAPE’s (2008) analysis of interviews with parents and students in Cambodia. Students who perceived themselves as ‘slow’ learners attended school less frequently, due to embarrassment and hopelessness—especially where teachers punished students for struggling to understand the lesson. Furthermore, No, Sam & Hirakawa (2012) explored school dropout in Cambodia through interviews with students in two rural provinces, concluded that by and large, Cambodian children were passive and easily intimidated. Therefore, when students lack social support networks, they view schooling as lonely, boring and insecure, which leads to disinterest in attendance.

There are studies, however, that place responsibility for children’s experience of social exclusion, and their limited understanding of their class work, on the quality of education provided (Marshall et al. 2009; Sokhom 2004). Qualitative studies of Cambodian education regularly document the ‘teacher centred’ methodology found in classrooms (Cambodian Education Sector Support Project [CESSP] 2006; Geeves et al. 2002). Generally, teachers spend very little time developing dynamic lesson plans, and fail to effectively explain content or make connections between elements in the curriculum. Students therefore regularly copy from textbooks, and responses to teacher questions focus heavily on memorisation and basic cognitive skills. Commonly, teachers do not develop effective lesson plans because they prioritise extra work opportunities for supplementary income instead of focusing on teaching duties (Vantha, Shrestha & Lok-Van 2008).

As a result of experiencing silent exclusion from education, children engage in work during peak agricultural seasons when families are at greater economic advantage (Duryea 2003; Kruger 2007). However, agricultural workers can encounter risks of unstable low income-levels depending on crop yield (Sengupta 2008). Poor and marginalised farmers therefore have a high tendency to move into seasonal migration after completing peak agricultural seasons (Deshingkar & Start 2003).

1.5.2 Migration – theory and application to the school setting

Migration is a complex social phenomenon that varies in duration, cause and type, in and between countries and regions (IOM 2013). Varying forms of migration include permanent, short-term or seasonal migration, which are prominent throughout low income and high-income countries. In recent times there have been rapid increases to migration in low-income nations, with high numbers of permanent, seasonal or temporary rural migrants moving into developing urban centres for employment opportunities (Deshingkar 2006). Such increases have led to multi-faceted issues in housing, employment and poor health. Migrants are generally less secure than the native-born in countries of destination, and without social networks they struggle to establish themselves, compromising their
resettlement experiences (IOM 2013). Therefore, migrants engage in social networks with former or current migrants during departure and upon arrival of their migration destination to gain information on employment opportunities, vulnerabilities of unauthorised migration and remittances (Görlich & Trebesch 2008; Hegde & Hoban 2013). This support Massey’s (1993, p. 448) claim that ‘migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community’ to attain access to foreign employment.’ Increases in migration rates have led to a weakening of the social fabric in communities, confounding educational attainment of rural children and youth as poorer populations considering migration for the financial betterment of their families (Lopez Cordova 2005; Sommers & Uvin 2011).

1.5.2.1 Background context to migration in and from Cambodia

A large proportion of Cambodia’s population (13.4 million) is under the age of 25, due to Cambodia’s baby boom in the 1980s after civil war (IOM 2010; Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training [MoLVT] 2011). Consequently, Cambodia has an estimated 300,000 new workers ready to enter the job market each year (Tunon & Rim 2013). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2013) has raised concern that Cambodia’s employment market is not rewarding individuals for attaining higher levels of education which in turn may discourage students from continuing their education, leading to insufficient skill levels, poor productivity and ultimately a negative impact on Cambodia’s economic growth (OECD 2013). Despite an increase in Cambodia’s GDP per capita from 2009 (USD $706) to 2013 (USD $944) it is suspected that this growth is urban-centric (World Bank 2013). Therefore, Cambodia faces major financial hurdles in rural development, where over 30% of the population live in poverty (UNDP 2013b).

In an attempt to address employment problems for Khmer youth, the RGC has recently encouraged engagement in overseas labour migration to Thailand, Korea and Malaysia (Chan 2009; MoLVT 2011). Countering this, Lopez Cordova’s (2005) investigation of migration in Mexico questioned whether migration actually leads to development, arguing that it weakens the social fabric of local communities. Moreover, instead of Cambodians migrating for long periods of time and aiming to increase the socio-economic status of their family in Cambodia, it is more likely that Cambodian migrants engage in short-term seasonal labour migration (NIS 2010). This is because 80.5% of the Cambodian population live in rural areas where they engage in agricultural work and experience unstable employment continuity (NIS 2010). The NIS stated that 87% of women are assured continuity of employment in the non-agricultural sector, while 82% of women working in the agricultural sector are seasonal workers. Agricultural workers earn approximately USD $3.17 per day in rural Cambodia (Kang & Liv 2013), which is
comparable to garment factory workers who earn between USD $61 and USD $80 per month in Phnom Penh (Teehan 2014). Seasonal migration is therefore a common phenomenon among rural Cambodians, to cope with unexpected problems such as illness, lack of employment, landlessness, poor crop yield and lack of access to markets (Görlich & Trebesch 2008; Konseiga 2007). There is, however, little empirical research on seasonal and temporary migration in the Pacific and Southeast Asia that meets experimental standards: further investigation into this phenomenon is needed (Gibson, McKenzie & Rohorua 2013).

1.5.2.2 Migration to Phnom Penh

Domestic migration from rural to urban areas (such as Phnom Penh) has been a fast growing phenomenon. Consequently, significant growth has occurred in the garment industry, tourism and construction sectors (Socheth 2012). The Cambodian industrial sector increased from under 13% of GDP in 1993 to 21.5% in 2011 (Socheth 2012). The garment industry is the largest industry in Cambodia, employing an estimated 250,000–290,000 Cambodians (mostly young women) and producing 80% of Cambodia’s export products (Abella 2005; Maltoni 2007; Webster 2004). Fitzgerald and colleagues (2007) argue, however, that although the garment industry provides more than a quarter of a million jobs to mainly young Cambodians, it is unlikely that this industry will significantly contribute to long-term poverty reduction, due to low the remittances sent by young workers to households.

1.5.2.3 Migration to Thailand

Although Cambodia is a latecomer to regular authorised cross-border migration for labour, increases in labour migration to countries that share an international border with Cambodia is a fast-growing phenomenon (Chan 2008; Utit 2013). Figures from Cambodia’s MoLVT report indicate that during 2009/2010 there were 53,160 Cambodians registered to work abroad, whereas in 2007/2008 there were 14,285 (MoLVT 2011). Workers from Cambodia have been migrating to Thailand since 1994 even though the Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] was signed between Thailand and Cambodia in 2003 (Huguet, Chamratrithirong & Natali 2012). The official recruitment of Khmer workers under this MOU began in 2006. In 2013 there were 104,261 Khmer migrants entering Thailand for work through the MOU (Australian Aid and ILO 2013). This figure does not, however, include unauthorised cross-border migrants, who enter Thailand without passports or authorised working permits and who make up the majority of Cambodians working in Thailand (Holliday 2012). Unauthorised migration has been defined as people illegally crossing borders to work or live in a country without authorisation (LeVoy & Geddie 2009). In 2009, the CDRI (2011) estimated there were 124,761 unauthorised Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand. The average cost for an individual to migrate legally to Thailand to work is
about USD $700, versus $100 for an illegal migrant. There is also a limited number of working permits available for Khmer workers (Walsh 2012). Therefore, most migrant workers choose to migrate illegally to Thailand for work instead of migrating legally, due to restrictions and higher costs (Chan 2009).

There is a strong pull for Cambodians to migrate illegally to Thailand to work in large informal sectors, including manufacturing and agricultural sectors that makes up 50% of Thailand’s GDP (Holliday 2012). These sectors involved 3D jobs (Dirty, Dangerous and Disliked): construction, farming, fishing and domestic services (Chan 2009). Additionally, these sectors rely heavily on illegal migrant workers to maintain economic viability, due to Thai workers’ unwillingness to take work with low wages (Heng 2013). The pull of (predominantly) youth from rural to urban areas is driven by wage differentials between agricultural work and unskilled work (CDRI 2007). Legal Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand are required to be paid the minimum wage, approximately USD $10 a day (Alexander, Salze-Lozac’h & Winijkulchai 2013), whereas many illegal migrant workers in Thailand earn USD $5–6 per day (Walsh 2012). This is above the average agricultural worker’s wage of USD $3.17 per day in rural Cambodia (Kang & Liv 2013).

1.5.2.4 Children and migration

There are two categories of children involved in migration: children who migrate without their parents (child migrants), and children who migrate with their parents (children of migrants) (Jampaklay 2011). There is limited credible research focused on children of migrants and migrant children. Nevertheless, research states that most child migrants are working in the agricultural sector, manufacturing sector and other informal economies (ILO 2006a). This leaves migrant children vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, decreased or no pay and being overworked in hazardous conditions (ILO 2006b; Jampaklay 2011). In rural Cambodia, children are pressured to leave school and work during agricultural seasons because out-migration is causing labour shortages (Kang & Liv 2013; Tong, Hem & Santos 2011). However, agricultural activities only offer three to six months employment: therefore, Cambodian youth leave their villages and migrate to urban centres for unskilled work, resulting in a circular migration pattern (CDRI 2007). De Haas (2005, p. 1269) takes the stance that ‘the key lies in encouraging circular migration. Instead of uselessly and harmfully trying to stop inevitable migration, immigration policies allowing for freer circulation can, besides increasing migration control, enhance the vital contribution of migrants to the development of their home countries’. Migration is, however, ultimately jeopardizing Cambodian children’s and youths’ personal and educational development. Migration and education policy-makers should take this into account when assessing whether migration, or educating the next generation of Khmers, will accelerate development in Cambodia.
1.5.2.5 Labour migration policy in Cambodia

The RGC developed a policy on Labour Migration in 2010 to manage sudden increases of migration. The policy aims:

a) To develop a labour migration policy, legal framework and provide effective management of labour migration based in international instruments;

b) To assume a rights-based approach and provide migrants protection against abusive practices by enforcing national law and regulation;

c) To include migration into the development agenda so that remittances and skills acquired from migration are successfully funnelled into local Cambodian communities (RGC 2010c).

Although Cambodia is developing a system to cope with accelerating rates of labour migrations, the RGC is arguably facing the challenges of managing legal frameworks and institutions to control increases in labour migration rates. This is especially the case regarding migration to Thailand.

1.5.2.6 Migrant social networks

Families often rely heavily on social networks to inform them of migration options (Görlich & Trebesch 2008; Hegde & Hoban 2013). This supports Massey and colleagues’ (1993, p. 448) claim that ‘migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community’ to attain access to foreign employment. Migrants engage in social networks, during both departure and arrival, to gain information about employment opportunities, vulnerabilities of unauthorised migration and remittances (Hegde & Hoban 2013). Many studies demonstrate the importance of social networks with family and friends and direct effects on migration flows (Garip & Curran 2010; Hegde & Hoban 2013; Liu 2013).

Nonetheless, reliance on social migration networks depends on the sending or receiving community context (Garip & Curran 2010), their financial state (McKenzie & Rapoport 2007) and whether or not they are migrating across international borders (Davis, Steckloy & Winters 2002).

It was asserted, following Fitzgerald and colleagues’ (2007) mixed-methods study into community wellbeing and household mobility in nine Cambodian villages, that wage labour, including migration, is the most emergent employment opportunity in rural Cambodia. The poorest village in the study had a 45–47% rate of adult earners selling labour either in their community, in neighbouring provinces or across the Thai-Cambodian border. When poor households experienced unemployment, they relied on social networks and moved across-borders for availability of work. Against these findings, the qualitative elements of the study were not conducted rigorously, including the failure to code and
integrate data from semi-structured interviews and FGDs into the analysis. The validity of the findings regarding the reasoning for frequency of migration from Cambodia to Thailand are therefore in question.

Families are commonly influenced by friends and relatives who return to villages as representatives of successful labour migration (Social Environment Research Consultants [SERC] 2010). SERC explored the impacts of migration across Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand by conducting interviews with 4,500 people who were either migrants themselves, or family members receiving remittances. It was found that migration was a matter of choice for many young people in rural areas due to the process of migrant returnees showing off their ‘trophies of migration’ which are desired by other villagers. Such items included motorbikes, mobile phones, new clothes, televisions and new houses. This display of purchasing power as a result of migration paves the way for future villagers to follow social networks in search of employment and financial reward.

1.6 Rationale

International studies that explore reasons for children’s lack of school attendance and work engagement abound (Alcáraz, Chiquiar & Salcedo 2012; Beegle, Dehejia & Gatti 2009; Ota & Moffatt 2007; Postiglione, Jiao & Gyatso 2006). While many studies draw on data from national surveys, there are insufficient qualitative studies that explore the context of children’s lack of school attendance and child labour. Moreover, there has been limited academic research regarding child labour in Cambodia, aside from small site-based quantitative projects conducted by development agencies that explore reasons for children’s engagement in work rather than school, or other studies that focus on ways of eliminating worst forms of child labour (Kim 2011; United States Department of Labor 2008; World Bank 2006a). There is a gap in the literature, and hence knowledge, around how to better understand the complex and multi-faceted social, cultural and economic factors behind this issue. These multi-faceted determinants are heightened in a resource-poor country such as Cambodia, particularly in rural regions, where there are many hurdles to be faced in improving education quality and ensuring children remain in school.

Despite a strong preference for quantitative research in Cambodian governance (Miles & Thomas 2007) an increased awareness of the value of qualitative inquiry, and its potential to address gaps in child-labour and education-focused research, is warranted. Therefore, this qualitative study has focused on giving a voice to individuals at the grassroots and policy levels of the Cambodian education system. Although children are rarely asked for their opinion in the Cambodian culture due to significant power imbalances between adults and children, it is important that children were included in this study as their experiences of school, work and family influence their ability and desire to attend school. This
qualitative study builds on previous studies by exploring how children’s work involvement affects their school attendance. In doing so, this study provides insight into the discourse and perceptions surrounding the influence of child labour on school attendance throughout the Khmer school year, and contributes to the growing local evidence-based research around education and child labour.
CHAPTER 2

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This ethnographic study involved my participation in the everyday lives of children and their families in two communes in rural Cambodia. The ethnography included data gathering techniques of in-depth interviews with parents, teachers, principals and key education informants, alongside FGDs and interviews with children aged 9 to 18. This chapter describes the steps that were taken to explore how children's involvement in paid and unpaid work influences their school attendance. This chapter explores the advantages and disadvantages of conducting ethnographic research, and presents a rationale for the research methodologies employed. The methodological challenges of conducting cross-cultural research in a foreign setting, and the lessons and limitations arising from these challenges, are discussed. Finally, the chapter explores quality assurance, ethical implications and analytical procedures, in order to ensure methodological rigour.

The study's aim was to explore how the rice harvest season affects school attendance among children in grades five to eight who lived in Chup Commune, Banteay Meanchey Province and Kiri Commune, Svay Rieng Province in Cambodia. This was achieved by undertaking three objectives:

a) To explore the decision-making process and influences on children's school attendance during the rice harvest season;

b) To describe teachers' lived experiences of teaching in rural Cambodia and its effects on students' school attendance during the rice harvest season;

c) To assess how the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport provides support to children at risk of not attending school during the rice harvest season.

As mentioned in the preface, however, once field research began the preliminary findings revealed multi-faceted influences—in addition to rice harvest season—on children's school attendance in rural Cambodia. Therefore, the study's scope broadened to include interrogation of the interconnected social factors that emerged, and these were incorporated into the study design. Two further objectives were therefore added, to ensure a comprehensive assessment of these multi-faceted influences:

a) To explore children's lived experiences of school and how that affects their school attendance;

b) To understand how children's work involvement and engagement in labour migration influences their school attendance.
2.2 Ethnography as a qualitative research approach

Ethnography requires that researchers give voice to people in their own context, enabling them to tell their story in a rigorous, credible and authentic way, to ensure a full understanding of the intended meaning (Fetterman 2010). Ethnography arguably ‘began as a method which was discovered, perfected, and institutionalised in western centres of power, for telling stories about marginalised populations of the world’ (Behar 2003, p. 15). The role and value of descriptive ethnography versus more structured and formal methodologies is debated (Czymoniewicz-Klippel 2011). For example, Scheper-Hughes (1992, p. 27) states that ethnographies are still considered ‘unwarranted intrusions in the lives of vulnerable threatened people’ by reducing subjects to objects for our ‘discriminating and incriminating scientific gaze’. In contrast, Madden (2012) argues that ethnography is ‘description and analysis coming together to answer questions and build theories, which in turn can respond to future ethnographic issues and generate future ethnographic theories’. The ethnographic nature of this study allowed me to have what Fetterman (2010, p. 3) calls ‘multiple interpretations of reality and alternative interpretations of data’ as I listened, observed and built rapport with families. The findings of this study provide valid information for future development of education policies and programs at the national level and have the potential to be implemented at the local community level throughout Cambodia.

2.3 Children’s participation in ethnographic research

Ethnographic research around children’s experiences and perceptions of their learning and social process is quite recent in social sciences (Morrow 2008). There is increasingly a shift toward viewing children as ‘social actors with opinions and views of their own and co-constructors of the meaning of their own learning’ (Smith, Duncan & Marshall 2005, p. 474). This is a move away from traditional constructs of children, in which they are viewed as passive individuals within school and family socialisation processes. Despite this recent shift in child participatory research, Waterson and Kumar Behera (2011) question whether ethnographers are ensuring that children’s opinions in the Asia-Pacific region are heard on matters that concern them, especially when the UNCRC (1990) highlights children’s right to participation. Although there are tensions around the ethics of conducting research with children (refer to section 2.11) (Morrow 2008), children were included in this study to better understand their lived experiences around school attendance.

2.4 Field research

To employ an ethnographic approach, it is important for the researcher live, work within and experience the studied culture (Fetterman 2010). Five months prior to field research, I moved to the capital city of Phnom Penh to set up a research site office and develop the research plan and design. During this
planning stage, education documents published by international and national agencies, research institutes and MoEYS were reviewed, to become conversant with current education-focused research and to ascertain any gaps therein. To become familiar with the research sites, I visited the regions in which the ethnography would be conducted—Chup and Kiri Communes—up to six times. Chup Commune was selected as a research site because children not attending school during the rice harvest season was seen as an issue by a local NGO worker based in Chup. Chup Commune is a 30-minute drive from the Provincial town, Sisophon, in the northwest Province of Banteay Meanchey. During familiarisation visits, I discussed children’s schooling and work involvement with community members and regularly heard stories of Khmer people migrating from Chup to Thailand for work. Such accounts broadened my field of inquiry, as I began contemplating how migration would influence the research findings.

I therefore opted to broaden the scope by including Kiri Commune, in Svay Rieng Province, as another research site. Additionally, I partnered with a NGO in Kiri Commune, Cambodia. This NGO had established education focused programs. Therefore, conducting research in Kiri Commune provided the NGO with further insight into education needs in the Kiri. Kiri Commune is a 30-minute drive from the Provincial town, Svay Rieng, in the southeast Province of Svay Rieng. Svay Rieng has a strong focus on rice production. It borders Vietnam, which provided me opportunity to compare children’s work involvement during the rice harvest with the influences of out-migration on children’s education in different parts of the country. By selecting two study sites, this provided opportunity to present insights into the confounding influences on education from the north-west and south-east of Cambodia.

Before conducting field research, I obtained written approval for the study from the Provincial MoEYS education officials in Banteay Meanchey and Svay Rieng. Field research was undertaken from November 2012 to March 2013 in the villages of Kaun, Krasang and Thrapeang in Chup Commune and the villages of Prasath and Cheak in Kiri Commune (pseudonyms have been provided for village and commune names to protect anonymity).

During field research, I stayed in the town centre of Chup and the provincial town of Svay Rieng. My Cambodian research assistant [RA], Jorani (pseudonym), and I stayed at a local NGO in Chup with an NGO project manager. Jorani and I also stayed at the Red Cross Hotel in Svay Rieng. In both provinces I stayed at a distance from the study villages, providing opportunity to reflect on what I had learnt in the villages. Reflecting, documenting thoughts and deconstructing events were critical to the research process (Engin 2011).

During the first week of research in both provinces I revisited the Provincial Directors of Education and met with the District Directors of Education, commune leaders, village leaders and school principals to
introduce myself, Jorani and the study. During these meetings, I showed evidence of written 
authorisation from MoEYS and Deakin University, which gave me access to schools and villages. I had 
ever worked in Chup or Kiri—therefore, as an ethnographer; I had an outsider perspective of the local 
communities (Naaeke et al. 2011). Nevertheless people in the villages recognised me from my previous 
visits; this helped me to build rapport, which is essential for conducting high-quality data collection 
(Duncan et al. 2009).

2.5 The researcher and research assistant

Throughout field research, a strong professional and personal relationship was developed with my RA, 
a Cambodian national. This was important given the cross-country limitations of working in an 
international environment. Jorani is a trained anthropologist and an experienced Khmer- and English-
speaker, who has worked on a variety of research projects with NGOs and universities. Although Jorani 
is originally from Banteay Meanchey, she had not worked and was not known in Chup. During our visits 
to rural villages, she showed sincerity and empathy for children and families. Her genuine interactions 
built trust and rapport with participants; we also had a strong rapport in our own working relationship.

Mill and Ogilvie (2003) acknowledge that it is important to use participants’ native language so that they 
are able to effectively express their worldview. Research was conducted in the Khmer language. My 
Khmer language skills were limited: I therefore communicated indirectly with participants through 
Jorani’s translation. There is some debate that indirect communication distances the researcher from 
participants’ original meaning, leading to increased complexity during the interpretive process (Birbili 
2000; Squires 2008). Mindful of the literature, I worked closely with Jorani and purposely debriefed after 
interviews to ensure that I had a thorough understanding of the intended meaning expressed by 
participants (Mill & Ogilvie 2003). As an Adult Third Culture Kid (ATCK) myself, I have spent most of my 
formative years living in other cultures other than my own (Australia), including Botswana, Vietnam and 
Nepal, due to my parents’ career paths with international organisations. This life experience of 
observing and quickly learning cultural norms gave me the ability to interact well and build trust quickly 
with Khmers I met during field research.

2.6 Selection of study participants

This study recruited 85 participants including two provincial MoEYS education officials (one in Banteay 
Meanchey Province and one in Svay Rieng Province); two UNICEF education advisors (one in each 
province); four school principals (two each from both Chup and Kiri); nine primary and lower secondary 
school teachers (four from Chup and five from Kiri); eight parents (four each from Chup and Kiri); and 
54 children, some from grades five to eight, and some of equivalent age who had dropped out of 
school. These children were aged 9 to 18 (29 from Chup and 26 from Kiri). The selection criteria
included children in grades five to eight (or children of equivalent age not currently attending school) because it was concluded that children in grades five to eight are coming of an age when they can begin working instead of prioritising school. The selection criteria also included parents of children in the aforementioned age range, teachers of grades five to eight, and principals of primary and secondary schools in Chup and Kiri. This maximum variation sampling strategy sought to recruit participants at varying level of influence on the Cambodian Education System, in order to obtain a wide range of perceptions and insights into children’s work involvement and school attendance. For the purpose of this study, 'child' is defined as a human being male or female 18 years old and below (UNCRC 1990).

2.6.1 Sampling and recruitment

This study adopted purposive and snowball sampling strategies. In purposive sampling, a participant is selected because they have experienced the phenomenon being investigated (Liamputtong 2009). Snowball sampling occurs when existing participants recruit other potential participants from among their acquaintances who also have experience in the phenomenon of interest (Carpenter 2010). These sampling strategies enabled us to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to provide in-depth information.

2.6.1.1 Children

Recruitment involved visiting schools and villages to play games, speak with children and build rapport (Duncan et al. 2009). Information flyers were distributed to all children in grades five to eight in all schools and I asked them to give the flyer to their parents or guardians. Children were invited verbally, as well as through the flyer, to participate in the study. Many female child participants expressed interest in coming to our FGDs; it proved more difficult to recruit male child participants due to their reluctance to express interest in a public space. This is probably because we were two female researchers in our 20s, which created gender and age barriers with potential male child participants. We overcame this by spending more time visiting households and inviting male children individually to join our FGDs; this gave them the opportunity to privately express interest.

At the time of the study, there were 2,681 children aged 6 to 17 attending school in Kiri Commune and 4,474 children aged 6 to 17 attending school in Chup Commune. Snowball sampling began by asking if children in the study knew of others in grades five to eight who might be interested in joining the study. We asked referral children to give interested children an information flyer to give to their parents or guardians, which instructed them to contact us if they were interested in joining a FGD or interview. This continued until 54 children had been recruited for the study.
Information provided on the flyer asked parents or guardians to contact Jorani by phone if they were interested in their child joining the FGDs. During visits to villages, we were frequently approached by children, parents and guardians with expressions of interest. We gave parents or guardians a Plain Language Statement [PLS] (Appendix 10) and a Consent Form (Appendix 14) and children a PLS (Appendix 12) once they expressed interest. If children, parents or guardians were illiterate or semi-literate, Jorani read out these documents, after which parents could ask questions. If they expressed interest in their child participating in the study, they were instructed to contact Jorani who would then organise a time and place for the FGD.

One child from each FGD was asked to volunteer to participate in an in-depth interview. When a child volunteered to participate in an in-depth interview we gave the child's parents or guardians a PLS (Appendix 11) and Consent Form (Appendix 14). We also provided parents or guardians a verbal explanation about process and content of the in-depth interview.

2.6.1.2 **Teachers, school principals and parents**

Teachers, school principals and parents or guardians were informed about the study when we delivered information flyers to schools and selected villages. To express interest in participating, teachers, principals and parents were instructed to phone Jorani. During phone conversation with teachers, principals and parents or guardians, we verified their eligibility based on the inclusion criteria. Teachers, principals and parents were given a PLS (Appendix 8) and Consent Form (Appendix 13) before interviews. The PLS and Consent Form were read to illiterate or semi-literate parents or guardians. If teachers, principals or parents were still interested in participating in an interview after being given PLS and Consent Form they were instructed to phone Jorani to organise an interview.

Snowball sampling was initiated once purposive sampling strategies were implemented. It was only necessary to implement snowball sampling strategies to recruit the total number of teachers (9), children (54), and parents (9). The remaining participants groups were solely recruited by purposive sampling strategies. We asked grades five to eight teachers, children in grades five to eight and parents of children in grades five to eight who had consented to participate if they knew of other potential participants who fit the inclusion criteria for teachers, children and parents. If they did, they were asked to pass the flyer onto these potential participants. If potential participants were interested in participating then they were instructed on the flyer to contact us by phone.

2.6.1.3 **Provincial MoEYS education officials and UNICEF education advisors**

An invitation letter was directed to the Provincial Department of Education and Provincial UNICEF office to invite the participation of MoEYS education officials and UNICEF education advisors based in
Banteay Meanchey and Svay Rieng Provinces. When these parties expressed interest in participating in the study, they were advised to contact Jorani by phone. A PLS (Appendix 9) was for these parties to review and sign if interested in participating, and again, they were instructed contact Jorani by phone to organise an interview.

In total there were 85 participants involved in the study. The demographic information of participating children, parents and teachers can be found in Appendix 19. The composition of FGDs and interviews are listed below in sections 2.8.1 and 2.9.

2.7 Informed consent

2.7.1 Informed consent from children

I adopted the protectionist stance when addressing the complexities of informed consent and voluntary participation that surround research with children (Powell & Smith 2009). According Ennew and colleagues (2009), permission from parents or guardians is not sufficient to engage children in research. Children were therefore always invited personally, and permission to use their stories was sought during interviews and FGDs, as suggested by Morrow (2008). However, no research took place without informed consent of a child’s parent or guardian.

When we delivered information flyers to children, a verbal explanation was also provided to ensure understanding of the research aims, data-gathering methods, and to assure understanding of anonymity and confidentiality. Children were informed that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any stage without consequence as recommended by Davis (1998). Children were able to ask questions about the study. When children expressed interest in participating (with agreement from their parents or guardians), they were asked to relay back their understanding of involvement in the study, in order to check that children comprehended their participation (Gibson 2007). Each child was asked if they consented to participating in the FGD and/or in-depth interview using an audio recorder. In addition, they were asked to tick either Yes or No on the Consent Form (Appendix 15 and 16). Each child was asked to give informed consent by providing their thumbprint on the Consent Form immediately before the FGDs and in-depth interview commenced. Thumbprints were required on the Consent Forms instead of signatures because thumbprints have equal significance to a written signature in Cambodia. For example, Cambodians provide their thumbprint on ballot papers during general elections (Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia 2001).

Caution should be taken when working with children and young people who voluntarily consent, because the power imbalance between the child and the researcher may influence the story being told.
(Thomson 2007). Children may struggle to tell the researchers that they did not want to participate, or to ask to withdraw from the study. Therefore, informed consent was negotiated in an ongoing fashion, as outlined above as recommended by Einarsdóttir (2007).

2.7.2 Informed consent from parents or guardians

As the majority of students were under the age of 18, parents or guardians were required to provide consent for their child’s participation in the study (Munford & Sanders 2004). This process involved delivering information flyers to children’s parents or guardians and providing an informal verbal explanation of the study. Written and oral explanation addressed issues of confidentiality and anonymity and gave parents or guardians the opportunity to remove their child from the study at any time. If parents or guardians expressed that their child was interested in participation in an FGD and/or in-depth interview, they were given the relevant PLS. Where parents or guardians were illiterate or semi-literate, Jorani read the PLS aloud. They were asked for consent by ticking either Yes or No on the relevant Consent Form and were audio recorded. They were also asked to provide their thumbprint on a Consent Form when organising a time and place for the FGD and/or in-depth interview. However, in instances where a parent or guardian agreed to the child participating but the child was not interested, then the child was not persuaded to participate. An interested child was also not able to participate where their parent or guardian did not consent. Children did not suffer any negative consequences from not participating in the study.

2.7.3 Informed consent by adult participants

All adults participants were given a PLS and Consent Form and asked if they would consent to participating in an interview and having the interview audio-recorded. They were able to tick either Yes or No on the Consent Form. Participants were able to ask questions regarding the study. Adult participants, excluding parents, were expected to be literate. When they agreed to have an interview, they were asked to provide a written signature on the Consent Form at the time of the in-depth interview. Parents who partook in the study were not expected to be literate, and were asked to provide their thumbprint on the Consent Form. In the unlikely event of participants experiencing harm or discomfort during their participation in the study, participants were provided with contact details for the Social Services of Cambodia; these details were listed on the PLS for all participants. During the research planning stage I consulted with experts in the education field and they advised that I provide the participant’s with contact details for the Social Services of Cambodia. The Social Services of Cambodia is a network of social workers that provide direct social services to communities.
2.8 Data collection

2.8.1 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions provide an interactive group setting for children to discuss their values, beliefs and understandings of an issue without feeling pressures associated with being individually approached by a researcher (Gibson 2007). Nine FGDs were conducted (five in Chup and four in Kiri; 54 participants in total) to find out about children’s experiences of schooling and work outside of school. Three pilot FGDs were conducted to test the FGD methodology of seasonal diagramming. As suggested by Ennew and colleagues (2009), the FGDs comprised children of similar ages—and usually of the same gender—to ensure that participants were comfortable to share with others in the group setting. Table 2 displays the composition of each pilot FGD and FGD:

Table 2: Pilot Focus Group Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot Focus Group Discussions</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Commune Location</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Pilot FGD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Village teaching space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pilot FGD</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 7–8</td>
<td>Primary school undercover area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Pilot FGD</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Grade 5–6</td>
<td>Primary school undercover area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants in Pilot FGDs</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Focus Group Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Discussions</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Commune Location</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 FGD</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 7-8</td>
<td>Village meeting space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 FGD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 5-6</td>
<td>Village meeting space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 FGD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 7-8</td>
<td>Village meeting space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FGD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 5-6</td>
<td>Primary school room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 FGD</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 5-6</td>
<td>Primary school room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 FGD</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kiri</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 7-8</td>
<td>Primary school outdoor area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 FGD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kiri</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 5-6</td>
<td>Primary school outdoor area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 FGD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kiri</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 7-8</td>
<td>Primary school outdoor area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 FGD</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kiri</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 5-6</td>
<td>Primary school outdoor area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants in FGDs</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.8.1.1 Pilot Focus Group Discussions

The pilot FGDs were conducted to test how comfortable children were with participatory methodologies, and how suited to the FGD format based on their age, gender and reading and writing abilities. Two pilot FGDs had mixed-gender composition to test whether or not this would affect FGD outcomes. The gender mix and imbalance affected the final pilot FGD, where three females and one male participated. The other male participants failed to attend the pilot FGD, which caused the remaining male to become shy while participating. Furthermore, gender stereotypes persist throughout Cambodia and females are still considered to be of lower status relative to males, which restricts their participation in decision-making (Kasumi 2004). Therefore, we opted for single-sex FGD composition to ensure children were given equal opportunity to share.

The pilot FGDs provided an opportunity to identify flaws and develop more creative methodologies. Children were asked to draw and write on the timeline to indicate yearly events. Younger children were, however, reluctant to draw or write on the timeline due to their lack of confidence in reading and writing.
Therefore, Jorani and I brainstormed more appropriate data-gathering methods tailored to children’s literacy abilities. I drew colourful pictures of yearly events and asked children to stick the pictures on a seasonal diagram at the places where they thought these events occurred. The children were more willing to participate in this activity and to discuss the placement of pictures on the diagram. We had more immediate positive response with two games that we ran in the pilot FGDs, which successfully built rapport with the children. These activities are discussed in greater detail below.

2.8.1.2 Procedures during Focus Group Discussions

During FGDs, there were two Khmer-speaking facilitators. One facilitator was female and the other was male. Jorani was the moderator while the other facilitator was the note-taker. Jorani, following the FGD outline (Appendix 7), explained the seasonal diagram and asked all questions linked to the cycles of the diagram, while encouraging children to contribute. The note-taker in Chup was a student at a local university in Tuek, and was known to Jorani. The note-taker in Svay Rieng worked at a local NGO. Although the FGDs were being recorded, the note-taker was responsible for taking detailed notes of the discussions and keeping track of children’s input during the FGDs (Mack et al. 2005).

2.8.1.3 Creative methods employed during Focus Group Discussions

Khmer music was played upon children’s arrival to FGDs and snacks and water were provided throughout. Each child was given a yellow card at the outset of FGDs and interviews. We explained that raising the yellow card indicated that they would like to stop their participation (Czymoniewicz-Klippel 2009). No children raised their yellow card. Children were asked to think of a pseudonym for themselves, such as a movie star’s name; this was then used instead of their own name (Mack et al. 2005). Jorani collected demographic information from each child, including age, gender, grade, household living situation, family’s source of income, family land ownership and whether or not they participated in the rice harvest. This data informed and strengthened the qualitative data analysis by providing contextual perspectives on participants’ stories (Saldaña 2009).

2.8.1.4 Warm up activities

Before FGDs began, a warm up game was played to develop trust, generate group communication and create a social environment. Children were asked to stand in a circle and place their hands in the middle of the circle. Children were instructed to join each of their hands with hands belonging to two different participants; this caused a tangle. The children were then instructed to communicate with one another and move to untangle themselves and form a circle again. We also joined in the warm up game to build relationships and trust with the children (Colucci 2007). After the game, Jorani, the note-taker, the children and I all introduced ourselves and spoke about our families. This provided an opportunity
for children to become familiar with our and other group members' backgrounds. The warm up game helped maintain children's interest in the FGD, as their attention was waning during demographic data collection activity.

2.8.1.5 Seasonal diagramming

The activity-oriented discussion that was implemented during the FGD was seasonal diagramming (Inner Spaces Outer Faces Initiative [ISOFI] 2007; Mukherjee 2003a, 2003b). Rural livelihoods are inherently influenced and connected to seasonality (Mukherjee 2003a, 2003b). Each season presents specific challenges that significantly impact upon rural lives and livelihood. As seasons change there are changes in crops grown, and availability of water and food. Therefore, seasonal diagramming provided an avenue to explore and compare related aspects of rural living and their influences on children's workload, schooling and employment (Mukherjee 2003a).

Seasonal diagramming was appropriate for children in grades 5 to 8, as it allowed for creativity and an avenue for illiterate or semi-literate children to express their thoughts. Discussions during seasonal diagramming shed light on the months where children were most at risk of not attending school, and how school fitted with their out-of-school responsibilities (Conway 2009). Jorani and I drew a timeline and colourful pictures of Khmer New Year, the wet and dry seasons, school holidays, children starting school, the rice harvest season and rice planting season. Children placed pictures on the timeline, and some drew lines indicating when different seasons started and stopped. This created discussion around the social, economic and cultural factors that influence child labour and school non-attendance.

2.8.1.6 Cool down activities

At the end of the FGD, children were given time to free draw while we debriefed about the FGD, their school life and work. Finally, children engaged in a game where everyone stood in a circle and passed around a paper ball while Khmer music played. Once the music stopped, the child with the ball unwrapped one layer with an instruction to either dance, sing or behave like a familiar animal in their village. The ball was passed around until all layers of the ball had been removed and they found the prize. This proved to be a culturally relevant game: the children enjoyed dancing, singing popular Khmer songs and laughing together as they acted out animal sounds and actions.

2.8.2 Interpretive in-depth interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were the second method of data collection. As opposed to direct and objective interviewing styles, semi-structured in-depth interviews allow the researcher to conduct conversation-style interviews while following interview question guidelines (Appendices 1–6). This
enables participants to discuss experiences they feel are vital to the exploration of the phenomenon (Liamputtong 2009). All thirty-one of the aforementioned adult participants and nine children were interviewed. Table 4 below documents the interviews conducted:

Table 4: Semi-structured in-depth interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MoEYS Education Officials</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Banteay Meanchey and Svay Rieng</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school principals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chup and Kiri</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 5–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school principals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chup and Kiri</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 7–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chup and Kiri</td>
<td>Male/Female (1)</td>
<td>Grade 5–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chup and Kiri</td>
<td>Male/Female (5)</td>
<td>Grade 5–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chup and Kiri</td>
<td>Male/Female (8)</td>
<td>Grade 5–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Advisors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant (Teacher trainer)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant (local NGO)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chup</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant (Rice Production Specialist)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informants (Education Specialists)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants in interviews</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jorani and I attended interviews and FGDs with children together, to maintain professional balance between the child and me, and to protect children’s rights and needs (Ennew et al. 2009). The interviews, with nine individual children, were all conducted in public spaces. Different approaches and styles of communication were used while interviewing children, including the use of drawing materials. Adults were interviewed one-on-one. Parents were also interviewed to understand their perspectives on children’s school attendance and work involvement. While interviewing teachers, I asked about their lived experiences of teaching in rural Cambodia and their thoughts about students’ school attendance. I explored school governance, teaching quality and the effects it has on school attendance with school
principals and key informants. Interviews with UNICEF education advisors and Provincial MoEYS education officials gave insight into education policies and plans for future initiatives to provide support to children at risk of dropout. All FGDs and interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and translated verbatim from Khmer into English by Jorani. This process enabled Jorani to accurately detail participants’ experiences through precise transcription (Fossey et al. 2002).

2.8.3 Gifts provided to participants

It was deemed appropriate to give children, parents and teachers a small gift of 4,000 Riel [R] (USD $1) to participate in each research activity as a sign of appreciation for their time (Gibson 2007). It also covered any travel costs on their part. Snacks and water were provided during interviews and FGDs to ensure that participants were not distracted by thirst or hunger (Liamputtong 2009). This is especially important in a study site such as Cambodia, where families in poor communities spend the majority of their time earning enough money to meet their family’s basic needs. We arrived at 4,000 R as an appropriate amount: it was not considered a large amount of money, but was enough to compensate for participants’ time and travel. Therefore, the small gift did not impair the voluntary nature of the participants’ involvement.

2.9 Quality assurance

2.9.1 Reliability and validity

Qualitative research embraces the core principles of reliability and validity; these terms, however, are rarely used in qualitative approaches (Nueman 2011). Reliability and validity were incorporated into the study design to ensure that findings were recognised by both qualitative and quantitative research disciplines. Validity refers to the credibility and authenticity of research findings (Nueman 2011). Validity and reliability of the research objectives was achieved through rich description of data, analysis and reporting the findings. There was a wide variety of perspectives from participants at varying levels of the Cambodian Education System which strengthened the overall analysis of confounding factors influencing children’s education (Creswell 2009). Reliability refers to consistency and dependability throughout a research study (Nueman 2011). To ensure reliability and validity, I returned to Chup and Kiri two months after field research to conduct member checking. This gave participants the option to check their transcripts for accuracy prior to data analysis (Mero-Jaffe 2011). Jorani read out interview transcripts to participants who were illiterate. Member checking provided opportunity to add relevant information that had changed since the time of fieldwork. An example of this was teachers’ salaries, which had increased by 20% since conducting field research.
Additionally, timelines were prepared for FGD member checking. During field research, I took photos of everyday activities in local communities that children had mentioned during FGDs, such as household chores or going to school. When referring to FGD transcripts, I placed these photos on the timelines. This colourful representation of activities captured children’s attention, which provided opportunity to clarify each activity children engaged in and how it impacted their schooling. After member checking FGDs, I visited the homes of the nine children with whom I had conducted interviews, and had follow-up conversations to verify what we had discussed.

2.9.2 Rigour

Rigour refers to the quality of qualitative inquiry (Creswell 2009). Rigour was achieved through the process of keeping a research diary. Engin (2011, p. 297) describes the research diary as a ‘scaffolding tool in the construction of both research knowledge and identity as a researcher’. Keeping a research diary allowed for reflexivity as I wrote down my thoughts throughout field research. I described observations and conversations I had had in the field and tracked decisions made (Gibbs 2007). The explicit description of research processes informed data analysis and interpretation (Holliday 2007).

2.9.3 Triangulation

Triangulation is the application of more than two data sources to explain research themes (Flick 2008). Triangulation is important in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to establish validity of findings by analysing the research question from multiple perspectives (Flick 2008). Triangulation was achieved by implementing two research methods (FGDs and in-depth interviews) in two research settings with four different participant groups as a result of maximum variation sampling (Liamputtong 2010). The validity of emerging themes was analysed through lenses of social exclusion theory and migrant social network theory.

2.10 Ethical implications

2.10.1 Confidentiality and privacy

Ethics approval was granted in September 2012 by Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (reference number: 2012–233). Ethical consideration was given during design development, coding and storage of the study, in order to mitigate potential harm. For questions of confidentiality and storage of research data, Deakin University Human Research Ethics Manual was consulted. Maintaining confidentiality and privacy in FGDs requires special precautions; therefore, participants’ names were substituted with pseudonym (Mack et al. 2005). All FGDs were conducted in open spaces: a village meeting area, a local school-room and a local school-yard that children could access easily.
Interviews were conducted in children's homes, in the presence of a family member or visible otherwise to the public eye to ensure children felt safe and parents felt comfortable with their child participating.

Some challenges arose around confidentiality. The choice of venues made it difficult to provide children with assurance confidentiality. This was because mothers and children watched FGDs due to an interest in me and in the activities we organised. Thankfully this had little effect on children's responses during FGDs, perhaps because these children are part of small communities where most information is shared amongst families. However, some children were too shy to play in the cool down game because others were watching them. Additionally, some children were influenced to answer a certain way by their parents during interviews. The presence of onlookers may have had an overbearing effect on some children (Gardner & Randall 2010), so they were asked if they wanted more privacy. Most were indifferent to this question. Nevertheless, it was explained to onlookers that the children needed space to participate in FGDs.

Participants who partook in interviews were given great assurance of confidentiality. Participants' details and assigned pseudonyms were kept in a password-protected document so that participants could be re-identified when revisited for member checking. The Consent Forms were kept in a locked cabinet in the project supervisor's office (National Health and Medical Research Council 2007). Participants were assured that special precautions had been taken to protect their identities and research data. If a participant wished to withdraw from the study after these assurances then they were given freedom to do so by placing a thumbprint or signing a revocation of Consent Form (Appendices 17 and 18). However, no participants withdrew from the study.

Digital recordings, transcripts and data analysis of FGDs and interviews were stored electronically and kept on a password-protected computer. Back-up copies of these electronic files were transferred to an external hard drive and kept in the project supervisor's locked cabinet. All information regarding the project will be stored for a minimum of six years, after which time it will be destroyed in accordance with Deakin University's research procedures.

2.11 Data analysis

Analytical methods of data immersion, open coding, creation of categories and thematic analysis and consolidating themes were utilised during data analysis (Fossey et al. 2002). I analysed each transcript to provide a thorough thick description that accurately portrayed participants' perception regarding school attendance and child work. Data generated from pilot FGDs was not included in data analysis. After fieldwork, I immersed myself in the data. Data immersion enabled me to identify features of the
data that influenced later coding procedures. I met regularly with Jorani to clarify any queries I had about the transcripts and contextual meanings (Irvine et al. 2007).

After data immersion, I began open coding by linking codes to units of meaning within the data (Saldaña 2009). I manually analysed each transcript three times, while implementing descriptive coding, seeking to capture the meaning of subjective experiences and perceptions through summarising primary topics found in transcripts (Saldaña 2009). Codes were then transferred into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to begin developing categories and themes.

Demographic information obtained from participants was analysed using NVivo through attribute coding and linking to emerging themes (Saldaña 2009). Attribute coding is most appropriate for qualitative studies with a wide variety of data, such as participants from various backgrounds. Attribute coding provided context and participant information for further analysis of interrelationship between themes (Saldaña 2009). Finally, themes were analysed to understand meaningful relationship between them (Fossey et al. 2002).

Categories were developed from data by gathering codes with similar meanings (Saldaña 2009). To ensure full understanding of the meaning that participants wanted to convey, I constantly made refinement of codes. This led to the process of inductive thematic analysis, where themes and categories are derived from data alone (Fossey et al. 2002). Inductive category development was implemented to seek out these common emerging themes by adding, examining and altering categories (Saldaña 2009). These categories included children’s engagement in work, school attendance in rural Cambodia, school dropout in rural Cambodia, teachers, migration and education interventions.

To overcome the overwhelming detail of coding within categories, I developed a concept map based on the main emergent themes (Appendices 20–26) (Brightman 2003). This broadened my perspective, deepening my understanding of the data and helping to structure my own thinking in a visual manner before writing the findings chapter.
CHAPTER 3

Findings

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings of the research. This chapter provides interpretation of the data which gives insight into children’s experience of school attendance and non-attendance, alongside confounding influences on children’s education, such as family financial strain and teachers’ professional commitment to teaching. This chapter also addresses a number of other pertinent issues: school curriculum, content and delivery; children’s involvement in work activities; children and their families migrating for unskilled work; and the exploration of education policy and interventions in rural Cambodia. Demographic information was collected from children, teachers and parents which is presented under Appendix 19. Demographic information provided contextual information for participants’ stories (Saldaña 2009).

3.2 Children’s experience of going to school

During children’s interaction with us, they shared their views on the education they received in their schools. Children valued education because they felt it gave them opportunities to extend their knowledge by learning school curriculum content and becoming literate, as well as allowing them to be in a social space with friends. However, work commitments, apprehension about future study in secondary school, financial strain and family sickness created barriers in continuing their study.

3.2.1 Children’s drive to learn

Some children felt that they wanted to obtain knowledge and understand their schoolwork so that they could learn alongside their literate peers, instead of being excluded. This was true for Pov, a 16-year-old girl who lives in Thrapeang. Pov had completed grade 6, but returned to repeat grade 6 after spending three months working in Thailand. When Pov returned to her village she noticed that friends who had continued at school during her absence had learnt more content than her. This gave Pov motivation to return to school and become literate: ‘I saw other friends who know more than me in the village so I want to be a person who is very educated and can read and write.’

3.2.2 School as a social space

Other children spoke about their enjoyment of social experiences at school, and the benefit of learning in the school environment. I met Toch in Kaun village. Toch was a 15-year-old girl who had recently dropped out of grade 6. Toch stated, ‘I enjoyed school because I play with my friends and learn’.
Similarly, Eiva, a 12-year-old, told me she had dropped out of grade 1 the previous year (when she was 11). Eiva spoke freely about her enjoyment of going to school: ‘When I went to school it was fun and I got some knowledge.’

Not all children had positive social experiences at school. Chhouk, a 15-year-old girl who had recently dropped out of grade 7, described how she was bullied and shamed at school for not reading well in front of the class and for poor school attendance. This contributed to Chhouk dropping out of school:

When I read for everyone in class they would tease me for not reading well. [...] When I missed school, friends would say something bad to me so I stopped going to school (Chhouk).

Instead Chhouk’s positive social experience was with her friends in Kaun village who had dropped out of primary school. I often saw Chhouk laughing with her friends when I visited Kaun. It became evident during the FGD that Chhouk’s girlfriends and older sister influenced her decision to drop out of school:

I have two friends in the same village who also stopped school because they were struggling to understand the lesson. Then I stopped after them. [...] My older sister also stopped school to work in Thailand and help during the harvest (Chhouk).

3.2.3 Children influenced by the example of siblings dropping out of school

Many children I met were the only children out of all their siblings still attending school. In most cases their older siblings had dropped out of school in primary or lower secondary school. For many children, their older siblings’ experiences of dropping out of school influenced their decision to stop school and begin work. For example, Toch, who dropped out of grade 6 at age 15, had four older siblings who had stopped school. Toch had a 30-year-old brother who had stopped school in grade 3 and who works during the harvest season, a 20-year-old sister who stopped school in grade 4 and was working in Thailand on a farm, and two older brothers who had recently stopped school to work with their sister in Thailand. Toch wanted to join her siblings working in Thailand once she no longer had to look after her cousin while her Aunt was working during the rice harvest.

Pov had five older sisters: her eldest sister, 28-year-old Romdoul, who had never been to school; her 26 and 23-year-old sisters had stopped school in grade 7, and her 18-year-old sister had stopped school in grade 6. Pov followed the example of her older sister, Romdoul, by leaving school in grade 6 to work in Thailand. However, after three months of working in Thailand, Pov returned to school.

3.2.4 Children’s involvement in work

Family expectations of children’s involvement in paid or unpaid work was a main factor preventing children from attending school. Children’s chores included caring for younger family members,
chopping tapioca, participating in the rice harvest or migrating to work in Thailand, Phnom Penh or neighbouring districts.

Toch and Pov both prioritised work over attending school. Toch reluctantly described her tension between work and school: she regularly missed school because she was working during the cucumber harvest season. When I asked Toch whether she would like to return to school, she looked at her mother and said that she preferred to take care of her cousin rather than go to school while her family worked:

I missed a lot of school during cucumber harvest [...] I like work instead of school because I am busy taking care of my cousin while my family helps with the harvest (Toch).

Pov described her experience of working in Thailand with her older sister, Romdoul, harvesting pineapple, tapioca and sugar cane, instead of going to high school. Romdoul was sitting nearby and described how Pov wanted to work in Thailand after seeing friends returning to Thrapeang village from working in Thailand. Romdoul explaining how Pov was homesick after working in Thailand for two weeks and wanted to return to Cambodia:

I was in grade 6 last year and this year I am repeating grade 6 after coming back from Thailand. I went with my sister to Thailand and worked on a farm harvesting pineapple, sugar cane and tapioca instead of going to grade 7 (Pov).

3.2.5 Children’s family health problems and financial strain

Family members’ illnesses, the costs of health care and general financial strain all contributed to discontinuity of study for students. When a parent became sick, the children were faced with responsibility to financially support the family instead of attending school. Eiva had three siblings: a 14-year-old brother who dropped out of school in grade 3 to help with the rice harvest, one stepbrother who is eight years old and does not attend school, and one 2-year-old stepsister. Eiva described how her mother suffered from a heart attack and could not work. Therefore, Eiva left school in grade 1, aged 11, and worked as a housekeeper in Phnom Penh (as will be discussed further in section 3.8.8). Eiva explained that ‘there is not enough money to go to school’. Although Eiva was 12 years old and had not continued school beyond grade 1, she said, ‘I want to study, finish school and get work. Then I can buy land and build a new house.’

3.2.6 Transportation to and from school

Apprehension about traveling to high school prevented children continuing their studies. There is only one high school in Chup. Children who live in Thrapeang and Kaun villages ride bicycles for distances of five to ten kilometres to attend the Chup High School. However, not all children in these villages own a bicycle, leaving them with uncertainty about whether or not they are able to travel to school. Pov shared
concerns as we spoke about transitioning into high school: ‘I want to go to high school but I will not have a bicycle to travel there. I don’t know how to get a bicycle.’

Conversely, Prasath School is a good example of a school where children can transition from primary to lower secondary school, as they span grades 1 to 10. There, children are able to continue their studies into lower secondary school without facing travel problems.

3.3 Families and their influence on children’s education outcomes

Parents voiced their perceptions of the education their children received. Some parents viewed their children’s education as a means to finding skilled work. This was especially pertinent for parents whose older children had dropped out of school at a young age, and who were now unemployed or working in low-paid jobs. These parents wanted their younger children to complete school to assist them in finding skilled work. Other parents, the majority of whom had little or no education, wanted their children to receive an education because they themselves had not received a full education. Countering these view, teachers and key informants claimed that parents’ lack of appreciation for education, and their prioritisation of work over school, contributed to children stopping school.

3.3.1 Education as a means to finding work

Parents valued education as a means of securing employment which would provide a steady income for their children’s future. Veha, a farmer living in Prasath village, was the father of three children. He had a 23-year-old son who had dropped out of school at 18, in grade 8, to work in Bavet as a labourer. Veha had two daughters: Kari, aged 17, who had recently dropped out of grade 8, and an 8-year-old daughter who was in grade 2. I asked Veha what he hoped for his youngest daughter. He explained, ‘I wish for her to be educated and have the skills to work. [...] I understand that education is good.’

I visited Theary’s home regularly to discuss her children’s schooling. Theary was a mother of four children. Her husband worked in Phnom Penh as a motorbike taxi driver. Theary had a 19-year-old daughter who had stopped school in grade 6 and an 18-year-old son who had stopped school in grade 7. Theary also had a 15-year-old son in grade 6, Bona, who joined a FGD, and a 6-year-old son in grade 1. I asked Theary what she wanted Bona to do after finishing school. She replied, ‘It is better that he is educated and can work.’

Limited literacy and numeracy was a common feature among the families we interviewed. Dara and Montha had three children, including 19- and 17-year-old daughters and a 10-year-old son. Their daughters dropped out of school in grade 7 and their son was still in grade 6. Dara and Montha did not receive formal education and were illiterate. Out of the 54 sets of parents that I visited, only three
parents were literate. These parents had lived through the KR regime (1974–79) during their school-age years, when formal education was banned. Dara explained, 'We want to see our children educated because we have never studied before.'

3.3.2 Lack of hope for future job prospects

Rural Cambodian families often saw their children complete school yet subsequently struggle to find decent paying jobs. Mom was a project manager for a local NGO in Chup and regularly visited families in remote communities to ensure that children were attending school. Mom would provide at-risk children with an opportunity to have a scholarship to support their education. Mom shared how children watched others graduate from school and only find low-salary work. Consequently, children at school lacked a sense of hope for their future prospects of earning a decent salary:

If children study then they can be a teacher and get a small salary. They do not have a dream for better paying jobs because they see other children in the village who had finished school with low-salary jobs (Mom).

The high school principal in Prasath, Vannak, shared similar observations by explaining that families see graduates from high school or university who are unable to find skilled work. These graduates worked in unskilled work such as construction or manufacturing. After witnessing this, families struggle to understand the benefits of children continuing school:

Some students finish high school or university and find it hard to get a job. So families do not value education. Instead they go to Phnom Penh and work in labour like uneducated youth who left school in grade 7 (Vannak).

3.3.3 Younger family members staying in school

Many parents wanted their younger children to remain in school after seeing their older children drop out of school to find paid work; these families regularly allowed their children to leave school before completing grade 10. Regularly children dropped out of school between grades 6 and 10. Theary’s eldest daughter, Nisey, dropped out of school in grade 6 as a 15-year-old, and her eldest son, Makara, dropped out of school in grade 7, aged 16. Makara went to Kompong Sao to work in a textile factory, where he earned USD $50 per month. Nisey left school to work in a factory in Phnom Penh where she also earned USD $50 per month. I asked Theary why she wanted her second youngest son, Bona, to complete high school. Theary explained, ‘I hope that my younger children finish school and are more educated than my other children.’

3.3.4 Teacher’s views on parental support for children’s education

Teachers and school principals offered a different perspective on parents’ support for their children’s education. The principal at Cheak Primary School, Teng, stated that school attendance depended on
children’s parents: ‘If parents are educated then they encourage their children to attend school.’ Similarly, Viseth, a grade 7 teacher, explained, ‘Parents lack knowledge so they force the kids to work for several days. They think study is not useful for themselves and their kids.’

3.4 Confounding influences on children continuing school

Although parents expressed that they wanted their children to continue their education, there were many confounding factors influencing whether or not children continued schooling. These factors included families’ inability to pay for their children’s education due to financial hardship, despite primary education being supposedly free in Cambodia; children’s fear of travelling five to ten kilometres alone by bicycle to school; children’s limited understanding of the curriculum content; and tensions between children’s involvement in paid and family work and regular school attendance.

3.4.1 Family financial strain

Parents spoke about their inability to financially support their children’s education. Veha, who was mentioned in section 3.3.1, was a thin weathered man. He reflected on his 23-year-old son, Len, and his 18-year-old daughter, Kari, both of whom discontinued their studies beyond grade 8 because of family financial hardship. Veha’s family had recently had a poor yield from their rice crop: ‘It’s difficult, there is not enough money to send my children to school because the rice that we made is not good.’ Their financial strains were exacerbated by the informal school fees being charged by teachers at Kari’s high school.

Dara and Montha worked hard on their farm growing cucumbers and tending to their rice field. When Montha spoke about Chhouk dropping out of secondary school, he became irritated and described the struggle to afford schooling. Montha explained that school fees were higher in secondary school compared to primary: ‘There is not enough money to go to school. In high school, we need to spend more on school fees than primary school.’

In Kaun I interviewed Sae, an 11-year-old boy in grade 8 who enjoyed studying. Sae’s father was a primary school teacher and his older sister, Channary, was in grade 9. As I spoke with Sae, his mother, Kaliyan, sat next to him listening. I took the opportunity to ask Kaliyan her thoughts on children’s schooling. Kaliyan shared that families have greater financial costs when they send their children to high school: ‘When children are studying in high school they need more money to pay for study materials, exams, school uniform and bicycles.’
3.4.2 Informal school fees leading to family financial pressure

There is subtle pressure placed on families by school teachers to support the education system by paying informal fees for additional services such as tutoring or exams. Such actions are considered acceptable by some teachers and principals. Parents and key informants, however, explained how it caused financial strain for students and their families. Dalin, a teacher trainer for MoEYS, expressed concern for students at risk of dropping out of school due to informal school fees: ‘About the money, it’s related to students who stop study. They don’t have enough money to pay so they don’t study.’

Mom told me about children she would regularly visit who had dropped out of high school due to financial pressure from informal school fees. Mom described how children would complain that they were unable to pay teachers additional funds:

Children complain that they do not have money to buy the photocopy handouts or to pay during exams. Sometimes the handouts have the questions and answers. It is about 500 R (USD $0.125) (Mom).

Kanya informed me that informal school fees were higher in high school. Kanya lived in Thrapeang village and was a mother of three girls and one boy. Two of her daughters, ages 15 and 18, had dropped out of secondary school when their father became ill and the family could no longer afford additional education costs: ‘When their father got sick they stopped [school] because they are grown up and we don’t have enough money to support their study such as buying books.’

3.4.3 Children’s lack of understanding the school curriculum content

Children’s lack of understanding of their schoolwork caused parents concern. Theary described how her 19-year-old daughter had studied hard in grade 6 (at 14), but had struggled to understand the learning content. At that time the family was facing financial strain, which was exacerbated by sending four children to school. Therefore, Theary’s daughter made the decision to stop school and work in Phnom Penh:

My older daughter is working in Phnom Penh, she used to study hard but she could not understand. We also have a hard life so she decided to work to support the family (Theary).

Theary also spoke about Bona, her 15-year-old son in grade 6, and her ongoing challenge to get Bona to stay at school. He had repeated two grade levels in primary school, and was already 15. Theary said that Bona’s limited understanding of his schoolwork had resulted in him losing interest in study.

Dara and Montha were most angered by their daughters’ struggles to understand schoolwork. Dara became annoyed as he explained how his daughters went to school routinely before dropping at grade 8, but could not understand education material:
I feel that my children study hard and do not understand. I feel so angry when this happens. Yes we want our children to have education but we cannot support their schooling (Dara).

I continued to ask Dara and Montha about Chhouk and Davy’s literacy skills. Montha told me that Chhouk and Davy could not read or write because their teachers did not care about educating children like they used to. He also said teachers used to have contact with parents through their village leaders and would speak with parents about their children’s progress in school, but that this no longer happens:

No they cannot read and write because their teachers don’t teach them well. This has changed and teachers don’t care anymore about children and their education. Before a letter was sent to the village leader but now there's no letters about our children (Montha).

I also asked Chhouk about her understanding of schoolwork. She replied, ‘I do not understand much at school and the exams. I only do about five questions on exam papers and fail exams.’

I spoke to an Education Specialist, Vuth, about literacy throughout Cambodia. He had noted, during his school visits, that sizeable portions of students were struggling with literacy: ‘We’ve done some school visits looking at grade 3 and 4 students and maybe one third of them were not able to read and write. It’s becoming an issue.’

3.4.4 Lack of educational support from parents

Vuth acknowledged that limited parental involvement and support contributed to children’s inability to read and write. Similarly, Mom felt that parents had a role to ensure that their children were able to read and write. Mom did acknowledge, however, that illiterate parents struggle to provide the right support: ‘It's a problem. Parents are unable to help their children because they are illiterate.’

Although there were reports of parents wanting their children to become educated, there was limited parental support provided to children and their education at home. A teacher trainer, Dalin, linked the lack of parental support to the KR era: ‘Most parents cannot read and write because they are from the time of the KR so they cannot support their children with studying.’ Vuth also explained that parents did not take responsibility for their children’s education, but instead expected teachers to take full responsibility for educating their children:

Parents are illiterate so they cannot support their children's learning. They rely heavily on teachers. When we meet with parents they say, we are not teachers so how can I support my children to learn? The teacher is responsible for that (Vuth).

3.4.5 Child involvement in work

Once they felt out of depth with schoolwork, the aforementioned children, Chhouk, Davy and Bona, increased their engagement in paid and unpaid work instead of continuing their studies. Each time I arrived at Kaliyan’s house, her children were at school, doing homework, taking care of the cow or
fishing. Kaliyan's 11-year-old son, Sae, who is in grade 8, had excellent school attendance. As Sae spoke about his work at home and going to school, Kaliyan added to the conversation that her children managed their housework and study: 'My children work after school helping with housework or fishing. They don't have much time, just helping a bit, then back to school.'

Contrary to this, Theary's son Bona was never at school when we visited Prasath High School. We drove to his house to meet with his mother and asked her where Bona was. Theary would regularly tell us that Bona was working with his neighbours on their farm; he was not at school. Bona was an able-bodied 15-year-old boy and looked physically capable of farm work.

Children and their families shared similar values for education as a means of gaining knowledge and securing employment and financial stability. However, teachers and key informants argued that parents did not appreciate or value education and instead prioritised their children's work over school attendance. Financial strain, family illness, work commitments and children's limited understanding of their school material all created further barriers to school continuation.

3.5 Teachers

Some teachers stated that they enjoyed teaching when students contributed to class and understood their teaching content. Conversely, teachers did not enjoy teaching when students did not understand the education material. Furthermore, teachers had concerns about their salaries being too low to support them and their families. There were many factors influencing whether or not a teacher regularly taught class: teachers prioritising extra work commitments, such as farming, in order to supplement their salaries; teachers attending cultural ceremonies; and teachers misusing alcohol which resulted in them missing their teaching duties or teaching while under the influence of alcohol.

3.5.1 Teacher satisfaction

When I explored the idea of job satisfaction with teachers, they said that they greatly enjoyed it when they were successful in teaching students how to read and write, and when their students understood their class material. I interviewed Leap, an experienced grade 4 and 5 teacher in Kaun village, behind a half-built temporary school building while their school was being built. I observed two classes in progress with no dividing wall: teachers competed to be heard. There was no age or grade differential apparent in this classroom. The few children that were in attendance were reciting class material over the top of one another. Despite these difficult teaching and learning conditions, Leap expressed enjoyment when his students progressed in literacy and numeracy: 'I enjoy teaching when my students can read and write.'
Neary was a 25-year-old teacher of grades 7 to 9 who was in her second year of teaching at Prasath High School. Neary expressed similar teacher satisfaction to Yin: ‘If the students listen to my explanation and can understand the lesson then that makes me happy.’

3.5.2 Teacher dissatisfaction

Teachers listed a range of issues related to student attendance, classroom conditions, classroom management, students’ limited understanding of class content and a lack of school resources as examples of dissatisfaction as a teacher. As I interviewed Leap, teacher of thirty-seven years, he stated his dissatisfaction with teaching when students do not attend school regularly. Leap reflected on how class sizes are impacted when students migrated with their families and did not attend school: ‘When I come to school and students miss class regularly. Sometime, their parents migrate and the children go with them.’

Yin had been a teacher for 23 years and was teaching grade 5 at Cheak Primary School. Yin expressed frustration that there were no teacher guidebooks, which hindered him from teaching properly. The primary school curriculum had recently changed, but teaching resources had not been supplied to support the revised curriculum:

We do not have teacher books, we only have student textbooks. It’s a problem because we cannot teach properly. Before we used to have teacher guidebook but now the curriculum changed and we do not have a new book (Yin).

3.5.3 Teachers’ salaries

Teachers expressed frustration that they were not paid enough. All nine teachers interviewed said that their salary was between 270,000 R per month (USD $67.5) and 382,000 R per month (USD $94) before the 20% salary increase that was adopted in February 2013. The lowest-paid teacher, Borey, a grade 6 teacher based in Thrapeang village, had been teaching for three years. The highest-paid teacher, Viseth, was a grade 7 and 8 teacher based in Prasath village, and he had been teaching for thirteen years. Thrapeang Primary School principal, Heang, stated that a teacher beginning their career at Thrapeang Primary School would get paid 190,000 R (USD $47.5) per month. Generally, high school teachers are paid higher salaries. Additionally, teacher’s salaries depend on the number of years teaching experience they have. I made contact with four out of nine teachers during data member checking. All four teachers stated that their salaries had increased by 20% at the beginning of 2013. Neary explained, ‘My salary has increased to 340,000 R per month after the 20% increase. I heard that this will happen every year.’ Table 5 below lists teachers’ salaries and the 20% salary increase in both Khmer Riel and US dollars in 2013:
Although teachers had concerns about their salary not being adequate, Education Advisor Sara provided a different perspective on the complexities of teachers’ salaries. Sara said that 90% of the RGC’s national budget for education is spent on teachers’ salaries. Efforts to increase these would reduce funding available to spend on non-teacher-related education initiatives:

it’s a complex issue [...] about 90% of budget is spent on teacher salaries, so if you increase teacher salaries it has a huge impact on the amount that is left to do quality improvement. Without budget increase then it’s very difficult to increase teacher’s salaries. I don’t see salaries as a huge factor except that teachers have additional income (Sara).

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<th>Riel before 20% increase</th>
<th>US Dollars before 20% increase</th>
<th>After 20% increase</th>
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<td>Grade 7–8 Teacher</td>
<td>382,000 R</td>
<td>$94</td>
<td>470,000 R/$117.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prasath Village</td>
<td>Grade 7–9 Teacher</td>
<td>280,000 R</td>
<td>$70</td>
<td>340,000 R/$85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheak Village</td>
<td>Grade 5 Teacher</td>
<td>390,000 R</td>
<td>$97.50</td>
<td>No contact during memberchecking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheak Village</td>
<td>Grade 6 Teacher</td>
<td>280,000 R</td>
<td>$70</td>
<td>No contact during memberchecking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prasath Village</td>
<td>Grade 6 Teacher</td>
<td>310,000 R</td>
<td>$77.50</td>
<td>No contact during memberchecking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.4 Teachers’ financial struggles

Teachers described the hardships they faced when relying on their salaries to support them and their families. Viseth received the highest salary of all teacher participants. Despite this, he stated that his salary was insufficient to support his family, even with his wife running a store: ‘If we compare what I earn to prices that we have to pay in the market then it’s not enough to support my family.’

Borey was a 29-year-old unmarried grade 3 and 5 teacher at Thrapeang Primary School. He lived with his parents, two brothers and one sister and his family made a small income from their farm. Borey’s
salary was USD $77.50 per month during data member checking. I asked Borey if he had to share his
teacher salary with his family to subsidise their income, which he confirmed that he did: ‘Most of my
income is kept with the family but I also keep some for my own expenses.’

Sopheap was a 30-year-old grade 6 teacher at Chup Primary School. Sopheap told me that he
completed a teacher training course and became a teacher because his family could not financially
support him at university. He told me that he was paid USD $70 per month, and that his wife worked at
a group money-saving scheme. After asking Sopheap what he thought about his salary, he explained
that he and his wife were expecting their first child and expressed grave concern that his salary was
insufficient to support his new family: ‘I get USD $70 per month and my wife also works. But now that
we are having a baby, my salary is not enough to support us.’

3.5.5 Teachers’ extra work

Eight out of nine teachers interviewed had extra jobs in addition to their teacher salaries. As one
National Education Advisor stated: ‘A key finding from local research is that more than 50% of teachers
have a second job because of low salaries so they have to find extra income.’

The High School principal in Prasath village, Vannak, expressed that: ‘the salary is not enough to
support teachers’ families, so they have another job to support their families such as farming.’ The
Education Advisor gave examples of jobs that teachers engaged in to supplement their income as:
‘running snack shops and parking fees for bicycles in schools or running a small farm.’

As we discussed teacher’s extra sources of income, the Banteay Meanchey Provincial MoEYS
education official explained that extra family business and remittances could lead to further provision:
‘Teachers can provide further support to their families by receiving remittances from family members
working overseas or have extra business such as raising pigs.’

Leap was the longest-serving teacher I interviewed. He spoke about how rural teachers had to own a
farm otherwise they would struggle: ‘Teachers’ other income in the countryside is working on a farm if
their salaries cannot support their family.’ This was the case for Leap and his wife, who were supporting
their son’s education as he studied to be a teacher in Tuek Township, as well as their daughter who
was in grade 12 at Chup High School:

I have a rice field and a farm; the rice field can only support the family with rice and food for the year.
From the farm my wife earns money and supports our children studying in Tuek and Chup. My teacher
salary also helps my children’s studies (Leap).

Upon arriving to interview the Thrapeang Primary School principal, Heang, I noticed that his demeanour
had changed drastically from the first time we met. Two weeks prior, he had enthusiastically welcomed
me to the school. However, on this occasion, he looked very serious and expressed concern that he would not be able to answer my questions as it could cause him trouble with MoEYS. I assured him that his identity would not be known to anyone, including in written publications, and that there would be no repercussions if he participated in the study. He refused to have the interviewed recorded, but agreed to continue with the interview while I took notes. During the interview, it came to my attention that he was receiving USD $100 per month as a principal and an extra USD $100 per month for teaching grade 2. His total salary was USD $200 per month. Heang stated that he had to teach this class because there were not enough teachers at the primary school. However, on every visit I made to the primary school I never saw Heang teaching grade 2.

3.5.6 Teachers’ school attendance

During fieldwork, I often heard reports about, or observed myself, teachers in Chup and Kiri villages being absent from their classrooms. Reasons for this included prioritising supplementary work commitments over their teaching responsibilities and attending cultural ceremonies such as weddings. When primary and secondary school teachers were not at school teaching they were not assigned a replacement teacher to take over their teaching responsibilities, which resulted in teachers from another grade level taking the absent teacher’s class. Moreover, when high school teachers were missing from their class, students were free which meant they would ‘hang around’ the school grounds or, more commonly, return home.

3.5.7 Teachers missing class for extra jobs

In conversations with a Banteay Meanchey Provincial MoEYS education official, he said, ‘The education timetable has changed to accommodate teachers’ extra sources of income. Teachers can teach in the morning or afternoon and during their free half day they can work in their extra jobs.’ Education Specialist Sara, however, shared concerns regarding teachers’ work outside of school: ‘If teachers are working outside of school then it could impact on teaching hours that teachers are meant to be teaching.’ Leap, a teacher, was more specific and said that teachers often take time off without permission: ‘Teachers have to ask permission to take time off from school from the district education office. But a lot of the time teachers don’t ask for permission.’

Teacher Borey said that some schools did not have replacement teachers to fill in for teachers who were absent, which frequently resulted in children returning home. However, when Borey took leave from his teaching responsibilities, which he did about twice a month, there were replacement teachers to stand in for him during his absence: ‘When I take leave, another teacher will replace me. But some
schools do not have teachers to replace teachers on leave. Then students usually decide to return home.'

When teachers were asked about their school attendance especially during the rice harvest season, most denied that they missed teaching classes. Sarath said, ‘I don’t miss school often because school policy doesn’t allow teachers to help with the harvest.’ Principal Heang felt that many teachers like himself were fearful that MoEYS officials would make unannounced visits to schools to check teachers’ attendance during the rice harvest season.

Nevertheless, despite their fears of unannounced visits from MoEYS, Heang and other teachers at Thrapeang Primary School were regularly missing from teaching duties during my visits. I asked Yin about how his teaching time was affected by his extra work on his farm. Yin replied, ‘I never miss teaching. I ask for permission when my children get sick and I need to take them to the hospital.’ However, as we talked more about his work, I asked Yin again how his work outside of school impacted his teaching time. He said, ‘Sometimes I need to take care of the farm so I come to teach by about 10-15 minutes late.’

3.5.8 Teachers attending cultural ceremonies instead of teaching

We conducted field research during the main Cambodian wedding season, which is November to March (although weddings can take place at other times). During a visit to Chup High School I noted that all other grade levels were in class except for the grade 7 students. No grade 7 teachers were present. I asked the pupils where their teachers were. A young girl replied that their teachers were attending the wedding of one of the grade 7 teachers. I learnt from the students that there were no replacement teachers available to stand in. In the absence of teachers, children talked and played outside their classrooms until it was time to attend the next class, or to return home.

Vannara was the mother of Peakmi, who had attended Cheak Primary School the previous year before moving into grade 7 at Prasath School. When I asked about attendance, Vannara gave me an account of Peakmi’s irregular school attendance during primary school. She described how students, including her son, missed classes because their teachers were busy outside of school attending weddings or ceremonies instead of teaching. ‘When he studied at this school he missed a lot of study. [...] Sometimes teachers are busy with relatives’ weddings or ceremony so they do not teach often at school.’
3.5.9 Teachers refusing to teach small classes

Shortly after completing field research, I made contact with a key informant, Ben, who was the founder of a local NGO in Chup. He told me about a boy, Visal, in grade 11 at Chup High School. Visal’s teachers regularly chose not to teach children when there were less than five students in the class. Ben said that Visal’s situation was not unusual; in fact it was a common practice in other classes at Chup High School and in other schools in the area:

If there are less than five students in class then teachers won't teach. If there's 10 then that is fine. He said this is fairly common. It's a catch 22. It's relying on students to come to class and they don't turn up because teachers are often not there. Then the teacher doesn't teach because there are not enough students in class (Ben).

Arun taught at the same high school that Visal attended and he confirmed Visal’s observations, stating that students at the high school regularly do not attend class, which results in other students deciding not to attend class as well. Students assume that when there are few students in attendance, the teachers will not teach the class: ‘If some students don’t show up, then other students also decide not to go to school because they think the teacher will not teach.’

3.5.10 Teacher alcohol misuse

I heard reports of teachers’ misuse of alcohol and how this influenced their school attendance. I was approached by one grade 5 boy as I sat across the road from Cheak Primary School with Kolab, a parent. I asked this boy why he was not at school and he replied that his teacher was not teaching the students today due to being under the influence of alcohol. The student said that this occurred a few times a month. This young boy said that he was scared when his teacher entered the classroom under the influence of alcohol and began to teach the students. I asked Kolab about teacher alcohol misuse and she confirmed that it happens occasionally in her community. She explained, ‘I see teachers sometimes joining weddings and they drink but they still come to teach. Sometimes they miss teaching.’

Amanti visited her family in Cheak when she had time off from working in a clothing factory in Phnom Penh. During our interview, Amanti explained how she had dropped out of school in grade 6 due to family financial strain. I asked Amanti if she enjoyed going to Cheak Primary School, to which she replied, ‘Yes I like [going to school], but often the teacher does not attend school or is going to drink alcohol.’ After speaking with Sarath about his experience of teaching at Cheak Primary School, I asked him about reports I had heard of teacher misuse of alcohol. Sarath confirmed that there were teachers who taught when they were under the influence of alcohol.
When I first introducing myself to the Thrœapœang Primary School Principal Heang, I made observations of teachers' misuse of alcohol. Heang was not there when I arrived and the teachers explained that he was attending a wedding. Below is an excerpt from my research diary from the day I met with Heang:

I met with Heang today after waiting thirty minutes. He came riding on his motorbike across the school field and eagerly welcomed me to the school. As he greeted me with the *sampan* [Cambodian greeting] I could smell alcohol and wondered why he was drinking when he should be working (Research diary excerpt).

Mom said that many children in the village told her that their teachers asked them to buy rice wine for them: ‘Sometimes children tell me that the teachers ask them, “please buy the rice wine for me. It’s so cheap.”’ Rice wine is considered the cheapest alcohol in the local community. But Dara claimed that teacher misuse of alcohol was no longer a pressing issue now that local primary school teachers were from Chup:

Before this [teachers’ misuse of alcohol] happened a lot, but now most teachers that are teaching here are from Chup so it is better. Before there was a teacher in our village who would get drunk and ask students to buy alcohol for him (Dara).

After hearing many stories of teacher misuse of alcohol and observing this myself, I asked Mom why she thought teachers were regularly under the influence of alcohol. Mom said that teachers were possibly relying on alcohol so that they did not have to confront the struggles of receiving small salaries and having a low standard of living in rural Cambodia:

Maybe because when they are not drunk then they are thinking a lot about problems such as not enough salary. They ask, why this and why that? Maybe they use alcohol to not think. They drink alcohol when they are not happy (Mom).

3.5.11 Teacher summary

Overall, teachers experienced job satisfaction when students participated in class and understood their classwork. However, teachers did not enjoy teaching with a lack of resources and when their students struggled to understand the content. Teachers also shared concerns regarding their salaries being insufficient. Subsequently, teachers would supplement their teacher salaries by working in extra jobs during class time. Teachers also attended cultural ceremonies and engaged in misuse of alcohol during class time, resulting in their missing teaching duties.

3.6 School curriculum, content and delivery

Some teachers said they developed lesson plans, while others claimed that they did not have enough time to prepare for lessons. All nine teachers stated that they faced difficulties preparing for class and attempting to provide quality education, especially without essential resources including teacher guidebooks. Concerns were raised that children were receiving poor quality education, due to a lack of
teaching and learning resources and poor teaching methodologies. Poor methodologies included expecting children to write out lesson content repeatedly until they understood, and relying on those students with good comprehension to provide educational support to their struggling counterparts. Furthermore, students who had limited understanding of class content were progressing through primary and secondary school grade levels without additional support, resulting in them being illiterate or semi-literate. Informal school fees were placing children at risk of dropout in both communes due to financial stress. Finally, students were not spending many hours learning at school due to teachers failing to teach and students discontinuing their school attendance for up to two months.

3.6.1 Teachers' lesson planning

Half of the teachers interviewed said that they spent between 30 minutes to 5 hours per week preparing lesson plans. The remaining half stated that they did not have enough time to prepare for lessons. Instead, the time they were meant to be preparing for class, they spent working informal jobs for extra income. Sokun, an Education Advisor in Svay Rieng, expressed concerns about teachers not completing their lesson plans and the effect on teaching quality. She said that lesson planning depends on the commitment of teachers, and if a primary school teacher completed his or her lesson plan then they should be able to teach children the school curriculum for the full four hours (morning or afternoon sessions in primary schools). Children in rural Cambodia either attend morning or afternoon classes with many primary schools rotating between the two and other schools choosing either the morning or afternoon: 'It depends on the commitment of teachers; some primary school teachers have good lesson plans to teach well for four hours and not just for three or less hours.'

When I asked Sokun what prevented teachers from doing lesson plans, she replied with frustration, ‘Teachers have second jobs and they do not have time to prepare for classes. It’s a big challenge.’ Sokun expressed concern that teachers did not have enough knowledge and experience to complete lesson plans, which she felt was the reason why most teachers did not prepare for their class: ‘Teachers have to organise the material for main learning outcomes. It's not hard but there's limited knowledge and experience of teachers. I think most teachers don't prepare.’

Furthermore, Leap told me, ‘Teachers that have been teaching for a long time do not really prepare because they have second jobs. But new teachers do lesson planning.’ He said that experienced teachers only prepare for lessons when they know MoEYS staff are coming to visit their school.

One of the few teachers who showed commitment to lesson planning was Neary. She had been a secondary school teacher in Prasath School for two years, and had recently been trained in lesson planning. Neary described how she organising the lesson into different sections that would be covered
during class: ‘I spend a lot of time lesson planning. We have to separate into many parts of the lesson. I spend approximately two hours to complete a lesson plan well.’ Neary did this work without a teacher guidebook, using instead the student textbook:

I have to use the student textbook to do my lesson planning. If we had teacher guidebooks it would be easier to prepare but we don’t have guidebooks. So I have to read the lesson in the students’ textbook to understand it (Neary).

3.6.2 School resources

Limited student textbooks and no teacher guidebooks was a concern among all participating teachers. Education Advisor Sokun said that MoEYS had developed a new primary school curriculum and teacher guidebook, but had failed to provide every teacher with a copy of the new guidebook due to limited funding: ‘The ministry had a new curriculum and a new book to provide to teachers but now they haven’t provided teacher guidebooks.’ According to Sokun, MoEYS could not find an NGO to help fund the distribution of teacher guidebooks: ‘Book are limited, they [MoEYS] don’t want to provide a guidebook, they don’t have money and the government can’t find an organisation to support them.’ When I met with Chhourn, the Chup High School principal, his first concern was limited resources for teachers in the high school. He said, ‘There are not enough resources for teachers. Eight teachers have to share resources enough for three teachers. There are also no teacher guidebooks.’

Yin had similar concerns regarding teaching resources at Cheak Primary School. He said that the quality of teaching was negatively affected because teachers did not have guidebooks to prepare for their class: ‘The quality of teaching is not good because there are no teacher guidebooks. If teachers have the guidebooks then I think quality will get better.’

Principal Teng, however, informed me that there were enough books for the teachers and students at Cheak Primary School. He further claimed that the school was receiving teaching books because they were receiving them from MoEYS and ChildFund: ‘There are enough books for teachers and students. We have two sources of support to provide our school with books. The MoEYS and ChildFund.’

Sokun was irritated with the limited action taken by MoEYS to improve the quality of education in Cambodia. She described how students were not being given the free UNICEF-funded study books, and that these were being sold in markets. Sokun said that when she visited schools in her supervisory role, students told her about the lack of textbooks:

Regularly there is no action taken about a lack of student textbooks. This is a problem and sometimes they are sold in markets! We check and students tell us, we don’t have textbooks or we have to share (Sokun).
3.6.3 Teaching methods

Sokun was concerned about children receiving poor quality education because teachers had poor teaching skills. Sokun said that if a teacher was enthusiastic and committed to teaching then they would use creative teaching methodologies to educate their students: ‘Quality of teaching is very important. It depends on enthusiasm and experience of teachers and professional commitment. Some teachers use techniques that are creative.’

However, Sokun described how teachers simply ask children to copy and read from textbooks or blackboards. Sokun stated that teacher’s lack of concern for students’ academic progress, school attendance and participation in class all negatively impacted on their interest in learning: ‘Teachers only tell students to copy from the board or from textbooks. Teachers don’t care about children’s participation or their learning achievements. Then children are bored and stop school.’

Narath was a grade 6 teacher at Prasath School and he taught chemistry. Narath pointed out the lack of materials for practical activities. He stated that teachers needed be creative and ‘find our own materials with some money from the School Budget Program and ChildFund.’ Despite this, Narath also mentioned that teachers did not have enough time to source class materials. Instead of organising materials to complete learning activities in class, teachers only taught verbally, explaining class material and showing students pictures in the textbook: ‘The way we teach is just by speaking and showing some pictures in textbooks. It’s really difficult.’

3.6.4 Students progressing through primary school illiterate and unprepared

During member checking, Neary told me that she had ten students in her grade 7 class at Prasath School who were illiterate. She shared her concern that students were being pushed by teachers to advance through primary school grade levels without being taught how to read and write properly.

Similarly, Borey told me how students at Thrapeang Primary School were moving up grade levels unprepared. I asked him if there was a school process in place to assess if students were ready to advance. Borey replied that even if students failed exams, they decided if they wanted to move onto the next grade level without a discussion with the grade teacher. Some students, however, recognised that they could not understand the curriculum and needed to repeat the grade level:

Students can apply for higher grade levels and move up to the next grade even if they failed. However, some students know that they don’t understand the lessons so they willingly repeat the grade (Borey).

To my surprise, Borey continued to tell me that the school principal encouraged students who failed exams to advance to the next grade level. This was so that students would not be a financial burden on
their family by repeating a grade level: ‘The school principal realises that if students stays in the same class, then their family has to pay again for the repeating school year.’

3.6.5 Charging informal school fees

Teachers regularly charged informal schools fees in both communes. Although charging informal fees is officially prohibited, there are inconsistencies found in national policies regarding the practice. According to Education Specialist Sara, the teacher code of conduct allows teachers to give extra tuition and take additional jobs for income: ‘It’s accepted practice although it’s officially not allowed. But it’s inconsistent because the teacher code of conduct allows teachers to charge extra tuition and have additional jobs for income.’

The Provincial MoEYS education official in Banteay Meanchey did not acknowledge inconsistencies found in the policy regarding informal school fees. Furthermore, it was denied that there was any such problem in Banteay Meanchey:

There is a policy against informal school fees. If teachers charge extra fees then they can be fired or moved to another school but charging extra school fees is not a problem in Banteay Meanchey (Banteay Meanchey Provincial MoEYS education official).

Teacher Dalin emphasised that charging informal fees was problematic and against Cambodian law. Dalin went on to explain how teachers try and hide the occurrence of charging informal fees: ‘They take behind and tell students don’t let someone know about this.’

Sara provided insight into the complexities of this issue. She stated that once the revenue system in Cambodia improves then more budget will be available to increase teachers’ salaries. However, once this occurs, teacher may struggle to stop charging informal school fees due cultural acceptance of the practice:

When the revenue system in Cambodia becomes more efficient then budgets will be available to increase teachers’ salary. The difficult thing will be to go back to normal by not charging informal school fees because teachers always tell you, ‘When my salary goes to US$500 per month then I will not ask for informal fees.’ They practise what they have been practising – charging informal school fees. It’s become a mindset and also a culture (Sara).

After confirming that Viseth, a high school teacher in Prasath, received the highest salary compared to the other participant teachers, I enquired about informal school fees being charged at his school. Viseth casually spoke about how it is a ‘requirement’ that students spend money at his school. However, as Viseth explained, ‘We need agreement from students for [photo]copying exams, they spent about 100 R or 200 R.’
Vannak, the high school principal at Prasath School, clarified that MoEYS is aware that teachers are charging students extra fees of 100–200 R for copying lessons. However, teachers are only able to charge these fees when they have a ‘good relationship’ with their students: ‘The Ministry of Education knows that teachers take money from students. If teachers have good relationship with students, they take 100 R or 200 R for a copy of lessons.’

3.6.6 Concern for students’ ability to pay informal school fees

All responses denying the charging informal school fees came solely from teachers in both communes. When I spoke with Borey about informal school fees, he stated that students did not need to pay extra fees: ‘No, the students do not need to contribute money. Some other schools take money from student. Not at my school.’

Despite Borey’s assertions, an interview with Pov, a grade 6 student at Thrapeang Primary School, revealed that informal fees were being charged at the school. Pov stated that informal school fees were required for a number of things: ‘I have to pay for forms to start school, extra lessons and taking exams. I pay 500 R (USD $0.125) for the exam paper, 500 R for ceremonies at school.’

Instead of charging informal school fees, Yin, a grade 5 teacher in Cheak, stated that teachers at his school never print or copy exams papers that students pay for. Instead, Yin described, ‘I just write questions on the board and students will answer in their notebook.’

Veha, a father of three children in Prasath, stated that increased informal school fees in high school caused his daughter, Kari, to stop school at grade 8: ‘When my daughter asks for money for school, it’s sometimes 5,000 R and sometimes 10,000 R [...] there are more school fees in high school than primary school.’ Veha continued to explain that Kari had asked for 30,000 R to pay for exercise clothes. However, Kari did not receive the clothes nor did she receive the money back from her teacher. This incident upset Kari and resulted in her dropping out of school:

My daughter told me that she needed 30,000 R to pay for exercise clothes at school. The day they gave the clothes, she did not get any from the teacher and she was upset. She asked them but she still did not get it or the money back. So this made her feel like not going back [to school] (Veha).

3.6.7 Number of hours students spend at school

During field research, I noticed that children were not spending many hours learning at school. Sara, an Education Specialist, pointed out that during her visits to schools in remote areas of Stung Treng, a north-eastern Province, she had noted that ‘the actual school hours completed by students were around 450 hours compared to the official 900 hours that students are supposed to reach’. Sara estimated that students’ school attendance could only reach a maximum of 50% of requirements because schools
themselves are only open for 50% of the time. She listed off various reasons why schools would not be open and why students lacked school attendance: ‘There are extended holidays and the harvest season so children are working. Then there are issues around ceremonies and cultural events such as weddings or funerals.’

Chhourn, the Chup High School principal, voiced that students’ school attendance dropped when labour was needed during the rice harvest and planting seasons. Chhourn added that there were school breaks throughout the academic year, including the Khmer New Year break after the first semester exams:

After first semester exams there is the Khmer New Year from 6th to 19th April. Students decide not to come to class after their first semester exams because they think there is not much to learn and there are fun ceremonies, such as Trak Phoung, throughout the villages. This extends the break until Khmer New year is finished (Chhourn).

I was given further insight into these extended school breaks during data member checking. I did not see one class in progress at Chup High School when I was reviewing an interview with Arun in the schoolyard. Below is an excerpt from my research diary the day I met with Arun:

I was confused when I didn’t see any students in class and asked Arun where the students were. Arun explained that students had finished their first semester exams and some students would not return until after Khmer New Year. I was shocked! It was mid-February at the time and Khmer New Year finished mid-April. I clarified with Arun that students would be missing school for up to two months and he nodded as if this was a normal yearly occurrence.

While visiting Kaun, I saw Somalin. She was the only 15-year-old girl in the village that consistently attended grade 8 while I was conducting research two months earlier. However, she did not attend any classes during data member checking. I asked Somalin why she was not at school. Somalin told me that she wanted to go to school but there would not be many students attending now that exams were finished. They would not return until after Khmer New Year. As discussed above (section 3.5.9) teachers would not teach if there were not enough students present.

3.6.8 Summary

Overall, students were not receiving good quality education due to limited school resources, teachers’ failure to complete lesson plans and poor teaching techniques. It was common for students to advance grade levels illiterate or semi-literate. Moreover, students were being charged with informal school fees, which put financial pressure on their families and contributed to school dropout. Finally, students were not spending many hours learning at school due to a lack of both student and teacher attendance.
3.7 Child labour

Children spoke of their work commitments outside of school. These work tasks included taking care of cows, taking care of young family members, chopping tapioca, housework, fishing, helping with the family farm, and planting and harvesting rice and cucumbers. In Chup, many children were working to help with the rice harvest season instead of attending school. In contrast, children in Kiri would provide very little assistance during the rice harvest season but work during the rice planting season. As a result of missing too many days of school to help with the rice harvesting and planting seasons, children dropped out of school. Children who had dropped out in both Chup and Kiri considered their only option for generating income, following the rice planting and rice harvesting seasons, to be illegal work in Thailand, Phnom Penh or in neighbouring provinces. Children would migrate and work in factories, furniture shops or on farms, or as domestic or manual labourers.

3.7.1 Children working in rice production

The rice harvest season was the busiest work time of year for children in Chup and other parts of rural Cambodia. This was not, however, the case in Kiri, where the busiest time was during the early rains of monsoon season (May–June) when the rice planting season begins. The school year is still in progress when the rice planting season starts. As I discussed child work with a Provincial MoEYS education official in Svay Rieng, he explained:

During rice harvest and rice planting season children work and make money. But children in Svay Rieng work more during rice planting season than rice harvest season because of the transplanting technique and their families need more help (Svay Rieng Provincial MoEYS Education Official).

When I met a Rice Production Specialist, Sopheap, he explained why the transplanting technique was so labour intensive: ‘Transplanting is labour intense because it involves preparing seed beds, pulling seedlings, carrying seedlings, and then transplanting one by one.’

In Chup, the broadcasting technique is widely used instead, due to labour shortages. Sopheap explained the difference between transplanting and broadcasting:

Transplanting method is decreasing due to less labour; farmers do more broadcasting. If you compare labour costs per hectare, it’s about 40–50 person per day for transplanting. But for broadcasting its only one person for two hectares per day so labour is much less (Sopheap).

This shift from transplanting to broadcasting techniques has resulted in fewer children in Chup working during the rice planting season. Somalin, a 15-year-old girl in grade 8 at Chup High School, told me during a FGD: ‘We used to help with transplanting but not anymore because people use broadcasting methods instead.’
Mom described how that there were shortages of labour in Chup because people were migrating to Thailand for work, resulting in children working during the rice harvest season: ‘Many people go Thailand and just a few people in villages. So now farmers are sharing workers and hiring children to complete harvest.’ Viseth and I discussed his grade 7 students at Prasath School working during the rice planting season and his concern regarding labour shortages. Viseth stated, ‘Families have difficulties finding people to hire for transplanting so they do it by themselves and children need to help.’

3.7.2 Children working during rice harvest season

The rice harvest season is when most abled-bodied people in rural Cambodia come together and work in the rice fields. As seen in the children’s demographic information collected during FGDs, 45 children stated that they worked during rice harvest and 11 children stated that they did not. During FGDs, many children mentioned different steps of harvesting. According to Peakmi, a 13-year-old boy in grade 7 at Prasath School: ‘The harvest is busy because we have to cut, collect and take it from the rice field to dry.’

Many children told me that they enjoyed helping with the rice harvest including Sae, a 12-year-old boy in grade 8 at Chup High School: ‘I have fun during the rice harvest because I want to learn how to harvest [...] and have fun with my family and friends.’

Children informed me of salaries they earned while working as hired labourers during the rice harvest. Pov told me, ‘Sometimes I get hired for the rice harvest and get paid 17,000 R (USD $4.25) per day.’ In contrast, the grade 7 and 8 girls who came to a FGD in Kiri stated, ‘We get paid 10,000 R (USD $2.50), 11,000 R (USD $2.75) or 12,000 R (USD $3.00) per day to help with the rice harvest.’

Some children who helped with the rice harvest stated that they did not miss school to work. Solyka, a girl in grade 6 at Cheak Primary School, told me during a FGD that the rice harvest did not interfere with her schooling: ‘The rice harvest does not take away time from study. When I finish school then I go to work during my free time.’

Nevertheless, some teachers expressed concern about students missing school due to their work commitments during the rice harvest. Jorani, a grade 7 teacher at Prasath School, stated, ‘During the rice harvest students are busy working so they miss study. Five or six students are absent per day.’ Leap, the grade 5 teacher at Krasung Primary School, noted, ‘Some children stop school for between one to fifteen days and then return to school in February after the rice harvest.’ Further, Mom told me that while visiting villages around Chup, she would check how long students would be out of school
over the rice harvest season. Children would stop school for three to six weeks so that they could work during the rice harvest.

Borey, a grade 6 teacher at Chup Primary School, blamed students’ parents for taking them out of school to work: ‘Parents want their children to miss school and take care of the house or work in the rice field.’ Borey explained, ‘They don’t understand about the importance of children going to school every day.’

Sopheap described children working during the rice harvest as a normal way of life in rural Cambodia. ‘In rural areas parents usually ask their kids to feed the chicken or pig or help with harvest. This is normal for families in rural Cambodia.’ Sopheap did, however, acknowledge that there should be restrictions in place so that children could complete their work tasks but also continue their school: ‘We have to put restrictions in place for children working. They must attend school in the morning and help with the farm in the afternoon when there is no school.’

3.7.3 School dropout during rice harvest season

It was reported that 12 children (6 study participants, and 6 friends of participants) from grades 3 to 8 had permanently dropped out of school during the rice harvest season to work instead of attending school. Eight of the children were based in Banteay Meanchey, and the remaining four in Svay Rieng. Kaliyan was a farmer in Kaun and the mother of Sae (see 3.4.1). Kaliyan summed up, ‘Children help their parents during harvest. Harvest takes a long time so children decide to stop school and drop out during the rice harvest season.’

Neary also spoke of the out-of-school children she would see working in the rice fields in Prasath: ‘I often see children who don’t come to study helping in the field. These kids have dropped out of school during past rice harvest seasons.’ Similarly, 12-year-old Eiva told me how she had dropped out of Cheak School in grade 1 at age 11. Eiva explained that she enjoyed studying but had to work during the harvest season: ‘My parents are poor and busy with harvest season so I have to take care of the siblings.’

It was the peak of the rice harvest season when I interviewed Dara and Montha. Their daughter Chhouk had previously told me that she stopped school before the rice harvest season began. I asked Montha if his children worked during the rice harvest season. Montha explained that all three of his children stopped going to school to help with the rice harvest. However, Montha stated that he would rather his children attend school than help with the rice harvest:

If I tell them [children] to stop school then they will stop school to go help me with the harvest. But I want them to go to school more than helping me with the rice harvest (Montha).
Mom gave further insight into consequences of children’s lack of school attendance during the rice harvest season. Mom observed that missing school for more than one month during the rice harvest often led children in Chup to drop out of school:

School dropout happens during the harvest season when they can earn money. If children leave school for a few days then it’s not a big problem. But during harvest season some kids stopped for more than one month then they do not go back to school (Mom).

3.7.4 Child labour summary

Children worked frequently during the rice harvest and rice planting seasons. Consequently, children would prioritise work instead of attending school regularly. As a result of missing too many days of class, children frequently dropped out of school.

3.8 Migration

Many children in this study had family or friends who would regularly migrate to Thailand, Phnom Penh or other provinces in Cambodia to find work in factories, construction labour, agricultural labour and domestic labour. Once children finished working during the rice harvest season and decided to stop going to school, they faced unemployment. This is also when children might witness family and friends making plans to migrate. Subsequently, many children were influenced to migrate alone or with their families to find sources of income.

3.8.1 Migration to Thailand

Migrating to Thailand was a common occurrence for families based in Chup. Koy, aged 11, was in grade 5 when he joined our FGD in Thraveang. Koy spoke about his sisters who worked as farmers in Thraveang but would regularly travel to Thailand: ‘Five of my sisters are all farmers and sometime they go and work in Thailand; they are planning to go again to work on a farm.’ Khlouk, aged 12, joined one of our FGDs and shared about his parents working in Thailand. Khlouk was in grade 5 and lived with his younger sister, aunt and uncle while his parents worked in a factory in Thailand. During the 2012 end-of-year school holidays Khlouk and his sister visited their parents in Thailand for one month. During this time, Khlouk and his 10-year-old sister worked in a factory with their parents:

In Thailand we worked with our parents in the factory; folding towels. We were paid 500 Baht (USD $15.30) each for one month of work before returning to Cambodia to go to school. My parents wanted us to earn some money while we were visiting them (Khlouk).

The grade 5 and 6 girls who came to our FGD in Kaun shared similar stories about their families working in Thailand. Veata, a 12-year-old, spoke about her family working in Thailand. Her parents were working as labourers:
I have five older siblings including four brothers and one sister. All of my siblings are in Thailand working except for my younger brother. My sister used to study in grade 7 but she is working in Thailand now. My parents are working in Thailand as labourers (Veata).

Similarly, Toch (see 3.2.2) spoke about her family working in Thailand. Toch dropped out of grade 6 to look after her cousin while her family worked during the rice harvest season. Toch shared with the group that her two older brothers and one older sister were working on a farm. Later while interviewing Toch, she told me she wanted to work in Thailand with her siblings instead of returning to school because she feared being behind at school:

I don't want to go [back to school] because I will go to Thailand to earn money picking oranges with my siblings. [...] I don't want to go back to school because I will not understand much in class (Toch).

During data member checking, Toch had left to work in Thailand with her parents once the rice harvest season was over.

3.8.2 Migration to Phnom Penh and surrounding provinces

Families living in Kiri would often migrate to Phnom Penh and other surrounding provinces. During our grade 5 and 6 FGD in Cheak, Nearidei, a 14-year-old in grade 6, spoke about her older siblings and the work that were involved in: ‘My second eldest brother is selling sweets in Siem Reap. My third brother is working as labourer in Phnom Penh and my sister is a tailor.’

Likewise Neang, who was a part of the same FGD, told the group about her older siblings working in Bavet, near the border of Vietnam. Neang was the youngest in the family and in grade 6, while her 18-year-old brother was in grade 10: ‘My 22-year-old and 23-year-old brothers and my 21-year-old sister are working as labourers in Bavet.’

During an FGD with grade 7 and 8 boys at Cheak Primary School, 15-year-old Khemarak spoke about his eldest siblings’ sources of work: ‘My oldest brother is a labourer in Bavet. Then my two older sisters and brother work at home making furniture.’

3.8.3 Children moving with their families

Parents would regularly take their children with them when they migrated to Thailand for work. As teacher Leap and I discussed the influences of migration on children’s school attendance at Krasang Primary School, Leap shared his concerns about children migrating with their parents for lengthy periods: “Children’s parents move to Thailand. They ask permission from the school principal if they can take their children with them. Then their children will miss school for maybe three months.”
Leap explained difficulties faced by the Krasung Primary School principal when allowing students to be absent from school for extended periods of time: ‘If we do not allow children to go with their parents, then who will take care of their children? The children have to go with them.’

Once children returned to their home villages in Cambodia with their families, some children would return to school. I asked teacher Sopheak to explain the process of re-introducing children into Chup Primary School after being absent for so long. Sopheak explained that the school would have to be given paper work to see if the child had to repeat a grade level or continue their studies as usual:

When families return from migrating, some children come back to school. But it depends on paper work from the school that the child attended in the other province. We can see if the child can join the class again or has to repeat a grade level (Sopheak).

This procedure was not in place at Krasung Primary School. As Leap revealed, ‘When students are in grade 1 and they go to Thailand with their parents for three months, their names are kept on the school list.’ I clarified with Leap if MoEYS knew about these students who had migrated to Thailand. Leap explained that the enrolment list would be sent to MoEYS so they were unaware that students were not attending school for as long as three months. Leap described how students who returned from Thailand would continue on to the next grade level despite struggling with schoolwork:

When children come back, they don’t want to repeat. They go into grade 2 but they can't understand. Classes are reviewed for them but its difficult teaching students who are at different knowledge levels in the class (Leap).

3.8.4 Children influenced to migrate

During field research, I began to see and hear how children who witnessed their families and friends migrating to neighbouring countries and provinces were inclined to do the same. Kaliyan (see section 3.4.1) was the mother of 11-year-old Sae, a boy in grade 8. Kaliyan viewed rice harvest season as an opportunity to earn an income: ‘Most kids in the village during the rice harvest season have money because they work.’ Kaliyan went on to say, ‘After the rice harvest there is nothing to do in the village so they go to Thailand to make more money.’

Mom described a similar scenario with children in rural villages surrounding Chup, highlighting the risk of permanent school dropout, especially around the transition from primary to high school:

Kids who are 13 or 14 years old and in grade 5 or grade 6 will stop school for the first time during the rice harvest season. They will not migrate because they are not big enough. But the next year when they are beginning high school they will go to Thailand after the rice harvest season (Mom).

Arun, a grade 7 and 8 teacher, told me how students at Chup High School were influenced to migrate by friends, who returned home with valuable items they had bought with income from working in Thailand:
‘I see some students who own nice things like phones and also clothes, other students see them and want the same style so they go work in Thailand.’

Teng, the primary school principal in Cheak, told me that concerns had been raised during staff meetings about children stopping school to work in factories:

During our staff meetings we discuss issues related to decreased school attendance, such as students always seeing their friend that work in factories. They want to earn money like their friends and they leave school to follow their friends. Most of the time the students are in grade 6 (Teng).

Mom shared insights into the dynamics of families’ decision-making regarding migration that she had gleaned during her visits to rural villages surrounding Chup. Families receiving multiple incomes from their children working in Thailand displayed an increased standard of living to other families in the village. Consequently, families with little income would compare themselves to those families. This created a ripple effect in the village:

They see families who have kids working in Thailand. They know that the family will receive 10,000 Baht (USD $310.00) or 12,000 Baht (USD $375.00) that year so that they can buy motorbikes, build a house or nice clothes. Someone delivers money from Thailand and it’s not a secret. The families are proud and will tell their friends about the money they received. It’s like a competition. Who can earn more money and access the nice dream. So other families will also send their children to Thailand to work (Mom).

3.8.5 Children migrating for work

Chhouk had dropped out of grade 7 at the age of 15 during rice harvest season. During data member checking I visited Chhouk in Kaun. Chhouk had not returned to school, but instead was at home with her older sister Davy. Both Davy and Chhouk were without work after the rice harvest. Chhouk told me that she wanted to work in Thailand with Davy so that she could help pay off the family’s debt. This debt was incurred when they borrowed money for their farm. Davy was planning on going to Thailand again to work in a shop, but she did not want Chhouk to go with her, as she feared that Chhouk would be at risk of physical and verbal abuse:

I do not want her to come with me because she might not know the work and she might get hit by Thais with dishes or yelled at. This has not happened to me but I have seen it happen to others. This happens because the Khmer girls cannot speak Thai and it’s a stressful shop (Davy).

Davy told me that her father would be worried about Chhouk’s wellbeing if she worked illegally in Thailand, because she was only 15. Davy explained how Chhouk wanted to follow the example of her 15-year-old friends who had left school in primary school. They were soon to leave the village to work in Thailand.
3.8.6 Price to pay for migrating to Thailand

I asked Davy about the financial costs involved when she migrated to Thailand in 2011. Davy explained that she was working illegally in Thailand without a passport. Davy had paid 2,500 Baht (USD $77.50) to an agency that organised a work permit for her to work in Thailand. Davy also had to pay 2,500 Baht to the agency when she returned to Cambodia.

Pov, a 16-year-old girl who had completed grade 6 in Thrapeang, spent three months working in Thailand before returning to repeat grade 6. Like Davy, Pov explained that she did not have a passport but paid 2,000 Baht (USD $61) to an agency that organised a work permit for her. Pov earned a total of 4,000 Baht (USD $123) while working on a farm in Thailand for three months. Despite these substantial costs, Mom explained that families still choose to send their children to work in Thailand: ‘If they have three children working in Thailand they can send more than 10,000 Baht (USD $310) per month back to their families in Cambodia.’

3.8.7 Factory work

Phnom Penh is a three-hour trip from Kiri compared to an eight-hour trip from Chup. The children that worked in factories in Phnom Penh were predominantly females, averaging 15 years of age, who had dropped out of primary school or lower secondary school. I asked Sokun, an Education Advisor in Svay Rieng, about how under-aged children were legally working in factories in Phnom Penh:

The problem is in lower secondary school because students are becoming adults but they are not of age to work. Then if they have repeated a grade they will most likely look older in grade 7 and can make a fake I.D. to go work in the factories (Sokun).

Amanti, who had dropped out of school in grade 6 as a 15-year-old, also spoke about the process she took to work in a factory in Phnom Penh. Amanti organised to have a fake identification card made so that she would be permitted to work in a factory. Amanti was now 17-years-old. I asked Amanti if there were other children working in the factory with her. Amanti replied, ‘Yes, there are a lot of children working under the age of 18 in the factory. They make fake I.D. cards and put 18-years-old on it.’ I asked Amanti if the factory personnel knew that there were under-age children working in the factory. Amanti explained that the factory personnel did not know because they are under the impression that people from rural Cambodia look under-developed: ‘They don’t know that we have fake I.D.s because they think people in the countryside look smaller than their age because we work harder since we were very young.’ Amanti informed me that she was being paid USD $70 per month at the factory. But if she worked overtime (ten hours per day) she would be paid USD $140 per month.
When I met with Vuth, an Education Specialist, we discussed how this influx of young people working in factories was affecting school dropout. Vuth voiced his worries about more factories being built around the outskirts of Phnom Penh and in neighbouring provinces:

We are also looking at the factory boom in Cambodia. We heard that 100 factories were built around Phnom Penh, which has absorbed a lot of girls. Especially garment factories. Recently more factories have been built in Kampong Speu Province and more factories are being built along national road number five in Kampong Cham Province (Vuth).

Consequently, Vuth explained how this rise in factories will increase labour demand and will lead to an increase number of students dropping out of school: ‘100,000 students have already quit school to work in factories. These factories will need more labour. I think they need 40,000 or 50,000 people to work in the factories.’ Vuth described how students in secondary school were particularly at risk of dropping out of school to work in these factories: ‘The target is students because they’re young and mostly coming from secondary school. So we need to ensure this does not happen.’

3.8.8 Domestic work

Children also told me about their experiences of working as domestic help in Phnom Penh. When I met with Eiva in Cheak there were no onlookers except for Eiva’s close friend, Soaphea, who had dropped out of school in grade 1 when she was a 10-year-old. Both girls had joined our FGD the week before. Eiva, 12 at the time, freely spoke about how she had dropped out of grade 1 as an 11-year-old. Once Eiva’s mother became sick after suffering a heart attack, Eiva was sent to work as a housekeeper in Phnom Penh. Eiva appeared distressed and described how she was poorly treated for four months, which led to her return to Cheak: ‘I was taking care of children, washing clothes, washing dishes. I did not like it because they used bad words. After four months I asked my mother to come get me.’

I asked Eiva how much she was getting paid. Eiva replied, ‘I don’t know because every month my mother came to take it all.’ I then asked her who had made the decision for her to stop school and go and work in Phnom Penh. Eiva told me that her mother made her stop school so that she could financially support the family. Eiva’s friend Soaphea interrupted the interview and told me that she too had gone to work as a housekeeper in Phnom Penh. I was shocked to hear this because I had interviewed Soaphea’s mother, Kolab, the day before. Kolab had not mentioned that Soaphea had gone to Phnom Penh to work. Soaphea explained that she had gone to work with Eiva in Phnom Penh but came back to Cheak after two days of work because she felt that the chores were too hard for her. Eiva looked upset but went on to tell me that she and Soaphea were told to lie if anyone asked them why they had come to Phnom Penh to work as housekeepers:

The house owner said if anyone asks us why we came here to work then we have to say, we’re not working, but we are distant relatives and have come here to help the grandmother (Eiva).
During data member checking in Cheak, I visited Kolab and Soaphea. As I verified findings from the interview with Kolab, I asked her about Soaphea working in Phnom Penh. Kolab looked away and smiled. She explained that Soaphea saw Eiva leave the village to go and work as a housekeeper in Phnom Penh and Soaphea wanted to go with her. I asked Kolab why she would let Soaphea go to Phnom Penh when she already has two sons working in neighbouring provinces. Kolab replied that she did not want Soaphea to go and she was fearful of what would happen to Soaphea but she could not stop her from going with Eiva. Kolab then described how Soaphea did not like the work in Phnom Penh so she came back to Cheak.

3.8.9 Construction work

While under-age girls migrated to Phnom Penh for factory and domestic work, under-age boys were predominately migrating to Phnom Penh to work in construction. There were, however, fewer reports of children migrating to Phnom Penh for construction work compared to children working in factories surrounding Phnom Penh.

At the end of each FGD, I asked children if they had any friends who had dropped out of school, and what they were doing now. Veasna and Chhaya were a part of our grade 5 and 6 boys FGD in Cheak. Chhaya spoke about one boy in the village: ‘[He] went to Phnom Penh as a construction worker. But now he has been back and is studying again.’ Likewise, Veasna told us about his friend who had gone to work in construction but was refused work: ‘One friend dropped out of school to work as a construction worker in Phnom Penh. But he was under-age and not acceptable to work.’ Krouch was a part of our grade 7 and 8 FGD in Cheak. Krouch described his 14-year-old friend, now working in construction: ‘[He] stopped school in grade 8 because his family was poor and now he is working as labourer in Phnom Penh.’

3.8.10 Child labour and migration summary

Children had many work commitments outside of school, particularly assisting during the rice harvest and rice planting seasons. Children would miss too many days of school during these two seasons and drop out of school. Once the seasons were over, parents and children would migrate to neighbouring countries and provinces such as Thailand and Phnom Penh to work with their family and friends.

3.9 Education interventions and policy

Throughout field research, I asked participants about the education interventions being implemented in their communities. Many participants mentioned scholarship programs and NGO initiatives. UNICEF education advisors and specialist outlined the Child Friendly Schools policy and talked about the
various processes in place—such as the SSC—to enhance school community engagement. Nonetheless, it was noted that these education initiatives were not being successfully implemented at the local community level. In an attempt to address the barriers to effective implementation, UNICEF is now focusing more on strengthening the education system through capacity building of ministry officials.

3.9.1 Education Scholarships

Scholarships were a common intervention to ensuring at-risk children remained in school. ChildFund Cambodia, World Food Program [WFP], Red Cross, the Belgium Association and other local NGOs based in Chup and Kiri including KATRA, Angkor Organisation and Child Mekong Association, were all mentioned as organisations that provided scholarships to children at risk of dropout. An Education Advisor explained the benefits of receiving a scholarship: ‘NGOs provide scholarships by giving food and money. This supports children to go to school regularly.’ She further explained, ‘If food is provided at schools, children still need to support the family by working. But overall, I think it’s a good approach to prevent school dropout.’

3.9.2 Kampuchean Action for Primary Education

KAPE was commonly mentioned as an organisation that provided support for keeping children in school. One strategy that KAPE implemented was a system whereby teachers were to visit the homes of children who were regularly absent from school. Jorani gave an overview of how the process was taking place at Prasath School: ‘Teachers visit students’ houses and give them advice and persuade them to come back to school. Parents are also asked to come into school to speak to the principal.’

Jorani described how the strategy was delayed in being implemented due to a lack of financial support. ‘We could not use this strategy because there was no money to support teachers’ petrol when they visited the students.’ During data member checking in March 2013, however, Jorani told me that since January 2013 funding for petrol had been provided to teachers to visit at-risk students. This enabled Jorani to visit the homes of three students with low attendance records, and all three students had returned to school.

To crosscheck whether the same strategy was being implemented at Cheak Primary School, I asked Yin which steps he took if one of his students was not attending regularly. Yin replied that he would visit students’ homes and report back to the school principal: ‘I report information to the school principal after visiting children’s homes. Teachers report when students are not attending regularly so that the principal can report to the village leader.’ Yin also informed me, ‘I don't visit students much because I only have time to come and teach. The other times that I'm not teaching, I am working.’ Furthermore, I asked the
high school principal, Chhourn, what process was in place at Chup High School to contact children at risk of dropping out. Chhourn emphasised that the school principal was responsible for making contact with students who were not attending school:

Students are spoken to and the principal sends a letter home with other students that live nearby. The principal will also sometimes visit the family and finally the authority [village leader] will visit the student’s home (Chhourn).

I asked participating out-of-school children and their parents if a teacher or principal from the child’s school had been to enquire about their school attendance. Unfortunately, there was only one report of a teacher and principal making contact with a mother, Kolab, whose three children dropped out of primary school for work. Kolab described the contact from teachers and the principal:

My children’s teachers came to the house and wanted them to go study, but my children do not go. [...] If my children missed school for one week then the principal will send a letter (Kolab).

Conversely, there were six other reports from out-of-school children and their parents who had had no enquiries about the child’s lack of attendance. I asked Dara and Montha—parents of girls Chhouk and Davy, who had both dropped out of school—if a teacher or the principal from Chup High School had made any contact with them once their daughters’ school attendance began to decrease. They replied, ‘No, no one spoke to us from the school about our daughters.’ Similarly, Veha explained how his 18-year-old daughter, Kari, had dropped out, yet he had not seen any of Kari’s teachers coming to visit their home.

3.9.3 UNICEF – Child Friendly Schools

UNICEF has been successfully implementing an initiative in Cambodia called the Child Friendly Schools policy. As Education Specialist Sara stated: ‘CFS started off as a UNICEF and NGO support pilot in 2000 that has expanded to a nation-wide system run and owned by the government. Now it’s implemented nation-wide in 7,000 primary schools.’ Another Educational Specialist, Vuth, confirmed the positive support that the RCG has given CFS by describing the progress made in primary schools regarding school environment: ‘The government is very supportive of CFS and schools are really making change in terms of school environment such as, hand wash sanitation to improve health, hygiene and safety.’

Vuth did, however, emphasise that improvements made to education in Cambodia should not only be focused on improving the school environment and disseminating resources. Instead, he thought that energy should be funnelled into connecting the local communities to their schools: ‘It’s not just about mobilising resources to improve school environment. But also highlighting issues regarding community involvement in school planning and management, teacher performance and student learning.’
CFS is still in the early stages of implementation in rural provinces such as Banteay Meanchey. An Education Specialist in Banteay Meanchey, Minsor, explained that quality delivery and application of CFS to rural schools in Banteay Meanchey is still limited:

The quality of implementation of CFS is still limited because in some places it is new such as in Banteay Meanchey. Schools received the CFS framework in 2010 so it’s a short time to improve. But I there is progress being made only two years (Minsor).

Minsor added: ‘The difficulty we face [implementing the CFS framework] is teaching and learning.’ The focus is on learning outcomes for children. However, he further stated that improvement in learning outcomes would take time: ‘Quality learning is hard to implement in Cambodia but it’s improving slowly. Looking at the big picture; there’s some improvement.’

3.9.4 School Support Committees

Implementation of CFS has improved understanding of children’s rights in schools. Nevertheless, Vuth explained that collaboration between schools, parents and local authorities in School Support Committees [SSCs] is a dimension of CFS that needs special consideration for improvement. ‘We are trying to encourage more involvement of parents and local authority in the SSCs.’

To further understand partnerships between schools and parents in local communities, I asked Prasath High School principal, Vannak, if he met with parents of students. Vannak gave a short answer: ‘When I meet with parents at the school or in the community, they are mainly interested in money for attending rather than their children’s education.’

According to Vuth, ‘Every school has a SSC and the issue is around disfunctionality of the SSC including limited participation, engagement and involvement in SSCs.’ To address the lack of partnership between schools and local communities, the schools had been given improved guidelines for SSCs. As Vuth described, ‘It’s really about participation of stakeholders including parents. Recently there’s been a change in guideline to re-enforce role function, composition of members and responsibility of SSC.’

Disappointingly, Vuth stated that schools had been failing to implement change in the functioning of SSCs: ‘Some schools have not revised membership of SSCs because they think that SSCs are already functioning.’ As Vuth stated, ‘There should also be parent representatives sitting on the committee so that they provide a different picture.’

3.9.5 National Assessment Tool

Additionally, there is no national tool to assess student learning outcomes. As I discussed student learning achievements with Sara, she voiced that very little is known about children and their learning in
Cambodia: ‘There is no system that assesses learning achievements. We don’t know exactly what children learn and don’t learn and the differences in terms of subject, by sex or geographical areas.’

Sarah explained that there are considerations being made by UNICEF to develop a nation-wide learning outcomes assessment tool, although implementation of such a tool may be delayed due to risks of political strain:

It’s a very slow process because there are risks involved especially for the government. When it comes to, what would it mean if the scores are very low and the links to political connections? (Sara).

Nevertheless, Vuth affirmed that learning assessment and student performance had, and would continue to be, a key priority for UNICEF over the coming years. Vuth explained:

I hope with advocacy it would be better. UNICEF is focused on quality of education and school attendance. It’s important. It cannot be based on national trends but break it down to provincial, district and commune levels (Vuth).

3.9.6 UNICEF rechanneling funding

UNICEF is aiming to support MoEYS with the sustainability of the CFS policy throughout Cambodia. According to Vuth, however, UNICEF will rechannel the funding into strengthening the Cambodian education system’s own capacity:

UNICEF is still supporting CFS systems to ensure sustainability within the government so that UNICEF can phase out of maintaining sustainability. Once we can step back a little bit we can look more at strengthening the system and capacity development of ministry officials at different levels (Vuth).

Instead of focusing on programs to improve education in Cambodia, UNICEF is aiding in the development of the Education Strategy Plan (ESP) for 2014–2018 while partnering with MoEYS and other key stakeholders in Education:

UNICEF is one of the working groups for the development the ESP for 2014–2018. UNICEF and key education stakeholders are trying to ensure that all inputs and challenges that we have faced such as, proper resource allocation and policy action, are included in the new ESP (Vuth).

Vuth provided a thorough explanation of how the current ESP is departmentalised, but how the new ESP will be developed using a ‘sub-sector approach’. These sub-sectors (i.e. primary education and secondary education) will incorporate administration and finances support within them:

Sub-sectors means five sectors capturing more than twenty departments under MoEYS. For example, primary education includes teacher training, financial support and administration; bringing those departments together in the sub-sector. Secondary education sub-sector would have the same (Vuth).

Vuth clarified that the departmentalisation approach was preventing personnel from effectively communicating and working together. However, the new sub-sector approach will allow for better collaboration:
This will allow for more outcomes to be achieved in each sub-sector especially on quality of education and service delivery. Currently there is poor collaboration and communication in the departmentalisation approach. But, we are breaking down the wall so that people really see what needs to be done across sub-sectors (Vuth).

3.9.7 Education interventions and policy summary

There is an array of education interventions throughout Cambodia: scholarships, NGO initiatives and the implementation of CFS policy including SSC in local communities. Nevertheless, the implementation effectiveness of these interventions, at the grass roots level in both Chup and Kiri, is questionable. UNICEF is therefore re-focusing their efforts by moving towards strengthening the education system throughout Cambodia through the development of the ESP 2014–2018 and capacity building of ministry officials at all levels.
CHAPTER 4

Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main discussion points that arise from the above study of the complexities and interrelated obstacles that influence children’s school attendance in rural Cambodia. Consideration is first given to the problem of social exclusion from education, which takes away children’s opportunities and their right to complete their formal education. The second point for discussion is that of migrant social networks and their influence on socially excluded children, as well as the resultant of migration and child engagement in unskilled, low-waged informal employment sectors in neighbouring provinces and across international borders. The third issues that bears examination is the effectiveness of both Cambodia’s education policies, and the education interventions implemented by international agencies and NGOs. Finally, recommendations for improvement in education policy reform, initiatives and interventions, and a discussion of the limitations of the study, are presented.

4.2 Social exclusion

This ethnography supports international literature which emphasises the importance of social connectedness in a child’s schooling experience (Phelps & Graham 2010; Van et al. 2012). Unfortunately, many children in this study did not experience social connectedness in relation to their schooling. Instead children faced countless obstacles that hindered their ability or desire to attend school, and therefore their connectedness, thus infringing upon their right to receive an education. These include overlapping issues such as limited to no communication and collaboration between families and local schools; grade repetition; long distances and transportation issues to and from school; regular student absenteeism due to paid and unpaid work commitments; and being charged informal school fees causing family financial hardships.

Furthermore, social exclusion was intensified if a child experienced 'silent exclusion' due to regular absenteeism and receiving poor quality education, which resulted in children struggling to learn their class content or gain literacy skills. These findings confirm Hossain’s (2005, p. 19) concern that out-of-school children experience social exclusion from their community, which blocks ‘their membership in general society’. Children in rural Cambodia are citizens and entitled to their rights, as put forward in the UNCRC (1990). This study also supports Landman’s (2006) conclusion that social exclusion of children from schools violates children’s rights and opportunities to receive quality education and to further their development into adulthood. Additionally, this research identified a concerning issue whereby parents
and local schools frequently deflected their responsibilities in ensuring that children remained in school. There was a perpetuating cycle of blame between parents and teachers, both of whom held the other responsible for ensuring that children attended school and learned the class content; this further contributed to children being socially excluded from education.

4.2.1 Silent exclusion

In past research, many children who experienced silent exclusion from education were categorised as ‘not interested in studies’ and these children eventually dropped out of school (IIPS 2000). However, the findings of this study align closely with studies that place the responsibility for children’s limited learning on the poor quality of education (Geeves et al. 2002, Marshall et al. 2009; Sokhom 2004; UNESCO 2011a). Families in rural Cambodia make immediate financial sacrifices when they decide to keep their children in school and out of work. This study found that parents were willing to consider investing in a child’s education if it allowed the child to have better employment opportunities in the future. These financial sacrifices help us to understand the frustration among parents who witnessed their children receive poor-quality education, make little progress with schoolwork, and then experience unemployment after graduation, despite regular attendance at school.

4.2.2 Community and school engagement

Contrary to earlier Cambodia-based research by Ang and colleagues (2012) who found that teachers felt comfortable to communicate with parents about their children’s progress at school, this study found no evidence of a positive and enabling relationship, good communication or respect between teachers and parents. Children’s experience of difficulties with education fuelled parents to place blame on teachers for both the children’s lack of school attendance and their limited understanding of class content. Parents questioned quality of education, and especially the commitment of teachers, who prioritised other paid work over teaching responsibilities, thus feeding into children’s non-attendance. These findings confirm growing concern throughout Cambodia regarding insufficient teacher salaries, which leads to teacher engagement in other sources of income to maintain a basic standard of living. Additional work commitments appears to distract teachers from teaching commitments (Ang et al. 2012; CITA 2010), perpetuating the cycle of poor teaching, poor learning and both teacher and child absence from school.

4.2.3 Informal school fees leading to family financial strain

Despite attempts to abolish corrupt practices of charging informal school fees in Cambodia by 2008, the practice continues unabated. This contradicts the fact that children are entitled to nine years of free basic education under the Cambodian Constitution (MoEYS 2010; NEP 2007). Similar to findings in
Kenya, children whose parents could not meet informal school fee expenses were even further socially excluded and denied an education (Ohba 2011). Given that 55% of the total corruption in Cambodia is found in public services (EIC 2006), it is essential that there is a shift in perception among MoEYS, NGOs and AID donor agencies regarding the universal acceptance of informal school fees to ensure children do not experience social exclusion. This practice must be terminated.

Further, the practice interferes with parent–teacher relationships (Knight & Macleod 2004a; Sann Chan et al. 2012). Parents make financial sacrifices to ensure their children remain in school and put faith in teachers to provide their children with an education. When teachers then fail to prioritise their teaching commitments for the reasons discussed, parents lose trust and become resentful towards teachers. This hinders their ability to work collaboratively to maximise children’s education.

4.2.4 Teacher alcohol misuse

A new and alarming finding was the existence and open display of teacher alcohol misuse. Parents and children expressed serious concern about teachers’ alcohol misuse in communities or in the school grounds. This issue impacted on both teachers’ attendance and their standard of teaching. This finding has not been documented in Cambodian education literature. Nevertheless, there have been recent anecdotal reports of an increase in alcohol consumption among the general population throughout Cambodia (Banta et al. 2013). This increase has been associated with mental health disorders, exposure to family and community violence and poverty (Banta et al. 2013; WHO 2011). The findings are consistent with the World Bank’s (2004) research regarding teachers in India being in class under the influence of alcohol and failing to teach due to alcohol misuse.

The findings from this local research suggest that teachers’ alcohol misuse may be a symptom of the stress they experience from low salaries, and subsequently poverty, in rural Cambodia. This study did not explore reasoning for teachers’ misuse of alcohol in depth, but found examples of how it negatively impacted on the quality of education provided in schools. This issue consequently caused distrust of teachers among parents and children. It is hoped that this concerning finding will further inform one of the main priority areas of ESP policy 2009–2013, which aims to strengthen teachers’ code of conduct.

4.2.5 Teachers perceptions of parents’ regard for education

Cambodian culture emphasises the importance of preserving one’s professional reputation, and far less importance is placed on the value of transparency (Dawson 2009). In an effort to maintain their professional and social reputations, teachers deflected responsibility and minimised the significance of issues regarding informal school fees and their commitment to teaching. Instead, teachers shifted blame and questioned parents’ regard for education and whether or not they prioritised their children’s
education over earning money. This is despite parents’ claims that they wanted their children to be educated because they themselves received limited or no education during the KR regime (1974-79).

Nevertheless, teachers’ perceptions support extensive literature on child labour that parents enabled their children to leave school and find unskilled work for short-term financial benefits (Beegle, Dehejia & Gatti 2009; Edmonds & Pavcnik 2005; Ersado 2005; Soares, Kruger & Berthelon 2012). Moreover, findings support evidence from Africa, Pakistan, India, Thailand and Cambodia that parents’ limited education and poor health leads to their children dropping out of school and starting work (Awan, Waqas & Aslam 2011; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay 2010; Hunt 2008; Sabates, Fernandez & Ricardo 2010; Van et al. 2012). To prevent intergenerational persistence of limited education and poor health, it is essential that children are given necessary opportunities to receive an education and increase the likelihood of developing into healthy educated parents who want the same for the following generation (Cutler 2010).

4.2.6 Child labour

Children’s experience of social exclusion from education regularly led to children contributing to the livelihood of their families by engaging in unskilled work. This finding is supported by international studies that associated children leaving school for paid work opportunities when family encountered sickness across varying countries (Hunt 2008); increased labour demand during agricultural peak seasons in Brazil (Kruger 2007); increased informal school fees in Cambodia (Bray 2007) and family financial strain in Dhaka (Cameron 2008). Findings also revealed that children regularly engaged in unpaid hidden forms of child labour such as domestic work, agricultural work and related tasks. While this study contributes to growing literature on hidden forms of child labour (Jayaraj & Subramanian 2007; Ohba 2011; Webbink, Smits & De Jong 2012), there is still limited empirical research addressing implications of hidden forms of child labour and how it influences children’s education.

Cambodia has ratified various international conventions and the Cambodian Labour Law (RGC 1997), which protects children from engaging in work that can negatively impact their education. These include the ILO Convention No. 138 (1973) on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in 2006, the ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) on Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2006 and the UNCRC (1990) in 1992. However, the RGC and relevant agencies are failing to monitor the implementation of these major policies to ensure that children remain in school and out of work. In addition, the Cambodian Labour Law (RGC 1997) fails to include the informal employment sectors, where the majority of child labourers are found, including in the agriculture and domestic sectors. This is a serious oversight, given that the RGC has not ratified the ILO Convention No. 10 on Minimum Age (Agriculture) (1923) and the agriculture sector is considered the most hazardous but least regulated in regards to protecting child
labourers (Miller 2012). Additionally many children who do not attend school are exposed to abuse and exploitation while engaging in domestic work and related tasks (Jayaraj & Subramanian 2007).

To achieve Goal 1 and Goal 2 of the CMDGs that addresses equity issues such as child labour, achieving universal primary education and accelerating progress in lower secondary education retention rates (RGC 2010a), the RGC should consider their responsibility as duty bearers, and take seriously the implementation of regulation and intervention to ensure that child labour does not interfere with children’s right to education. This involves developing a platform to collaborate with other duty bearers such as NGOs, parents, local schools, and international agencies to fulfil their responsibilities. However, the much needed policy reform, investment in teachers' capacity and improvements in quality of education will require considerable political and financial commitment by the RGC if they are to achieve free universal access to basic education under the Cambodian Constitution.

4.2.7 Transition from primary to lower secondary school

This study found that the increased cost of secondary school education, coupled with the long-distance travel required, proved prohibitive to children’s school continuation. The transition from primary to secondary schooling also occurs at a time in children’s lives when they are entering adolescence, developing independence and social skills, physically maturing into able-bodied productive workers and forming identities (Miske & DeJaeghere 2008). The risk of school dropout is further heightened when children are old for their grade level due to grade repetition.

These findings correspond with Siddhu’s (2011) and Miske and DeJaeghere’s (2008) findings in rural India and Vietnam, respectively, who found that barriers to successfully transition from primary to secondary education are shaped by economic, geographic and socio-cultural contexts. This is a critical finding in the Cambodian context. Since 2007 there has been reduction in the number of children enrolling in lower secondary schools, which has been attributed to lower rates of transition. It is recommended that the CFS policy continue to be implemented in primary schools and introduced into lower secondary schools to ensure better quality education is provided to reduce the high rates of dropout.

4.2.8 Relevance of education

This study concluded that education in rural Cambodia has consistently failed to provide students with skills that take them into well-paid jobs. This is an issue that is also being widely recognised in other developing countries such as India and Bangladesh (Froerer 2012; Hossain 2010). The unfulfilled promise of education-opportunity-employment has left a disenfranchised population of Khmer youth, who believe that education is a time-consuming and expensive activity with few job prospects after
comple. The next generation of Khmer youth in rural Cambodia now question the relevance of public education, especially where families lack necessary economic resources and political connections to transfer school certificates into well-paid employment. Therefore, children are being influenced by families and their community to engage in unskilled low-paid work instead of continuing their studies (Tariquzzaman & Hossain 2009). This is a complex issue in Cambodia where 300,000 new youth are ready to enter the job market each year (Tunon & Rim 2013).

Concern has been voiced by the OECD (2013) that skill levels reliant on the inefficient Cambodian education system will be insufficient to meet the needs of the labour market and will have a direct affect the country’s economic growth. Therefore, it is urgent that Cambodia takes initiative to improve education quality in order to skill people for more sophisticated production processes through addressing quality education. Especially when Cambodia will have full membership to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2015 which will allow for regional economic integration (UNDP 2014). This will boost the country’s export competitiveness, boost future job creation and move the economy up value chains. A skilled and educated workforce will be essential to Cambodia’s development.

This study provides evidence that receiving an education does not always automatically lead to skilled employment, particularly as education standards are unregulated; children may progress through primary and lower secondary school and remain illiterate. This study therefore questions the widely-held belief that national development in resource-poor countries will not necessarily be achieved if access to education is prioritised (Hossain 2010). It is imperative that the RGC shifts their priority from increasing access to education to more pressing issues such as education quality, prevention of school dropout and development of employment opportunities for high school graduates.

Currently, parents and children in rural Cambodia continue to lack confidence in the value of education. Consequently, at-risk children and their families prioritise both local and migratory employment opportunities, reinforcing among themselves the irrelevance of education.

4.3 Migration

This ethnography found that children and youth migrate seasonally to neighbouring provinces or across the Thai-Cambodia border, either alone or with a family member, to work in the agricultural sector, the manufacturing sector, in domestic work or in other informal economies. Findings concur with literature from Moldova, Burkina Faso and Cambodia, which conclude that seasonal migration is a common phenomenon and is undertaken to cope with unemployment, low wages, illness and lack of access to markets (Görlich & Trebesch 2008; Konseiga 2007; Maltoni 2006). Findings also strongly support international literature that states children rely on social networks in their community to inform them of
migration options and as a means to remit money to their family once they find employment (CDRI 2007; Görlich & Trebesch 2008; Hegde & Hoban 2013). As a part of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003–2005, the RCG has encouraged overseas labour migration to increase remittances and address issues of unemployment among youth, in the hope of enhancing national development (Chan 2009; MoLVT 2011).

This study, however, agrees with research that counters the notion of migration leading to national development. Migration causes local agricultural labour shortages (Tong, Hem & Santos 2011), because young productive workers have out-migrated, which puts pressure on children and youth to prioritise agricultural work over school attendance. This situation contributes to a perpetuating cycle of Khmer children and youth dropping out of school during agricultural seasons, followed by unemployment, followed by labour migration: this causes circular migration patterns (Deshingkar & Start 2003).

4.3.1 Migrant social networks

It was common for families in this study to have one or more family members who had migrated to Thailand, Phnom Penh or a neighbouring province to find higher-paid unskilled employment. Regularly, unemployed children and youth who had dropped out of school or were transitioning from primary to lower secondary school would follow their older siblings and friends and migrate illegally to Thailand to work. Additionally, children and youth regularly migrated to cities or neighbouring provinces where they knew others had migrated to previously for unskilled work opportunities. This allowed for prospective migrants to engage in social networks with former or current migrants during departure or upon arrival of their migration destination to gain information on vulnerabilities of unauthorised migration and employment opportunities. This trend was especially heightened when families saw friends and relatives returning to the village with modern consumable goods after periods of migration. These trends influence families’ decisions to allow their children to leave school and migrate for work.

Findings revealed that working in urban centres or internationally gave children a new-found independence, money that they could send to family and fulfil filial obligations, and the means to buy items of perceived necessity including mobile phones, motorbikes and fashionable clothes (SERC 2010). However, this cycle of migration has adverse effects on rural communities with frequent population movements in and out of rural villages, which weaken the social fabric of communities (Lopez Cordova 2005). Additionally, fluid migration increases the likelihood of children dropping out of school, repeating grades or decreasing school attendance (Jampaklay 2011). Furthermore, poverty persists for many (not all) families who await remittances from young migrant workers (World Bank 2006b).
4.3.2 Labour migration policy

As stated above, the RCG encourages overseas migration to address issues of employment for Khmer youth. De Haas’ (2005, p. 1269) supports this approach, claiming that 'instead of uselessly and harmfully trying to stop inevitable migration, immigration policies allowing for freer circulation can, besides increasing migration control, enhance the vital contribution of migrants to the development of their home countries'. Despite the RGC developing a Labour Migration Policy (RGC 2010c) in 2010 to address increasing migration and providing migrants with protection against abusive practices, the RGC is arguably facing challenges managing legal frameworks and institutions that regulate accelerating labour migration rates. Furthermore, this study gave voice to participants’ concerns regarding the risks around children migrating illegally: risks of verbal or physical abuse and labour exploitation. Migration should therefore not be encouraged among Khmer youth if there is no adequate regulatory system. Instead, realising children’s right to education ought to be given priority.

One of the key goals of the Labour Migration Policy (RGC 2010c) is to recognise the skills acquired from migration and successfully funnel them into local Cambodian communities. Even though this goal is recognised as a stepping stone to achieving national development, it is questionable as to how this goal can be achieved when so many Khmer migrants have never had an education, or have not completed their education. Khmer migrants are engaging in basic unskilled labour due to their limited skills and education (Walsh 2012). This demonstrates minimal understanding and acknowledgement among migration and education policymakers that migration is jeopardizing children’s and youths’ educational development; especially when so often Khmer youth migrate for short-term unskilled employment opportunities instead of continuing their schooling. Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness among education and migration policymakers of how prioritising quality education instead of increasing migration will accelerate development of Cambodia in the long term.

4.4 Education and interventions in Cambodia

Providing quality education is regularly mentioned as a key challenge in Cambodia (Reimer 2012). This study found that many children had poor comprehension levels due to limited resources and poor teaching techniques that did not encourage critical thinking or participatory learning. This confirms local literature, which states that there is a lack of education resources (VSO 2010), and that teaching methodologies are based heavily on memorisation and basic cognitive skills (Geeves et al. 2002). This situation is a result of disenfranchised teachers, who prioritise extra sources of income over lesson planning. This study also found that inadequate student contact hours due to agricultural seasons, public holidays and cultural ceremonies have led to poor comprehension and frequent school dropout.
This study revealed that there are several interventions the RGC sustains (with aid from donors) to ensure that children remain in school, including the CFS policy. Once key donors such as UNICEF rechannel funding from local to national level education intervention, however, the effectiveness of these local interventions will be called into question. Thus, NGOs must remain focused on safeguarding local level education initiatives such as School Support Committees to ensure community participation in school-based management. Yet, the lack of transparency, wide-spread corruption and failure to decentralise power in the education sector has resulted in donors’ reluctance to support the Cambodian education budget (VSO 2010). Therefore, UNICEF is changing its role in the Cambodian education system by rechanneling funding and technical support into developing the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) for 2014–2018. This will ensure that policy action, resource allocation and capacity building are effectively executed, leading to sector-wide reform and successful decentralisation of MoEYS education initiatives.

4.4.1 Teachers’ salaries

Instead of focusing on lesson planning, teachers took on additional work to supplement their teaching salaries. Of the MoEYS budget, 90% is allocated to administration and teachers’ salaries, which were increased by 20% in early 2013. Nevertheless, this study concurs with literature stating that teachers in Cambodia perceive their income to be insufficient to support themselves and their families (CITA 2011). Bray (2007) attributes inadequate teacher salaries in Cambodia and Lebanon to their national governments’ failure to demand the higher levels of taxation necessary, particularly after civil war, to pay teachers with adequate salaries. Additionally, MoEYS struggles to fund professional development for teachers, especially in rural areas where there is shortages of qualified teachers and teacher trainers (UNESCO 2011a). This calls for an urgent boost in national revenue to guarantee that teachers are content with their salaries, prioritise their teaching duties, and receive sufficient teacher training and professional development to deliver quality education to Cambodian children.

4.4.2 Hours spent in the classroom

An education specialist in this study stressed that students are only completing approximately 450 hours engaging in learning activities in the classroom, compared to the official 900 hours. This negatively impacts on quality of education provided in schools. Findings confirmed international literature that teacher and student absenteeism is a perpetuating cycle that is synergistic and results in a loss of valuable learning hours (Banerjee et al. 2012). Even though increasing learning hours is a key priority policy area for the ESP 2009–2013 (MoEYS 2010), it is common practice for schools to accommodate national holidays, political rallies, religious celebrations and key agricultural seasons (Kim 2009).
This study has demonstrated the link between inadequate learning hours during agricultural seasons, regular national holidays and extended school vacations, and high dropout rates. Therefore, it is vital that school management committees and rural communities recognise the impact of missed classroom hours on children’s learning outcomes. Holidays, political rallies and key agricultural seasons need to accommodate school operations to ensure that children learn the curriculum content during set school hours.

4.4.3 Education interventions

There are many education interventions such as scholarship schemes, sponsorship programs, provision of school buildings and resources. Two education initiatives were regularly mentioned in this study: KAPE’s initiative, which provides financial assistance to teachers to enable them to visit at-risk students’ homes, and UNICEF’s implementation of the CFS policy to address issues of quality education. The Cambodian education system continues to be heavily dependent on financial assistance from international development agencies. However, corruption, lack of transparency and system errors continue to permeate the RCG (UNESCO 2011a). For example, findings revealed that there were inadequate numbers of student textbooks and teacher guidebooks. Moreover, findings confirmed that there is insufficient funding for resources, and that resources often do not arrive at schools but instead are sold at markets (UNICEF 2012). Therefore, social accountability monitoring systems should be implemented to monitor school operational funds such as textbook production and distribution.

4.4.4 Centralisation to decentralisation

The ADB has developed a close association with Cambodia in support of achieving its decentralisation reform program (Niazi 2011). Although the RCG has recognised the need to surrender control of key processes at provincial, district and local levels, it continues to be heavily centralised. High levels of corruption in the education system have contributed to failed attempts at decentralisation and have excluded disadvantaged rural communities from the education system (UNESCO 2011a). Thus, it is critical that the RGC acknowledges that if they continue to thwart attempts to decentralise power and ignore the importance of capacity building at local and district levels, they may continue to experience hesitancy from donors in providing funding. Engel (2011) reported that even though the government has recently passed the Anti-Corruption Law (RGC 2010b), there is still concern regarding effective enforcement of the law, which will negatively affect external aid flow, collection of internal revenue, educational development and employment generation for school graduates through private investment.
This study reported that major donors such as UNICEF are re-channelling funding from grassroots education initiatives to developing the ESP for 2014–2018 and strengthening the education system through capacity development of ministry officials. Development depends heavily on national governance (UNESCO 2009); it is therefore encouraging to see UNICEF changing its role in implementation of CFS policy by equipping MoEYS to take ownership of the policy’s sustainability. UNICEF is working closely with the RGC to achieve successful policy action and resource allocation, effective capacity building and decentralisation of the education sector. Additionally, a key priority for UNICEF is the implementation of a national assessment tool to further understand student learning and promote transparency regarding student and school performance. A national assessment tool will strengthen the Cambodian education system and will identify areas need of reform.

4.4.5 School Support Committees

Community engagement is a vital force for educational and social integration, which contribute to achieving education goals (NEP 2011). The CFS policy seeks to involve parents and communities in school management and development processes at the individual school level. MoEYS (2002) established SSCs to achieve one of the priorities for the ESP 2009–2013; to ensure community and private engagement in implementation of improving access to and quality of education (MoEYS 2010).

This study, however, found limited evidence of the promotion of community participation in school-based management (Pellini & Ayres 2007). This is due to MoEYS maintaining majority control and political authority over the Cambodian education system (Engel 2011). This in turn is the consequence of the destructive KR regime, which intentionally kept all parts of society uneducated, fearful and disempowered (Engel 2011).

Disseminating power to the local community level in Cambodia is a bold step that inherently goes against the grain for both local communities and the RGC, as participation in governance has traditionally been discouraged and local communities have been socialised to accept their leaders’ decisions without question (Pellini & Ayres 2007). This study’s findings were similar to those of Nguon (2011), who found that the success of SSCs is compromised when it encourages parents from low-SES backgrounds to voice their views and influence decision-making process on an equal basis to influential and educated persons.

This study re-enforces literature stating that Cambodian parents have very little involvement in their children’s education. Instead, parents have upheld teachers as the traditionally honoured and respected members of community who have sole responsibility for educating children (Ayres 2000b; Shorakus 2008). Previous research has claimed that parents’ lack of involvement in their children’s education is due to parents undervaluing education (NEP 2011). Yet there has been a continual
struggle between traditional and modern concepts of education, causing social fragmentation in rural communities. This study revealed that education as a means to modernisation has been a largely unfulfilled promise, and that its institutions lack open dialogue with their local communities, both of which have led to discontentment among students, teachers and parents. One can therefore begin to understand why parents have limited involvement in the education system.

Local literature highlights that the disconnect between teachers and parents in Cambodia will worsen if both groups are not provided with specific information about their roles and responsibilities for SSCs (Knight & Macleod 2004). This study found that improved guidelines for SSCs have been given to schools to implement; however, some schools have refused to revise membership of their SSCs because they are under the impression that their SSCs are functioning well. This example of schools’ resistance to revising parent representation on SSCs re-enforces the argument that the Cambodian education system is pervaded by a lack of transparency and inhibits community integration.

4.4.6 Summary

While children's access to basic education has significantly improved over the past two decades, MoEYS continues to rely heavily on international agencies to fund key education strategies. Moreover, MoEYS remains heavily centralised and riddle with corruption, contributing to the failure of SSCs and resulting in disengagement in poor local communities. Nevertheless, key donors such as UNICEF are taking necessary steps to address these major shortcomings in MoEYS by redirecting funding and technical support into capacity building and sector-wide education reform.

4.5 Recommendations

4.5.1 Quality of education

A variety of policies and initiatives can be improved to ensure quality basic education is provided throughout Cambodia. Education achievements for children in rural Cambodia remain low. This is attributable to previous and current initiatives that only focus on children's school enrolment. The focus needs to shift to addressing the quality and content of education, as well as addressing the broader social and economic determinants of education in post-conflict Cambodia. Community and education integration is fundamental to children’s learning success at school (NEP 2011), and successful SCCs would be one way to encourage such integration. SCCs have been institutionalised as a policy in Cambodia, however, have not been internalised at the local level. Below are recommendations to aid in the success of SSCs:
a) Remove societal constructs from SCCs by gathering each SSC representative group separately such as, parents, teachers, principals and other key representatives.

b) Open up avenues for dialogue with each separated SSC representative group about how to overcome the social and cultural barriers to successful collaboration between stakeholders in SCCs.

c) Bring SSC representatives together to discuss and collate ideas on successful collaboration between all SSC representatives based on reciprocity and mutual trust.

d) All SSC representatives should carefully review and discuss the improved UNICEF guidelines on the roles and composition of SCCs.

4.5.2 Social accountability

There is an opportunity to strengthen accountability of school management to parents and local communities. Benveniste, Marshall and Caridad (2008) claim that social accountability systems to monitor teacher absenteeism and school operational funds and spending have been generally ineffective in Cambodia. Citizens should, however, be empowered to monitor the use of their tax money by implementing effective social accountability monitoring systems. Strategies such as this will hold the RGC ‘accountable and increase transparency in the public sector to improve social welfare and human rights’ (KIND 2013, p. v). Recommendations below are based on social accountability strategies that have been successfully implemented and evaluated by The Centre for British Teachers [CfBT] (2013) in rural India to overcome social barriers to achieving effective community engagement:

a) Develop an innovative strategy of a simple traffic light performance monitoring system, using SMS technology, to improve school accountability.

b) Empower and build the capacity of illiterate community members to use traffic light performance scorecards to assess quality basic education through regular school visits.

c) Present performance scorecards at SCCs and discuss possible school improvements.

d) Ensure that teachers are not judged and reprimanded if school performance is not sufficient. Instead, MoEYS personnel need to design strategies that will provide training and professional development to teachers.

4.5.3 Awareness raising

One of the activities during the CfBT project (2013) was to build local awareness and knowledge of children’s right to education. This is particularly needed in Cambodia, where it is universal for parents to be unaware of their children’s right to nine years of free basic education. Instead, parents accept—grudgingly and with considerable economic hardship—the costs of informal school fees. It is recommended that:
a) NGOs partner with SSCs to conduct local community meetings with parents to raise awareness about their children’s right to nine years of free education. The partnership between NGOs, SSCs and parents will enable them to demand free access to education from MoEYS, which will aid in the transparency and accountability of authorities.

4.5.4 Education policy and practice

There are many opportunities to improve the education policy and policy action. Firstly, strategies need to be implemented to end corruption in the education system, including better distribution of UNICEF-funded school textbooks. It is essential to fill transparency gaps found in MoEYS so that funding bodies are more willing to fund education textbook manufacturing and distribution throughout Cambodia. It is recommended that:

a) Cambodia should implement an initiative called Check My School, implemented in the Philippines in 2011 by a regional NGO, the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific [ANSA-EAP] (2011). The Check My School monitoring program relies on civil society organisations to serve as social watchdogs in textbook distribution processes, ensuring that the right quantity and quality of textbooks are being produced and delivered.

Secondly, Cambodian children are not reaching the number of required learning hours in school to achieve learning goals. It is recommended that:

a) MoEYS urgently prioritise increasing number of learning hours—a key priority area of the ESP 2009–2013—by developing and implementing stricter guidelines around children’s completion of required learning hours.

Thirdly, the existence and open display of alcohol misuse among teachers is a new and concerning finding that needs immediate attention. During Jamieson’s (2012) analysis of alcohol misuse in Cambodia, it was concluded that Cambodia has a weak national alcohol policy and poor alcohol misuse prevention programs. Therefore one general recommendation to address teachers’ misuse of alcohol is to:

a) Prohibit teachers’ misuse of alcohol in the teacher code of conduct.

b) Allow for open dialogue among teachers and representatives in SSCs to discuss issues of alcohol misuse relating to societal and health problems.

4.5.5 Preventing school dropout

Findings revealed that children were at risk of school dropout during transition from primary to lower secondary school. This study provided one example of a strategy used by a school in Kiri that aided
children in this transition. They merged the primary and lower secondary school on the same campus. This eliminated the physical barrier of distance to school. The primary school students were already familiar with the functioning of lower secondary school, and therefore the transition to secondary school was a smooth process. It is recommended that:

a) MoEYS consider merging primary and lower secondary schools throughout rural Cambodia to help children transition from primary to lower secondary school.
b) A system be developed to help principals keep track of children who transitioned from primary to lower secondary school.
c) The implementation of KAPE’s initiative to fund teachers conducting home visits for at-risk children should continue.

4.5.6 Child Labour

This study revealed that children’s engagement in hidden forms of child labour negatively impacts on their school attendance. This should be taken into serious consideration, given that 70% of the Cambodian population rely on farming for their livelihood and that the agricultural sector is the least regulated to protect child labourers (Miller 2012). Therefore, it is recommended that:

a) The RCG revise the existing Child Labour Law to ensure that children’s engagement in hidden forms of child labour does not negatively impact their school attendance.
b) The RGC ratify the ILO Convention No.10 on Minimum Age (Agriculture) (1923) to protect child labourers in the agricultural sector.

4.5.7 Employment and training

The unfulfilled promise of education-opportunity-employment is being widely recognised throughout rural Cambodia. Cambodian youth are left without well paid-jobs, despite receiving an education. Consequently, Khmer youth believe that education is fruitless and does not lead to gainful employment. Learning by doing is a traditional Khmer way of gaining skills (Reimer 2012). Therefore, it is recommended that:

a) Avenues for vocational education should be developed, leading to skilled jobs.
b) The RGC need to consider broadening and increasing diversification of job-creation for growth in rural areas, to create incentive for Khmer youth to remain in school and work in their villages.
4.5.8 Migration

Khmer youth regularly leave school and migrate to urban centres for unskilled work opportunities. Therefore, rather than a futile attempt to stop migration, it is recommended that:

a) An adequate regulatory system be developed to address safety concerns of children migrating where they may face verbal or physical abuse and labour exploitation.

b) Migration and education policymakers should consider implementing a free informal literacy program for youth migrants. This will ensure that Khmer youth are literate despite leaving school in either primary or lower secondary school.

4.5.9 Further qualitative inquiry

There are numerous research gaps demanding immediate attention. Firstly, there is evidence to suggest that there is limited understanding between local communities and international agencies on the discourses surrounding education, policy and hidden forms of child labour (Nordtveit 2010). Children’s educational opportunities should not be put at risk due to their engagement in hidden forms of child labour. Therefore, it is recommended that:

a) Child labour and education policy makers and international agencies attend seriously to the local context by conducting further qualitative research to understand the complexities of community-based decisions regarding child labour and education.

Additionally, there is very little concrete data around textbook manufacturing and distribution throughout Cambodia, or around the number of learning hours children complete. This is due to the sensitivity associated with transparency and system errors in the education system (KIND 2013). It is recommended that:

a) Further qualitative and quantitative inquiry be conducted to understand what causes hindrances to children’s time in school and what system errors lead to insufficient distribution of school textbooks.

4.6 Limitations

This study contains both strengths and limitations. Cross-cultural qualitative research presents hazards and challenges, including the power dynamics that were recognised and negotiated throughout the study. As a Caucasian woman from an internationally-recognised university, conducting research in rural Cambodia, there were political, economic and social boundaries which created uneven power dynamics between me and the research participants (Katz 1996). Given Khmer values of deference and hierarchy, this may have influenced research participants to withhold true personal perspectives on
children’s education in Cambodia, and instead communicate what they thought I wanted to hear as the researcher.

Another limitation arose from the complex process of working, as a researcher, in a language other than my own. Communicating through interpretation can lead to the misunderstanding of participants’ views (Birbili 2000; Squires 2008). Even though, as an ethnographer, I had an outsider perspective of the local communities (Naaeke et al. 2011), I was fully aware that translation-related problems such as accuracy were inevitable. Nevertheless, I worked closely with my RA and debriefed after interviews to ensure thorough understanding of the full intended meaning expressed by participants (Irvine et al. 2007). One suggestion to overcome these two limitations would be to remove the power imbalance and translation barrier by fostering a Western researcher to collaborate and further train Cambodian researchers in qualitative methodologies. This will empower local Cambodian researchers to develop research designs that are locally and culturally relevant in order to further explore the voices of local communities around the issue of children’s education.

Thirdly, given that this study is a Masters by research, there were limitations to understanding the intricate and inter-connected obstacles preventing children from attending school. While this study has provided some insight into the low learning hours children were completing at school, it did not encompass a quantitative component that gave direct measures of children’s learning hours. Looking forward, there is opportunity to conduct further qualitative and quantitative research both in measuring learning hours, and exploring the reasons why children are struggling to complete the necessary hours.

4.7 Conclusion

The Cambodian education system has significantly improved since the devastation of the KR regime, with both numbers of schools and student enrolments increasing. Nonetheless, the quality of education remains low. This study presents three main arguments to explain the interconnected and complex issues that surround children’s lack of school attendance and access to quality education in rural Cambodia.

Firstly, Cambodian children experience social exclusion from education when they receive low quality education, achieve low learning levels, and there is limited community and school engagement. This issue is exacerbated by regular absences from school due to paid and unpaid work commitments, and family financial strain because of informal school fees.

Secondly, once children experience social exclusion from education, they are more likely to leave school and link into migration-related social networks, in order to engage in informal employment sectors in neighbouring provinces and across international borders.
Thirdly, there are numerous gaps in the effectiveness of Cambodia's education policies, as well as in those interventions implemented by international agencies and NGOs that are aimed at improving quality of education and children's school attendance in rural Cambodia.

Despite these interrelated obstacles, there is opportunity to improve a variety of policies, initiatives and practices to ensure children remain in school and receive quality education. These include removing the social and cultural constructs that prevent parents from effectively participating in SSCs; implementing effective social accountability systems in schools; raising awareness among parents about their children's right to nine years of free basic education; addressing teachers' misuse of alcohol in the teachers' code of conduct; implementing a national assessment tool to understanding student learning and practically supporting children's transition from primary to lower secondary school by joining primary and lower secondary schools.

It cannot be denied that Cambodian children will continue to face obstacles to continuing their schooling. Therefore, the Child Labour Laws need to closely address the hidden forms of child labour that influence children's school attendance. An adequate regulatory system needs to be developed to address safety concerns around children engaging in migration, and the RGC should consider providing informal education programs for youth migrants to further their educational development.

Finally, further qualitative enquiry must be prioritised at the local level regarding children's school attendance and quality of education, in order to build knowledge and increase awareness of this issue, so that Cambodian children may have an improved chance of receiving their right to a basic education and experiencing better social health and wellbeing.


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APPENDIX 1

**Interview question guide for teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Follow-up Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How long have you been a teacher?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Which school do you teach in and what grade do you teach?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many children are in your class?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do you enjoy and what do you not enjoy about teaching?</td>
<td>a. Why do you enjoy or not enjoy these elements of teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Why do you seek another source of income?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you seek other sources of income while being a teacher?</td>
<td>a. Probe: If so, what is this other source of income?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Why do you seek another source of income?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What resources are you provide with, if any, to help prepare lesson plans for class?</td>
<td>a. Do you think that these resources are of good quality or not? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How often do you notice children not attending school during the rice harvest season?</td>
<td>a. Why do you think some children do not attend school during the harvest season?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How does children’s nonattendance at school during the rice harvest season affect their performance at school?</td>
<td>a. How are children provided with assistance if they are not performing at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you participate in rice harvest activities during the rice harvest season?</td>
<td>a. Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Can you please tell me about your attendance at school throughout the school year?</td>
<td>a. Are there times when you are unable to teach due to other commitments? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question guide for principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Which school are you School Principal of?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How long have you been School Principal of that school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do you keep track of children’s school attendance at your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What are the patterns of children’s school attendance throughout the school year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What about during the rice harvest season?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do you think are the main factors that influence school attendance throughout the school year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are your thoughts regarding the quality of teaching provided at your school and its effects on school attendance and school performance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Are there ways that the school provides support to children who are at risk of not attending school during the rice harvest season?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. If you do, can you tell me about them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. If not, why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you conduct regular meetings with teachers at your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. If so, how often?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What is discussed during these meetings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Does your school partner with the Ministry of Education in Banteay Meanchey or Svay Rieng to try and increase school attendance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. If not, why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 3

### Interview question guide for MoEYS education official

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Sub-questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do you think about children’s school attendance in Svay Rieng or Banteay Meanchey?</td>
<td>a. Does it need to improve or is it adequate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are some of the influences on children not attending school compared to children who do attend school?</td>
<td>a. How do you think the rice harvest season has influence on children’s school attendance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does the Ministry of Education ensure that children are attending school for the majority of the school year, including during the rice harvest season?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Can you please tell me about what the Ministry of Education does to practically and financially support teachers based in either Svay Rieng or Banteay Meanchey?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do you think about teacher’s salaries and the fact that they engage in other work to supplement their salary?</td>
<td>a. How do you think this has an effect on the quality of teaching provided to children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Are children’s families who are based in either Banteay Meanchey or Svay Rieng Province charged extra school fees to take exams and engage in other school related activities?</td>
<td>a. If so, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. If so, are there any future initiatives planned to eliminate these extra school fees?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. If so, how do you think these extra school fees affect families and their ability to send their children to school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Are there any education policies in place that aim to increase school attendance?</td>
<td>a. If so, can you please tell me about them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are there any future education initiatives to be implemented that ensure students attend school during most of the school year, especially during the rice harvest season?</td>
<td>a. If there are, can you tell me about them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. If there are, are you partnering with any organisations in these initiatives? If so, who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. If there are no future initiatives, what is the reasoning for this?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 4

Interview question guide for children

1. What grade are you in?
2. How often do you attend school during the week?
3. How many children are in your classroom?
4. What do your parents do for a source of income?
5. Could you please tell me about your siblings?
6. Do you participate in work?
   a. If you do participate in work, could you tell me about what you do for work to help your family?
   b. How does participating in work activities affect your school attendance and performance?
7. Do you help during the rice harvest season?
   a. Why or why not?
   b. If yes, what activities do you do during the rice harvest season?
   c. Who makes the decision for you to not attend school and help with the rice harvest season?
   d. If you do help during the rice harvest season, how do you feel about going back to school after the rice harvest season has finished?
   e. What do you think happens when a child does not go to school for a long time?
8. If you could go to school or help with the rice harvest season, what would you do?
   a. Why?
9. What do you enjoy and what do you not enjoy about going to school?
10. What would you like to do in the future?
### APPENDIX 5

**Interview question guide for education advisors**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. | What do you think about children’s school attendance in Banteay Meanchey or Svay Rieng Province?  
   a. Does it need to improve or is it adequate? |
| 2. | What are the trends of children’s school attendance throughout the school year in Banteay Meanchey or Svay Rieng? |
| 3. | What are some of the influences on children not attending school compared to children who do attend school?  
   a. How do you think the rice harvest season has influence on children’s school attendance? |
| 4. | What are your thoughts regarding teacher’s salary and their engagement in other sources of employment to supplement their salary?  
   a. How do you think this has an effect on the quality of teaching provided to children?  
   b. How does this influence children’s school attendance? |
| 5. | How is the international and NGO sector support children to remain in school in Chup Commune or Kiri Commune especially during the rice harvest season?  
   a. Does the international and NGO sector partner with local schools in Chup Commune or Kiri Commune to ensure school attendance and good quality education? If so, how? If not, why not? |
| 6. | How is the NGO sector partnering with the Department of Education to develop and administer the Government’s education policies?  
   a. Can you tell me about these policies?  
   b. Do any of them focus on school attendance throughout the school year? If so, how do they aim to increase school attendance? |
| 7. | Are you partnering at all with the Department of Education in any future education initiatives to be implemented that ensure students attend school during most of the school year, especially during the rice harvest season?  
   a. If there are, can you tell me about them? |
**Interview question guide for parents**

1. How many children do you have?
2. What gender and how old are your children?
3. What does your family do for a source of income?
4. Are your children still in school?
   a. If yes, what grades are your children in?
   b. If yes, does your child receive any assistance from an NGO or from the MoEYS to remain in school? Can you tell me about this assistance?
   c. If no, at what age and in what grade did they stop going to school?
   d. If no, did anyone from your child’s school come to your house and enquire about your child’s school attendance?
   e. If no, why did your child leave school?
   f. If no, what does your child do now?
5. What do you think about the education that your children receive?
   a. Why do you think that?
6. Does the education that your children receive need to improve or is it adequate? Why?
7. What are the trends of your children’s school attendance throughout the school year?
8. Do your children help with the rice harvest season?
   a. If yes, how and why?
   b. If yes, how does their participation in the rice harvest season affect their school attendance?
   c. If no, why do they not participate during the rice harvest season?
9. Do your children have other work commitments that affect their school attendance?
   a. If yes, why and how do their work commitments affect their school attendance?
   b. If no, why?
10. Are there any informal school fees that you need to pay to keep your children in school?
    a. If yes, can you tell me about these informal school fees?
11. Do you ever go to meetings at your child’s school or do school staff ever come and visit your local community?
    a. If yes, what is discussed?
    b. If no, why do you not go to their child’s school and why do you think school staff do not come to your local community?
# APPENDIX 7

## Focus group discussion outline

| Room set-up | ➢ Focus groups held at a community setting or school setting  
            | ➢ Open space for participants to sit on the floor  
            | ➢ Moderator and note taker ensure to sit on the floor with the children  
            | ➢ Snacks and drinks set up at the back of the room  
            | ➢ Play Khmer music while the participants arrive |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Items needed | ➢ Snacks and water  
            | ➢ Drawing materials  
            | ➢ Permanent Markers  
            | ➢ Mat  
            | ➢ Poster paper  
            | ➢ Speaker for music  
            | ➢ Thumbprint pad  
            | ➢ Consent forms  
            | ➢ Yellow papers for withdrawal  
            | ➢ Water  
            | ➢ Withdrawal forms  
            | ➢ Rubbish bag  
            | ➢ Sticky tape |
| Arrival of participants | ➢ Engage participants in conversation, creating a relaxed environment  
                           | ➢ Ask participants to think of pseudonyms  
                           | ➢ Ask participants to sit in a semi-circle  
                           | ➢ Hand out consent forms and read the consent form aloud to participants  
                           | ➢ Ask participants in they understand the consent form  
                           | ➢ Ask participants to repeat what it means to participant in the FGD  
                           | ➢ Ask participants if they have any questions  
                           | ➢ Ask participants to place thumbprint on consent form  
                           | ➢ Hand out yellow cards and explain the withdrawal process  
                           | ➢ Ask for participants’ permission to turn on the voice recorder  
                           | ➢ Turn on voice recorder  
                           | ➢ Invite participants to talk about their families. The moderator and note taker also share about their families.  
                           | ➢ Moderator and note taker collect demographic information from participants as they talk about their families |
| Warm up game | ➢ Participant asked to stand in a circle and place their hands in the middle of the circle  
               | ➢ Each participant instructed to join each of their hands with a hand belonging to two different participants, causing a tangle  
               | ➢ Participant given the task of communicating with one another to move and untangle themselves to form a circle again |
| Seasonal diagram | ➢ After the warm up game ask participants to sit in a semi-circle  
|                 | ➢ Place the timeline and another square piece of paper in front of participants  
|                 | ➢ The moderator introduces the concept of a timeline while pointing to the months of the year  
|                 | ➢ Ask participants to point out on the timeline: Khmer New Year, school year beginning and ending, wet and dry season and agricultural seasons including rice planting and harvest  
|                 | ➢ Moderator writes on the timeline during discussion about key yearly events  
|                 | ➢ Moderator writes on another butcher paper about other work activities that participants speak about  
|                 | ➢ Ask questions from the question guide:  
|                 |   o What activities do you engage in during the rice harvest and planting season?  
|                 |   o What do you enjoy and what do you not enjoy during the rice harvest season? Why?  
|                 |   o Do you attend school during the rice harvest season? Why or why not?  
|                 |   o Do you enjoy going to school? Why or why not?  
|                 |   o What other work activities do you do outside of school? Can you tell me about them?  
|                 |   o Who decides whether or not you help with the rice harvest season?  
|                 |   o What are the factors that influence the decision about whether or not you help with the rice harvest season or attend school?  
|                 |   o Would you prefer to go to school or help with the rice harvest season? Why?  
|                 | ➢ Thank participants for answering questions and contributing to the discussion  
| Drawing          | ➢ Play Khmer music in the background  
|                 | ➢ Provide participants 15 minutes to free draw  
| Cool down game   | ➢ Ask participants to stand in a circle  
|                 | ➢ Passed around a paper ball while Khmer music plays  
|                 | ➢ Once the music stops, the participants with the ball unwraps one layer with an instruction to either dance, sing or behave like a familiar animal in their village  
|                 | ➢ The ball will be passed around until all the layers of the ball had been removed and participants find the prize  
|                 | ➢ Thank participants for participating in the FGD and hand each participant an envelope with the gift of 4,000 R. |
TO: Teachers, School Principal and Parents or Guardians

Plain Language Statement

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children’s School Attendance

Principal Researcher: Elizabeth Hoban, Robyn Ramsden and Jan Moore

Student Researcher: Lauren Purnell (Masters of Applied Science Student)

You are invited to take part in this research project. Participation in any research is voluntary and you are not obliged to take part if you do not wish to. There will be no consequences if you decide not to participate and it will not affect your relationship to the researchers. Once you have read this form and agree to participate, please put your thumbprint on the attached consent form. You may keep this copy of the Plain Language Statement.

The purpose of this study is to explore effects of the rice harvest season on school attendance and dropout among children in grade five to grade eight in Svay Rieng and Banteay Meanchey Provinces. The overall findings of this study will be published in the form of a Masters thesis and a summary report of the findings will be sent to you at the completion of the project if you wish to receive it. No individual will be able to be identified in any publication.

With your consent, you will participate in an interview of approximately 60 minutes. The interview will take place in a public space such as the local school or community area. You may decide to stop the interview at any point without any consequences. You are able to ask up to the time of data analysis that all information you have provided be destroyed and not used for research. If you decide to withdraw from this research project, please notify the researcher then complete and return the Revocation of Consent Form attached. Each participant will be given 4,000 riel for participation and to cover all travel costs. Indicative interview questions include:

[Copy for teachers and school principals]
- What do you see as a common occurrence regarding school attendance and dropout among students during the rice harvest season?
- What is being done to provide support to students who are at risk of not attending school or dropping out during the rice harvest season?

[Copy for parents]
- What are the trends of your children’s school attendance throughout the school year?
- Does the education that your children receive need to improve or is it adequate? Why?

I will ask for your consent on the Consent Form to be audio-recorded during the interview as well as to have the interview transcript sent to you for reviewing within a four week timeframe then returned back to me. If you do wish to have the interview transcript sent to you but you do not return the transcript
within four weeks then I will assume that you have agreed for me to use the transcript in its original
form. To comply with government requirements all data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet for a
period of a minimum of 6 years after final publication.

If you experience any distress or discomfort during participation in this study then you are welcome to
contact the Social Services of Cambodia for assistance (phone number: +855 23 430-247).

Project ID: 2012-233

Complaints
If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any
questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Office of Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria
3125, Telephone: +66 9251 7129, Facsimile: +66 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au.

If you require further information or have any problems concerning this project, you can contact the
researcher:

Researcher Contact Details:

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(Masters of Applied Sciences Student – School of Health and Social Development)
Address: Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125,
E-mail: lpurnell@deakin.edu.au

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School: School of Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 3 924 46688 (Australia)
Phone number: +855 1299 5247 (Cambodia)

Jan Moore
Position: Lecturer
School: School of Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 3 92443748 (Australia)

Robyn Ramsden
Position: Honorary Research Fellow
School: Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 43963775 (Australia)
TO: MoEYS Education Official and Education Advisors

Plain Language Statement

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children’s School Attendance

Principal Researcher: Elizabeth Hoban, Robyn Ramsden and Jan Moore

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With your consent, you will participate in an interview of approximately 60 minutes. The interview will take place in a public space such as the local school or community area. You may decide to stop the interview at any point without any consequences. You are able to ask up to the time of data analysis that all information you have provided be destroyed and not used for research. If you decide to withdraw from this research project, please notify the researcher then complete and return the Revocation of Consent Form attached.

- What do you see as a common occurrence regarding school attendance and dropout among students during the rice harvest season?
- What is being done to provide support to students who are at risk of not attending school or dropping out during the rice harvest season?

I will ask for your consent on the Consent Form to be audio-recorded during the interview as well as to have to interview transcript sent to you for reviewing within a four week timeframe then returned back to me. If you do wish to have the interview transcript sent to you but you not return the transcript within four weeks then I will assume that you have agreed for me to use the transcript in its original form. To comply with government requirements all data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet for a period of a minimum of 6 years after final publication.

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Robyn Ramsden
Position: Honorary Research Fellow
School: Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 43963775 (Australia)
To: Parent/Guardian (Focus Group Discussion)

Plain Language Statement

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children’s School Attendance

Principal Researcher: Elizabeth Hoban, Robyn Ramsden and Jan Moore

Student Researcher: Lauren Purnell (Masters of Applied Science Student)

Reference Number: 2012-233

Your child is invited to take part in this research project. Participation is voluntary and your child is not obliged to take part if he/she does not wish to. There will be no consequences if he/she decide not to participate and it will not affect his/her relationship to the researchers. Once you have read this form and agree for your child to participate, please put your thumbprint on the attached consent form. You may keep this copy of the Plain Language Statement.

The purpose of this study is to explore effects of the rice harvest season on school attendance and dropout among children in grade five to grade eight in Svay Rieng and Banteay Meanchey Provinces. The overall findings of this study will be published in the form of a Masters thesis. A summary report of the findings will also be developed and will be given to you in person if you wish to receive it. No university or individual will be able to be identified in any publication.

With your consent, you child will participate in a focus group for approximately 60 minutes. The focus group will take place in a public space such as the local school or community area. Your child may decide to stop their participation at any point without any consequences. You or your child are able to ask up to the time of data analysis that all information he/she has provided be destroyed and not used for research. If you decide to withdraw your child from this research project, please notify the researcher then complete and return the Revocation of Consent Form attached. Your child will be given a yellow card during the focus group discussion to show the Researcher if they decide to withdraw from this research project at any time. If this occurs then the Researcher will ask you and your child to complete and return the Revocation of Consent Form attached. Each participant will be given 4,000 riel for participation and to cover all travel costs. Indicative questions during the focus group include:

• What do you do during an average day during the rice harvest season?
• Do you enjoy helping with the rice harvest season or going to school? Why?

I will ask for your consent on the Consent Form for your child to be audio-recorded during the focus group activities. To comply with Australian government requirements all data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet for a period of a minimum of 6 years after final publication.
If your child experiences any distress or discomfort during participation in this study then you are welcome to contact the Social Services of Cambodia for assistance (phone number: +855 23 430-247).

Project ID: 2012-233

Complaints
If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Office of Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: +66 9251 7129, Facsimile: +66 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au.

If you require further information or have any problems concerning this project, you can contact the researcher:

Researcher Contact Details:

Lauren Purnell  
(Masters of Applied Sciences Student – School of Health and Social Development)  
Address: Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125,  
E-mail: lpurnell@deakin.edu.au

Research Supervisors Contact Details:

Elizabeth Hoban  
Position: Senior Lecturer  
School: School of Health and Social Development  
Phone number: +61 3 924 46688

Jan Moore  
Position: Lecturer  
School: School of Health and Social Development  
Phone number: +61 3 92443748

Robyn Ramsden  
Position: Honorary Research Fellow  
School: Health and Social Development  
Phone number: +61 43963775 (Australia)
TO: Parent/Guardian (Interview)

Plain Language Statement

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children's School Attendance

Principal Researcher: Elizabeth Hoban, Robyn Ramsden and Jan Moore

Student Researcher: Lauren Purnell (Masters of Applied Science Student)

Reference Number: 2012-233

Your child is invited to take part in this research project. Participation is voluntary and your child is not obliged to take part if he/she does not wish to. There will be no consequences if he/she decide not to participate and it will not affect his/her relationship to the researchers. Once you have read this form and agree for your child to participate, please put your thumbprint on the attached consent form. You may keep this copy of the Plain Language Statement.

The purpose of this study is to explore effects of the rice harvest season on school attendance and dropout among children in grade five to grade eight in Svay Rieng and Banteay Meanchey Provinces. The overall findings of this study will be published in the form of a Masters thesis. A summary report of the findings will also be developed and will be given to you in person if you wish to receive it. No individual will be able to be identified in any publication.

With your consent, you child will participate in an interview for approximately 45 minutes. The interview will take place in a public space such as the local school or community area. Your child may decide to stop their participation at any point without any consequences. You or your child are able to ask up to the time of data analysis that all information he/she has provided be destroyed and not used for research. Your child may also choose to have an adult present at the interview. The Researcher will be accompanied by a Research Assistant who will translate during the interview. If you decide to withdraw your child from this research project, please notify the researcher then complete and return the Revocation of Consent Form attached. Your child will be given a yellow card during the interview to show the Researcher if they decide to withdraw from this research project at any time. If this occurs then the Researcher will ask you and your child to complete and return the Revocation of Consent Form attached. Each participant will be given 4,000 riel for participation and to cover all travel costs. Indicative questions during the interview include:

• How often do you attend school during the harvest season?

• What do you enjoy about going to school and also helping with the harvest season?

I will ask for your consent on the Consent Form for your child to be audio-recorded during the interview. To comply with government requirements all data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet for a period of a minimum of 6 years after final publication.
If you experience any distress or discomfort during participation in this study then you are welcome to contact the Social Services of Cambodia for assistance (phone number: +855 23 430-247).

Project ID: 2012-233

Complaints
If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Office of Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: +66 9251 7129, Facsimile: +66 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au.

If you require further information or have any problems concerning this project, you can contact the researcher.

Researcher Contact Details:

Lauren Purnell
(Masters of Applied Sciences Student – School of Health and Social Development)
Address: Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125,
E-mail: lpurnell@deakin.edu.au

Research Supervisors Contact Details:

Elizabeth Hoban
Position: Senior Lecturer
School: School of Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 3 924 46688

Jan Moore
Position: Lecturer
School: School of Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 3 92443748

Robyn Ramsden
Position: Honorary Research Fellow
School: Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 43963775 (Australia)
Hello,

My name is Lauren Purnell

I am a student at Deakin University. I am doing a project for my degree on how the harvest season affects children going to school or not going to school.

I want to know about the different activities that you do and whether or not you enjoy going to school or working during the rice harvest season. I hope this will help me to understand more about children going to school in Cambodia.

I would like to ask you and other children in your Commune to be part of my project. If you agree then you will be invited to come to and join a focus group. With your permission, the focus group discussion will be audio-recorded.

I will also ask if one child from each focus group discussion would like to participate in a 45 minute interview. If you agree to participate in the interview then we will talk about what you do during the rice harvest season and the interview will be audio-recorded with your permission. Each participant will be given 4,000 riel for taking part each research activity in the study and cover any travel costs. Some questions in the interview might be:

- Can you please tell me about what you do during a normal day when it is the rice harvest season?
- Do you enjoy helping with the rice harvest season or going to school? Why?

Interviews and focus group will be held at your school or community area at a set time when your parents agree for you participate in the research project. If you agree to take part in the interview, I will write down what you say. You will be able to read it or someone can read it to you if you want to and you can make changes to what is written from the interview.

When the project is finished I will write a report. If I use your words in the final report I will give you a false name so no-one will know who you are.

This project is voluntary, so you can be a part of it or not, and you can change your mind about it later. I will give you a yellow card during the focus group and/or interview and you can show it to me if you
want to stop participating. You will not have to explain why you want to stop. I will then ask you and your parents to your thumbprint on a Revocation of Consent Form.

If you do not want to be in the project, then you will not need to come to the focus group or interview. If you feel worried about the project, or have any questions, you can talk to me or your parents.

If you feel sad at all while participating in this study then you are welcome to contact the Social Services of Cambodia to help you (phone number: +855 23 430-247).

Thank you for thinking about helping me to find out more about children going to school during the rice harvest season in Cambodia. If you are willing to take part then talk with your parents about it who will also have received a letter from me. I will then ask you to put your thumbprint on the consent form that is attached to this letter at the time of the focus group and/or interview.

Ms Lauren Purnell

Project ID: 2012-233

Complaints
If you have any complaints about the project or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Office of Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: +66 9251 7129, Facsimile: +66 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au.

If you want more information about this project, you can contact the researcher.

Researcher Contact Details:

Lauren Purnell
(Masters of Applied Sciences Student – School of Health and Social Development)
Address: Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125,
E-mail: lpurnell@deakin.edu.au

Research Supervisors Contact Details:

Elizabeth Hoban
Position: Senior Lecturer
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Phone number: +61 3 924 46688

Jan Moore
Position: Lecturer
School: School of Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 3 92443748

Robyn Ramsden
Position: Honorary Research Fellow
School: Health and Social Development
Phone number: +61 43963775 (Australia)
Consent Form

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children's School Attendance

Reference Number: 2012-233

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.
I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.
I have been given a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

☐ I am aware and agree to be audio-tape recorded during the interview.
☐ I freely agree to review and edit the interview transcript within a four week timeframe.
☐ I freely agree to provide my email or postal address to researcher to receive the interview transcript.
☐ I wish to receive a copy of the summary report

Participant’s Name (printed) ………………………………………………………………………

I agree with the above statements:

☐ YES
☐ NO
TO: Parents/Guardians

Third Party Consent Form

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children’s School Attendance

Reference Number: 2012-233

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I give my permission for …………………………………………………… to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.

I have been given a copy of Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

[ ] I wish to receive a copy of the summary report

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my child’s identity and personal details, including where information about this project is published, or presented in any public form.

Participant’s Name (printed) ……………………………………………………

Name of Person giving Consent (printed) ……………………………………………………

Relationship to Participant: ……………………………………………………

Thumbprint: Date ……………………………
TO: Child participant (Focus Group Discussion)

CONSENT FORM

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children’s School Attendance

Reference Number: 2012-233

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.

I have been given a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details, including where information about this project is published, or presented in any public form.

I am aware and agree to be audio-tape recorded during the focus group discussion.

I agree that I will not reveal or talk about any information that is shared during the focus group discussion.

☐ I wish to receive a copy of the summary report

Participant’s Name (printed) ………………………………………………………………………

I agree with the above statements:

YES

NO

Thumbprint:
TO: Child participant (In-depth Interview)

CONSENT FORM

Date: 8th August 2012

Project Title: Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children’s School Attendance

Reference Number: 2012-233

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.

I have been given a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details, including where information about this project is published, or presented in any public form.

I am aware and agree to be audio-tape recorded during the interview. I also agree for the interview to be transcribed:

☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ I freely agree to review and edit the interview transcript within a four week timeframe.

☐ I wish to receive a copy of the summary report

Participant’s Name (printed) ……………………………………………………………………

I agree with the above statements:

YES

NO

Thumbprint:
TO: Participant

**Revocation of Consent Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: 8th August 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Project Title:** Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children's School Attendance

**Reference Number:** 2012-233

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the above research project and understand that such withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardise my relationship with Deakin University.

Participant’s Name (printed) .................................................................

Thumbprint:

Date...........................................

Please give this form to the Research team or please mail this form to:

#14, Street 240, Chaktomuk Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
**Revocation of Consent Form**

**Date:** 8th August 2012

**Project Title:** Impact of the Rice Harvest Season on Children’s School Attendance

**Reference Number:** 2012-233

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent for...................................... to participate in the above research project and understand that such withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardise my relationship with Deakin University.

Participant’s Name (printed) ……………………………………………………

Name of Person WITHDRAWING Consent (printed) ……………………………………………………

Relationship to Participant: ………………………………………………………

Thumbprint:

Date …………………………

Please give this form to the research team or please mail this form to:

#14, Street 240, Chaktomuk Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
## APPENDIX 19

### Demographic information

**Part 1a: Grade 5 and 6 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Thrapeang**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
<th>Sibling education status</th>
<th>School drop out history</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14 year old sister in grade 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 year old brother in grade 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pich</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pich unsure of the number of siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (Mother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pich unsure of the number of siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pich unsure of siblings’ education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sreyneang</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14 year old brother in grade 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 year old brother in grade 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pov</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 (all married)</td>
<td>12 year old brother in grade 5</td>
<td>Eldest sister never went to school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remaining sisters dropped out in grade 6 and grade 7 (Pov unsure of ages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaemarak</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eldest sister: 15 years old in grade 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sokhim</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9 year old sister in grade 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanta</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Siblings remain in school (Chanta unsure of age and grade level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Part 1b: Grade 5 and 6 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Thrapeang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Parent level of Education</th>
<th>Total family members</th>
<th>Order of birth</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Family’s source of income</th>
<th>Migration Status</th>
<th>Family land ownership</th>
<th>Assists with the harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phary</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pich</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>Unsure of the number of family members</td>
<td>Grandparents + Aunt</td>
<td>Aunt farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sreyneang</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pov</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Second youngest</td>
<td>Parents + 1 sibling</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaemarak</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Oldest sister works in Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sokhim</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + 1 sibling</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanta</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Part 2a: Grade 5 and 6 Boys Focus Group Discussion in Thrapeang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
<th>Sibling education status</th>
<th>School drop out history</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Koy was unsure of when and what age siblings dropped out of school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Kreum                 | 10  | Male   | 5     | 0        | 3       | Eldest sister: 7 years old in grade 2  
2 sister: 10 years old in grade 4  
3 sister: 10 years old in grade 3 | 2                       |
| Khlouk                | 12  | Male   | 5     | 0        | 1       | 9 year old sister in Grade 4 | 2                       |
| Chory                 | 13  | Male   | 6     | 1        | 0       | 10 year old brother in Grade 4 | 2                       |
| Nimol                 | 16  | Male   | 6     | 1        | 3 (all married) | Nimol was unsure of when and what age siblings dropped out of school | 2                       |
| Kruen                 | 13  | Male   | 6     | 1        | 1       | 6 year old sister in grade 1  
10 year old brother in grade 4 | 2                       |
### Part 2b: Grade 5 and 6 Boys Focus Group Discussion in Thrpeang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Parent level of Education</th>
<th>Total family members</th>
<th>Order of birth</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Family’s source of income</th>
<th>Migration Status</th>
<th>Family land ownership</th>
<th>Assists with the harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koy</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents + sisters</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>Sisters work in Thailand temporarily</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kreum</td>
<td>Father: Grade 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents + sisters</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>Sister works as a painter in Thailand</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother: No education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khlouk</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Aunt and uncle</td>
<td>Parents farmers and migrants</td>
<td>Parents work in Thailand temporarily</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chory</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimol</td>
<td>Unsure of parents' education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>Brothe works as a painter in Thailand</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kruen</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Part 3a: Grade 5 and 6 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Kaun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
<th>Sibling education status</th>
<th>School drop out history</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salay</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>All siblings are in school</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veata</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14 year old sister in grade 7</td>
<td>Veata unsure of when and what age siblings dropped out of school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toch</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 6 drop out</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Toch unsure of when and what age siblings dropped out of school</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veata</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Youngest sister has gone with parents to Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eldest sister: 12 years old in grade 6 2 sister: 10 years old in grade 4 3 sister: 14 years old in grade 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
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### Part 3b: Grade 5 and 6 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Kaun

<table>
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<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
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<th>Family’s source of income</th>
<th>Migration Status</th>
<th>Family land ownership</th>
<th>Assists with the harvest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salay</td>
<td>Father: Grade 3 Mother: no education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents are shop keepers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veata</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Aunt and Uncle + sister</td>
<td>Migration for farm work</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<td>Toch</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Aunt and Uncle</td>
<td>Parents work during harvest, Siblings migrate for farm work</td>
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<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veata</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Migration for labour work</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neary</td>
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<td>Parents shop keepers</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>mother + siblings</td>
<td>mother farmer</td>
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### Part 4a: Grade 7 and 8 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Kaun

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<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Eldest sister: 13 years old in grade 6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10 year old brother in grade 4</td>
<td>Chanou unsure of when and what age siblings dropped out of school</td>
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<td>Malis</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13 year old sister in grade 6, 10 year old brother in grade 4</td>
<td>1 (mother) Father left family</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>12 year old sister in grade 5</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>12 year old sister in grade 5</td>
<td>Eldest brother: 14 years old in grade 6</td>
<td>1 (sick mother) Father left family</td>
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<td>Living situation</td>
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<td>Assists with the harvest</td>
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<td>Chhouk</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>Sister migrates to Thailand temporarily Chhouk eager to migrate</td>
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<td>YES</td>
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<td>Parents + 2 siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers + Sister takes care of cows</td>
<td>3 brothers work in Thailand</td>
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<td>YES</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Mother + siblings</td>
<td>Mother farmer</td>
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<td>YES</td>
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<td>Chhoukrath</td>
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<td>Second youngest</td>
<td>Parents + 1 sibling</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
<td>Older siblings work in Thailand</td>
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<td>Komplueng</td>
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<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
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<td>Koulab</td>
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### Part 5a: Grade 7 and 8 Boys Focus Group Discussion in Kaun

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<td>16 year old sister in grade 9</td>
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<td>Prak</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12 year old brother in grade 6</td>
<td>Eldest brother: 14 years old in grade 7 1 sister: 12 years old in grade 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasmey</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>All siblings are in school</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Assists with the harvest</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Father: Grade 6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents + sister + Aunt</td>
<td>Mother farmer, Father teacher</td>
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<td>YES</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Prak</td>
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<td>Middle</td>
<td>Parents + 2 siblings</td>
<td>Parents and sister farmers, Older brother working in Thailand as a painter</td>
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<td>YES</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
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<td>Reasmey</td>
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<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + 2 siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
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<td>YES</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
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<td>Samlain</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Father is a business owner, Mother and sister farmer</td>
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<td>YES</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
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## Part 6a: Grade 5 and 6 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Prasath

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<td>Sok Pisey</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10 year old sister in grade 3 8 year old sister in grade 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soaphea</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 1 drop out</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No children in school</td>
<td>Brother 1: 13 years old in grade 6 Brother 2: 10 years old in grade 3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sok Lyka</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7 year old sister in grade 2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noon</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 year old brother in grade 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eiva</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 1 drop out</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No children in school</td>
<td>All sibling dropped out in grade 1 - Eiva unsure of ages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nearidei</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eldest brother stays home Eldest sister is a tailor</td>
<td>Nearidei unsure of when and what age siblings dropped out of school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phally</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18 year old brother in grade 10</td>
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<td>Nesa</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10 year old brother in grade 4 15 year old sister in grade 7</td>
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### Part 6b: Grade 5 and 6 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Prasath

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<th>Migration Status</th>
<th>Family land ownership</th>
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<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
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<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soaphea</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
<td>18 and 15 year old brothers migrated to work in furniture shop</td>
<td>Rent Land</td>
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<td>Sok Lyka</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Parents farmer</td>
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<td>YES</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Lives in PP</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents are hired to work during rice harvest and planting season</td>
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<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Father is carpenter</td>
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<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phally</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Father no longer labourer due to sickness Mother raises pigs</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmers</td>
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### Part 7a: Grade 5 and 6 Boys Focus Group Discussion in Cheak

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<td>0</td>
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<td>1 older brother: 14 years old in grade 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darany</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>16 year old sister in grade 9 19 year old brother in grade 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bona</td>
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<td>6 year old brother in grade 1</td>
<td>Eldest sister: 15 years old in grade 6 1 older brother: 16 years old in grade 7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15 year old sister in grade 6</td>
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<td>25 year old brother works in manufacturing in Thailand</td>
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<td>Parents farmer + 1 sister works in a furniture making shop</td>
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<td>Parents + older sisters farmer</td>
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<td>Parents + sister farmers</td>
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### Part 8a: Grade 7 and 8 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Cheak

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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Younger brother in grade 5 youngest brother is 3 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanti</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Older brother: 15 years old in grade 7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kari</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 6 drop out</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7 year old sister is in grade 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12 year old sister in grade 6 7 year old brother in grade 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Part 8b: Grade 7 and 8 Girls Focus Group Discussion in Cheak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Parent level of education</th>
<th>Total family members</th>
<th>Order of birth</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Family's source of income</th>
<th>Migration Status</th>
<th>Family land ownership</th>
<th>Assists with the harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mara</td>
<td>Father: Grade 3 Mother: No education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Father: Grade 3 Mother: No education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Labour worker and parents farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avira</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanti</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kari</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents farmer</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Grandmother + siblings</td>
<td>Travel and hired for harvest seasons</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
## Part 9a: Grade 7 and 8 Boys Focus Group Discussion in Prasath

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
<th>Sibling education status</th>
<th>School drop out history</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krouch</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 year old brother in grade 1, 2 year old brother</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaker</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11 year old brother in grade 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhean</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 year old sister in grade 1</td>
<td>1 sister: 15 years old in grade 7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kren</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7 year old sister in grade 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peakmi</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19 year old sister graduated and volunteering for NGO</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant pseudonym</td>
<td>Parent level of Education</td>
<td>Total family members</td>
<td>Order of birth</td>
<td>Living situation</td>
<td>Family's source of income</td>
<td>Migration Status</td>
<td>Family land ownership</td>
<td>Assists with the harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krouch</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Father teacher Mother farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaker</td>
<td>Father: Grade 6 Mother: No education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Father policeman Mother farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhean</td>
<td>Father: Grade 3 Mother: No Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Second eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Father furniture maker Mother farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>17 year sister works in a factory in Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kren</td>
<td>Father: Grade 3 Mother: Grade 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eldest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Mother factory work Father business owner and farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peakmi</td>
<td>Father: Grade 4 Mother: Grade 3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>Parents + siblings</td>
<td>Parents shop keepers and farmers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Part 10a: Parent demographic information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Village location</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Daughter</th>
<th>Son</th>
<th>Children's schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dara and Montha (wife and husband)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Kuan</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10 year old son in grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Thrapeang</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12 year old son year in grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Trapeang</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12 year old son in grade 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veha</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Prasath</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8 year old daughter in grade 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaliyan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Kaun</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11 year old son in grade 8 16 year old sister in grade 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Prasath</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15 year old son in grade 5 6 year old son in grade 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolab</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cheak</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vannara</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cheak</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13 year old son in grade 7 19 year old daughter graduated from school and volunteering at NGO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

162
### Part 10b: Parent demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Children school drop out history</th>
<th>Total family members</th>
<th>Migration status</th>
<th>Source of income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dara and Montha (wife and husband)</td>
<td>19 year old daughter: dropped out at 16 years old in grade 7 17 year old daughter: dropped out at 17 years old in grade 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eldest daughter temporarily migrates to Thailand for domestic work</td>
<td>Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanya</td>
<td>18 year old daughter: dropped out in grade 10 15 year old daughter: dropped out in grade 7 (Kanya unsure of ages)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Daughters migrate temporarily to Thailand for farm work</td>
<td>Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesor</td>
<td>Eldest daughter never went to school Remaining daughter dropped out in grade 6 and grade 7 (Kesor unsure of ages)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Daughters migrate temporarily to Thailand for farm work</td>
<td>Farm + Raising pigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veha</td>
<td>23 year old son: dropped out at 18 years old in grade 8 18 year old daughter: dropped out at 17 years old in grade 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Son works in Bavet as a labourer</td>
<td>Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaliyan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Farm and husband is a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theary</td>
<td>Eldest daughter: 15 years old in grade 6 Son: 16 years old in grade 7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Husband is a motorbike taxi in Phnom Penh</td>
<td>Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolab</td>
<td>18 year old son: dropped out at 13 years old in grade 6 15 year old son: dropped out at 10 years old in grade 3 13 year old daughter: dropped out at 10 years old in grade 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 sons work in a furniture shop in a neighbouring province Son remittances Raising cow Hire during rice harvest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vannara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>shop keepers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Part 11a: Teacher demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade taught</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Years of teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heang</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 4 and Grade 5</td>
<td>Krasung Primary School</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borey</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 3 and Grade 5</td>
<td>Trapeang Primary School</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arun</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 7 and Grade 8</td>
<td>Chup High School</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sopheak</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Chup Primary School</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorani</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Grade 7, 8, and 9</td>
<td>Prasath High School</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viseth</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 7 and Grade 8</td>
<td>Prasath High School</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yin</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>Cheak Primary School</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarath</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Cheak Primary School</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimith</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Prasath High School</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Part 11b: Teacher demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Salary (USD)</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Son</th>
<th>Daughter</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Extra source of income</th>
<th>Assist during rice harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heang</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wife + children</td>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borey</td>
<td>$67.50</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents + siblings (helps financially support family)</td>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arun</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Raise pigs and chickens</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sopheak</td>
<td>$77.50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wife + child</td>
<td>Farm (rice and tapioca)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorani</td>
<td>$70</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents + siblings (helps financially support family)</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viseth</td>
<td>$118</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wife + children</td>
<td>Family shop</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yin</td>
<td>$97.50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wife + children</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarath</td>
<td>$85</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wife + children</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimith</td>
<td>$77.50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wife + children</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 20

‘Perceptions of education’ concept map segment
APPENDIX 21

'Quality of education' concept map segment
APPENDIX 22

‘Families and their influence on children’s education’ concept map segment

- Families and their influence on children's education (A)
  - Parents’ influence on education
    - Parents’ lack of appreciation for education
    - Parents’ frustration regarding teachers' lack of school attendance
  - Lack of finances to support family
    - Family finances
    - Family sickness
  - Parents’ provide support regarding education
    - Family loans
APPENDIX 23

‘Children and their families engagement in work’ concept map segment

Children and their families engagement in work (5)

- Parents' influence on education
- Parents' lack of appreciation for education
- Parents' frustration regarding teachers' lack of school attendance
- Parents' provide support regarding education

- Family loans

- Rice planting season
  - Broadcasting technique
  - Children working during planting
  - Transplanting technique

- Rice harvest season
  - Financial event
  - Taking care of cows
  - Taking care of family members
  - Chopping tapioca
  - Housework
  - Care for the house during rice harvest/planting

Children's work activities

- Cultural event
- Social event
APPENDIX 24

‘Migration’ concept map segment
APPENDIX 25

‘Support provided for education’ and ‘Education system’ concept map segment

Evidence for improvement in:
- The participation of families and communities in SSCs
- Effective Learning

Focused on sectors capturing more than 20 departments

Development of Education Strategy Plan

Child Friendly Schools

Education system (8)

UNICEF

Support provided for education (7)

20% increase in teachers’ pay

NEP

KAPE

Scholarships

Reports of initiative not being implemented effectively

Initiative to visit children who are lacking school attendance

Reports of funding to implement initiative