

**HOW EQUAL IS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
CAMBODIA? THE IMPACTS OF FAMILY INCOME, FAMILY BACKGROUND,  
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, AND CULTURAL FACTOR.**

**By**

**SOK, SOVATHA**

**THESIS**

*Submitted to*

*KDI School of Public Policy and Management*

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements*

*For the degree of*

**MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY**

2013

**HOW EQUAL IS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
CAMBODIA? THE IMPACTS OF FAMILY INCOME, FAMILY BACKGROUND,  
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, AND CULTURAL FACTOR**

**By**

**SOK, SOVATHA**

**THESIS**

Submitted to  
KDI School of Public Policy and Management  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of

**MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY**

2013

Professor Yong S Lee

**CAMBODIA? THE IMPACTS OF FAMILY INCOME, FAMILY  
BACKGROUND, GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, AND CULTURAL FACTOR**

**By**

**SOK SOVATHA**

**THESIS**

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of MASTER OF

PUBLIC POLICY Committee in

charge:

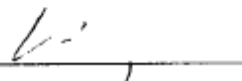
Professor Yong S LEE, Supervisor



Professor Changyong CHOI



Professor Taejong KIM



Approval as of August, 2013

## **ABSTRACT**

### **HOW EQUAL IS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA? THE IMPACTS OF FAMILY INCOME, FAMILY BACKGROUND, GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, AND CULTURAL FACTOR**

**By**

**SOK, SOVATHA**

Without strong pillar, Cambodia is listed as one of the least developing countries. With such status, Cambodia lacks major tools to boost development, especially in human resource. This is the result from having inequality in higher education, which is the most prevalent issue in Cambodian society. Notably, there is no equal opportunity for students to enter tertiary education. There are four main underlying reasons contributing to the inequality. Initially, family income is one of the determinants, as wealthy students tend to have more access to higher education, let alone the poor one. Secondly, family background is also the contributor, as parents who have better or high educational background seem to encourage their children to study as high as possible, while no-education family may not do so. Thirdly, place of residence is the cause to inequality since most of the universities are located in the city, but few in the provinces. Last but not least, gender discrimination keeps female students from continuing to higher education due to old concept. These four determinants draw great impacts to the access in higher education in Cambodia.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This whole procedure of completing this thesis would not have gone smoothly and successfully without guidelines, suggestions and fruitful comment from following people. I would like to express my sincere thanks to a great deal of important people who have helped make this thesis possible. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my family especially my parents who are always there to give me both emotional and financial support unconditionally. In addition, I am grateful to KDI School of Public Policy and Management for providing a scholarship and a platform to complete coursework as knowledge for doing a thesis. Importantly, I would like to thank my major advisor-Professor Yong S Lee, and my second advisor - Professor Choi Changyong, committees in charge of my thesis, who have devoted their valuable time in giving valuable suggestion, comprehensive inputs and constructive comments to put my thesis on the right track. Also, I want to thank to all my professors at KDI School who have tried their best to transfer/share their knowledge with responsible and careful explanation. Lastly, I would like to specially thank to Mr. YIM Pouthea, KDI Alumnus 2012, the faculty members, friends, students and all respondents to my interview who have shared their experience and knowledge for data collection process of my thesis.

## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>1. Introduction .....</b>                            | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>2. Background of Higher Education .....</b>          | <b>7</b>  |
| 2.1 Khmer Republic (1970-1975).....                     | 7         |
| 2.2 Khmer Rouge Regime (1975-1979) .....                | 7         |
| 2.3 Vietnam Occupation (1979-1991).....                 | 8         |
| 2.4 UNTAC and the Coalition Government (1991-1997)..... | 9         |
| 2.5 Hun Sen Regime (1998-Present) .....                 | 9         |
| <b>3. Issues for Debate.....</b>                        | <b>10</b> |
| 3.1 Access to Higher Education .....                    | 10        |
| 3.2 Inequality in Higher Education .....                | 11        |
| <b>4. Past Studies .....</b>                            | <b>13</b> |
| <b>5. Comparative Perspectives.....</b>                 | <b>18</b> |
| <b>6. Hypothesis .....</b>                              | <b>19</b> |
| 6.1 Family Income.....                                  | 19        |
| 6.2 Family Background .....                             | 20        |
| 6.3 Place of Residence.....                             | 21        |
| 6.4 Gender Discrimination .....                         | 21        |
| <b>7. Data.....</b>                                     | <b>22</b> |
| <b>8. Analysis and Findings .....</b>                   | <b>24</b> |
| <b>9. Summary of Findings .....</b>                     | <b>29</b> |
| <b>10. Discussion .....</b>                             | <b>31</b> |
| <b>11. Summary and Conclusion.....</b>                  | <b>34</b> |
| <b>12. Recommendation .....</b>                         | <b>37</b> |
| 12.1 Individual family Initiative.....                  | 37        |
| 12.2 Private Sector Initiative .....                    | 38        |
| 12.3 Government Initiative.....                         | 38        |
| <b>APPENDICES.....</b>                                  | <b>43</b> |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>                                | <b>47</b> |

## LIST OF TABLES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Family income division and number of students                              | 24 |
| Table2: Number of students in both private and public universities (Year 2010-2011) | 25 |

### **LIST OF FIGURES**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Level of education between men and women       | 26 |
| Figure 2: Average annual educational expenditure in 2007 | 27 |

### **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**ADB:** Advanced Development Bank

**ASEAN:** Association of Southeast Asian Nation

**CDRI:** Cambodia Development Research Institute

**CEDAW:** Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

**CSES:** Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey

**DK:** Democratic Kampuchea

**GEM:** Gender Empowerment Measure

**GII:** Gender Inequality Index

**MoEYS:** Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

**NIS:** National Institute of Statistic

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNTAC:** United Nation Transitional Authority Committee

**WB:** World Bank

## **I . INTRODUCTION**

In the context of human resource, education plays an important role in human development. No single country can effectively develop itself without qualified human resources. Developed countries, of course, invest a large proportion of their national budgets in improving the educational sector for the sake of human resource development.



Consequently, these countries can really improve their economies because they have a strong pillar of workforce. Importantly, education also helps reduce poverty in the country as everyone has a potential ability to earn money. In order to have strong human capital, education must encompass all levels ranging from basic to higher one. Without proper education, citizens will not be able to follow the trend of modern society. Since higher education is an important contributor to labor demand and the need for country's development, it is important to encourage young people to have equal chance to get access to education.

As far as education is concerned, equal opportunity for all the students in higher education is an extremely vital factor to be taken into account in every country for the sake of growth and development. Likewise, Cambodia needs potential people with high education to develop the country. Indeed, Cambodia is one of the least developing countries in Southeast Asian region with a colonial legacy as well as a long history of war. The country is in short supply of human resource in almost all areas that are essential for the building of modern economy. Starting from the sketch without good governance, Cambodia has met many challenges in its development journey. The first and foremost is the educational sector, which was destroyed completely during the previous dictatorship regime. The need for educational development – tertiary education - is absolutely crucial to the prosperity of the country.

In order to discuss the controversy of inequality in higher education, let's take a look at the concept of inequality. Educational inequality refers to the issue that only particular students can get access to higher education leaving behind other students. This situation happens when students, who are academically capable of pursuing higher

education, are not able to do so. The underlying facts behind those particular students are inter-connected with specific factors to be described in the next section in the research.

Apparently, there is a concern about the inequality in higher education. Ironically, gender discrimination is an issue of morality with regard to higher education. Women are not really motivated or encouraged to have high education. Traditionally and culturally, women are viewed as and supposed to be inferior to men.

Precisely, inequality is not only the issue of morality, but is also the issue of the economy as stated above. Basic education- primary to high school- is not the answer to country's development. Besides high school, people need higher education to be qualified and potential competitors in the job market. Question may arise: *what is the causality between inequality in higher education and economic development?* The answer can be addressed as follows. Income inequality creates a boundary between poor and rich families. Rich people can afford to invest as much as possible, especially in educational field, while poor families lag behind because of not having enough money to invest in education for the children. Since those poor children cannot pursue tertiary education, they do not have enough capacity/ability to compete in the demanding job market and will end up in poverty. Notably, poverty is an arching enemy to the development of the country. The poorer the people, the lesser the chance for the country to grow its economy.

Furthermore, once wealth is properly distributed throughout the country, more people will have enough money to support their families and to engage in more productive economic activities. Then, they will use money in production process by

investing in education. With education, there will be more potential human resource to work for the government resulting in more effective and efficient economic sustainability.

As a matter of fact, the government has a compulsory nine-year education policy and provides public education from primary to secondary level for free of charge. In other words, Cambodian students do not need to pay any fee for their initial 12-year education at public schools, 9 years of which has to be completed. College education is a different story. After finishing high school, students have to pay fee for higher education unless they meet the criteria for priority option to attain scholarship opportunity. For poor students, the fact that tertiary education--both public and private-- is not complimentary is a barrier to university-level education. Meanwhile, those students who are from financially capable families can overcome this problem easily.

All things considered, the unequal opportunity in higher education is a controversial issue in Cambodia, which is in need of proper policy for the sake of country's development. If there is just a small portion of students who can afford to pay for tertiary education, the economic development will be ultimately unsustainable. Notably, poverty is so widespread throughout the country and education is an important tool that can be used to fight against it. If there is no policy, which makes higher education obtainable by the poor, they will continue living in poverty.

The study aims to specifically answer these questions:

1. *How equal is the access to higher education among people in Cambodia?*
2. *Who can go to colleges and universities in Cambodia?*
3. *What are some of the major culprits contributing to this inequality?*

4. *What are some of the possible and feasible policy options to bring about equal access to higher education in Cambodia?*

There are some significant purposes of asking these questions. The research aims to investigate the gap between the rich and the poor, and male and female students concerning higher education pursuit. It also attempts to illustrate what kinds of students studying in universities or colleges based on their status/social class-based. Specifically, the above questions purposefully wish to draw readers' attention to the factors contributing to inequality in higher education among Cambodian youngsters. After finding out the culprits responsible for the inequality, policy options for bettering the situation will be recommended or raised.

The previous scholars tended to focus more on the quality and problem in higher education alone, but they did not take a closer look at the limitation of students. There is still a gap to be focused on, regarding the unequal opportunity of students in higher education. Unequal access to higher education is neither a minor issue nor a simple one to be addressed. If inequality remains untouched, poverty will not be able to reduce, and development will be out of place. Notably, four major determinants are to be analyzed under the theme of inequality in higher education among Cambodian people. Those four factors are family income, family background, and place of residence and culture/gender stereotype.

The finding of this study will make several contributions. Initially, it aims to show how family income, family background, place of residence and gender discrimination are indicators to the unequal higher educational opportunity of Cambodian students and to

find out its root causes. Moreover, this research digs out who really can go to colleges and universities in the country by focusing on the enrollment rate of students in both private and public educational sectors in Cambodia. Last but not least, it looks for realistic and viable recommendations for policy makers to bring about equal access to higher education for all Cambodian students. All in all, these three aspects will contribute to the production of more qualified and potential human resources in the future by providing equal access to tertiary education for the people. This will improve private and public higher education in Cambodia, which will lead to greater development of the country's economy.

In order to substantiate the above claims/hypothesis, both inferential scheme and supporting evidence will be utilized throughout the research. Case studies from related literature on higher education in Cambodia will be analyzed critically so as to draw a concept for this research. In addition to the case studies, data collection and interview will be conducted.

This study will be organized into different sections under specific theme. First, it will describe the situation of Cambodian people and background of higher education—public and private sectors. Next, it will show the connection between major determinants mentioned above and the opportunity to receive higher education in the country. Based on literature review, those determinants are family income, family background, place of residence and gender factor. Each factor will be illustrated separately with feasible supporting evidence. This can be done by showing the student enrollment data as well as qualitative data. The last section will provide feasible policies and recommendations to

narrow the gap between the rich and poor, and discrimination between male and female students in regard to the access to higher education.

## **2. Background of Higher Education**

Historically, Cambodia underwent both internal and external legacy of destruction and conflict dated back in the 1970s. Due to the instability, important structure of the country was put in “zero-condition”, especially in the educational sector. Precisely, the infrastructure of higher education has suffered from a great loss. In order to understand the situation of higher education in Cambodia, a series of timelines may be usefully classified.

### **2.1 Khmer Republic (1970-1975)**

Under the Khmer Republic, there was assistance from the United States to the country. Cambodia at that time was under the control of Lon Nol Government who was pro-democracy. According to Ayres (2000), “Lon Nol Government had considered education expansion as a priority for the success of the country’s development.” This indicated that education had also been emphasized in that regime. However, the cold war had an influence in Cambodia, creating political instability as well as educational postponing.

### **2.2 Khmer Rouge Regime (1975-1979)**

Sadly, Cambodia got trapped in the dictatorship regime for almost four years starting from April 17, 1975. The regime put Cambodia into an agrarian society rather than industrialized one. During the period of those four years, there was no sign of development since the whole country was put into a blank condition. According to the

research done by Ayres, “Only basic education for the purpose of political ideology had been introduced in the country (Ayres, 2000: 106, 118).” During the 1970s, Cambodia did not have the quality and quantity of higher education, but the tremendous loss of human resources. During Khmer Rouge Regime, it is estimated that 500,000 people were killed and perhaps half of Cambodia’s educational facilities were destroyed in the bombing and fighting between 1970-1975 (Duggan 1997). The Khmer Rouge aimed to demolish all existing structure left from the previous regime, and they came up with an idea of new educational policy -- four-year plan-- to install a socialist ideology. In regard to this plan, the leader of the regime also stressed that, “Study is not important. What’s important is work and revolution.” This idea put the country into no-education society.

### **2.3 Vietnam Occupation (1979-1991)**

After the collapse of Khmer Rouge Regime on January 7, 1979, there was a Vietnam occupation in Cambodia, and war also broke out. There was also an attempt to restore the educational sector in the country as stated that, “People with low education teach the ones with no education; people with high education teach the ones with low education (Sen, 2011). It seems that there was no systematic structure in the educational field as Cambodia was still under the control of Vietnam. In 1980, Cambodia achieved some support from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam and other Eastern countries. However, higher education received little benefit from this effort, and there was an embargo against assistance to Cambodia by the United Nations from 1979-1989 by preventing many other countries from giving aid and donation to Cambodia. However, there were five universities opened during this period.

Therefore, the present weakness of the higher education system in Cambodia is the result of the genocide in 1975-1979, civil war, political conflict, social unrest, and no assistance in economic reform.

#### **2.4 UNTAC and the Coalition Government (1991-1997)**

With the Vietnam occupation ended in the country, there was another sign for Cambodia as institutional reforms had been under operation. The development of higher educational institution also made its way into the country. Since there was an intervention from United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC), Cambodia achieved its peaceful and fair election. There was an Educational Investment Plan (1995-2000) in order to develop and restore higher education in the country. However, there was still political instability and civil war because of internal conflict between coalition governments during 1997.

#### **2.5 Hun Sen Regime (1998-Present)**

The Civil War was over and once again, Cambodia has a light of prosperity with the effort to build up the country from the sketch. It is not easy to develop the country with bare hands, especially in the educational sector, which underwent destruction and postponement. According to the research International Journal of Learning and Development (2012), “Cambodia higher education has been analyzed by different educational experts as a cause for concern, plagued with difficulties, and in a ferment of concern.” This is due to the financial constraint.



### **3. Issues for Debate**

In mid-1990s in Cambodia, there was an existence of privatization policy as well as an open of free market economy. Thus, there was a rapid growth in the private sector throughout the country. The emergence of privatization also shed the light on educational sector, especially in higher educational sector. According to the report from the Ministry of Education of Cambodia (2011), there were 91 higher educational institutions (34 public institutions and 57 private institutions) located in 18 provinces and in the capital city, Phnom Penh. 55 higher educational institutions are under supervision of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (8 public and 47 private institutions). The number of private higher educational institutions increased by 6 (2 universities and 4 institutions). Tertiary education plays an important role in bringing about qualified human resource for the sake of current job market. However, there are not many students enrolling in university after their high school graduation due to some significant reasons.

#### **3.1 Access to Higher Education**

Before taking a closer look at the reasons contributing to unequal access to higher education, the pathways to tertiary education should be illustrated. Successful completion of grade 12 in upper secondary school is a basic way to get onto university level. The second route is the successful completion of an associated degree. These two routes have become the only ways to tertiary education in the country. Without the certificate of grade 12 or an associated degree, no one is permitted to obtain education at undergraduate level, let alone postgraduate level.

### **3.2 Inequality in Higher Education**

Having known mandatory requirements for higher education in Cambodia, let us take a look at the background of major reasons contributing to the inequality in tertiary education. Under the devastating regime of Khmer Rouge for almost four years, the educational sector had been abolished almost completely. “Educational facilities were completely destroyed, and approximately 75 percent of higher educational lecturers and 96 percent of university students were lost in genocide (Pit, 2004). According to the international journal, it illustrates that, “Prior to the DK, Cambodia had 5,275 primary schools, 146 secondary schools, and 9 higher educational institutions, but about 90 percent of these educational facilities and all their documents were completely destroyed under this regime (Rany, 2012).” Building the educational field empty-handed is really hard since the government and citizens are poor. However, there has been a gradual increase in country’s economy. Nevertheless, educational sector received less support from the government so not many people receive scholarships from the government. According to the statistic from World Bank, “Financing higher education is virtually limited by the government's annual budget. Overall, educational expenditure amounts to 1.60% of the GDP while public higher education expenditure receives only 0.05 % of the GDP (WB, 2012).” This simply means that government is facing financial constraint resulting in insufficient budget allocation for education. People have to bear the cost for their own higher education. Notably, the majority of Cambodians are living in poverty so they cannot afford to spend their money on tertiary education. Moreover, most of the Cambodian people are farmers so they prefer their children to help with the agrarian work rather than sending them to university.

Practically, government also allows private sector to run higher educational institutes. Private higher education is growing more and more, and there are not many scholarships available for students, especially the poor ones. The private school fee is higher than that of the public school, and so is the number of the private educational institutions. Private schools are more accessible than public ones. However, private educational institutions seem to give high priority to outstanding students rather than poor students when it comes to applying for scholarship. The majority of Cambodian people are poor; if only outstanding students are awarded with scholarship, where will that majority continue their higher education? Notably, some of those outstanding students are rich already so it does not really make sense to support those who can afford to study. Therefore, it can be assumed that both public and private higher educational institutions tend to have an element of inequality between the rich and the poor. Family income has a great impact on tertiary education accessibility.

Moreover, regarding gender factor, it is stated in the constitution as follows.

“Gender equality is guaranteed in the Cambodian Constitution, which prohibits all forms of discrimination against women (Article 45). Both men and women should have equal opportunity to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Cambodia became a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992, from when key gender related laws and policies have been passed.”

The Cambodian Government seems to pay a great deal of attention to bring about equality in gender. Apparently, this is only a slogan but not a reality. Based on the research, “Female education may need special attention in Cambodia. The gap between male and female education is apparently higher in Cambodia than in the ASEAN countries” (CDRI, 1998). To understand the root cause of gender discrimination, it is necessary to look at it from the historical/cultural perspective.

Cambodian society is living under the theme of masculinity ideology, which places more importance on men and their achievements, leaving women behind or in lower position. In such a male dominated society, men tend to have more privilege and priority in terms of education. Women are viewed to better help parents with household chores without the need of having higher education. Thus, women are not often encouraged to study a lot as she just have to get married and look after the household. From the perspective of old people, they believe that when women learn a lot, they will only use the knowledge to write “love letters” to men, which is not an appropriate action or culture. It is important to note that more than half of Cambodia’s population is women (51.35 percent). Regardless of this data, women are still left behind in higher education compared to men.

According to the report from UNDP (2011), “Cambodia ranks 99 out of 145 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) in the Human Development Report 2011. GII is a new measurement replacing the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).” Therefore, gender becomes another hot issue/culprit contributing to unequal access to higher education. Under the same research from UNDP, “Almost the same number of boys and girls attend school until the age of 14. However, fewer girls continue in higher education. Adult literacy rates are also unequal: only 70.9 percent of adult females are literate, compared to 85.1 percent of their male peers.”

#### **4. Past Studies**

In order to gain more insight into higher education, the first step is to take a look at research, conducted by the World Bank on higher education in Cambodia. Many

Cambodian parents do not see the value of education. It is stated that

“Poor parents will be forced to sacrifice investment in the future education-related earnings of their children in order to meet current consumption needs, because they cannot afford the direct and/or indirect opportunity costs of sending their children to school. Poor and near-poor individuals who cannot afford to fail will rationally decide to undertake activities and investments that minimize risk, rather than those which have slightly higher risk but also much higher potential reward (World Bank, 2009:108).”

This simply means that students from poor families need to think about their condition before thinking of pursuing higher education. This is because Cambodian youngsters depend on both physical and emotional support from family in the academic sector. If his/her family is poor, he/she cannot afford to study at tertiary education level but can only choose to contribute in earning money for the family. If they just stop studying and find a job right away, they can more or less support the family, which can be seen directly. If parents pay for their children to study at higher educational institution, they need to invest much money for a long period before seeing the fruitful result. Who can be their families' contributor or supporter if children are sent to school? It is true that family always comes first to children. They cannot ignore the family condition and go to school.

Moreover, most parents, especially the poor ones, do not give much value to education because they place more importance on earning as much money as possible. Plus, they may not be well educated so the importance of higher education may not be seen as a fruitful or promising investment. It is claimed that: “The poor tend to be cynical or fatalistic about education and are therefore disinclined to invest in it on their children’s behalf, particularly at higher levels where costs rise, because of a well-founded belief that good employment is based largely on connections and the ability to pay (IIEP, 2011, P. 33).”

The above excerpt illustrates that higher education is deemed to be not worth the benefit it provides based on the reason that the cost of higher education is high and the

return is expectedly not proportional to the expense. This is because they believe that only those who have money or connection can find a well-paid job regardless of high or low educational background. Since they are poor, no matter how high education their children attend, there will be no good job waiting for them. Thus, they would better invest their small amount of money despite of their poor family income, which is in urgent need. Moreover, their children may not be able to secure employment, as the demand for labor force is smaller than the supply side. It was stated, “There are estimated 20,000-30,000 new formal jobs each year for around 300,000 new entrants to the labor force (Hagenlother and Rith, 2006).”

One may argue that regardless of poor family income, students can still get advantages from government's scholarships as they are provided every year. It is stated in the study done by UNESCO in 2011, “Despite the availability of scholarships to students from poor families, subsidies alone are not enough to persuade parents to keep their children in schools.” It is true that the scholarship is not really sufficient to cover the educational and living expense. The authors argued that scholarship seems to provide not many incentives to poor people to pursue higher education. There is still a financial constraint for those people. They mention:

“It must also be emphasized that the so-called "scholarship" students in public institutions are spared only from paying any fee, but receive no cash whatsoever to cover their subsistence. They also represent a steadily declining proportion of all undergraduate students entering public HE institutions. This academic year 2007-8, they are fewer than a

quarter, with the effect that Government HE institutions are largely privatized. This year, the Department of HE has reckoned that overall HE institutional enrolments are 91% fee-paying. Questions remain about the capacity to provide for quality higher education in the context of the rapidly growing number of students spread over one hundred campuses (Locard and Ang, 2010).”

Indeed, the government is responsible for public higher education by giving scholarship to outstanding students in “baccalaureate” examination.<sup>1</sup> The scholarship is also provided on the basis of poverty level and remote area of residence. It simply means that those who are from poor family background and from countryside are in a more privileged position to receive the government's scholarship. Yet, some students still cannot take advantage of the scholarship. This is because the scholarship does not provide enough support for their living expenses except tuition fee. Therefore, they have to pay all the expenses on books, food, transportation and other necessary things by themselves. This is also a challenge for those who are from remote areas and come to the city for higher education. Living in the city is so expensive so they will not be able to afford to continue their study in the city. According to the statistics from the Ministry of Education of Cambodia (2006), 2,432 scholarships were given by the Department of Higher Education in 2006. However, 503 scholarship recipients were unable to accept the granted scholarships because scholarships did not cover the living expense in Phnom Penh. Therefore, family income is really a challenge for poor families when it comes to choosing whether to send their children to the city to pursue higher education regardless of the scholarship program. It also illustrates that the government does not provide enough support to all Cambodian people. Therefore, there is an unequal access to higher education in Cambodia in terms of socio economic status.

---

<sup>1</sup>It is a national examination conducting at the end of high school (grade 12) to assess the ability of students to pursue in higher education.

In addition to the above claim, it is claimed,

“Disparities in access to education in Cambodia are mapped along the lines of deeply entrenched socio-economic divisions within the country, particularly between poor and rich, and urban and rural. A sense of fatalism and low expectations of the government among older generations, coupled with the desire to maintain stability at all costs, may mitigate the severity of grievances related to these disparities to some extent (IIEP, 2011, P. 35)”

This clearly shows that Cambodia is facing problem in providing equal access to higher education to young citizens. It can be implied that one needs to have enough money if he/she wants to pursue higher education regardless of government scholarship. Without money, students will be left behind, as there is a big gap between the rich and the poor. Moreover, the location also sets the boundary of who can go to university since there is an unequal distribution of educational institutions between rural and urban areas. Urban dwellers will have more chances to get access to tertiary education with better quality of education.

They also continue to mention that the equal access to higher education may not be well organized, as there is a rapid growth of privatization in educational sector. They stated, “If this policy of laissez-faire and untrammled market solution is allowed to continue with growth largely uncontrolled, one may wonder how it can be consistent with Government declared policies of equal opportunity and poverty reduction” (Locard and Ang, 2010, p. 61). This simply means that the cost of tuition fee will make it hard for students to afford, as there is no systematic control or support, which enables poor students to pursue their tertiary education. Therefore, the government policy to bring about equal access may not be a success unless there is a strategic plan ahead.

In addition to the above theory, Duggan also claims, “Even though higher education was viewed as key to human resource development in the economy, foreign



financial support in this sub-sector was limited, compared to basic general education” (Duggan, 1997). It can be assumed that there are fewer funds for higher education so not many students can get scholarship to study. For those who are poor, they will not have a motive to go for further education.

Moreover, in order to bring the literature review to a closure, it is necessary to establish the empirical baselines for the problem of gender inequality in higher education. This is because concrete observation has been important as qualitative data. Observation in the real society, both rural and urban area, is crucial to gain insight understanding so as to prove if the claim is true or not.

## **5. Comparative Perspectives**

Having been illustrated the relevant past studies about higher education in Cambodia; the studies really show the unequal trend of getting access to the education. To provide in dept understanding of the topic, comparative studies from other countries would be necessary to take a look. Four countries are to be described, namely, Japan, South Korea, Finland, and Singapore.

In Japan, students can get access to higher education regardless of the family income. This is because Japanese government introduces supporting system to defray the expense by letting the students’ family to pay around 20 percent of the average family’s income and leave the rest to the government and students. Notably, students normally find a part time job and borrow government money to study through Japan Scholarship Association. There are also the supporting systems from local government, organization,

and corporation and other entities. The interest rate is also low which really enables more students to pursue their tertiary education.

In addition to higher education in Japan, South Korea can also encourage its youngster to get higher education. There is a tuition support service for poor and near-poor families to encourage their children to study. Parents can apply for the supporting system on behalf of children through government online. Therefore, there is an increase of the number of students in higher education in Korea.

In Finland, there is also a financial support from the state to Finnish students. The support will be withdrawn if students show low performance in their study. However, even with the supporting system, the scholarship is still not enough to cover the academic expense. Therefore, students have to work to finance their studying, and students can also apply for government-loan.

Last but not least, in Singapore, despite of country size, higher educational institutes are really famous in the region and globe. Singaporean as well as foreign students studying in tertiary education can apply for “Student Loan Program” with low interest rate. Thus, students can study and work to earn money to pay back the loan step by step.

All in all, it can be assumed that these four countries can encourage their people, especially those students who are from poor income families to study in higher education. The similarity is that the four countries introduce Loan Program to ease the burden of finance. Therefore, there are many students who enroll in tertiary education.

## **6. Hypothesis**

There are four main hypotheses to be taken into account under the issue of unequal access to higher education in Cambodia. Those four claims are under the theme of family income, family background, place of residence and culture or gender stereotype. These four factors are remained to be tested with concrete data and supporting evidence. The underlying aspects of each point will be illustrated in detail as follows.

### **6.1 Family Income**

This study investigates the following hypothesis of how family income contributes to the inequality in higher education. It can be stated, “If only the children of rich families are attending colleges and universities, higher educational opportunities are not equally available to the Cambodian people.” Statistically, the average annual income in Cambodia is US\$540 with thirty five percent of the population falling under the poverty line (income under one dollar per day). It can be implied that most families cannot afford to send their children to universities due to financial constraint. To back up the above claim, let’s take a look at the research. It is claimed, “Family income is a major determinant of access to tertiary education in all East Asian Countries. Students from better economic backgrounds have better access to tertiary education than their poorer peers(World Bank, 2009).” It simply means that financial difficulties force students to stop pursuing higher education since high school knowledge seems to be enough for earning a living. It is also important to note that the government only underlines the policy of nine-year basic education to the citizens with free-paid program. Yet, higher education is the responsibility of students themselves so they have to bear all the

necessary expenses. The cost of studying at higher educational institutions is somehow high, especially poor people in both rural and urban areas. Students have to pay for academic and living cost including lodging, food and transportation. Moreover, the tuition fee is also relatively high for poor students to afford. Assumably, higher education opportunity does favor students from better family income so there is no equal chance for all the youngsters to get higher education resulting in poor human resource. Taking everything into account, it can be assumed that cost-benefit barrier or family income is a factor leading to inequality in higher education.

However, there are still some exceptional cases that poor families can still send their children to higher education regardless of their family situation. Who are those people? Some families can get the support from outsources such as NGOs, religious group and other entities. With the assistance from those people, family does not have to worry about financial burden. Those supporters may not only help with academic finance but also find a job for people. Moreover, a few private universities employ poor students to work as internship in order to provide free tuition fee. Importantly, there is strong will and encouragement from some individual family to send their children to tertiary education.

## **6.2 Family Background**

Family background can be another main hypothesis. If family background or parents' education is the determinant, there will be not many students who have the same equality in higher education. It is true that some families may not want their children to pursue higher education since they do not give much value or see much pay-off from doing so as already stated in the previous section of literature review. They would rather

tell their children to help with their work such as business, farming and other household work. This can be proved when parents are farmers. They need labor force to work in the field in order to gain more profit. If they send their children to continue in higher education, labor will not be sufficient. Some may believe that basic education is really enough for their children to earn money. Higher education will bring no difference to work in the field or selling in the market. Literally, if parents are not well educated, they will somehow keep their children from going to college. To conclude, educational as well as career background of students' parents plays the role in determining whether their children can go to college or university.

### **6.3 Place of Residence**

Place of residence can also be listed as one of the causes. Those who live in rural area are not likely to send their children to colleges and universities. As Cambodia is a poor country, financial capacity that is needed in order to build enough higher educational institutions for youngsters throughout the country is being absent. Most of the universities and colleges are located in the city, let alone the provinces. There are few universities in the provinces and the quality of education cannot be compared to the city. If people want to continue their study, they have to move to the city. The cost of transportation and living is very high so they may not be able to afford that. As a result, they are likely to choose to work upon the completion of high school.

### **6.4 Gender Discrimination**

In addition, cultural factor is the determinant aspect. Parents, especially those who are poor, are not likely to send their daughters to colleges and universities. Similarly, those who live in cities and rich are likely to send their daughters to colleagues and

universities. Men seem to have more freedom and access to higher education, while women are being left behind. Women in Cambodia are viewed as inferior to men, and they are not encouraged to have higher education. This is because they are viewed as housewives who can only look after the household. Also, they need to look after parents and help with working/family job. This kind of belief has been instilled in the perspective of old generation until now. Most parents find a partner for their daughter even they have not properly finished their high school under the perspective that having a life partner is more important than having higher education for women. As a result, daughters are obliged to stop studying and to get married. In addition, Cambodia is a masculinity-favored society in which men have more say and power than women. Men are more welcomed to have as higher education as possible. Women are not encouraged to have high education or position in the workplace. It is true that men dominate in the workplace while women are staying at home.

## **7. Data**

To test the above hypothesis, the study will utilize both qualitative and quantitative data to cater more accurate finding. The two approaches will be combined together to analyze equal higher educational opportunity for Cambodian students and how family income really affects the enrolment of students in tertiary education.

Regarding the qualitative data, background information about higher education in Cambodia will be used so as to draw a trend on how it develops. To further analyze the situation, two main concepts – scholarship and privatization - will be taken into account in order to evaluate the school fee of both private and public sectors and how it

affects family income of students. Comparative studies from other different countries regarding higher education will also be utilized to add on the concept. Past studies from various sources will also be included to back up the finding.

Interestingly, interview with three types of family, namely poor, medium and rich one, will be conducted so as to gain in-depth understanding of their condition, especially their individual perspective regarding the access to higher education. Importantly, interview is done to find out exceptional case of sending children to higher education despite the fact of living in poverty.

The methodology of collecting interview data is done as follow: twenty families were selected purposefully so as to have all the three types of family involved. Some families are living in the province, while some are in the city. Each interview was done within 10-20 minutes based on interviewees' contribution.

In addition, the quantitative data is needed to show the enrolment rate of students in both public and private universities so as to give a response to the issue of inequality in higher education among students. Importantly, data will be borrowed from institutions such as the World Bank, Advanced Development Bank, United Nation for Development Program, and statistics from the Ministry of Education in Cambodia. After presenting the finding, discussion will be made accordingly so as to come up with appropriate recommendations and to pave the path for further research.

Three underlying factors will be evaluated throughout the research. The first point will be focused on the historical background of higher education in Cambodia. Secondly, the research will be written about the causes of unequal opportunity for students to pursue

their study. Lastly, impacts of unequal access to higher education will be analyzed critically leading to form viable recommendation.

## 8. Analysis and Findings

There is a statistic from public and private higher education sectors regarding the unequal access of students in higher education. First of all, let's take a look on how family income affects students. Below is the table showing the family income situation of students in higher education in one public university.

Table 1: Family income division and number of students

| University | Poor | Middle | Rich |
|------------|------|--------|------|
| UFA        | 5%   | 80%    | 15%  |

Note: UFA refers to Royal University of Fine Art (Public School)

| Total number of students |      |
|--------------------------|------|
| Female                   | Male |
| 423                      | 1042 |

Source: Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education, 2012

The figure shows that most of the students who pursue their higher education are from middle and high family income, excluding the poor income one. Only five percent of students who study in that university are poor, while eighty percent are of middle-income class and another fifteen percent come from rich families. This has shown the unequal access of Cambodian students in tertiary education. Poor students seem to have fewer chances to get higher education because of family situation. It is also important to



note that the majority of Cambodian people are poor. According to the UNDP report, “poverty has been decreased from forty-seven percent in 1993 to thirty percent in 2007. However, a third of Cambodians still survive below the national poverty line (2473 riel or US\$ 0.61)” (UNDP, 2007). Therefore, if only five percent of poor students attend the university, the unequal access really needs to be addressed.

In addition to family income, gender/cultural factor also contributes to unequal access to higher education. Figure 2 below illustrates the number of male and female students in both public and private universities in Cambodia. It can be seen that male students dominate female ones as in public universities, there are 31609 female students and 48997 are male—nearly 20000 more than the number of female students. Moreover, there are only 42216 female students and 63096 male students. In total, among 185,913 students from both public and private universities, only 73,825 are female which is a lot smaller in number in higher education in the year 2010-2011. Based on the above figure, it can be concluded that women are underrepresented in higher education as men are dominated in number. However, the percentage is somehow similar as around forty percent of total students are female, and another sixty percent are male students. This has shown that there is a change in the perspective of parents in sending their daughter to higher education. Not all parents keep their daughter at home. This can be implied that gender discrimination has a small affects to the access of students in higher education in Cambodia.

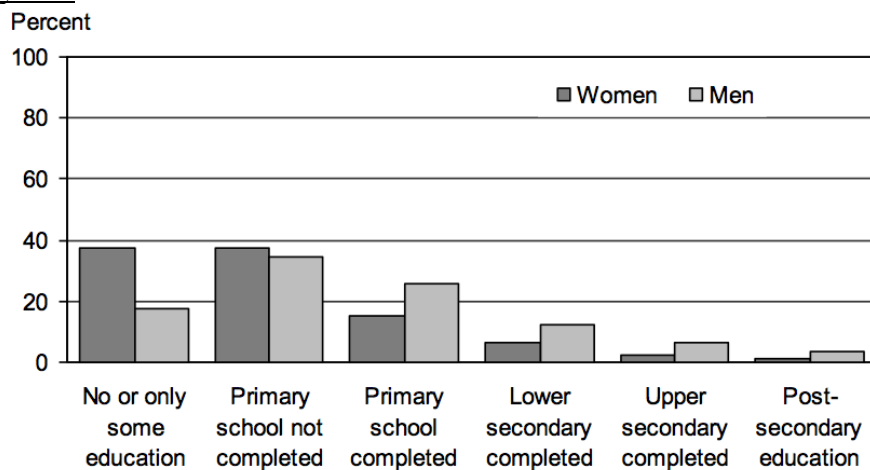
**Table 2: Number of students in both private and public universities (year 2010-2011)**

| Gender | Public         | Private         | Both            |
|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Female | 31, 609 (39%)  | 42, 216 (40%)   | 73, 825 (40%)   |
| Male   | 48, 997 (61%)  | 63, 096 (60%)   | 112, 093 (60%)  |
| Total  | 80, 606 (100%) | 105, 312 (100%) | 185, 918 (100%) |

Source: Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education, year 2010-2011

Additionally, figure 1 below shows the differences or gap between men and women in education from the category of “no or only some education” to “post-secondary education”. This figure illustrates the trend in education in order to give an idea how low level of education women has compared to men. The access to tertiary education is not equal, given that women are left behind. The figure also indicates that there was a gradual decline in the number of students in academic field. Specifically, in post-secondary education, numbers of students are below twenty percent, while there were only a small percentage of female students attending post-secondary education or tertiary education.

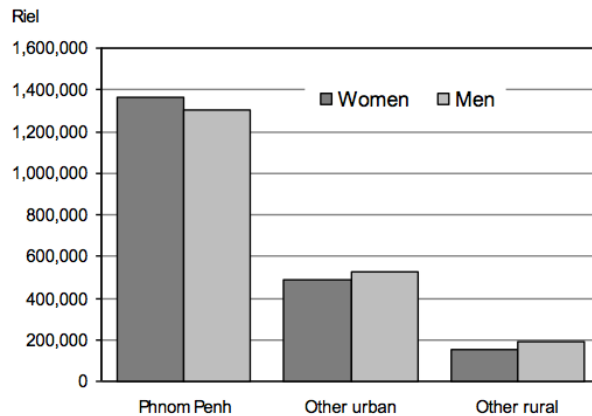
**Figure 1: Level of Education between men and women**



Source: CSES 2009, NIS

Having mentioned how low the level of education of women is when compared to men, men are really dominant. At the same time, it can also be drawn that the number of students decreases in academic field due to the high expense of living in Phnom Penh. Based on figure 2 below, the average expenditure in education in Phnom Penh is much more expensive than that in other urban and rural areas. Women seem to spend more money in education than men do. This can also have two implications. Firstly, most of the universities are located in the central city, Phnom Penh, so youngsters will not pursue higher education. This is because the cost of education and living expense in Phnom Penh are very high. Furthermore, women are not encouraged to continue their study at higher education level. Due to the above implication of gender discrimination and the fact that academic expenditure is also high, women are kept at home to contribute to household income upon their completion of high school.

Figure 2: Average Annual Educational Expenditure in 2007



Source: CSES 2009, NIS

In addition to the above quantitative data, finding from the interview of twenty families regarding the access to higher education is going to be described as follow. First of all, there are five poor families as respondents. Four of them could not send their

children to higher education, as they have no money to pay for tuition fee as well as other necessary expense for moving to study in the city. At the same time, the labor force is needed to earn income to the family. Only one family manages to support children to pursue higher education through different means. Notably, all the parents in five families have low education, three of which give no value to higher education while the other two believe in opposite. Moreover, four poor families give priority to son in studying if they are to choose.

In the middle-income and rich family categories, ten middle-income and five rich families are the respondents. Since the two types of families can financially support their children to higher education, they should be combined together. Only a few of them have some difficulty finding enough money for children, while the rest have no problem. They can support their children both financially and emotionally. Even though they have no higher education, they still send their children to study as high as possible. There is one family which parents hold graduate degree. Thus, they really value the importance of getting higher education and want their children to study even higher than them. However, some families still concern about other expenses since there is few or even no higher educational institutions in the province so that they have to send their children to the city.

More expenses are needed, for example, room rental fee, gasoline, school materials and so on. Based on the interview from these families regarding gender issue, it is interesting to note that eleven of which send both daughter and son to school without any gender discrimination. Notably, these families have no problem with money, and they are living in the city so there is no difficulty whether to send son or daughter to higher education. However, three of which prefer to send son to get higher education

under the perspective that son is always stronger than daughter and can face any problem. Lastly, one family advises daughter to continue family business and get married without the need of going to universities.

Having shown how unequal the access to higher education is among Cambodian youth ranking from family income, family background, gender discrimination and place of residence, it can be assumed that there is a gap between rich and poor students, male and female ones regarding enrolment rate. This will lead to poor human resource, which greatly affects the development of the country's economy.

## **9. Summary of Findings**

Having substantiated the hypothesis by proving supporting evidence, it can be said that the four major culprits really determine who can study at higher education level. First of all, the access to higher education is only available to the rich, and there is not enough access to the poor. According to the above table 1, it clearly shows that only five percent of the total students are from poor income family. This can be proved with the above finding from the interview, which only middle-income and rich families can send their children to university. Since the expense on higher education is high, poor students will instead think of finding a job to support their families. They may think that they will become a burden to their families since they need to use a lot of money to cover their studying.

Due to financial constraint, there is no hope for poor students to continue their study. Only those who are from middle-income and rich families can manage to pursue higher education. Therefore, it creates unequal opportunity among people for higher

education. One can draw a model that the access to higher education is a dependent variable, while family income is an independent one.

In addition to family income, family background is also evidently found to create inequality. Parents who are not well educated and/or earn a living with low-paid job would not want their children to attain higher education. Those families may not give much value to education since they need children to help with their work. They may think that basic education is already enough for making a living. However, based on the interview with twenty families, those who have no education and are living in the province are not likely to send their children to university, as they see no incentive and importance leading to have no willingness to do so. Those who are living in the city, even though they do not have higher education, they can see the trend of development more clearly through potential human resource which derives from having higher education.

Moreover, place of residence is one of the determinants. Having been stated statistically, there are not many universities located in rural areas while most of them are densely situated in the central city, Phnom Penh. There is an unequal geographical distribution in terms of higher educational institutions. Having to move far away from province without having enough money will surely make poor students choose not to continue their education.

Last but not least, gender discrimination is also a factor leading to the inequality. According to the above data, the majority of students are male. Men tend to have more opportunity to access higher education, while women are not encouraged to do so. However, there is not much difference between the enrolment of men and women since

the perspective of people regarding gender discrimination has been improved. This is also important to note that those daughters who are from rural area would not have a high chance to get higher education compared to those who are in the city. It can be drawn as a conclusion that gender also limits the access of students in tertiary education, but not to high extent as in the past.

Based on the above research finding, a connection between the four causes and higher education can be drawn as follows.

$$\text{Higher education} = \text{family income} + \text{family background} + \text{geography} + \text{gender}$$

According to the above correlation, higher education is a dependent variable given that family income, family background, geography and gender are independent factors. In order to get access to higher education, four above aspects have to be taken into account.

## **10. Discussion**

One may argue that an increase in the number of higher educational institutions will make tuition fee decrease because there is a competition among the universities to attract more students to enroll. With the reduction of fee, poor students can also have a chance to get higher education, which is going to be better than before. This is a result of free market economy and privatization in higher education. In addition, one may continue to argue that parents can borrow money from the bank in order to pay for their children's tertiary educational expense. Therefore, low-income family is not really a main reason that prevents students from getting access to higher education. Government also provides monthly stipends of certain value to scholarship students.

However, it is also important to note that not many scholarships are given to public higher education, while there is a growing rate of students passing “Baccalaureate” examination. The monthly stipend given is not really enough. It is just around 40\$ per month. Therefore, it cannot even cover the basic needs of the students. It is true that parents can borrow money to pay for their children’s school fee, but the interest rate is quite high and they need to have collateral to get the money. Thus, they will end up being in a heavy debt after their children graduate. Taking everything into account, students will choose not to continue their study, but to work so that they can earn money to support their families.

In addition, it is found that family background contributes to the inequality since those poor or less educated parents may not acknowledge the value of education. This can also be argued that it is not that they do not send their children to university because they do not want them to have higher education, but because they are financially-incapable to do so and they need to think of their family as the priority. They may presume that the society is full of network and corruption. Those who want to get employment need to know someone or have money to pay for bribe. Since they are just ordinary poor people, they will not be able to do so. Therefore, there will be no motivation for them to invest their limited money in higher education and then in getting a job. Moreover, most of the people who are living in rural areas are farmers or small business owners. Their family income is rather low compared to those who are living in the city. It would be better if their children can help them with their work, as it will generate more income to the family.



Nevertheless, one should also know that once you have true education, you would be able to find a good job without network and corruption. Informal fee does happen in Cambodia, but it does not happen everywhere or in every workplace. Real capacity and knowledge are what each workplace needs and wants. As long as one has high education, he/she will be able to compete with other people and to get better position. Indeed, family is always the priority, but parents should encourage children to study as high as possible since there will be a fruitful result from education. Children can help parents with family work once they are back from school. They can also work and study at the same time so as to reduce financial burden on family.

Regarding place of residence, one could also argue that there is no point for the government to build more universities in rural areas or provinces as there are not many people living there and can afford to pay for the fee. Building university in each province will be costly, and national budget is not enough to do so. However, if more schools are built and there is assistance from the government, students will choose to pursue higher education. Since there is no university located near their residence, they will not continue their education.

Gender discrimination, so-called “socio-cultural issue”, exists in today Cambodian society. One could argue that it is not about discrimination to female students. They also have the right to study as high as they can. Cambodian parents just want their daughter to get married as soon as they finish high school due to the perspective that the delay in marriage of daughter would be a gossip for neighbor to talk about. Then, they can continue their higher education. However, since they have to take care household chore and family, they will choose not to study higher. However, one should also notice

that woman is not the one who is responsible for household chore. Men should also share that responsibility. There is no task-division regarding the gender. Men and women can do the same thing to family.

## **11. Summary and Conclusion**

Having been describing the trend of higher education in five different regimes, it can be seen that education has been suffered from destruction as well as postponement from time to time. Human resource in Cambodia is not really qualified to bring about changes to the country's economy. In order to contribute to country's development, higher education needs to be in place with more enrollment rate.

Taking everything into account, higher education is a main driving force for human resource and economic development in every country, especially the developing ones. Likewise, Cambodia is one of the poorest nations, which is in need of qualified and well-organized educational sector to foster the growth of human capital development. This is because when more people are highly educated, they will be able to find well-paid jobs leading to poverty reduction in their families. When poverty is eliminated or reduced, Cambodia will be able to develop quickly. Having mentioned earlier, due to privatization and free economy, the rapid increase of universities/colleges is so significant, especially in the city. The growth manifests both positive and negative points in the educational sector. Regarding the positive one, there are more colleges and universities for the growth of students in each year. In contrast, most private institutions require students to pay high tuition fee and give less scholarship opportunities to poor people. Notably, public universities seem to have limited budget for the provision of enough scholarships and

incentives to poor students. The government scholarship covers only the tuition fee with small amount of or even no monthly stipend. Those students who are from poor income families tend to find it hard to pursue higher education because they cannot afford to pay for their living expenses. Based on the survey of students' family income, it can also be seen that most of the university students are from middle-income and high-income families. Therefore, family income really determines who can pursue higher education.

Family background is another determinant of inequality. Some parents, especially those who live in rural area, do not see the high return from their investment in higher education for their children. This is because they have already been instilled with the concept that there is no equivalent benefit or higher opportunity from getting higher knowledge. Studying will be taken much time to see the benefit or to get money, while working can help family to better their living condition. This kind of fallacies often be seen when parents are uneducated or have low education and are living in the rural area. Those parents perceive that earning money is more important than education. This can be assumed that educational background of parents determines if their children are approved to study in universities or not. However, the situation seems to be better in current situation as the perspective of people changes time by time.

School location is also the factor since poor students prefer to pursue higher education in their province or city. Most of the universities are built in the capital city leaving other areas behind. This is a problem of unequal distribution of higher institutions. Therefore, students have no enough money to move to the city, as everything is far expensive. With budget constraint, they may choose to look for a job so that they can financially help their family.

Furthermore, women are not motivated to have higher education, while men are encouraged to have as high education as possible. This is due to a false perspective that women are only obliged to help with household chores. This belief was strongly injected in the past. Men are the ones who earn money to support family so they have more priority to obtain higher education. Precisely, Cambodian culture manifests the masculinity society since male dominates almost all the sectors in the country. It can also be concluded that gender discrimination is still one of the causes of the inequality in higher education even though the situation is slightly improved.

It can be inferred that there is an unequal opportunity among people concerning the accessibility to higher education in Cambodia. Having known the issues, the government should pay more attention to poverty reduction as well as gender mainstreaming and promote more equal access to students in tertiary education.

In conclusion, higher education is absolutely important to Cambodia for the sake of economic growth, labor market projection, and to individual for personal advantages. Higher education is a main pillar that brings about potential human resource. At the same time, with higher education, individual can also get well-paid job. Furthermore, he/she can maintain good quality of life in terms of health. Cambodian people should equally have a chance to get access to higher education regardless of the above four factors. As the hypothesis suggested, family income, family background, place of residence, and gender are indicators that decide who can obtain higher education.

## **12. Recommendation**

### **12.1 Individual family Initiative**

In order to strengthen the equality in higher education, the first step is to be done individually. Individual family is a major culprit to the inequality so it will be a main force to bring equality. Family is the one who supports and encourages children to pursue higher education. Without encouragement and willingness, students will not be able to study. It is true that they need money and workforce to help. Parents should understand that education is a long-term investment, which will ultimately provide worthwhile benefits for the rest of life. It cannot be seen directly, but it really has a strong impact on one's future. Youngster can help with work after their study so they should not be banned from having education. Moreover, parents should give both sons and daughters equal opportunity to get access to higher education. Let's take a look at the case study below to see how one views the importance of education.

"I am a poor widow. Even though I have many children, I still encourage all of them to go to school. I do not keep them to work at home. In the past, people kept the girls at home. They did not want the girls to study much. But I am not like that. I want to encourage all sons and daughters to have a higher education." Said Chroeung Sok Vorn, a rice farmer from Cambodia's rural Kompong Cham province (The Asia Foundation, 2011).

Based on the above quotation, it can be implied that she gives value to education as she sends her children to school regardless of her hardship. Parents should take her as a role model since her effort really paid off because her daughter can study in one private university with good job to support the family. Parents should not let family income become a barrier to higher education for their children, especially to daughters.

## **12.2 Private Sector Initiative**

Private higher educational institutions also play an important role in the development of human resource. Private universities should provide more scholarships to poor students (rather than outstanding and rich students) or reduce the amount of school fee for those marginalized group of students so as to encourage them to enroll in higher education. In addition, banks should introduce “special loan program”, which enables poor students to borrow money to pay for school fee with low interest rate. Moreover, private universities should also focus on the quality of education because there is a rapid growth in higher educational institutions, all of which aim to compete with one another. Importantly, each university- either private or public – should introduce an installment system. Moreover, university should especially provide more job opportunities to poor students so that they can earn money to pay the installment upon graduation. All in all, as long as family income is not a problem, equal opportunity for Cambodian students to get access to higher education will be maximized. Importantly, private sector should provide equal opportunity to both male and female in recruitment so that more daughters will be encouraged to study higher so as to reduce gender discrimination.

## **12.3 Government Initiative**

Since family income is a determinant of the access to higher education among Cambodian people, the government should invest more budgets in this factor. Notably, among all kinds of education, higher education tends to be the most necessary for the development of human resource and nation. There are some theoretical foundations to show how higher education is vitally important. As Rath (2010) mentions:

“There was an agreement among all leaders of the countries in the region to formulate a policy to ensure that human resource development was the first priority for reducing the economic gap. To narrow the economic gap, the higher education sector can play a significant role in training qualified leaders and highly skilled professionals in numerous areas to lead the development of a nation (Rath, 2010, p. 2).”

It simply means that attention paid to educational sector should be equivalent to other major forces of country’s economy such as tourism, garment industry, agriculture. According to policy below from the Ministry of Education of Cambodia, it is stated that:

**Policy 1: Ensuring Equitable Access to Education Services**

Increase opportunities for equitable access to higher education through increasing scholarship numbers for prioritized students (poor students, female students, students from remote areas and outstanding students) and promoting partnerships between the public and private sector, and development partners.

The policy can generate more advantages for those prioritized groups. Scholarship program should give more privilege to poor people, especially those students who are from low-income families, single-parents families, and near-poor families by taking into account their economic and living condition.

**12.3.1. Providing and increasing monthly stipend for scholarship students**

However, increasing the number of scholarship alone is not enough to bring about equality. This is because some students are too poor to accept the scholarship if granted as the living expense is so high. Therefore, national scholarship should both cover tuition fee and provide sufficient and reasonable monthly stipends to those marginalized groups such as the poor and those who are from remote areas so as to let them have more chances to obtain higher education. Since some students are from countryside, there should be more dormitories near the university in order to reduce room fee, especially to ensure the safety for female students.

### **12.3.2 Introducing Government Loan Program**

Importantly, Ministry of Education should come up with a policy; so-called “Government Loan Program for Higher Education” targeted for poor people, especially women, who are not able to receive scholarship and who are too poor to accept the offer. Based on Japan, South Korean and Singaporean educational policy, poor parents can apply for student loan program for children so that their children can enter higher education with the support from government. They can pay back money step by step with a defined payment plan until the loan is off.

### **12.3.3. Income Contingent Loan Scheme (ICL Scheme)**

Because the ability to pay for school fee is limited, income contingent loan should be introduced with proper guideline. ICL scheme is one of the affordable tools to provide a promising chance and future for youngsters to pursue their higher education despite their hardship. ICL is a kind of supporting system to help students overcome financial burden in pursuing higher education. “The debt is to be collected by taking into account future capacity to pay, not time (Chapman, 2005).” There are two main advantages from adapting this scheme, namely, default protection and consumption protection.

Default protection helps students not to pay the school fee through the support and protection from government. In addition, consumption smoothing can reduce the burden of repayment since there will be no repayment when students have low income. When they have high income, they have to repay high as well.

In order to systematically process the scheme, right administration should be set up and well-organized so that government can keep record of students’ debt and their



income after they graduate. Interestingly, this policy is introduced in Australia, New Zealand and England with satisfaction so poor students can access to higher education. However, in Cambodia context, it would take much time to implement such a scheme since Cambodia is one of the least developing nations.

#### **12.3.4. Promoting women to have higher education**

Gender discrimination should be eliminated so as to bring about gender equality in higher education. There should be more campaigns, advertisements, and broadcasts under the theme of how important women are to educational sector and economic growth in order to raise awareness among people. In addition, the government should give more incentives to those parents who send their daughters to universities by providing special loan or more financial support so that those female students can afford to obtain higher education. Furthermore, there should be training and educational programs to teach people in rural areas about the importance of education and to show the equality that men and women should have in current society. As long as parents and people know about gender equality and equity, gender issue in the society will be minimized to a certain extent. All in all, women make up the majority of the population in the Cambodia so female participation in higher education is very crucial to the development.

#### **12.3.5. University Cluster**

Moreover, there should be more universities and colleges established in rural areas or at least one or two universities so as to give more chances to students to pursue higher education. Moving to city to study is not really convenient for poor students since

there is more expense ahead. However, building university in the rural area needs to consider properly the population distribution and the possibility of having students to study because government is too poor to build in every province. “University Cluster” should be introduced as a first stage to save the government budget. For example, three nearby provinces should have one university so that students do not have to move to the city.

In order to develop human resource, the government needs to focus on this factor because the majority of people live in rural areas. By building university as a cluster, it will also help reduce the dense population in the city. In short, equal distribution of higher institutions should be maximized.

#### **12.3.6. Promoting Vocational Training School**

Some families may see no incentive, as the duration for attending university is at least four years. They may want their children to learn necessary skill required short duration so that they can immediately earn money to support family. Thus, government should promote and increase people awareness to “Vocational Training School”, where their children can learn what they want and what job market is preferred. Importantly, it may also reduce family’s spending.

In order to bring about equality in higher education, single step or hand will not work well as it needs the combination of different aspects starting from individual to government capacity. The educational policy has to be set with proper/measurable guideline and time-bound. Short and long term planning should be articulated so as to keep educational issue on the right track.

## **APPENDICES**

1

## APPENDICES

### 2 **1. Family income division and number of students**

| University | Poor | Medium | Rich |
|------------|------|--------|------|
| UFA        | 5%   | 80%    | 15%  |

3 Note: UFA refers to Royal University of Fine Art (Public School)

| Total number of students |      |
|--------------------------|------|
| Female                   | Male |
| 423                      | 1042 |

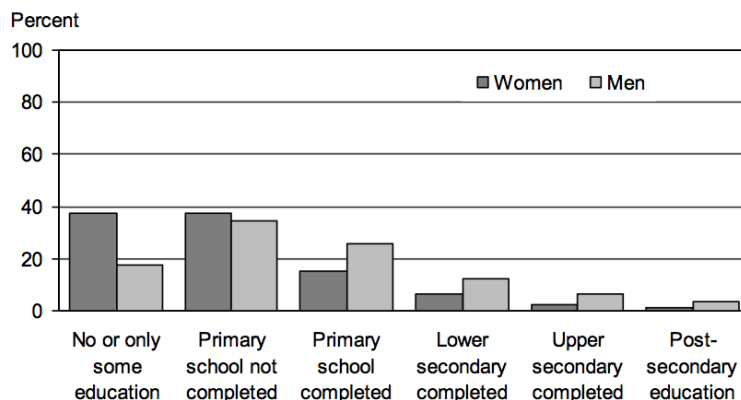
4 Source: Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education, 2012

### 5 **2. Number of students in both private and public universities (year 2010-2011)**

| Gender | Public         | Private         | Both            |
|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Female | 31, 609 (39%)  | 42, 216 (40%)   | 73, 825 (40%)   |
| Male   | 48, 997 (61%)  | 63, 096 (60%)   | 112, 093 (60%)  |
| Total  | 80, 606 (100%) | 105, 312 (100%) | 185, 918 (100%) |

6 Source: Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education, year 2010-2011

### 7 **3. Level of Education between men and women**



Source: CSES 2009, NIS

#### 4. Average Annual Educational Expenditure in 2007



Source: CSES 2009, NIS

#### 5. An Interview Scheme

*The contributed information from respondents would be kept confidentially and would be used only in research purpose to fulfill Master Degree at KDI School in Korea.*

---

- A. Have you ever heard of inequality in higher education?
- B. What do you think about current higher education in Cambodia? Do you think there is any inequality in the higher education in Cambodia? If so, what are some of the causes contributing to inequality?
- C: Why do you approve of your children acquiring higher education?

#### **Four Testing Hypotheses**

##### ***1. Family Condition:*** Poor    Medium    Rich

- How many children do you have?
- Does your family situation affect your children's higher education? If yes, in what way?

##### ***2. Parents' educational background:***

- Briefly tell us your educational level.
- Does your educational background affect your children's higher education or stop them from pursuing? In what way for both YES and NO?

##### ***3. Place of residence:***

- Where do you live? (City or province)

b. Is the university you send your children to near your house or not? If not, do you have any problem sending your children to far-away university?

**4. Cultural Aspect**

a. Between son and daughter, whom do you prefer to send to higher education? Why?

b. What do you think about gender discrimination in higher education in the Cambodia?

**Final Remark**

1. Do you think the above four factors have inter-relation with one another which contributes to inequality in higher education? Do you have any comment?
2. Do you have any suggestion/recommendation to provide equal opportunity for youths to pursue education at college/university?

The End of Interview Scheme

Thank so much for your kind contribution!

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Asia Foundation. Equal Access to Education for Women in Rural Cambodia. 2011.  
<http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2011/03/02/equal-access-to-education-for-women-in-rural-cambodia/>
- Ayres, D. *Tradition, Modernity, and the Development of Education in Cambodia*. *Comparative Education Review*, 4(4), 2000.
- Cambodia Development Resource Institute. *Cambodia: Challenges and Options of Regional Economic Integration*. Phnom Penh: Cambodia, 1998.
- Chapman, Bruce. *Income Contingent Loans for Higher Education: International Reform*. Australia: The Australian National University, 2005.
- CIA. The World Fact-book: Cambodia. 2004.  
<http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>
- Duggan, S. *Education, Teacher Training and Prospects for Economic Recovery in Cambodia*. *Comparative Education*, 32(3), 1997: pp361-337.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050069628768>
- Hagenlother, H.; Rith, S. *47 colleges, thousands of graduates, but few jobs*. Phnom Penh Post, 16 July 2006.
- Locard, Henri and Ang, ThaLeng. *Higher Education in Cambodia and the Atypical Example of the History Department at RUPPS*. *Canadian and International Education*. Vol. 39: Iss. 1, Article 8, 2012.  
<http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol39/iss1/8>
- Leng, Phirom. *Students' perceptions toward private sector higher education in Cambodia*. Master Thesis, Ohio University, 2010.  
<http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi/Leng%20Phirom.pdf?ohiou1275029368>
- World Bank. Sustaining rapid growth in a challenging environment: Cambodia country economic memorandum. *Washington DC: World Bank, 2009*.



Ministry of education, youth and sport. Summary report on the education, youth and sport performance in the academic year 2009-2010 and the academic year 2010-2011 goals. Ministry of Education, 2011.

*Ministry of education, youth and sport. 2006.*

National Institute of Statistics. *Women and Men in Cambodia 2011*. Ministry of Planning. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2011.

Pit, C., & Ford, D. *Cambodian Higher Education: Mixed Visions* In P. G. A. & T. Umakoshi (Ed.), *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges* (). Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004: pp. 333-362

Rany, Sam. Cambodia's higher education development in historical perspectives (1863-2012). *International Journal of Learning and Development* ISSN 2164-4063, VOL.2, No. 2, 2012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v2i2.1670>

Rath, Chhang. *Designing a quality management system for a Cambodian university*. Master's thesis. University of Technology, 2010.

[http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/152336083?1-](http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/152336083?1-format=Thesis&sortby=dateDesc&q=nuc%3ANTSM&l-availability=y&l-australian=y&c=book&sort=holdings+desc&_=1342420411871&versionId=166038596)

[format=Thesis&sortby=dateDesc&q=nuc%3ANTSM&l-availability=y&l-australian=y&c=book&sort=holdings+desc&\\_=1342420411871&versionId=166038596](http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/152336083?1-format=Thesis&sortby=dateDesc&q=nuc%3ANTSM&l-availability=y&l-australian=y&c=book&sort=holdings+desc&_=1342420411871&versionId=166038596)

Sen, H. *Keynote Address at the Conferment of Certificate and Degree to Graduates of the University of Human Resources in August 11, 2011*, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

UNESCO. *Education and Fragility in Cambodia*. International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris: France, 2011. <http://www.iiep.unesco.org>

United Nations Development Program. *Key facts about gender equality in Cambodia*, 2012. <http://www.un.org.kh/undp/what-we-do/gender-equality/gender-equality>

World Bank. *Putting Higher Education to Work: Skills and Research for Growth in East Asia*. Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2012: pp113-116.