

Educating a Nation:

Education as a means to peace in Cambodia?

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Introduction

The educational system of any country is a pivotal social infrastructure and redefining its composition is a complicated process. In Cambodia,

and methodologies, the actors funding and implementing educational design will be responsible for the shape of the system itself. However, the outcomes of that system in terms of a peaceful society will ultimately be reflected in the lessons learned by citizens that participate in the educational process.

History

Angkor Empire, French Protectorate, Sihanouk, and Lon Nol (12th-20th Centuries)

At the height of the Angkor Empire, during the 12th century, Cambodian education was rooted in Buddhism. Volunteer monks in local temples taught young boys about ethics and how to read through the recitation of Buddhist chants. However, education was not systematized at this time and there is little documentation about education after the fall of the Angkor Empire in the middle of the 15th century. The French made Cambodia a protectorate in 1863, and in the 1930's, they set up a school system to reap the economic benefits that a skilled Cambodian workforce could bring. Nevertheless enrollment in the school system, which was modeled after the French system, grew only after Cambodia officially gained independence in 1953.ⁱ When the confident, subversive Prince Sihanouk gained power of Cambodia following independence, he left the French school system in tact and promoted education as a means to modernize his new sovereign nation-state.ⁱⁱ Sihanouk viewed Cambodian citizens as his children and considered his reign a “an “intense and constant crusade for national development.””ⁱⁱⁱ By the late 1960's, 1 million students, roughly one eighth of the population, was in primary school, nearly double the enrollment figures in 1960.^{iv} However, Sihanouk failed to match the curriculum with employment needs, and a restless group of intellectuals began to protest

unemployment and increasingly apparent government corruption. Lon Nol, head of a U.S. backed pro-democratic, pro-capitalist party, denounced Sihanouk's socialist policies and inability to control the economy, deposing him in 1970. To thwart the Lon Nol Regime, Sihanouk joined the communist opposition fronted by the Khmer Rouge. Educational opportunities diminished from 1970-75 as the communists gained support in large swathes of rural Cambodia and civil unrest spread throughout the countryside.

The Khmer Rouge (1975-1979)

The Khmer Rouge systematically destroyed all former vestiges of the educational system when they came to power in 1975 with a communist agenda. Peasants by origin, the Khmer Rouge began their movement in rural Cambodia. Their popularity rose when the U.S. bombed rural villages bordering Vietnam in 1969 and increased throughout the Lon Nol regime. The Khmer Rouge, distrusting city dwellers, believed farm workers were the true heart of Cambodia and that agriculture would enable the country to break free of dependence on other nations. During their regime they enforced mass exoduses of cities into rural villages, forcing citizens into forced labor with the objective of making Cambodia a self-sustaining nation. Considering educators and highly educated citizens a hindrance to their agrarian vision, they tortured and killed teachers, destroyed educational materials, and desecrated educational buildings. Tuol Sleng, once a high school in the city of Phnom Penh, became one of the most infamous symbols of the Khmer Rouge's terror tactics when they transformed it into one of their primary torture centers. During their regime 2 million Cambodian citizens died of disease, starvation, and overwork and residual trauma continues to have a powerful hold of the Cambodian psyche.

People's Republic of Kampuchea

The period from 1979-1981 was the very beginning of the ongoing recovery from the Khmer Rouge genocide. In 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, overthrew the Khmer Rouge, and set up the socialist People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) headed by Heng Samrin. The new government, supported by the Soviet Union and boycotted by Western nations, made education a top priority as a means to build a socialist nation, and began to build schools while Cambodia was still intensely fragile.^v However, throughout the 1980's there was heavy opposition to Samrin and Vietnamese occupation, and warring factions mounted resistance to the PRK until a peace agreement was signed in 1991. By this time the Soviet Union had collapsed, and the Western world turned its attentions toward holding elections for a democratic government, which they did in 1993. The elections ended in a coalition of the Royalist National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP).^{vi}

Present Day

The Royal Government of Cambodia is more devoted to the educational system than any previous government. Despite fluctuations in Cambodia's governmental structure since 1993, the current government, a constitutional monarchy with supposedly democratic principles, has teamed with international actors to universalize primary education. Since the 1990 World Conference on Education For All, when Cambodia and 154 other countries pledged to universalize education by 2010, UNESCO has assisted the Cambodian Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) with educational design. As of now the Cambodian school system offers pre-school in select areas, primary school

(grades 1-6), and Lower Secondary school (grades 6-9). An exam is required to continue on to Upper Secondary school (9-12), and there is an exam to graduate with a diploma. According to the MoEYS, there are 15 public and 26 private institutions for higher education in Cambodia today.^{vii} One of MoEYS' primary priorities has been to increase primary school enrollment; according to their statistics, net primary school enrolment for the 2007-2008 academic school year was 93%.^{viii} Continual efforts are made to resolve that threaten education such as poverty, corruption, gender inequalities, and teacher qualifications. However, statistics show that 10.6% of primary school students must repeat a grade and dropout percentages for each grade range from 9.5 to 22.5%. Schools operate in poverty; 39.4% of schools have no water and 28.3% have no latrine. Additionally teaching staff education levels are low with a majority having gone beyond secondary school. The realities on the ground show that while major increases in primary enrolment are a step in the right direction, much more work remains to be done.

Education as a Basic Right

Following the genocide, Cambodia scrambled to rebuild society from scratch. Regardless of the nation's efforts to adopt democratic principles and integrate into the international community, Cambodian citizens still struggle to meet basic needs like food, shelter, and security.^{ix} Large inflows of foreign assistance and emergency aid have helped the country meet some of those needs. However, when it comes to long run satisfaction, the old aphorism applies: If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach a man to fish then you feed him for a lifetime. Education is the key. To

the extent that a skilled workforce has more job opportunities than an unskilled workforce, the ability to access the right to education would greatly help Cambodians fulfill basic needs without having to continually depend on foreign aid. The notion of free education as a basic right was institutionalized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The status of education as a basic human right led universal education to become a Millennium Development Goal, and many international organizations to turn their attentions toward universalizing education. After the UNESCO World Conference on Education For All in 1990, Cambodia came away with national strategies and plans to universalize education by 2010. The MoEYS cites its “partners” in the implementation of these plans as: UNESCO, the European Commission, the Asian Development Bank, AUSAID, BTC CTB, NEP, JICA, UNICEF, USAID, and the World Bank.

However, while it is recognized as a right, education is not an end in and of itself. Unlike food or shelter, which provide immediate physical wellbeing, education is a normative process that constructs individual and communal ideologies. As Sperling argues, “As ambitious as it seems to shoot for universal primary education, basic education should really be seen as a starting point rather than an end goal.”^x Education must be a deliberative practice involving the voices of top, middle, *and* bottom level actors of a community if it is to enhance the norms, knowledge, and skill sets of an entire country. Without a holistic approach, the idiosyncrasies of a country’s culture may not integrate with the strategies of the top-level actors who promote its “development.” Cambodia’s educational system will only be effective to the extent that it works within the unique

context of Cambodia. In other words if you teach a man to fly a kite when what he really needs is a meal, his education has been wasted.

Structural Violence

The 1975-1979 genocide left Cambodian society deeply traumatized, and the devastating implications of its aftermath including an entire population awaiting access to education and many other basic needs cannot be denied. While it would be callous to consider the genocide an inevitable product of history, political conditions had long been ripening for catastrophe. Dating back to the Angkor Empire, governments prior to the Khmer Rouge have institutionalized brutal tactics to silence opposition, which has prevented the country from flourishing economically and socially. A large part of the Khmer Rouge movement comprised a group of angry peasants who had long been systematically deprived.

Galtung argues that a society in which a government distributes resources unevenly while employing institutionalized force to perpetuate its existence has a structurally violent design.^{xi}

In addition to brutality, Cambodia's governments have co-opted the educational system to perpetuate their power and strengthen the image of their respective nations at the expense of the wellbeing of their citizens. When the French Protectorate ended in 1953, Prince Sihanouk harkened back to the days of the Angkor empire by ruling in the fashion of a traditional Cambodian *warrior king*. He saw his country's citizens as children but brutally suppressed challenges to his authority while keeping power within the hands of a

corrupt minority. Though he expanded systematized education, he was most concerned with how education would lead to what he considered “progress” and created a jaded class of intellectuals with no job opportunities.^{xii} Following the Lon Nol Regime, the Khmer Rouge twisted education into a form of indoctrination whereby citizens were coerced into unlearning their cultural and spiritual makeup. They were then taught to practice subservience, brutality, and suspicion.

As Ayres writes, Cambodia is a “culture based on the exercise of absolute power, where public debate is nonexistent, opposing voices are silenced, and notions of good government are secondary to those of authority.”^{xiii} While authoritarianism creates a certain social stability, blatant human rights abuses can hardly be condoned. Throughout these brutal regimes, fear and pain have burrowed into the collective consciousness. State induced trauma has prevented citizens from meeting their basic needs, let alone campaign for their rights to universal education and the various correlating social freedoms. Ayres writes of this paradox between history and modernization, arguing that the tendency of Cambodian rulers to assert their authority often outweighs the modernization required to provide its citizens with adequate social mobility and political voice.^{xiv} He contends that the country’s leadership has used education to “build a nation-state that looks modern, yet is concerned almost exclusively with sustaining the key tenets of the traditional polity, where leadership is associated with power and where the nature of the state is perceived to be a function of that power.”

Cambodian leaders have long vied to regain the prestige that the nation enjoyed during the times of Angkor. While the notion of a stable nation-state seems benign or even

desirable, the way a nation defines stability as well as its path to achieve that stability calls for analysis. Statistical indicators show that despite its democratic formatting, the current government shares authoritarian tendencies with past leadership. The World Bank shows that “control of government corruption” has decreased from the 17th percentile in 2003 to the 8th percentile in 2008.^{xv} We can also cite anecdotal evidence of the government selling land from under its citizens to major corporations in order to promote development. As in the time of Sihanouk, the current government sees education as a means to development, and ironically prioritizes development over the wellbeing of its citizens. Solid education has the potential to relieve many of the obstacles facing Cambodia including gender norms and poverty, and practitioners like Reyhler view education as a precondition for sustainable peace.^{xvi} However, despite the recent push for universal education, educational reform in Cambodia lacks the perspectives of everyday citizens that might otherwise come from teacher’s associations, unions, and working groups. Given the structurally violent tendencies of the government, if education is a means to development, to what extent will development be a means to political, social, and cultural freedom?

Truth Telling

Cambodia has suffered decades of hardship and remains deeply traumatized from the genocide, yet since Buddhism promotes forgiveness, societal recognition of shared trauma is not common. It remains to be seen how this legacy of silence might affect the curriculum design of the educational system. With regard to teaching history, the dissonance between Cambodia’s glorious ancient past and its violent present may trigger

selective memory in terms of what is taught. Seanglim argues, “A ‘selective memory’ of focusing only on acceptable views of Cambodian cultural superiority may serve a limited function of blocking the failure; it may also serve to delay a deeper understanding of the dynamics at work through its cultural history.”^{xvii} The ability for citizens to freely access and discuss the truth of the genocide along with other social injustices is crucial if Cambodia is to transcend structural violence and achieve reconciliation. While schools have a critical role to play in the truth telling process, many do not offer substantial information about the Khmer Rouge era. In *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Ramsbotham and Wodehouse write that some school textbooks include fewer than ten lines about Pol Pot’s Regime.^{xviii} As recently as 2007, a Cambodian government review panel denied school-wide circulation of “A History of Democratic Kampuchea,” a high school textbook that covers the genocide in more depth than any other available school textbook. Unsurprisingly, Cambodian youth have little to no knowledge of this period. In an article published in the Washington Post, Kinetz questioned a first year student at the Phnom Penh University of Health and Sciences about her knowledge of Khmer history. The student’s idea of the genocide was vague. “‘I just heard from my parents that there was mass killing,’ Cheak said. ‘It’s hard to believe.’ Her high school history teacher told her the basics - the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 - and advised her to read about the rest on her own, she recalled.”^{xix} Yet there are youth today who would like to know more about the genocide and remember the past in order not to repeat the same mistakes. In 1999, four Cambodian university students concerned about the indifference of many youth regarding social justice designed a program called Youth for Peace. Its mission is to promote participatory peacebuilding and discussion about

social injustices like the genocide. Its primary objectives state:

- * Youth are equipped with peacebuilding tools and skills and are empowered to be agents of social change

- * Civil society is challenged and impacted for change through education and awareness of peaceful solutions to problems of social injustice^{xx}

Institutionalizing such objectives in the educational system could be very effective in achieving one of the primary goals outlined in the Policy for Curriculum Development of MoEYS. Under the “aim of Curriculum Section,” a primary goal is to impart students with “a commitment to...identifying, analyzing and working towards solutions of problems experienced by their families and society.”^{xxi} To achieve such a goal through critical discussion of major social injustice could have significant impacts on social norms. This, however, will require a commitment to social justice on the part of staff trainers and a reworking of certain accepted social norms.

Shifting Politics and Modernization

Since Cambodian culture is entirely interrelated with the country's shifting political priorities, the country's cultural context reflects the chaotic and often painful political history. Buddhism characterized the cultural and political context in Cambodia until the 19th century, providing its citizens with not only both spiritual and mental stimulation, but also a sense of stability. However, when the French began their protectorate in 1863, they brought with them their own understanding of how education should be taught (through a French system) and utilized (for developing human resources they could exploit). It is thus not surprising that cultural tensions increased between the Cambodians

and the French when the French set up their model of a school system in the 1930's. "Seeing that their traditional culture of education was on the verge of collapse caused by the French reform, the Cambodians opposed and even enhanced traditional cultural forms in rural areas far from the eyes of the French."^{xxii} Since the French Protectorate, Cambodians have been subjected to a roller coaster of political posturing.

A quick glance at the Cambodian political landscape of the last four and a half decades reveals a state that has shifted from monarchism to republicanism, to two radically different versions of Communism, and finally—at least on paper—to a liberal democracy based on pluralism. The formulation of each "new" state has been accompanied by the promulgation of a new constitution and, therefore, a change in the fundamental rules that were intended to guide and organize the life of the Cambodian nation.^{xxiii}

Today "traditional" education offered by Buddhism has been eclipsed by political shifts, tragic events, and vested interests. Currently Cambodia has a total of 9,431 schools, only 472 of which are in pagodas.^{xxiv} Additionally, increased international interest has inundated Cambodia with modern notions of what their educational system should look like. In the past 30 years, humanitarians, NGO's, and multilateral agencies have flooded the country, focusing primarily on only one small piece of the pie. These actors have identified Cambodia's "problem" as the destruction of the genocide, and their funding priorities indicate that the "solution," is economic development. In some ways, such intense concentration on one horrific period is useful for drawing attention and resources toward the country's reconstruction. There is no doubt that Cambodia is in desperate need of foreign investment and donor attention. However when the "diagnosis" is too simplistic, then the "remedy" may be hampered by tunnel vision. That the educational system is rife with challenges is the result of a broad phenomenon extending beyond any

singular extremist regime. While we have discussed Cambodia's history of structurally violent governments, social norms have also long promoted hierarchical government. There is thus huge potential for the educational system to be co-opted by the most powerful voices in politics. On one hand international donors may provide incentive for the Cambodian Government to remain accountable. However to ensure that communities will not fall victim to standardization of EFA guidelines, grassroots voices must be included in educational design. In the entire country only two teachers organizations, the Khmer Teachers Association (KTA), and the Cambodian Independent Teacher's Association (CITA), exist to promote the wellbeing of teachers and quality education that is blind of race, religion, politics, or gender. While their mandates are admirable and they have been able to utilize peaceful protest as a means to raise teachers' salaries, the ILO cites several difficulties that face these organizations. Though the 1993 Constitution ensures “the right to freedom of association and to organize trade unions,” a Civil Service Law passed in 1994 “fails to ensure the rights of public employees to organize unions, does not protect union activity, and fails to allow for collective bargaining rights.” This means that the two grassroots organizations representing the voices of those that will have the most meaningful impact on Cambodian education have essentially no voice in the decision-making process.

Addressing Gender Inequalities

Whereas traditional educational systems focused on boys to prepare them for monkhood, external influences and funders have caused Cambodia to advance women’s human

rights, including the right to education. International development strategies are now entrenched in human rights, and since the World Bank and the UN are major funders of Cambodian development, international norms now directly influence Cambodia's path toward universal education. In 1992, Cambodia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and thereby guaranteed to actively promote gender equality through adherence to international norms and support for policy initiatives.^{xxv} In 2004, Cambodia's report regarding the implementation of CEDAW norms included a large section concerning education. Among nine substantive measures to eliminate discrimination in education, Cambodia ensured

(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas. This equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training and;

(c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programs and the adaptation of teaching methods^{xxvi}

It seems that the MoEYS has utilized a multipronged approach to tackle the issues of equal access to education. While the gender gap in primary education enrolment is relatively low, girls have higher dropout rates and are much less likely to continue to secondary school than are boys. Several initiatives on the part of the MoEYS in conjunction with international and local NGO's focus on ensuring equal access to

education. Scholarship programs like the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR), implemented by the Asian Development Bank, MoEYS, and two local NGO's, provide funding for girls who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who continue on to lower secondary school, supporting them through the process. According to the World Bank's 2006 statistical analysis of the JFPR program, enrollment and attendance increased in the 93 participating schools by 30 percentage points.^{xxvii} However, equality is a long way off. As of 2004, in her gender equity analysis of the Cambodian educational system, Velasco wrote, "Despite improvements in basic education...gender gaps in education remain problematic and are still among the highest in East Asia." Perhaps even more daunting than equal access is *the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women in education*. Velasco writes, "The Khmer tradition and values place women in a secondary position and status relative to men, and hold rigid beliefs on the roles and relations of women and men."^{xxviii} Her analysis of gender issues tackles cultural, political, geographic, and economic reasons for gender inequalities.

The absence of 'role models' (female teachers and educated mothers) to encourage and support girls' continuation beyond primary schooling is exacerbated by poverty and the demands on girls at home. In addition, school factors, such as lack of suitable facilities (in particular, female toilets), gender- based differences in interactions with teachers and peers, curricula relevance and security issues exacerbate the situation... Attending school for many adolescents requires travel over long distances, living with relatives or some form of formal or informal student accommodation. These options are less acceptable to parents of adolescent girls.

Gender norms are not likely to change over night, but ensuring equality in education by committing to CEDAW and offering programs to increase female enrolment is a major step toward equal access. Given that a high percentage of females end up in trafficking circles, the opportunity to access any education can be considered a success. What will be crucial now is to constantly push for evaluation of gender roles; assuming that the government continues to follow the promises it made in its report to CEDAW, this goal may be realized with time.

Development Via Educational Expansion

Cambodia only recently re-entered the international community in the 1990's. After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, liberal countries turned their attentions toward Cambodia to proceed with "development." A wide range of activities fall under this controversial umbrella term depending on the agendas of the actors involved in the development process. The UN, a heavy hitter in the international community, promotes development by addressing social issues, such as improving education and healthcare through broad strategies like MDG's. UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) initiative resulted directly from the MDG to universalize primary education by 2015. Yet while the Cambodian educational system needs the funding and assistance of the international community, the extent to which local deliberation will temper the top-down EFA initiative remains to be seen.

“Developmentalism, it is argued, delineates development as a process and an outcome that is evolutionary in its frame of reference, that denies historicity, that is universalist, and that

is Eurocentric or West-centric. In short, it ignores the pervasive influence of local historical and cultural factors that affect the development process.

Development plans often resonate well on paper, but fail miserably in practice due to the fact that each country's context is unique. In Cambodia, various examples show that development programs have proven ineffectual. UNESCO first entered Cham Kar Bei, one of Cambodia's poorest villages, in 1998 with the intention of teaching the local population skills for garment making. The organization brought in machinery and taught villagers how to sew, knit and weave. However, when the mandate for this project ended in 2004, UNESCO left the village without having trained any of the local community to manage its continuation. Since the community had only participated at the bottom level, the machines deteriorated with disuse and the project fell apart. This case shows the detriment of tunnel vision that often accompanies development. Major social reform like the reconstruction of an educational system, requires a holistic approach that accounts for local culture and history. The EFA program is of a much larger scale than the Cham Kar Bei example since it is a systemic adjustment. EFA includes top-level Cambodian actors since its funding passes through the Cambodian Government, which is teaming with the MoEYS to revamp the educational system. Yet just as with the Cham Kar Bei project, this educational campaign shows signs of "developmentalism." While enrollment has certainly increased since the EFA initiative began, Cambodian law often prohibits local participation in the development process. "Without the right to organize, the right to appeal decisions, and a recognized presence in the decision making process, teachers' concerns continue to be focused on individual problems and have not played a big role in the public arena."^{xxix} While the Cambodian government is deeply engaged in this

development program, the voices that constitute the rest of the country are missing from this picture.

Given the huge amount of funding going into this project, the government's primary concern is to remain accountable to the donors and enrolment figures appears to have outweighed quality curriculum design. However, strategic design is entirely necessary since it will determine whether students will ultimately be employable upon graduation. History shows that a situation in which a large percentage of educated students were unprepared for the kinds of work that the country required. Under Sihanouk educational expansion was impressive, yet students failed to find employment opportunities in an economy that required specific skill sets. "At the top it needed engineers and technicians, and at the bottom barely literate (or even illiterate) workers with 2-3 years of primary education and direct from the village. The educational system was thus producing an increasingly numerous class of useless people."^{xxx} It is more relevant than ever to apply this history lesson to today when all countries, particularly impoverished ones, are struggling to even maintain their economies in the midst of the economic downturn.

The slower pace of poverty reduction in Cambodia is reflected in the current pattern of economic growth...Growth of the rural-based economy and the agricultural sector, which is the main income source for the poor, has been sluggish and unless it improves may lead to a slower rate of poverty reduction.^{xxxi}

The same report shows that GDP growth has steadily declined since 2005 when it was 13% to 2009, with its projected growth being 6%. Already one unintended consequence of fast paced development is the increasing disparity between urban areas, whose residents have more access to education, and rural areas. Citizens in rural areas, which

make up a large portion of Cambodia, are often excluded from education by nature of their circumstances. A participatory Poverty Assessment of 64 villages in the six provinces around the Tonle Sap Lake, undertaken by CDRI and NIS concludes:

the poor and the destitute lack access to important infrastructure, such as clean drinking water, and are routinely excluded from education, vocational training, and health care services because they are not able to pay for such services. As a result of the high costs associated with informal fees for teachers, the children of the poor, especially girls, tend to stop attending school at an early age.^{xxxii}

As poverty continues to grow in already impoverished areas, and may potentially worsen, education becomes a receding reality for certain areas due to disproportionate development.

Foreign Fingers in the Pot

Development does not happen of its own accord in an impoverished and divided society without the help or push from external sources. When foreign funding is added to the equation of “development,” a foreign set of actors with their own priorities heavily influence the process. This top-level set of actors tends to pressure beneficiary countries to produce results and conform to specific political and economic frameworks. During the Khmer Rouge years liberal nations had withdrawn all forms of support from Cambodia and under the Vietnamese-backed Samrin regime, which began in 1989, the country desperately needed external funding for reconstruction. Socialist bloc countries offered the Samrin regime significant financial support until the Soviet Union collapsed

in 1991. In the case of educational projects undertaken by Samrin's government, the focus on measurable results was actually stronger than the focus on quality. Dy and Akira cite an interview with a senior education official who had been involved in basic education and teacher training in 1979:

The restructuring and rehabilitation [to which] I refer was collecting school-aged children and putting them in school despite the poor condition of the school and even conducting classes in the open air or under the trees. We appealed to all those teachers and literate people who survived to teach the illiterates. We used various slogans such as "going to teach and going to school is nation-loving" and so on. There were no licenses or any high requirements for holding a teaching job. We just tried to open school and literacy classes – we didn't care about quality.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, liberal countries recommenced funding Cambodia, but the Cambodian government continues to push for measureable results in terms of constantly increasing enrolment. This time it must keep up with other countries to meet the MDG deadline to universalize education by 2015. Since the government must prove itself accountable in order to receive continued funding, it naturally focuses on visible dividends.

Since the ascendance of neoliberalism as the global framework, the Bretton Woods institutions have been the major funders of UN projects as well as the primary loan providers for developing countries. These institutions view development as a means to transform beneficiary countries into liberal democracies. Thus the aid they provide to countries attempting to foster social, political, and economic freedoms through international programs often entails compliance with neoliberal ideals. Most recently,

Cambodia has borrowed strategies from the Education For All initiative to build schools and show a steady increase in enrollment. Theary Seng, director of the Center for Social Development in Cambodia, considers this kind of top-down blueprint for universal education part of what she terms “chaotic development.” She argues that the huge monetary inflows of foreign aid encourage corruption and create a culture of national dependency and begging in Cambodia.^{xxxiii} After 30 years of development aid, Cambodia’s dependence on foreign funding is only increasing despite the fact that the country lags behind its neighbors in social, economic, and political indicators. The Human Development Index indicates that while official development assistance was measured as 3.7% of Cambodia’s GDP in 1990, the same indicator jumped up to 8.7% in 2005. However, in terms of the social freedoms that development supposedly brings, in comparison with Thailand and Vietnam, Cambodia is far from catching up. The 2007 World Bank Report measured Cambodia's literacy rate at 74%. By contrast, the same report places literacy rates at more than 90% in Vietnam and more than 93% in Thailand. Additionally, neither of these two countries is nearly as dependent on foreign assistance. This paints a bleak picture for Cambodia in terms of foreign direct investment, a crucial component of the neoliberal paradigm for the economies of developing countries. Thus Cambodia seems trapped; while participatory involvement in the educational system is scarce, the push to please donors overrides the deliberation necessary for strategic planning. The lack of planning inhibits quality education and therefore weighs down social indicators that supposedly improve with education, but which have not risen to the extent of enrolment rates. This sets the country back in terms of social *and* economic

wellbeing since the neoliberal paradigm requires immediate results on all fronts of the educational system in order to draw the attentions of potential investors.

The Government Agenda

The agenda of the Cambodian government directly affects the educational system. We see a direct example of this in the recent refusal of the Royal Government of Cambodia to allow school-wide circulation of textbooks that discuss the Khmer Rouge era. Yet the government's fingers extend beyond substantive curriculum materials such as textbooks into the young minds of citizens that will promote and create national identity. What is taught and those who are qualified to teach will inevitably influence the normative design of society. One need only look back at the remarks of Pen Navuth, Minister of Education of the socialist backed PRK in 1985, to see how the socialist objectives of the government influenced his view of Cambodian education. In their criticism of UNESCO's influence on educational policy in Cambodia in the 1990's, Dy and Akira cite the Minister as saying education's purpose was

“To serve the then revolutionary socialism of Kampuchea (Cambodia) and to form new and good, hard-working citizens with good health, technical awareness and support for the revolutionary Kampuchea. Schools were to be organized as cultural centers open to all and as a system of defense against enemy propaganda” (Pen Navuth as cited in Ayres, 2000, p. 452).^{xxxiv}

The shifting political ideologies of Cambodian governments, from communism to socialism and currently “liberal democracy,” have all affected educational policy. Since the end of the Cold War, the trajectory of Cambodian education has changed in

accordance with the global socio-economic paradigm shift. When foreign aid returned to Cambodia in the 1990's with different ideological strings attached, the Government rebranded educational policy with liberal democratic flare. The 1990 World Conference on Education For All, which resulted in the EFA program, heavily influenced the current vision of education, described in a multitude of documents by the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport. An excerpt from Cambodia's most recent Policy for Curriculum Development states that the curriculum should encourage students to "appreciate the value and importance of Science, Technology, Innovation and Creativity;" and to "be active citizens and be aware of social changes, understanding Cambodia's system of government and the rule of law, and demonstrating a spirit of national pride and love of their nation, religion and king" The diction of the two mission statements is subtle, but the values they are selling are unmistakable. While Nayuth underscored the importance of "good, hardworking citizens" as contributors to a socialist society, the new mission statement encourages citizens to be active and socially aware, placing special emphasis on "technology and innovation." Socialism is out and Liberal Democracy is in.

However, ideologies and rhetoric have long been co-opted to justify militaristic actions and political opportunism to respond to civil unrest. "The power to define reality is a crucial aspect of power and one of the major means by which certain groups are silenced...and suppressed."^{xxxv} Seanglim argues that the institutions in Cambodian society fail to protect its citizens from being victims, stating that the self-interest of military, religious institutions, and political leadership has always overridden the welfare

of Cambodians.^{xxxvi} When Cambodia joined ASEAN in 1999 after the 1998 election in which a coalition of CCP and FUNCINPEC assumed power, the conditions of its social policies, politics, and economy left much to be desired. Chandler points to the fact that while the new government spent only 5% of its money on healthcare, it spent 40% of its budget on defense, using the funds to pay its large army.^{xxxvii} Currently, Cambodia's rating on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index is extremely low. The CPI, which measures "perceived levels of corruption as determined by expert assessments and opinion polls," ranks Cambodia 166 out of 180 countries. As of 2008, "The U.S. State Department reports that Cambodia's fragile institutions, weak rule of law, and rampant corruption are major challenges to Cambodia's democratic development and economic growth."^{xxxviii} These are bleak reports indeed for a government so involved in the nation's educational plans.

Conclusion

Structural violence, shifting political climates, and abject poverty: the Cambodian educational system has always been subject to these constraints. Only in the past 30 years have international actors come into the picture, intending to "develop" both the size and substance of Cambodian social programs. These actors have brought their own interests and a sense of urgency for "modernization" in terms of Cambodia's national norms. Likewise, new actors and interests bring new challenges such as pressure to produce measurable results, cultural dissonance, and casualties of blueprint development programs. Education is a mechanism to promote or deny social, political, cultural, and

economic norms, yet current educational reforms focus primarily on increased enrolment. However, enrolment figures, regardless of their size, will not reveal how Cambodia's preexisting constraints combined with challenges associated with external interests and modernization will shape the substance of a new educational system. Multiple actors under a variety of circumstances have contributed to the expansion of the educational system despite shifting economic, cultural, political, social, climates. However, education's contribution to peace will depend on the extent to which its curriculum will empower Cambodian students to shape the future of the country's economy, culture, politics, and society.

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