

Educational Marginalization of Cham Muslim Populations: A Report from Cambodia

Kurt Bredenberg

Kampuchean Action for Primary Education

The present study was undertaken with support from Save the Children/Sweden and EQUIP 1 to assess the degree to which the Cham ethnic minority in Cambodia is able to access educational services from the state school system. The study recounts the enormous progress that Cambodia's educational system has made in recent years but also the difficulty for expectations to keep pace with what is actually happening in the country. This speaks to increasing pressures on the educational system, under resourcing, and the sensitivities that surround the issue of minority rights and bilingual education. The study also describes the situational context of the minority setting in Cambodia as well as specific problems in the formal education sector as they relate to the stated target group.

Because the state school system does not collect student data that is disaggregated by either minority or migratory status, researchers found it necessary to explore research questions relating to educational access by looking mostly at information provided by projects of limited scope that are active in the province, as well as data generated from attitudinal surveys among target groups. Thus, many conclusions are highly inferential in nature. For example, researchers found that districts with large Cham populations also demonstrate the lowest levels of educational efficiency. It was also found that Cham parents have clear expectations with regards to their children's education and that these frequently relate to instruction in and about their native language, the tenets of Islam, and the importance that attaches to the ability of teachers to be able to speak the Cham language; expectations that are not generally met by state schools. With selected survey data indicating that only about 1% of state teachers are of Cham ethnicity, even in heavily populated Cham areas, there is a potentially great problem in terms of disaffection between the Cham community and the state schools. This situation would explain the increasing prominence of Islamic schools in the province, which are not closely regulated by state authorities. Researchers expressed concern for what appears to be the emergence of a parallel school system for the Cham minority, which could threaten the nation-building function of state schools. At the same time, it was also found that attitudes of the Chams towards mainstream Cambodian society and their own culture are complex. On the one hand, the Chams want to blend into Cambodian society and pretend that they are actually Khmer in most respects except for their religion. Yet, the fact remains that they do not speak Khmer as a first language with their children so that when they attend state schools dominated by ethnic Khmer teachers and curriculum, they have to struggle; nor do most Chams prefer to live in Khmer villages, which mutes assimilation. Thus, the challenge for any program is to address distinct cultural and language needs while maintaining a fiction that they are not culturally different from the majority ethnic group.

Keywords: Cambodia, minority education, bilingual education

INTRODUCTION

Background

The present study has been undertaken in order to provide a preliminary overview of the situation of Muslim minority children in Cambodia with respect to educational service provision, mainly in the context of basic education. In Cambodia, the basic education sector is defined as Grades 1 to 9. Kampong Cham Province where the survey took place is a geographically large province located in

eastern Cambodia. It is in fact the most populated province in the country, exceeding even the capital city in terms of its total population. This makes it an area of central focus for educational development activities not only because of its continuing need but also because of enormous economies of scale that accrue to investments there. In addition, the provincial setting chosen for this study has the largest concentration of Cham Muslims in the country, which enables the study's findings to be more easily generalized to the Muslim population in Cambodia as a whole, though caution is still advised in interpretation. The study was conducted by a local NGO called, Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) at the request of Save the Children/Sweden. Considerable assistance was provided in the study's execution by an EQUIP 1 project supported by USAID, called Educational Support to Children in Underserved Populations or ESCUP. The primary aim in doing this study was to determine the extent to which children from the Cham ethnic minority in Cambodia receive educational services from the state education system and in cases where there are significant lapses in service provision, what the contributing factors are. The Cham population in Kampong Cham is the largest minority group in the province, as indeed it is the largest minority group in the country.

Scope and Focus of the Study

The layout of this study begins with a statement of primary and ancillary research questions and the significance of each. Following a review of research methodology, the study then provides a description of the situational context of the survey setting as well as specific problems in the formal education sector as they relate to the stated target group. Explanations of the general context also take in national policy with respect to minority group issues. Following this description of the situational context, the discussion moves onto specific issues relating to Cham children such as language proficiency, the emergence of independent Islamic schools, and general attitudes among Cham parents towards the state schools. The study concludes with a discussion of general needs and responses in the context of existing projects that have sought to address them as well as new suggestions for assistance.

A formalized investigation into educational service provision for children from the Cham community children is timely in Cambodia for a number of reasons. For example, there is growing willingness to question the oft-held assumption that there is little difference between Cham children and ethnic Khmer children who represent the majority in Cambodian society. Until relatively recently, most education development programs in areas with large Muslim populations in Cambodia have tended to lump ethnic Khmer and Cham children into one group with little differentiation in the interventions provided.¹ Study findings may, therefore, prove useful to improving the designs of existing educational development programs as well as suggesting new ones. In addition, there is also growing interest among donors and the international community in ensuring sectarian harmony between Islamic and non-Islamic groups in Southeast Asia. This interest is occurring against a backdrop of potentially destabilizing sectarian conflict in several countries in the region. As the national school system usually plays a key role in socializing children from all communities resident in a country, these concerns often tend to focus on the education system, hence the focus of this study. To be sure, it is important to remember that the Cham community itself is not monolithic in its viewpoints and there appear to be latent fissures about how Chams should view themselves as a community and how they should interact with the majority culture. There are also additional complications in interpreting the study's findings that relate to government policy, which generally tends to view the Cham

¹ An important exception in this regard refers to the Educational Support to Children in Underserved Populations Program (ESCUP), which is a relatively new program that has begun to differentiate its programming between ethnic Khmer and Cham children. This program has been in operation for about two years and will be ending in 2008.

population not as an ethnic group but as a religious minority who are still inherently 'Khmer' in their ethnicity, hence the designation, *Khmer Islam*. In a more general sense, there is growing recognition of the need for bilingual education in dealing with minority populations among policy makers in the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS). But this recognition has mainly adhered to the needs of hill tribe groups who are less numerous and who are defined as ethnically distinct from Khmers. This official recognition, however, has not extended to Cham children who, as noted above, are not seen as a distinct ethnic group but rather as a religious group.

Primary Research Question:

In view of the above, this study has set out to explore the educational situation of Cham children from an inclusive education point of view. This means in particular investigating the inclusiveness of education with respect to its non-discriminatory aspects as defined in international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Cambodia is a signatory. Therefore, the primary research question for the study is as follows:

Primary Research Question: To what degree do Cham populations receive educational services from the state school system and what factors affect the provision of such services?

School reporting on enrollment and retention does not generally distinguish between children in different ethnic groups. Therefore, it is difficult to determine with any great degree of certainty from official government reporting what the nature of educational service provision to this target group is. In the case of Cham children, the study has sought to investigate enrolment through direct interviews with selected members of the Cham community as well as representatives from Islamic Schools. Such interviews not only give some indication of enrolment patterns but also the causality for such patterns.

Ancillary Research Questions:

In addition to the above core research question, there are a number of ancillary areas of investigation that the study has pursued in order to improve understanding of attitudes of Cham parents in addressing the educational needs of their children. These research questions include the following:

Research Question 2: How do Cham perceptions of themselves and the majority Khmer community affect decisions relating to education for their children?

The decision of Cham parents to enroll their children in the state school system ultimately depends on perceptions of themselves as a separate community within the larger national community and the degree to which they feel that they want to participate in that larger national community. As the premier representative institution of Cambodian society at the local level, the state schools may or may not be perceived as a minority-friendly institution. This perception of the state schools among Cham parents will depend on prevalent attitudes about themselves and their role in Cambodian society, underlining this area of inquiry as an important one.

Research Question 3: To what degree are Islamic Schools satisfying the desire of Cham families to provide educational opportunities for their children in comparison to state schools?

The emergence of Islamic schools as a parallel provider of educational services is already well established. Indeed, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) reports that there are over 86 such

schools operating in Kampong Cham alone (Dept of Planning, Kampong Cham, 2007). There has been little systematic investigation about these schools including the nature of their relationship with educational authorities in the province, what they teach, or whether Cham children attend these schools to complement the education they receive from the state schools or to replace it. The role of Islamic Schools and their perception by Cham parents may, therefore, be of great importance in designing interventions that assist the state schools to increase their responsiveness to minority needs.

Research Question 4: What in general is the Khmer language proficiency among Cham children when they enroll in a state school?

As noted earlier, there is a widely held belief that Chams are not ethnically different from Khmers and that the primary point of difference between these two groups relates mainly to religion. This assumption is based on the observed close proximity of Khmer and Cham villages to one another and the high degree of assimilation attributed to the Cham community. For example, the Cham people are represented in Parliament to some degree and indeed the former Minister of Education was himself a Cham. By extrapolating these assumptions to the language readiness of Cham children when they enroll in state schools, one would imagine that such children enter school with a high degree of Khmer language proficiency. This assumption, however, has never been systematically tested. If it were found that a large number of Cham children were not proficient in Khmer language upon enrolling in Grade 1, it would have significant consequences for the ability of state schools to retain Cham children and the overall perception of such schools to meet their needs. Such consequences bear heavily on the central research question, which seeks to investigate what may be reasons for Cham parents not to send their children to the state schools.

Educational Policy in Cambodia: Two Realities

Cambodia is not without a legal framework to ensure that all children get a basic education. Indeed, the legal framework for addressing equity issues in education was first laid out in the Cambodian Constitution proclaimed in 1993. Article 68 of the constitution states that the “state shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools.” Similarly, the RGC has also ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* as stipulated under Article 48 of the constitution; it also participated in the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990 and has agreed to abide by the resolutions of the conference. With support from UNESCO, Cambodia developed a National EFA Plan that was disseminated in 2003. The plan places a strong emphasis on vulnerable groups but does not identify the Cham minority specifically (National EFA Secretariat, 2003). In addition, although the National Plan mentions ethnic minorities as a special needs group, it does not cite bilingual education as an important mechanism to meet these needs but rather refers only to a need for ‘curriculum reform.’

There have nevertheless been concerns that the rights of minorities are not being addressed by the RGC. For example, the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights recently noted that the RGC ‘has yet to submit Cambodia’s initial report on its compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which was due in 1994’ (OHCHR, 2007, p. 15). Similarly, in its most recent concluding observations on Cambodia’s compliance with the UN CRC, the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that it is ‘concerned that the State party’s Law on Nationality (1996) might lead to discrimination against children of non-Khmer ethnic origin and might, in violation of Article 7 of the Convention, leave as stateless a large number of children born

in Cambodia, such as children belonging to minority groups' (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2000, p. 6). In response to this law, the Cambodian government now requires *all* citizens to declare as their nationality, 'Khmer,' and will not recognize declarations of Cham, Steang, Tampuan, or other ethnic minority groups. Thus, the RGC seeks to respond to the above concerns by ensuring that no one is indeed made stateless, but nevertheless doing so in a way that requires everyone to deny their actual ethnicity. These developments are seen as problematic by legal observers such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as they conflate ethnicity and nationality, which are essentially different.

Although the proclamations and legal framework established by the government to ensure equitable access to education were an important step for Cambodia, they still did not match the reality on the ground for much of the 1990s. With a crumbling educational infrastructure, inefficient resource distribution, low quality educational delivery, and a poorly as well as irregularly paid teaching force, the education system was in critical need of comprehensive support. These problems demanded the lion's share of government and donor support as educational development got under way in the mid and late 1990s. In the first decade of the 21st century, Cambodia initiated a pro-poor educational reform program that led to dramatic increases in net enrolment, particularly among the poorest quintile of the population. Pro-poor policies have mainly taken the form of changes in financing of state schools including the provision of operating budgets, which have enabled the abolition of school fees, and the introduction of need-based scholarships for vulnerable groups at lower secondary school level. MoEYS has also worked closely with the World Food Program to introduce school breakfast programs in food insecure areas as a means of improving enrolment. The most recent developments in education policy have seen the promulgation of Child Friendly School (CFS) frameworks as an official element in all future national investment plans. CFS models are currently popular among development practitioners because they espouse a holistic approach to development. In this respect, the regional framework adopted by most Southeast Asian countries encompasses five dimensions of a child's learning environment. The decision to elevate CFS models to a high level of prominence follows a long period of piloting that began in 2001. While there is generally great enthusiasm that the MoEYS has moved quickly in this regard, there is also concern that it is premature to adopt the framework as a national policy.

In spite of the above movements in national educational policy, expectations are still running far ahead of the reality. It is generally accepted by many educators that efforts to improve educational quality have shown the most disappointing results (e.g., Wheeler, 1998; Bredenberg, 2004; Bernard, 2005). Even in the area of educational access where progress has been most rapid, NER levels in the primary education sector have been relatively static at about 90% for the last several years. It is believed that the 10% of the school-going age population still not in school primarily comprises minority groups, children in remote areas where educational service provision is patchy, and migrant children. At lower secondary school level, NER levels increased from 19% in 2001 to 31% in 2005, a considerable increase relative to the base figure (EMIS, 2006). Still, it is a sobering realization when one considers that about 70% of children in this age group do not attend lower secondary school.

In view of the above, it is clear that major access impediments to a quality basic education continue to exist throughout the country. The causality underlying this situation can best be understood as a complex interaction between supply and demand-side factors. Prominent supply-side factors impeding participation rates in Cambodia's educational system include (i) chronic teacher shortages; (ii) pervasiveness of incomplete schools; (iii) low educational relevance and quality; (iv) physical constraints in educational provision; (v) poor living and working conditions among teachers; and (vi) exclusionary 'push-out' factors. The latter of these refers in particular to low sensitivity to the needs

of girls, ethnic minorities, and disabled children. Important demand-side factors include (i) restrictive school access due to direct costs; (ii) exclusionary ‘pull-out factors’ due to the lower perceived value of education in comparison to income generating activities; and (iii) socio-economic ‘pull-out’ factors relating to such problems as opportunity costs, morning hunger among poor children, and other financial factors. In combination, supply and demand-side factors produce numerous negative effects that impede educational quality and access. These effects include high levels of repetition, dropout, and absenteeism as well as poor instructional quality.

RESEARCH METHODS

Review of Secondary Data Sources

The present study has relied heavily on a review of secondary data sources, such as they are, to generate many of the conclusions and recommendations that have been formulated. Secondary data sources have also been used extensively for purposes of examining attitudes and social dispositions of the Cham population in survey areas. In most cases, these sources consist of anthropological studies of social and political trends within the Cham community. However, researchers found there to be a virtual dearth of information about educational matters as they relate to the Cham population. In part, this is due to the fact that official education statistics do not discriminate between ethnic minority and Khmer children. As a result, a considerable effort was made to generate some primary data for this study through focus group discussions and interviews with key informants.

An important secondary data source relating to Cham ethnic groups is an anthropological tract compiled by William Collins in 1996 entitled, *The Chams of Cambodia*. This study is widely recognized by many anthropologists as the most comprehensive study of the Chams in recent times. It examines the historical origins of the Chams as well as their own sense of ethnic identity today and future prospects as a minority community in Cambodia. The study has also reviewed progress reports and localized surveys conducted by several projects that are currently operating in Kampong Cham Province. The surveys that have been examined are diverse in nature and include language proficiency surveys among Cham children that have been made available to researchers. Progress reports provided by agencies working in the education sector have also proven valuable for their insights on educational trends among vulnerable social groups and an assessment of the effectiveness of interventions that have been designed to deal with their needs. These assessments have proven to be highly useful in the formulation of recommendations for future effective interventions targeted at Cham and migrant children.

Primary Data Collection Activities: Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews

General: Primary data collection activities occurred mainly to gather attitudinal information on the Cham population in Kampong Cham Province. There were four areas of inquiry that were investigated in this regard, which are summarized in Table 1. It should be noted that investigation of the fourth area (language proficiency) utilized results of an earlier survey conducted by KAPE and World Education under the auspices of the ESCUP Program in 2006.

Table 1: Study Variables Investigated through Primary Data Collection Activities

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Attitudes towards the Cham community among Cham villagers |
| 2 | Attitudes towards the Khmer national community among Cham villagers |
| 3 | Satisfaction with the state school system among Cham community members |
| 4 | Language Proficiency of Cham Children |

Key Informants: The key informants contacted to participate in survey activities fell into two groups: (i) local community members in selected Cham areas and (ii) staff members working in Islamic

Schools. Community members generally included parents, village heads, community elders, *hakims* (clerics), and *tuan* (Islamic teacher). All of those interviewed were of Cham ethnicity. There were 80 individuals participating in community interviews across four districts (see Table 2). The largest grouping of participants were those who described their primary role in the community as parents. Participants were mainly selected through a combination of coordinating activities by local community leaders as well as availability and interest in participating. In this sense, the survey sample is not scientific or random but likely gives some sense of the prevailing world-view predominant in each community. Among those working in Islamic Schools, participants mainly included the teachers working there (*tuan*) and the headmasters who ran the school. In all, about 30 staff members from ten schools were interviewed across a wide sample of districts.

Table 2: Breakdown of Community Informants

| Primary Community Role | Number of Participants |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Parent | 38 |
| Village Leader | 13 |
| <i>Tuan</i> (Islamic Teacher) | 11 |
| <i>Hakim</i> (Cleric) | 8 |
| Commune Leader | 4 |
| Community Elder | 2 |
| Other | 4 |
| Total | 80 |

Information was also collected from the Provincial Teacher Training College and selected primary schools to determine the ethnic make-up of annual intakes into the college and among state teachers assigned to primary schools in areas with a heavy concentration of Chams.

Site Selection: Because of the generally preliminary nature of this study, data collection activities in Cham communities were limited to four communes in each of four districts, mainly in eastern Kampong Cham where there are large concentrations of Cham people. The four districts selected included Krouch Chma, Dambae, Tbong Khmum, and Ponycia Krek Districts. The communes visited in each district were chosen in a way where there would be a mix of cultural attitudes stemming from a wide range of living contexts. These contexts included villages where local Cham community members live mainly among themselves and not in close proximity to Khmer villages to areas where the opposite conditions prevail. The Islamic Schools selected to participate in the study were selected from a wider range of districts to generate a variety of school settings that included urban and rural, big and small, as well as old and new schools. Researchers were particularly interested in including the Islamic School in the provincial capital in the sample of those selected, which is one of the largest and most prestigious such schools in the province.

Data Collection Methods and Instrumentation: Data collection methods in the Cham community relied on a combination of focus group discussions and interviews. Focus group discussions were limited to data collection activities at community level while one-on-one interviews were used both with communities (in a post discussion setting) as well as at schools. A concerted effort was made to ensure that those conducting the interviews and large group discussions were themselves of Cham ethnicity so that there would be a maximum level of openness in answering questions, particularly with respect to those questions that pertained to attitudes towards individuals of Khmer ethnicity. A local Muslim organization based in Phnom Penh but with strong links to communities in Kampong Cham arranged for all meetings with communities and schools and assisted in the interviews. Those members of staff within the organization implementing the study who were of Cham ethnicity also

assisted in this regard. Three data collection tools were developed for purposes of conducting discussions and interviews. These consisted of a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions that generated both quantitative and qualitative data with regards to responding patterns.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

Educational Trends

The province in which this study occurred consists of 16 districts. Of these districts, a small handful seem to consistently appear among the top four or five with the worst performance against standard efficiency indicators such as repetition, dropout, and enrolment. If one defines the poorest performing districts as those, which appear four times or more among the worst performing districts, there are four districts whose performance is particularly bad. These include Dambae, Krouchma, Memot, and Steung Trong Districts, which incidentally all have sizable Cham minority populations. The incidence of poor performance for these districts is laid out in Table 3.

Table 3: Worst Performing Districts against 6 Efficiency Indicators

| District | Times Appearing among Worst 5 Districts for Each of 6 Efficiency Parameters | Significant Cham Minority** |
|--------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Dambae | 6 | Yes |
| Krouchma | 4 | Yes |
| Memot | 4 | Yes |
| Steung Trong | 4 | Yes |
| Prey Chor | 2 | No |
| Cherng Prey | 2 | No |
| Ponyea Krek | 2 | Yes |
| Batheay | 2 | No |
| Oriang O | 1 | No |
| Koh Sotin | 1 | No |
| Kampong Siem | 1 | No |

* Source: Dept of Planning, Kampong Cham, 2007;

** Defined as a population of 10,000 Chams or more

The Chams of Cambodia

The Chams are one of Cambodia's largest ethnic groups and are distinguished from ethnic Khmers by their subscription to Islam and the language they speak. They are most heavily concentrated in Kampong Cham Province where they began settling in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but can also be found in Kandal, Kampong Chhnang, and Takeo Provinces as well. The Chams originally lived in an Indianized kingdom called Champa in central Vietnam but were eventually conquered during a series of invasions from southern China by Viet-speaking peoples in the 14th and 15th centuries. The Chams eventually moved to Cambodia in a number of successive migrations where they formed a very close relationship with the Cambodian royal family, as noted earlier. It is estimated that there are about 500,000 people of Cham ethnicity in Cambodia comprising about 5% of the country's population (Ing-Britt and Ovesen, 2004).

In studying the Chams, it is important to note that they are far from a monolithic ethnic group and, indeed, have been classified into three distinct groups, which have been described in great detail by Collins (1996). One of these groups is known as the 'Jahed' and are widely regarded as the 'preservers of ancient Cham culture' (p. 46) because they still teach their children to write the Cham language in the ancient script of Champa. This is in contrast to other Chams who write their language in Arabic or Malay

script. The Jahed consider themselves 'ethnic' Chams and place a strong emphasis on their individual history, cultural heritage, and especially language. Although the Jahed are also devout Muslims, their religious practices set them apart from other Muslim sects because they only pray once a day on Friday instead of five times each day as taught in the Koran. The Jahed live mostly in the area around Oudong in Kandal Province, the former capital of Cambodia, and some parts of Kampong Chhnang Province. There are very few members of this group living in Kampong Cham.

A second group known simply as the 'Chams' is the most numerous subdivision within the national Cham community. Members of this group are located mainly in Kampong Cham, Kampot, and in the northern environs of Phnom Penh. These Chams also trace their ancestry back to the original kingdom of Champa, but do not see themselves as an 'ethnic' minority but rather a 'religious' minority. This appears to be partly because they prefer to try to blend in with Khmer society (though retaining some distinctiveness as a unique social group) but also because the religious beliefs associated with the Hindu cosmology of ancient Champa are at odds with their present religious practice. Although the members of this group also emphasize the use of their own language, they do not place the same value on their historical origins or animistic heritage intrinsic in the culture of Champa, as do the Jahed. Rather, they emphasize their practice of orthodox Islam under the Shafi branch of Sunni Islam and have strong links with Muslims in Malaysia (Ing-Britt and Ovesen, 2004). It is this grouping of Chams who constitute the majority of Muslims living in Kampong Cham Province.

A third grouping of Chams are not really ethnic Chams at all but rather a group who trace their ancestry from emigrants from what is today Malaysia and Indonesia. This group is sometimes referred to as the 'Chvea,' which derives from the word for Java, suggesting a point of possible origin. The term Chvea is also commonly used to include Khmers who have converted to Islam. The Chvea prefer to use the term *Khmer Islam* to describe themselves (Ing-Britt and Ovesen, 2004). This usage is probably accurate because it recognizes that members of this group speak Khmer and not Cham as their mother tongue. It is important to note, however, that the usage *Khmer Islam* is now also commonly applied to the Chams of the second group described above who live in Kampong Cham and elsewhere though they do not speak Khmer as a first language. Indeed, many of the Chams themselves seem to prefer this usage. In this respect, it was found that 92% of the sample surveyed for this study in Kampong Cham indicated that they preferred to be called *Khmer Islam* (see Section 4.1). This usage of the terminology *Khmer Islam*, however politically correct, causes confusion because it equates 'Islam' with an ethnic group, which is not really accurate. This leads to some Cambodians claiming that they do not speak Islam but can speak Christian (i.e., English). The political overtones of the *Khmer Islam* usage, however, will be dealt with in a later section of this study.

Kampong Cham Province has one of the largest concentrations of Cham people in the entire country. Altogether, there are about 138,000 Chams living in the province out of a total population of 1.7 million. This represents about 8% of the people living in the province. There are also 86 mosques located in the province with 86 Islamic schools associated with them (Kampong Cham Dept. of Sects and Religion, 2007). With some notable exceptions, the Chams tend to be concentrated mostly in the eastern half of Kampong Cham, where they form a significant proportion of the total population in some districts. The district with the largest population of Chams is known as Tbong Khmum, which is also the most populated district in the entire province (see Table 4). The districts where Chams are the next most numerous include Krouchhma and then Dambae District. While the Chams are most numerous in Tbong Khmum, they comprise a larger proportion of the total population in Krouchhma and Dambae. In this respect, 35% of the population is Cham in Krouchhma while 20% are of this

ethnicity in Dambae. This compares with a proportion of 18% in Tbong Khmum. About six districts in the province have a very negligible Cham population of 1% or less.

Table 4: Total Provincial Population and Cham Population by District, 2004

| District | Total Population | Female | Chams | Female Cham | % Cham | % Female Cham |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1. Tbong Khmum | 223,323 | 114,653 | 39,885 | 19,948 | 18% | 17% |
| 2. Krouch Chhmar | 105,646 | 53,835 | 37,034 | 19,870 | 35% | 37% |
| 3. Dam bae | 69,831 | 35,504 | 13,796 | 7,246 | 20% | 20% |
| 4. Ponyeakrek | 130,367 | 66,920 | 10,976 | 5,325 | 8% | 8% |
| 5. Stung Trang | 116,009 | 59,046 | 10,672 | 5,683 | 9% | 10% |
| 6. Memot | 125,565 | 64,016 | 10,090 | 5,397 | 8% | 8% |
| 7. Koah SoTin | 77,012 | 39,938 | 4,288 | 2,208 | 6% | 6% |
| 8. Kang Meas | 102,222 | 52,898 | 3,642 | 1,839 | 4% | 3% |
| 9. Chamkar Leu | 119,199 | 61,260 | 2,710 | 1,382 | 2% | 2% |
| 10. Kampong Cham | 42,583 | 21,667 | 2,235 | 1,204 | 5% | 6% |
| 11. Prey Chhor | 136,307 | 70,228 | 1,118 | 592 | 1% | 1% |
| 12. Srei Santhor | 108,174 | 55,884 | 856 | 463 | 1% | 1% |
| 13. Kampong Siem | 109,007 | 56,191 | 508 | 264 | 0.4% | 0.5% |
| 14. Cheung Prey | 86,570 | 44,688 | 235 | 126 | 0.3% | 0.3% |
| 15. Orang Ov | 92,175 | 47,871 | 63 | 34 | 0.01% | 0.01% |
| 16. Bateay | 102,622 | 53,597 | -- | -- | 0% | 0% |
| Total | 1,746,612 | 898,196 | 138,108 | 71,581 | 8% | 8% |

Source: Kampong Cham Dept of Planning (2004) and Dept of Sects and Religion (2007)

EXAMINATION OF RELEVANT ISSUES RELATING TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICE PROVISION FOR MINORITY AND MIGRANT GROUPS

The Curious Status of Cham Muslims: A Non-Minority?

The issue of the minority status of Cham Muslims appears to be a highly sensitive matter in contemporary Cambodian society. As noted earlier, the official status of this social group, as defined by government, is that they are a ‘religious’ minority but not an ‘ethnic’ minority. That is, they are simply Khmers who have converted to Islam. When speaking Khmer, it is considered politically incorrect to refer to the Chams as such though this usage appears to be generally accepted in English. Rather, when referring to the Chams in formal settings or in official documents, it is customary to employ the usage, *Khmer Islam*. Several development projects have reported being officially reprimanded for using the designation ‘Cham’ in official reports, demonstrating the high degree of sensitivity attaching to this issue (e.g., Office of Special Education, 2006). Some official documents go so far as to deny that the Chams are a minority group at all since such designation can only be applied to distinct ‘ethnic groups who are indigenous tribal people and who live in the forests and mountain areas of the country over a period of long duration’ (MoEYS, 2003).² To be sure, not all sections of the government appear to be consistent with respect to politically correct usages as they

² Readers are referred to a document put out by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport in 2003 that is known as *Circular 530 (yk.bs), Article 3*.

pertain to Cham populations. For example, the Ministry of Interior continues to refer to the Chams as such in several of its documents though it is not clear whether this is currently changing.

Though never stated directly, the reasons for the above situation are quite clear. Ethnic divisions in society are potentially divisive and such perceptions and fears have been heightened by recent ethnically charged regional conflicts in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. It is also important to remember that there appears to be a strong endorsement of this *status quo* by many of the Chams themselves. For example, when asked how different Chams and Khmers are in general terms, the majority of Cham community respondents (58%) in the study's sample responded that they are only 'a little different' while 39% said that they are 'not very different' (see Table 5). Only a very small minority (4%) expressed the belief that Khmers and Chams are 'very different'. When asked how they wished to be designated as a social group, a significant majority (92%) endorsed the politically correct usage, *Khmer Islam* although, ominously, no one endorsed the designation of 'Cambodian' or 'Khmer' (see Table 6). Of course, it is highly likely that if these questions had been asked to Jahed respondents, the pattern of responding might have been quite different given their oft-expressed pride in their ethnic and historical heritage.

Table 5: The Degree of Difference between Khmers and Chams Cited by Cham Respondents (N=80)

| | Responses | Number | % |
|--|--------------------|--------|-----|
| <u>Question:</u> How different are Khmer people and Cham people? | Not very different | 31 | 39% |
| | A little different | 46 | 58% |
| | Very different | 3 | 4% |

Table 6: Preference for Terminology Used to Describe Muslim Cultural Groupings Cited by Cham Respondents (N=79)

| | Responses | Number | % |
|--|-------------|--------|-----|
| <u>Question:</u> How would you prefer people to call you with respect to your cultural background? | Cham | 2 | 3% |
| | Cambodian | 0 | 0% |
| | Khmer Islam | 73 | 92% |
| | Khmer | 0 | 0% |
| | Other | 4 | 5% |

The above findings suggest that the Chams in this province do not want to draw attention to themselves as an ethnic group that is distinct from the majority Khmers. And ultimately, one must remember that ethnic attribution is essentially self-defined. At the same time, members of the sample sent a very different message as to how they viewed themselves as a community, in juxtaposition to how they wish to be perceived by the Khmer majority. In this respect, everyone in the sample indicated that their Cham cultural heritage was either 'important' or 'very important' to them (see Table 7). Similarly, a majority (89%) indicated that they preferred to speak the Cham language at home with their families even though most were fluent in Khmer language (see Table 8). Only about 11% indicated that they used Khmer, either exclusively or in combination with Cham language while at home. Finally, most respondents (64%) in the sample indicated that they lived in villages that were exclusively Cham while about 35% reported that they lived in a village that was mixed in terms of its ethnic composition (see Table 9). Only one person reported living in a village that was exclusively Khmer. What these findings suggest is that the Chams in Kampong Cham Province prefer to be seen as assimilating into Cambodian society and would rather be considered to be Khmer in every way except with respect to their religion. Nevertheless, their inward looking perspective is to see themselves as highly distinct from the majority ethnic Khmer both in terms of their separate cultural heritage and language. As a community, they prefer to be quite insular and tend to live exclusively in their own villages, though in close proximity to Khmer villages. This close physical proximity between the Cham and Khmer communities lends support to the widespread though erroneous

impression by outsiders that the former are simply a different kind of Khmer, but Khmer nevertheless.

Table 7: The Degree of Importance of Cham Heritage Cited by Cham Respondents (N=80)

| | Responses | Number | % |
|--|--------------------|---------------|----------|
| <u>Question:</u> How important is your Cham heritage to you? | Very important | 59 | 74% |
| | Important | 21 | 26% |
| | Somewhat important | 0 | 0% |
| | Not important | 0 | 0% |

Table 8: Language Preference When at Home Cited by Cham Respondents (N=80)

| | Responses | Number | % |
|---|------------------|---------------|----------|
| <u>Question:</u> When you are at home, what language do you speak with your family? | Khmer | 2 | 2% |
| | Cham | 71 | 89% |
| | Both equally | 7 | 9% |

Table 9: Degree of Cohabitation in Village of Residence Cited by Cham Respondents (N=80)

| | Responses | Number | % |
|--|------------------|---------------|----------|
| <u>Question:</u> How would you describe the people who live in your village? | Completely Cham | 51 | 64% |
| | Completely Khmer | 1 | 1% |
| | Mixed | 28 | 35% |

The above findings echo a similar assessment by Collins in which he notes that many Chams feel some insecurity about living in someone else’s house (i.e., in a country that belongs to the ethnic Khmer) and that they have to be deferential and considerate to their hosts (1996). At the same time, there is a fear of losing one’s cultural identity. He notes that many Chams have turned to Islam as a means to buttress this distinction between themselves and the ethnic Khmer:

[Some Chams] feel that Islam provides a sufficient support for the cultural identity of [their] community. . . in the near future, ‘Cham’ as a culture would completely disappear and be replaced by ‘Khmer Islam.’ This process of a redefinition of the Cham community to include fellow Muslims who are not ethnic Chams, that is, to include the Malay or Chvea, is an extremely old process, which I have called the Malaysianisation of the Chams in Cambodia. (Collins, 1996, p. 75)

Cham perceptions of their role in Cambodian society make the desire to develop educational interventions that are appropriate to their children very complicated. On the one hand, the Chams want to blend into Cambodian society and pretend that they are actually Khmer in most respects except for their religion. As a result, they actively accept and endorse their designation by government as *Khmer Islam*, thereby denying their own ethnicity. Yet, the fact remains that they do not speak Khmer as a first language with their children so that when they attend state schools dominated by ethnic Khmer teachers and curriculum, they have to struggle (see Section 4.2.2). Similarly, they have deeply different customs and dietary habits that prevent them from living in Khmer villages where there are pigs running about the place and frequent, heavy drinking among residents. This prevents their children from getting exposure to Khmer speakers that would facilitate acquisition of the majority language. Thus, the challenge for any program is to address distinct cultural and language needs while maintaining a fiction that they are not culturally different from the majority ethnic group.

Educational Trends in the Cham Community: State Education and the Emergence of Independent Islamic Schools

Language and Religion: Two Educational Taboos

The state religion and language of Cambodia are Buddhism and Khmer, respectively. As a result, there is a prohibition against teaching other religions and languages in the state schools. Recently, some flexibility has been extended to bilingual education programs working in the formal education sector, which cater mainly to hill tribe groups in the northern provinces (e.g., Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri). Advocacy among NGO groups have achieved tentative though as yet unofficial agreement for a three-year language bridge for ethnic minority groups in which such children may receive instruction in their native language (in successively diminishing doses) but only up to Grade 3. This kind of instruction has been occurring mainly in Community Schools supported by NGOs but in recent years there has been extension of bilingual education activities to the state system with assignments of state teachers to Community Schools and the limited introduction of bilingual education in state schools with support from UNICEF-CARE.³

It is important to note that the limited flexibility in the provision of bilingual education models described above has only been allowed in the context of groups that are defined as ethnic minorities, which as we have seen, the Chams are not considered to be. Thus, the state schools that serve Cham communities are allowed to teach neither the language nor religion of the local community. Survey findings from this study, however, have indicated that the Cham community places a very high degree of importance on the instruction of both religion and language for their children while at school. Indeed, everyone in the sample indicated that these things are either ‘important’ or ‘very important,’ particularly in the context of religion where 80% viewed such instructional provisions as very important compared to 69% for language (see Tables 10 and 11). The inability of the state education system to meet these expectations may, therefore, be a problem that impacts on participation rates and dropout among children of Cham ethnicity.

Table 10: The Degree of Importance Attached to Children Learning about Islam at School Cited by Cham Respondents (N=80)

| Question: How important do you think it is that your children learn about Islam at school? | Responses | Number | % |
|--|------------------|--------|-----|
| | Very important | 64 | 80% |
| | Important | 16 | 20% |
| | Not so important | 0 | 0% |

Table 11: The Degree of Importance Attached to Children Learning Cham Language at School Cited by Cham Respondents (N=80)

| Question: How important do you think it is that your children learn Cham language at school? | Responses | Number | % |
|--|------------------|--------|-----|
| | Very important | 55 | 69% |
| | Important | 25 | 31% |
| | Not so important | 0 | 0% |

Khmer Language Proficiency among Cham Children and Responsiveness of State Schools

The Educational Support to Children in Underserved Populations Program (ESCUP) was the first educational development program in Kampong Cham to consider the specialized needs of the Cham community. As part of its programming, ESCUP undertook a key investigative activity that helped to

³ CARE International/Cambodia has been a leading proponent of bilingual education in the formal education system for many years, mainly with hill tribe groups. Its Highland Children Education Support Program (HCEP) has been operating in Ratanakiri since 2003 and has had considerable success with the development of Community Schools and bilingual education curricula. Recently, CARE and UNICEF have entered into a four-year partnership to extend HCEP models to the state education system in five provinces (Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, Kratie, Stung Treng, and Preah Vihear).

assess the degree to which language barriers impeded learning among Cham children in selected case study sites where it planned to pilot experimental interventions designed to increase the responsiveness of state schools to minority needs. These sites comprised communes where Cham minority populations were a significant proportion of the total population (mainly in Tbong Khmum District). The methodology of the survey employed assessments by primary school state teachers at Grades 1 and 2 as the main determiner of language proficiency level among Cham children rather than direct assessments of the children themselves. This enabled an assessment of what the situation was like across a fairly large number of state schools that took in a sample of 56 state teachers. Against a backdrop of widely differing opinions among local educators about the extent to which Cham children spoke Khmer language when they first enrolled in state schools, the survey sought to provide some empirical information to determine actual language needs, if any among this minority group.

Survey results were striking in that they suggested the existence of significant difficulties in understanding the language of instruction among many Cham children in comparison to ethnic Khmer children. Given the fact that state teachers usually tend to underestimate the significance of language barriers in state schools in similar surveys,⁴ these findings were rather surprising and may even be an understatement of the actual problem. The extent of the language barriers found in the survey was particularly striking in several respects. First, it was reported that 98% of Cham children at Grade 1 spoke Cham and not Khmer as their primary language. Secondly, about a third of the teachers surveyed reported that ‘most Cham children in their classrooms could understand a little Khmer but not very well’ (see Table 12). These patterns were found to moderate somewhat at Grade 2; nevertheless, 21% of teachers still reported that the majority of such children still understood only a little bit of Khmer, thereby greatly complicating their instruction. While such findings are not surprising in the remote northern provinces given the ethnic homogeneity of these areas and the remoteness of minority groups from Khmer-speaking areas, such results in a majority Khmer-speaking province are.

Table 12: Proficiency Levels Indicated by State Teachers with respect to Cham Children (N=56 Teachers)

| Description of Language Proficiency by Individual Teachers | Percentage of Teachers Responding | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------|
| | Grade 1 | Grade 2 |
| ○ Nearly all understand Khmer instruction very well | 36% | 54% |
| ○ Some understand Khmer language instructions very well | 32% | 25% |
| ○ Most can understand Khmer language instruction a little bit but not very well | 32% | 21% |
| ○ Most cannot understand Khmer instruction well at all | 0% | 0% |

Source: ESCUP, 2006a

If one considers the finding that a third or more Cham children enroll in state schools with little understanding of the language of instruction against the prevalence of Cham-speaking teachers in the same schools, the extent of the problem with respect learning difficulties becomes apparent. For example, in the ESCUP survey cited above, about 79% of the sample of teachers interviewed indicated that Cham was not their first language. Similarly, a majority (58%) of the sample of Cham community members interviewed for this study indicated that none of the teachers in their children’s school could speak Cham. An additional 11% indicated that only a ‘very few can’ (see Table 13).

⁴ See, for example, surveys conducted by CARE in Ratanakiri Province for the Highland Children’s Education Program (HCEP).

Combined, this would indicate that about 69% of the state schools in Cham areas have little or no capacity to deal with minority children who cannot speak Khmer or who can speak it only a little.

The findings of the ESCUP language proficiency survey run counter to the conventional wisdom on the assimilated nature of the Cham population in Kampong Cham. Although many members of the education establishment continue to maintain that all or nearly all Cham children in Kampong Cham speak Khmer Language from an early age, survey results do not appear to support this view. This speaks to the fact that Cham communities tend to be highly insular in spite of the fact that they live in close proximity to ethnic Khmer villages, as noted earlier.

Table 13: Ability of State Teachers to Communicate in Cham Language Cited by Cham respondents (N=64*)

| Question: If your children attend a state school, are teachers there able to communicate in Cham language? | Responses | Number | % |
|--|--------------------|--------|-----|
| | Yes, they all can. | 10 | 16% |
| | Some can. | 10 | 16% |
| | Very few can | 7 | 11% |
| | None can. | 37 | 58% |

*Note: Only 64 members of the sample professed to know the Cham language proficiency of state teachers so only the view of these individuals was considered.

Representation of Cham Teachers in the State Education System

There has never been any systematic documentation of the prevalence of Cham teachers in the state education system in Kampong Cham. This is partly because their status as an ethnic minority group is not officially recognized but also because there was never thought to be a need to compile such information, since it is assumed all Cham children speak Khmer. As a result, the information on Cham representation in the state education system is at best spotty and mainly limited to unsystematic and scattered surveys.

In spite of the above limitations, a review of the available information acquired under this study has been able to provide some limited idea of the disparity between the representation of Chams in the general population in selected districts and their prevalence in the state school system. For example, one interesting source of information on demographic prevalence of Chams in state schools refers to intake lists for the Provincial Teacher Training College of Kampong Cham. This institution is responsible for the training of all teachers who are assigned to state primary schools. According to enrolment lists for the period 2001-05, the number of Cham students who entered the college over the period 2001 to 2004 was negligible (less than 1%) (see Table 14). When one considers that Chams comprise 8% of the total provincial population, the dimensions of the problem are clear. The representation of Cham students jumped in 2005 to nearly 4% due mainly to advocacy efforts by the ESCUP Program in collaboration with the Teacher Training Dept. to improve minority representation among state teachers. This was done mainly through a combination of recruitment campaigns in Cham areas, coaching on the entrance examination, affirmative action by government when considering examination scores, and scholarships for successful candidates.⁵ Still, the eventual intake was below the hoped for target of 20 candidates (ESCUP, 2006b).

⁵ Candidates applying for admission to the PTTC must take a competitive entrance examination so that not all Cham candidates who apply can easily enroll.

Table 14: Cham Ethnicity of Candidates Inducted into the Provincial Teacher Training College

| PTTC Intake Details | 2001/02 | 2002/3 | 2003/4 | 2004/5 | 2005/6* |
|---------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| Total Intake | 241 | 222 | 283 | 119 | 280 |
| Cham Ethnicity | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 10 |
| % | 0% | 0% | 0.3% | 0.8% | 3.6% |

*Introduction of Advocacy Scholarships for PTTC recruits of Cham ethnicity.

Source: Kampong Cham PTTC, 2007

Researchers also consulted selected school clusters affiliated with KAPE target areas with large Cham populations to determine actual representation of Cham teachers in the state schools there. A total of 54 schools in six school clusters were reviewed in this respect. It was found that the representation of Chams among state teachers ranged from 0% to as high as 3%, which contrasted sharply with an overall proportion of Chams among the general population in each district of 8% to 18% (see Table 15). Clearly, Chams are very much under represented among state teachers given their overall numbers in the general population. The reason for this under representation is not clear. Certainly, exclusion has not been intentional. Reasons cited in informal interviews with education officials included the concentration of Chams in remote areas where there are few high schools, little interest in education, high dropout, as well as proneness to seasonal migration and attendant effects on school attendance. All of these reasons ensure that few Chams finish secondary education, which limits their eligibility for PTTC admission. One possible reason not cited by officials relates to the lack of responsiveness of state schools to the needs of Cham parents (e.g., religion and language), which in turn may depress participation levels.

Table 15: Prevalence of Cham Teachers in State Schools in Selected Minority Areas

| District | % Chams in District | Selected Cluster in Cham Areas | Number of Schools | Total State Teachers | State Teachers of Cham Ethnicity | % | Locally Recruited Community Teachers | Community Teachers of Cham Ethnicity | % |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Ponyea Krek | 8% | Krek | 5 | 57 | 1 | 1.8% | 6 | 0 | 0% |
| | | Steung | 6 | 70 | 0 | 0% | 12 | 1 | 8% |
| | | Koki | 12 | 82 | 2 | 2.4% | 14 | 8 | 57% |
| Tbong Khmum | 18% | Trawpeang Russei | 13 | 101 | 1 | 1% | 17 | 2 | 12% |
| | | Cheas | 5 | 34 | 1 | 2.9% | 8 | 3 | 38% |
| | | Khna | 13 | 99 | 0 | 0% | 15 | 1 | 7% |
| | | Total | 54 | 443 | 5 | 1.1% | 72 | 15 | 21% |

Source: ESCUP, 2007a

Interestingly, ESCUP also reported the representation of Chams among Community Teachers who are selected directly by communities to work in state schools (with support from ESCUP, District Offices of Education, and Commune Councils).⁶ When local communities are left to their own devices to recruit teachers for local schools, the number of individuals of Cham ethnicity represented among teachers swells from 1.1% among state teachers to 21% among Community Teachers (see Table 15). This suggests that Cham communities are indeed interested in education but may not be presented with many direct channels for them to realize such interests. This speaks particularly to

6 The support of Community Teachers in state schools is an intervention that ESCUP introduced into Kampong Cham to help meet severe teacher shortages there. Although the MoEYS has no explicit policy excluding the use of Community Teachers in state schools, it was nevertheless an intervention that had first to be cleared with Ministry (see MoU, World Education, 2005). The Provincial Office of Education has since given strong support to this intervention with the result that it has now also been endorsed by the National Ministry.

rigidities in the manner in which new teachers are recruited into the teaching force. As noted earlier, entry requirements to PTTCs exclude many from areas where there is a lack of secondary schools. And past corruption scams in the province in which bribes were solicited from prospective individuals interested in becoming teachers (e.g., Contract Teachers) have resulted in a virtual lock down of activities to accredit teachers through other means (see, for example, Geeves and Bredenberg, 2005). Currently, ESCUP and other projects are lobbying for special measures to accredit Community Teachers. While many MoEYS officials have expressed sympathy for such measures, they have also been quite frank about the difficulties of actually getting them approved, given the unfortunate history of earlier teacher accreditation efforts in the sector.

The dearth of teachers of Cham ethnicity in the state schools assumes much greater significance when one considers the opinions of community members about Cham language ability among those who teach their children. In this respect, a majority (70%) indicated that it was ‘very important’ that those teaching their children should be able to speak Cham (see Table 16). To the extent that the state education system is unable to field teachers with Cham backgrounds, the state schools will, therefore, also be failing on another major measure of performance expected by the local community.

Table 16: The Degree of Importance Attached to Teachers Being Able to Speak Cham Language at School Cited by Cham Respondents (N=80)

| <u>Question:</u> How important do you think it is that teachers at your children’s school can speak the Cham | Responses | Number | % |
|--|------------------|---------------|----------|
| | Very important | 56 | 70% |
| | Important | 24 | 30% |
| | Not so important | 0 | 0% |

Responsiveness of State Schools to Minority Needs and the Growing Importance of Islamic Schools

The above discussion has already highlighted a number of areas where the state schools do not seem to be meeting expectations of the local Cham community. These include the expectation that their children learn the Cham language and the tenets of Islam as well as the ability of state teachers to communicate with their children in the Cham language. Focus groups discussions also identified a number of additional areas of dissatisfaction with the state schools, the most prominent of these being the prohibition to wear the traditional head scarf characteristic of Cham women, as there is a strict uniform code in place at all state schools. They also felt unhappy with seating arrangements where boys and girls are sometimes made to sit together. In general, participants at focus group discussions did not feel that their children are actively discriminated against at the state schools, but rather that they are treated equally. Nevertheless, a significant number expressed some dissatisfaction not because of what state schools did do but because of what they did not do (e.g., teach Cham, Islam, etc.).

Because of the insecurity that Chams as a minority group feel in Cambodia, it is unlikely that they are going to be very vocal about the way the state schools are operated. As the state schools are administered by central government and are not under the jurisdiction of local government councils, it is likely that changes in matters of curriculum and medium of instruction, which are sensitive national policy issues, would be very difficult in any case. But Cham communities do not appear to be sitting idly by in the face of non-responsiveness to their expectations either. Rather, they are voting with their feet. That is, they are increasingly sending their children to Islamic Schools, the number of which is multiplying. For example, the Dept of Sects and Religion has reported that there are currently 86 Islamic Schools operating in Kampong Cham Province with about 23,665 children

enrolled there (2007). These schools have 256 *tuan* or teachers providing instruction on a regular basis. Because there are no clear statistics on the number of Cham children enrolled in state schools, it is not clear what percentage of total school age population current enrolment at Islamic Schools represents. At over 20,000 children, it is certainly significant, and growing.

Given the growing importance of the Islamic Schools for the Cham community, researchers sought to develop a better understanding of what the average such school looks like (see Table 17). About 12% of the existing Islamic schools in the province were interviewed for this study comprising a mix of big and small schools as well as old and new. According to the information collected, the typical Islamic School is about ten years old and has an enrolment that is anywhere between 90 to 375 students, which includes both boys and girls. The average age range is from 7 to 16 years of age. Interestingly, four of the ten schools visited claimed to have been established within the last five years, validating a supposition that their numbers are growing. About 70% of schools claimed to have had permission to open from the Provincial Office of Education, although most rarely had any kind of continuous contact with local education authorities thereafter. A majority of these schools (60%) reported that they were originally established with foreign funds, mainly from Malaysia. The typical school has about three *tuans* teaching there whose average education level may vary from basic literacy to Grade 12. None of the schools reported having had *tuans* with a post-secondary education and only 20% reported providing any kind of staff development that focuses on teaching methodology.

Table 17: Interesting Facts about Islamic Schools Sampled (N=10)

| Characteristic | Findings |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. Oldest School: | Est. in 1980 |
| 2. Newest School: | Est. in 2006 |
| 3. Average Enrolment: | 206 students |
| 4. Average No of Teachers: | 3.1 teachers |
| 5. Average Hrs in Session/day: | 5.63 hrs |
| 6. Most frequently taught subject: | Koran |
| 7. Least taught subject: | Mathematics |
| 8. % Using Cham as medium of instruction: | 90% |
| 9. % established with foreign funds: | 60% |
| 10. % with Timetable: | 60% |
| 11. % of schools where boys & girls sit separately: | 100% |
| 12. % paying teachers: | 10% |
| 13. Average years of education of least educated <i>tuan</i> : | 3.8 years |
| 14. Average years of education of most educated <i>tuan</i> : | 7.6 years |
| 15. Main Source of Income is from community: | 50% |
| 16. Schools Opened with Permission from POE: | 70% |
| 17. Schools that never meet with POE or DOE: | 40% |

Surprisingly, the majority of schools reported that they do not pay their teachers (or if they do, not on a regular basis) and that the school is mainly dependent on community donations for its operating costs. Teachers generally teach a full load that is about 5.6 days per week. The average number of hours that schools are in session per day exceeds five hours though only 60% of schools have reported having a formal timetable. As one would expect, Koranic studies are the most frequently taught subject and the language of instruction is generally in Cham.

An important point of interest that was discussed with Islamic Schools related to what researchers perceived to be a growing competition with the state schools.⁷ This naturally was a sensitive topic. About 40% of Islamic Schools indicated that their impression was that all of their students also attended state schools though it was not clear how this was possible given that the state schools teach four hours each day while the Islamic Schools teach five hours a day on average (see Table 18). Nevertheless, another 40% of Islamic Schools reported that half or less than half of their students also attended state schools, which is of some concern.

Table 18: The Number of Cham Children at Islamic Schools Also Attending State Schools (N=10)

| | Responses | Number | % |
|--|----------------------------|--------|-----|
| <u>Question:</u> Approximately what percentage your students also attend the nearest state school? | All of them do. | 4 | 40% |
| | Most of them do. | 2 | 20% |
| | About half of them do. | 3 | 30% |
| | Less than half of them do. | 1 | 10% |
| | None of them do. | 0 | 0% |

When asked what their view was of the main reasons that Cham children preferred to attend Islamic Schools, a number of interesting points emerged. The level of incidence for each reason cited by Islamic Schools is summarized in Table 19. The most frequently cited reason for attendance of religious schools was that boys and girls are made to sit separately (though in the same room) when in class, whereas at state schools, they sit in a mixed manner. The next set of most frequently cited reasons included curricular issues (e.g., learning Malay and Arabic), more flexible school hours since many Islamic schools are in session in the evening, and distance to the state school. A generic reason that overlapped to some degree with some of the other reasons (non-responsiveness of state schools, mainly curriculum) was chosen by about half of the schools interviewed. Quality issues such as teacher attendance and preparation did not figure so prominently among the reasons cited for preferred attendance. It was somewhat surprising that more Islamic Schools did not cite the failure of state schools to teach about Islam as a leading cause for defection, since this is the *raison d'être* of the Islamic Schools and a leading cause cited by parents themselves. Nevertheless, it would appear that there are a number of important points of difference in the way that Islamic Schools are organized and in what they teach that gives them an important advantage over the state schools.

Table 19: Most Important Reasons Cited for Students Attending Islamic School Rather than State School (N=10)

| | Responses | Number citing this Reason | % |
|---|--|---------------------------|------|
| <u>Question:</u> What are the most important reasons that children attend your school rather than the State School? | The state school is not responsive to the needs of the Cham community in terms of curriculum (e.g., Cham Language, Islam, etc.). | 5 | 50% |
| | Students want to study Arabic or Malay in order to work outside the country. | 7 | 70% |
| | School hours of the Islamic School are more flexible. | 7 | 70% |
| | The state school is too far away. | 7 | 70% |
| | The quality of education at the Islamic School is better. | 1 | 10% |
| | Teachers' attendance at the Islamic School is better. | 2 | 20% |
| | The children are separated by sex when they study. | 10 | 100% |
| | Other: (State teachers are lazy) | 1 | 10% |

Although a sizable proportion of the Cham community may increasingly prefer the Islamic Schools to state schools for a variety of reasons related to cultural preferences, there are a number of points of

⁷ Those interviewing staff members at Islamic Schools were all of Cham ethnicity to maximize openness in responding.

concern that should be noted by educators in regards to the quality of education that Cham children may be receiving there. Mainly, these schools do not appear to be subject to any form of accreditation that would ensure minimum standards of educational practice. For example, only one of the schools visited indicated that it teaches Mathematics and only three indicated that it taught Khmer Language. Thus, if a Cham child attended Islamic schools exclusively, he or she would receive instruction in neither maths nor Khmer Language, which are core subjects in the state schools. In addition, many of the *tuans* who teach at the Islamic Schools seem to have highly variable levels of education themselves with many indicating that they had only studied to the level of primary education. This is at odds with Cambodia's efforts to raise the basic education level of all primary school teachers to 12 years, which is a requirement for entry to PTTCs. Furthermore, most *tuans* at Islamic Schools do not appear to have been trained in pedagogical techniques that are appropriate to young children, raising further questions about standards of educational practice there. Thus, the MoEYS is faced with an increasingly large proportion of children who are abandoning the state schools to attend a parallel school system that is not regulated in any direct way to ensure minimum standards of educational practice. This should be of concern to all.

Current Educational Responses to the Special Situation of the Cham Community

There have been few educational development programs that have focused specifically on the needs of the Cham community. As noted several times in this report, there has historically been a general assumption made by both government and donors that the Chams are no different from ethnic Khmer children; however, a review of language proficiency levels as well as varied parental expectations relating to cultural issues suggest that this is not true.

Encouraged by greater interest in minority issues by government and the growing realization that achievement of EFA enrolment goals by 2015 will not be possible unless strenuous efforts are made to reach out to minority groups, USAID engaged selected partner agencies to develop a program that responded to the educational needs of Cham children in Kampong Cham. The program, known as ESCUP, began in 2005 and is scheduled to be phased out at the end of 2008, having achieved its goal of piloting effective interventions targeted at ethnic minority groups. The ESCUP Program is currently the only program in Cambodia providing specialized educational interventions for the Cham community. All of the interventions piloted have been focused on improving the responsiveness of the state education system to the expectations of the Cham community. Interventions supported by the program fall into three categories: (i) classroom-focused (ii) structural; and (iii) community-focused.

Classroom Focused Interventions: Classroom-focused interventions include mainly the use of what are known as Bilingual Classroom Assistants or BCAs in classrooms with a large proportion of Cham children. BCAs do not provide direct instruction to children but rather assist an ethnic Khmer teacher who cannot speak Cham to provide special help to young Cham children. The use of this intervention gets around the government prohibition of using a non-Khmer language for direct instruction in state schools and is also useful in classrooms, which are heterogeneous in their ethnic make-up. The assistance provided by BCAs may include translation for Cham children and one-on-one assistance for particular learning tasks. BCAs are bilingual volunteers who are recruited from the local community. They receive about \$15/month in payment for the assistance that they provide. They also receive about five days of intensive training in pedagogical issues and periodic technical support throughout the school year. In general, BCAs are fielded only at the Grade 1 level, which is when Khmer language proficiency among Cham children is weakest. The intervention was developed with direct clearance from MoEYS and has actually received strong endorsement from high-ranking educational officials.

Education Structure Focused Interventions: Interventions relating to structural changes in the education system focus mainly on increasing the representation of Chams in the teaching force in the state schools. This is done through advocacy (mainly recruitment drives and scholarships) in the selection of minority candidates for PTTC entry and also through locally led initiatives to recruit Community Teachers to work in state schools in response to severe teacher shortages in the province. The recruitment of Community Teachers by local communities themselves ensures greater representation of minority groups among teachers, which in turn often leads to *de facto* bilingual education in the classroom; as such teachers have great facility in moving back and forth between Cham and Khmer Language during instruction. Both PTTC scholarship activities and the recruitment of Community Teachers have received strong support from MoEYS. The original design of these two interventions intended for graduating PTTC candidates to replace Community Teachers after two years of study. However, the need for Community Teachers has been so great that it is unlikely that there will be enough PTTC graduates to go around. This has led to intensive advocacy efforts to enable Community Teachers to take certifying examinations that would allow them to become state teachers. This has proven to be very difficult as the MoEYS requires clearance from the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF) to allow these individuals to be placed permanently on the state payroll, a very difficult process.

A third intervention focusing on structural change to accommodate the needs of minority groups relates to the construction of what are known as Intermediate Classrooms (ICRs). These are temporary buildings made of local materials (mainly thatch covering a wooden frame) that can be built quickly in remote areas with no access to education. As noted above, distance to a state school was cited by Islamic Schools as a leading cause for the preference for the latter. These one-room, intermediate classroom structures are generally staffed by a Community Teacher and enable educational service provision within a very short period of time. This approach is vastly superior to cumbersome school construction projects, which usually take years to complete from the time of program start-up through environmental impact assessments, actual construction, and eventual registration with government, excluding the additional time required to staff such structures with state teachers. In combination with the provision of Community Teachers and community mobilization activities, it has been found that support for ICRs can reach a large number of children in a very short period of time (six to eight weeks). After their establishment, they generate a local culture of school attendance and eventually put these remote areas on the radar screen for more formalized school construction by Government or an international development bank. ICRs can, therefore, play a crucial role in jump-starting an important process leading to expanded educational provision in remote areas where minority groups tend to be found in large numbers.

Community-focused Interventions: Another genre of interventions designed to improve the engagement of Cham groups in the state education system can generally be described as community outreach activities. These activities include such things as Cultural Life Skills, Cultural Centers, and general Community Mobilization. Cultural Life Skills activities are extra-curricular classes relating to cultural topics that are taught by an ethnic minority community teacher. Classes usually occur two hours per week and are intended to heighten responsiveness of state schools to local expectations with respect to local culture. Topics include traditional musical instruments, fish net weaving, and local handicrafts. Although the program had wished to include Cham language and Koranic studies as additional cultural life skills, this was thought to be too sensitive since the activities occur on the grounds of the state school. The development of Cultural Centers is an intervention that was borrowed from Save the Children/Norway's program in a neighboring province. Cultural centers are intended to provide a visible cultural point in the school to facilitate community meetings, student culture clubs, and display of cultural artifacts. Finally, Community Mobilization activities complement some of the interventions mentioned earlier such as community-led recruitment of Community Teachers, BCAs, and ICR construction.

The assessment of the activities described above has generally been positive. For example, schools with BCA interventions have reported an average rate of decline in dropout from baseline levels of 2% while repetition has decreased by 9%. The local recruitment of PTTC candidates and Community Teachers has dramatically increased the representation of Cham teachers in state schools as seen in Tables 14 and 15. In addition, these additions of Community Teachers have led to dramatic declines in Pupil Teacher Ratios from a baseline of 73:1 to 58:1 with attendant effects on school capacity, access, and quality (ESCUP, 2007b).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Impressions and Discussion

The key research question investigated under this study relates to the degree to which Cham children are receiving educational services from the state school system and the factors that affect provision of such services. Because there was little in the way of direct statistics on participation rates and efficiency indicators for this target group, it has only been possible to make conclusions based on inference and indirect data reviewed in the course of compiling this report. For example, it may not be a coincidence that the three or four districts with the highest repetition and dropout rates and lowest participation rates in the province chosen for this study also have significant numbers of minority children. In addition, there would appear to be serious issues in the provision of educational services that have not only been suggested by low levels of educational efficiency and language proficiency in Cham areas. Rather, there are also increasing concerns suggested obliquely by Cham parents about what and how they would like their children to be learning and, which they are clearly not getting from the state schools. These expectations relate to instruction in and about their native language, the tenets of Islam, and the importance that attaches to the ability of teachers to be able to speak the Cham language to their children. There is also latent resentment about prohibitions against wearing the traditional scarf among Cham girls and co-ed seating arrangements in state school classrooms. With selected survey data indicating that only about 1% of state teachers are of Cham ethnicity, even in heavily populated Cham areas, there is a potentially great problem in terms of disaffection between the Cham community and the state schools, since it is unlikely that ethnic Khmer teachers can easily see things from the perspective of Cham parents. On the other hand, the failure of state schools to meet community expectations does not appear to be one of intentional discrimination either, but rather one of omission. That is, the state education system does not intentionally do things to discriminate against Cham children, but yet does not appear to be very sensitized to their needs and expectations.

The attitude of the state school system in terms of its response to minority community needs is largely constrained by national policy, which is sometimes unclear and contradictory. On the one hand, the Royal Cambodian Government has made a commitment to address the special needs of minority groups in its National EFA Plan and is a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which protects the rights of minority children. However, the MoEYS does not have a clear or standard policy about Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education, the number of years that it will allow bilingual education in the state schools (e.g., one-year language bridge, three-year bridge, etc.) or to what extent bilingual instruction may occur in the state schools at all. Indeed, bilingual education is not explicitly mentioned as a desirable intervention for minority groups in the National EFA Plan. RGC also does not recognize certain groups such as the Cham as an ethnic minority so that whatever existing provisions there are to meet minority language needs through bilingual education do not pertain to what are known officially as *Khmer Islam* groups, since they are considered to be Khmer. Because policies relating to minority issues are set at national level, local

educational authorities have little latitude in making changes in either the language of instruction or curriculum, since these are sensitive issues that relate to national sovereignty. There are also apprehensions about foreigners meddling in such matters since such activities are often construed as challenging Cambodia's sovereignty over its internal affairs. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the MoEYS has also shown great flexibility for projects working with Cham populations and have demonstrated appreciation for close consultation and also endorsed specialized bilingual education interventions that are aimed at Cham children (so long as they do not challenge strictures on the medium of instruction and curriculum content).

This study has also sought to assess the completeness of educational service for the Cham community in the broader context of how they view their role in Cambodian society as well as how they view themselves as a community. The data generated by these investigations presents a complex picture. The Cham community in Kampong Cham clearly has a strong sense of its own identity, but is highly deferential to the majority ethnic group and does not wish to cause friction through advocacy activities that may be perceived as self-serving. Thus, the Cham community seems to feel that the state education system does not really belong to them and is not particularly responsive to their cultural needs as a distinct group; at the same time, they also feel that this unresponsiveness is all right. Rather than risking possible friction with the majority community, which dominates the state schools, the Chams seem to be turning to their own devices to meet their desires for their children's education. This device is increasingly taking the form of independent Islamic Schools, which seem to be increasing in number rapidly.

Although a majority (that is, more than half) of Cham children still seem to attend both state and Islamic Schools, there would appear to be a pattern of increasing defection of Cham parents from the state schools, according to key informants in Islamic Schools. Such defections should be something of growing concern to government, given the major role that the state schools play in building a common national identity in Cambodian society. It is admittedly difficult, however, for government to acknowledge that there is a problem since doing so may require concessions in terms of curricula, the medium of instruction, and general control, which may in turn be very threatening given what is going on in other countries in the region. To be sure, it is highly unlikely that MoEYS would make major changes in the current policy about Cham language instruction and religion in the state schools in any case, given recent tendencies towards retrenchment that is occurring with respect bilingual education activities. It is also unlikely that local communities will feel themselves to be in a position to advocate for these expectations given their insecurities about their role in Cambodian society, which ensures the strong likelihood for a parallel education system to emerge alongside the state schools. As things stand currently, this parallel system has absolutely no oversight from government including review of curriculum content, standards for teacher qualifications with respect to pedagogical competence and minimum education levels, or operational standards. This is far from an ideal situation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been formulated for relevant agencies working in Kampong Cham and local government officials to take under consideration for purposes of future programming to meet the needs of Cham minority children.

Sustained Funding of Bilingual Education Interventions Acceptable to MoEYS: Local and international agencies should start intensive dialogues with local government to find ways that would make acceptable bilingual education interventions designed for the Cham populations (e.g., Bilingual

Education Assistants) sustainable in the long-term. Such means might include accessing commune investment funds, which are supposed to be available for social services and not just infrastructure.

Language Proficiency Topics in the Curriculum of Teacher Training Colleges: Related to the above, it might be advisable to discuss with government the possibility of including instruction on discrete methodologies on working with minority children with limited Khmer language proficiency for prospective teachers enrolled at provincial teacher training colleges.

Multi-cultural Education: Pilot activities relating to multi-cultural education in selected schools in collaboration with local education authorities. Such activities could begin with a foundational workshop that defines local cultural needs (for both Khmers and Chams) and then identifies concrete activities to address those needs. Possible interventions may include affirmative action in the selection of teachers, culture-focused youth clubs, and cultural life skills. Similar modules about promoting cultural understanding in society might also be included on an extracurricular basis in the training program for teacher training college candidates.

Affirmative Action for Teacher Candidate Recruitment: The ESCUP Program has already made a good start in recruiting more Cham candidates into teacher training colleges through added incentives in the form of scholarships, special quotas for Chams, and local recruitment in mosques. These efforts should be extended beyond the life of the ESCUP Program and should link up with recent opportunities for more flexible teacher recruitment recently announced by MoEYS. These opportunities refer to a new policy allowing 9+2 recruitment in communes suffering from acute teacher shortages in selected provinces.⁸

More Active Sensitization of State Schools to Very Basic Cultural Expectations: There are several common practices in place in the state schools that are not subject to national policy strictures (such as language and curriculum), but which do much to annoy Cham parents. These relate to co-ed seating in classrooms and uniform rules that do not accommodate the use of the head-scarf among Cham girls. These practices seem to needlessly create antipathy between the state schools and the Cham community. It would not be difficult to request state schools to accommodate local expectations that boys are not seated next to each other in classrooms and that Cham girls are allowed to wear scarves. Very small measures such as these might be significant in their impact on Cham perceptions of the state schools.

Building a Bridge between State and Islamic Schools: This study has voiced concerns about the emerging parallel nature of education services provided by the state schools and independent Islamic Schools. It is suggested that regular forums for discussion between the two school systems be sponsored by third parties, such as a project or agency working in the province. These discussions could lead to concrete forms of future collaboration. Such collaboration could include allowing *tuans* to attend methodology training workshops to improve their teaching (e.g. ESCUP sponsors such workshops every summer vacation); access to teaching aids and textbooks used in the state schools (e.g., for Islamic Schools that teach Mathematics or Khmer Language), etc. Collaboration of this nature would help establish official channels of communication and a more formalized link between the two school systems.

⁸ Teacher recruitment in Cambodia has traditionally been governed under a 12+2 regime, which means that candidates must have completed 12 years of basic education as an eligibility requirement for entry to a teacher training college. These strictures have now been relaxed for a period of three years with effect from 2007 to address continuing shortages of teachers.

Extracurricular Possibilities of Cham Language Instruction in Association with the State Schools: It is clear that Cham language instruction is not allowed as part of the regular state curriculum and this cannot be changed. It may be possible, however, to introduce such instruction on an extracurricular basis in association with the state schools (e.g., use of state classrooms in the evening). Community Teachers could be recruited to provide this instruction. The attraction of sponsoring such activities is that they would demonstrate responsiveness of the state schools to a very real community desire and increase ownership of the state schools. The organization of such activities, however, would need to be discussed carefully with the Provincial Office of Education and may require clearance from the central Ministry.

References

- Bernard, A., (2005), Evaluation of UNICEF's Child-Friendly School Project in Cambodia, Phnom Penh: UNICEF/Sida.
- Bredenberg, K. (2004), Cambodia Secondary Education Study: Educational Demand in the Basic Education Sector and Strategies for Enhancement, Phnom Penh: World Bank.
- Collins, W., (1996) The Chams of Cambodia: Interdisciplinary Research on Ethnic Groups in Cambodia, Phnom Penh: Center for Advanced Study.
- Committee on the Rights of the Child (2000), Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Cambodia. 28 June 2000, UN Human Rights Website.
- Dept of Planning, Kampong Cham, (2005 & 2007) Provincial Profile, Kampong Cham: SEILA.
- Dept of Sects & Religion (2007), Statistical Table of Mosques, Sarav, and Muslims, Kampong Cham.
- EMIS, (2002-06), Education Statistics and Indicators, Phnom Penh: MoEYS.
- ESCUP (2006a), Language Proficiency Survey Results among Minority Children in Selected Areas (Unpublished), Phnom Penh: World Education-KAPE.
- ESCUP, (2006b), Third Quarterly Report, Phnom Penh: American Institutes for Research
- ESCUP, (2006c), Fifth Quarterly Report, Phnom Penh: American Institutes for Research
- ESCUP, (2007a), Seventh Quarterly Report, Phnom Penh: American Institutes for Research
- ESCUP, (2007b), Second Annual Report, Phnom Penh: American Institutes for Research/World Ed.
- Geeves, R. & Bredenberg, K. (2005), Contract Teachers in Cambodia, Phnom Penh: World Bank.
- Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (2003), Circular 530 (yk.bs), Article 3, Phnom Penh: Royal Government of Cambodia.
- National EFA Secretariat, (2003), National EFA Plan, Phnom Penh: MoEYS.
- Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, (2007), Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia, Geneva: UN OHCHR.
- Office of Special Education, (2006) Report on Official Field Visit to ESCUP Sites in Kratie and Kampong Cham, 16-19 May 2006, Phnom Penh: MoEYS.
- Provincial Teacher Training College, Kampong Cham (2002-06), PTTC Candidate Intake Lists, Kampong Cham: PTTC.
- Trankell, I.B. and Ovesen, J., (2004) Muslim Minorities in Cambodia, NIASnytt, No. 4.
- Wheeler, C., (1998), Rebuilding Technical Capacity in Cambodia, Phnom Penh: UNICEF/Sida.
- World Education, (2005), Memorandum of Understanding for ESCUP, Phnom Penh: MoEYS.