

April | 2012

Explaining the Continued Presence of Orphanages in Battambang Province, Cambodia

**KCD-Hart Fellows Program Collaboration
Battambang, Cambodia
2011-2012**

1. INTRODUCTION

According to a 2009 UNICEF statistic, there are an estimated 630,000 orphans in Cambodia. 12,000 children currently reside in orphanages. Although some institutions provide services specific to the needs of certain populations of vulnerable children (victims of sexual trafficking, HIV, street children, and children with disabilities), a 2011 UNICEF report revealed that most of the 12,000 children in Cambodia's orphanages are not double orphans. According to UNICEF, almost three quarters of them have one living parent (only 28% of children in orphanages have lost both parents).¹ The number of children in care has more than doubled in five years. According to UNICEF, the number of orphanage centers has nearly doubled to 269 facilities in the same period (just 21 of those are run by the government; the rest are funded and run by foreign donors and faith-based organizations). UNICEF's chief of communications, Marc Vergara has indicated that "a lot of this increase is due to funding from overseas, and we find that with the best intentions people who try to help orphanages in Cambodia through funding are actually contributing to separating children from their families." In 2006, the Kingdom of Cambodia adopted the Policy on Alternative Care for Children, which "aims to ensure that children grow up in a family and in a community environment that promotes the principle that institutional care should be a last resort and a temporary solution for children."² In light of the 2011 UNICEF report that demonstrated the failure of this principle to stem the increasing trend of opening and placing children in institutional care facilities, the Cambodian government has begun an investigation of the country's orphanages.³

In Cambodia's northwest province of Battambang, the number of orphanages registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) has more than tripled from 11 to 42 since 2000.⁴ There are 23 institutions registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Of 23 institutions, two have opened up multiple branches within the past 5 years—18 branches in total between the two—to bring the total number of officially registered orphanages in Battambang Province to 42. In response to this apparent discrepancy between national policy and the increase in numbers of institutions since 2006, a need has grown to better understand from the communities' perspective the reasons for such institutional expansion in Battambang Province.⁵ This qualitative study seeks to better understand some of the reasons for residential

¹ Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. *A Study of Attitudes Towards Residential Care in Cambodia 2011*. October 2011. http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Study_Attitudes_towards_RC.pdf

² *ibid*

³ Carmichael, Robert. "UNICEF: Cambodia's orphans not really orphans." *Deutsche Welle*, 3/24/2011. <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,6481673,00.html>

⁴ While 42 represents the number of legally-registered institutions in the province, the principal investigator learned over the duration of the project that a handful of informal institutions exist which are not registered with MoSVY. Historically, pagodas have provided spiritual and temporal sanctuary for children, and in addition to children who are admitted to pagodas to receive religious education, a number of temples will also provide informal care for orphans and vulnerable children. In addition to this long established Buddhist practice of pagoda-based care (monks caring for children with temple grounds), in recent years, other religious houses of worship—such as Christian churches—have also begun to provide sanctuary for orphans and vulnerable children.

⁵ While Battambang witnessed a remarkable increase in institutions between 2000 and 2010, it is important to note that this rate of institutional expansion has been sharply reduced after the implementation of the 2006 Policy on Alternative Care for Children, specifically between 2010 to present. Thus, new institutions are no longer being established, but the need remains to understand the continued existence of these many Battambang institutions, the reasons for their establishment, and their evolution over time.

care expansion in the province: Has the increase in institutions over the past decade been demand-driven? Are poor rural families opting to send their children to institutions because they can't care for these children or because, even though the care that the family was able to provide was adequate, the family envisions a better life for the child in an institution? To what extent are family and community-based options available and explored before institutionalization of orphans and vulnerable children? Through interviews conducted with the directors of a random sample of long-term and newly established institutions in Battambang Province, this qualitative study seeks to identify some of the reasons why children are sent to orphanages to live as well as to understand the attitudes of those stakeholders who are influencing the rise in institutions in the province. The results of this study could prove useful to MoSVY, local authorities, UNICEF, and other government organizations and foreign NGOs who work to promote the welfare of orphans and vulnerable children as well as poverty stricken families.

2. METHODS

Qualitative research was conducted through ten semi-structured interviews with directors of Battambang institution. One of these ten interviews was conducted with a social worker that has worked at the institution since its establishment. Prior to contacting directors to gauge their interest in participating in the study, all 42 institutions (23 institutions and their branches) were first categorized based on four criteria to ensure assessment of a representative sample of residential care institutions: size (small/large), old/new, foreign or local-run, religious or non-religious institutions. After institutions were categorized along these criteria, 15 institutions were randomly selected to participate in the study and 15 directors were contacted by email and in-person to determine their interest in project participation. If a director declined to participate, another institution was randomly selected for the study. Four of the 15 institutions originally contacted agreed to participate in the study. Ultimately all directors were contacted for participation in this study. In-person and electronic follow-up was performed over a period of three months. Although the original goal of the principal investigator was to conduct interviews with 15 of the 42 institution directors, only ten directors finally consented to be interviewed for the study (some directors refused to be interviewed for the study but were interested in attending the April roundtable discussion of research findings, open to all Battambang directors as well as local authorities, MoSVY, and UNICEF representatives). Directors who declined to participate in the study cited a number of reasons for their refusal, from "too busy" to needing permission from executive leadership in Phnom Penh or abroad (United States). During preliminary "meet and greet" discussions to gauge directors' interest in project participation, a few directors inquired as to whether UNICEF was to be involved in the research study. In light of the 2011 UNICEF report⁶ that deplored the discrepancy between the pro-family/community-based care national policy and the reality of countrywide institution expansion, and UNICEF's ultimate goal of deinstitutionalization, it appears that fear of possible government and UNICEF backlash was a reason why some directors refused to participate in the study.

Ethics and IRB approval was obtained from Duke University prior to contacting institutions. Written consent was obtained for all participants before beginning the interviews and participants were informed that they had the right to not participate in the study, the right to

⁶ Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. *A Study of Attitudes Towards Residential Care in Cambodia 2011*. October 2011. http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Study_Attitudes_towards_RC.pdf

stop the interview at any time, and the right to confidentiality (it was explained to directors that neither their names nor the names of their institution would be directly identifiable in the final report). Each semi-structured qualitative interview consisted of 23 questions; additional questions and probes were asked to clarify a response to one of these prepared questions. The 23 interview questions related to the origin and funding sources of the institutions, the services provided to children by the institutions, the socio-economic background of children who reside at the institutions, the type of outreach done by each institution to target orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), and the director's perception of the rise in institutions over the decade (interview questions are provided in Appendix A). The assistance of a translator was required in two instances when the English language skills of the directors were not sufficiently nuanced to provide comprehensive, in-depth responses to the questions.

One limitation of this study was the limited number of newly established institutions that agreed to participate in the study⁷—only 5 institutions founded on or after 2000 agreed to participate, and only 4 institutions established within the past decade participated. Thus, this study is a priori limited in its understanding of how new institutions obtained official permission to open in light of the 2006 government Policy on Alternative Care for Children. However, despite the drawbacks of having a majority of “established” participants, each interview provided insight into the evolution of the process of accepting OVC in residential care as well as into how institutions are responding to harsher government restrictions on childcare placement. Furthermore, aside from the 2011 UNICEF study, for which 14 institution directors in five different Cambodian provinces were interviewed⁸, this study is the most comprehensive in terms of the number of institution directors interviewed in Battambang province. As MoSVY moves to curb the expansion of institutions in Cambodia, a thorough understanding of each institution's perception of the community need vis-à-vis vulnerable children and the case-by-case scenarios that bring children to institutions is required.

TABLE 1: CATEGORIZATION OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Name	Size^{9*}	Date founded¹⁰	Religious/non-religious	Foreign/Local- Run
Institution 1	Large	Before 2005	Non-religious	Local-run (government and foreign-funded)
Institution 2	Small	Post 2005	Non-religious	Foreign-run (foreign-funded)
Institution 3	Small	Post 2005	Religious	Local-run (foreign, church-based funding)
Institution 4	Small	Before 2005	Non-religious	Local-run (local funds; indirectly foreign-funded)

⁷ For the purposes of this study, a “recently” established institution is one established within the past decade (2002-present).

⁸ In addition to the 14 directors, focus groups involving nearly 1000 participants and interviews with hundreds of stakeholders were also completed for this study.

⁹ For the purposes of this study, institutions with over 50 children in residence were considered “large” institutions.

¹⁰ Date founded refers to the date the residential center was created. For example, some institutions were founded at an earlier date, but later established a children's care center.

Institution 5	Large	Post 2005	Non-religious	Local-run (foreign-funding)
Institution 6	Large	Before 2005	Non-religious	Local-run (foreign-funding)
Institution 7	Large	Before 2005	Religious	Local-run (foreign funding, mostly church based)
Institution 8	Small	Before 2005	Non-religious	Local-run (foreign funding)
Institution 9	Large	Before 2005	Religious	Local-run (foreign government funding)
Institution 10	Small	Post 2005	Non-religious	Local-run (foreign funding)

3. FINDINGS

Due to the qualitative nature of this interview, the findings of this study will be presented along thematic lines. Trends that emerged during the interviews will be presented and explicated in the following pages.

DIRECTORS' LENGTH OF TIME AT INSTITUTION

With the exception of one director who has been working for two years at his/her respective institution, all directors have either worked at their respective institution since its establishment or for a period of time greater than 10 years. In one instance, the director of the institution was originally an orphan there and then continued on to work for and eventually manage the institution.

The purpose of sharing this statistic is to demonstrate that the directors interviewed for this study are very knowledgeable about the history of their organizations, the socio-economic backgrounds of the children admitted, the evolution of residential care-government relations, and the evolving needs of community members vis-à-vis residential care. 7/10 institution directors have been working at their respective institutions for 10 years or more. Of the remaining three institutions, 2/3 directors have been working at the institution since its creation. Again, this indicates a deep level of knowledge about the history of the organization, the reasons for founding the institution, and finally, the needs of the community.

REASON FOR OPENING

- 2/10 institutions opened due to the high number of orphans in the community. One of these two institutions was opened in the immediate aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime, precisely because of the number of children orphaned between the 1975-1979 period.
- 3/10 institutions opened to care for poor and vulnerable children.
 - Specifically, one of these two institutions specified that at the time of its founding, no institutions were supporting the poorest and most vulnerable community members in Battambang province; this institution supports poor children and their families with educational and well-being services and will only accept children to live at the center as the final options (after all other options have been explored). In other words, the institution was established to serve the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community with family support and educational programs and not originally to provide residential care for its target population.
 - The third institution was first established in the 1990s at a Thai refugee camp, using art as a medium to overcome the traumas of the war and camp life. However, in early

- 2000, this organization expanded its programming and established a care center for poor and vulnerable children to reside on a case-by-case basis.
- 1/10 institutions opened to serve families displaced after the Khmer Rouge regime. Over time, the institution began to bring children to live at the institution because they had no access to education and health services in their respective communities.
 - 1/10 institutions was created to meet the educational needs of community.
 - 2/10 institutions grew out of need to care for street children (provide a place for them to stay at night).
 - 1/10 institutions was established to care exclusively for Muslim OVC in Battambang province.
 - **Note:** While each institution provides services for orphans (orphans as defined by UNICEF), currently 0/10 institutions support *only* orphaned children. 5/10 institutions were originally established to meet the need of orphans; however, the criteria for accepting children into residential care has evolved over time to include other target populations such as OVC, trafficked children, poor children, and HIV positive children.

TABLE 2: REASON FOR INSTITUTION'S ESTABLISHMENT

Name	Reason for Opening
Institution 1	To answer the community's need to care for the many orphans in Battambang province.
Institution 2	To support the poorest and most vulnerable children (many organizations focus on certain populations such as trafficked children, HIV+ children, or street children; no institution addressed the needs of the of the most vulnerable children that don't fit into these categories).
Institution 3	To care for poor children from the villages who had no access to education or whose parents had abandoned them to find work in Thailand.
Institution 4	To care for children who were orphaned after the Pol Pot regime.
Institution 5	To meet the educational needs of the community.
Institution 6	To provide support for street children. In 2000, this institution began to provide services to children and youth who had been sexually trafficked in Thailand and later repatriated to Cambodia.
Institution 7	To serve displaced families after the war; however, the purpose has evolved over the years to bring children to the institution to receive an education (not available in the villages)
Institution 8	To provide shelter and services to Battambang street children.
Institution 9	To support Muslim orphans who were street kids —first Muslim organization in Battambang to serve the needs of the Muslim community.
Institution 10	To support OVC and very poor children on a case-by-case basis.

FUNDING SOURCES

- 10/10 institutions receive funding from foreign sources. 9/10 of these institutions receive funds directly from foreign sources (private and government sources), and 1/10 institutions receives funds indirectly from foreign sources.
- Only 1/10 institutions receives Cambodian *government* funds. This same institution also receives funding from a private French organization.

- 2/10 institutions receive funds from COSECAM, a Khmer organization whose function is to distribute foreign funds to various Cambodian NGOs; in other words, these institutions are indirectly supported by private, foreign, and mostly French funds.
 - One of these two organizations relies solely on funding from this local organization.
 - The second of these institutions receives funds from a mix of private, foreign charities; UNICEF; the World Food Program; in addition to the local Khmer organization.
- 2/10 institutions are supported by foreign churches.
- 2/10 institutions are supported by a foreign government: one institution is entirely funded by the Kuwaiti government, and the second institution receives a small amount of funding from the Australian government in addition to private Australian funds.
- **Note:** It should be noted that all institutions but one receive some form of *private* foreign funds. The following chart shows the breakdown in funding sources:

TABLE 3: INSTITUTIONS SOURCES OF FUNDING

Name	Source of Funding
Institution 1	Cambodian government and French organization
Institution 2	US, German, and Swiss donors
Institution 3	Church groups in America and Europe
Institution 4	COSECAM (Khmer NGO, which receives French donations and distributes them accordingly).
Institution 5	Australian donors; some money from the Australian government
Institution 6	Private French funds; UNICEF; other small foreign organizations.
Institution 7	Private funds from many countries and some churches
Institution 8	UNICEF, WFP, small foreign charities, COSECAM
Institution 9	Kuwaiti government
Institution 10	French organizations

REINTEGRATION AS A MAIN OBJECTIVE

This study sought to understand how “reintegration as a main objective” of Battambang institutions has changed since 2006, when the Kingdom of Cambodia adopted the Policy on Alternative Care for Children. This policy “aims to ensure that children grow up in a family and in a community environment that promotes the principle that institutional care should be a last resort and a temporary solution for children.”

- 4/10 organizations state reintegration as a main objective of the institution; the residential care provided by the institution is seen only as a last and temporary resort for the child.
 - Two of these institutions were established to serve a specific target population, specifically street children and victims of sex trafficking. *Reintegration is and has always been the main objective of these organizations.* The two institutions will first

try to reintegrate children into their families if possible; kinship care (relatives or foster families) is the second option, and community-based care is the third option. Until an appropriate arrangement can be made, temporary residential care (up to three years maximum) is provided these two institutions. When a child is reintegrated into his/her family or community, each of the two institutions will conduct a follow-up for a period of one year.

- One institution cited reintegration as an ultimate goal but warned that MoSVY should not rush the reintegration process; instead, the director encouraged reintegration to be sought on a case-by-case basis.
- 6/10 institutions clearly stated that reintegration is not their first objective but worked slowly toward reintegration into the family and/or community.
 - 1/10 institutions cited “difficulty” in reintegrating children back into their families.
 - 2/10 institutions stated that the focus should be on education first.
 - 1/10 institutions does not want to reintegrate children into at-risk situations; this institution only accepts children as a last resort when neither family nor community-based care is an option. Instead, this organization seeks to slowly rebuild the child’s relationship with his/her family.
 - 1/10 institutions does not cite reintegration as a main objective but explains that sometimes parents who relocate to Thailand for work will come back to Battambang province to take back their children. This director feared that in these instances the children would not be provided the same education and healthcare services they were provided at the institution.
 - 1/10 institutions did not specify why reintegration is not a main objective; however, this institution did explain that it does not seek to sever the child’s relationship with his family as “...they [children] need to go back” eventually.

REASONS PARENTS/GUARDIANS CITE FOR ADMITTANCE

Most institutions cite a number of reasons why parents/guardians bring their children to institutions, ranging from poverty and inability to meet the educational needs of children to domestic abuse and sex trafficking.

- 9/10 institutions cite poverty as one of the reasons parents give for sending their children to institutions. This abject level of poverty hinders a family’s ability to provide basic health care and education for their children.
- 2/10 institution directors explained that some parents must work during the day and cannot leave their children alone at home because neighbors and other members of the community might pose a risk to these children. These two institutions informed the principal investigator that children at their respective institutions had been raped and abused at the hands of neighbors while their parents were out working.
- 2/10 institutions admit HIV positive children in addition to OVC and poor children, and thus, inability to care for an HIV positive child is cited as the reason for admittance.
- 1/10 institution stated that while previously children had been admitted for a variety of reasons (poverty, HIV/AIDS, OVC, etc.), the new MoSVY policy has restricted the institution to accepting only those children who have no other family/community-based recourse.
- The following table reflects the reasons cited by parents/guardians for a child’s placement in institutional care:

TABLE 4: REASONS CITED FOR PLACEMENT IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

Name	Reason parents/guardians place child in institutional care
Institution 1	Poverty
Institution 2	In many cases the parents/guardians of abused and sex trafficked children are pressured by local authorities to place their children in institution 2's care; in these cases of abuse, parents will cite "financial hardship" as a face-saving measure.
Institution 3	Poverty
Institution 4	Poverty (main reason). Other reasons: parents must work during the day and it is not safe for the children to stay at home; children need safe place to grow up and learn.
Institution 5	Poverty, HIV/AIDS, Orphans with no other recourse.
Institution 6	Trafficked children, street children, and domestically-abused children (these children need a safe, temporary refuge before reintegration)
Institution 7	Poverty, inability to meet the education and security needs of child
Institution 8	Poverty, street children, abusive households
Institution 9	Poverty and lack of educational opportunities in the household
Institution 10	Poverty, domestic violence, street children, OVC, HIV/AIDS

CHANGES IN NUMBER OF CHILDREN ADMITTED TO INSTITUTIONAL CARE

- 4/10 institutions noted a general decrease in the number of children admitted over time.
 - 2/10 of these institutions cited the MoSVY policy as a factor in this trend and indicated that they are working to extend their services to vulnerable children and families in the community.
 - A third institution takes a specific number of children in a given year and raises those children until they are 18 years of age or ready to begin professional work/vocational training. In 2005 40 children were admitted; 5 children still remain. In 2012, this institution will admit a new group of children; this time only 15 will be admitted. It should be noted that while the number of children residing at this institution has not increased, the number of different provincial branches opened by this institution has increased.
- 2/10 institutions did not cite a specific pattern/trend over the years and explained that the number of children admitted fluctuates from year to year.
 - One of these institutions does not seek to increase the number of children admitted each year nor does it even seek to keep steady the number of children admitted each year. Any growth would be in the community outreach sector, not in the residential services sector.

- 1/10 institutions indicated that the number has remained about the same since 2006. Between 2005 and 2006 an influx in the number of families leaving to work in Thailand resulted in many children being trafficked to Thailand. Since 2006, however, IOM reports that the number of trafficked children has remained about the same.
- 3/10 institutions indicated an increase over the years in the number of children admitted to institutional care.
 - One institution indicated that the number of children admitted varies from year to year, but that last year marked a notable increase, possibly due to the fact that many families were leaving Cambodia to find work in Thailand.
 - The second institution admitted around 70 children when first established, and now provides residential services to 104 children.
 - The third institution cared for 18 children when first established, and now provides residential care to 50 (two years ago 70 children were living at the institution, but this number was deemed too large to provide quality care; the number was thus reduced to 50).

SCREENING PROCESS and LIASING WITH MOSA

All 10 institutions work closely with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) before accepting a child. Specifically, *each* institution's social worker(s) must work with a number of local, district, and ministry officials before admitting an orphan/vulnerable child. One institution mentioned that in years past it was possible to informally accept children to live at the institution, but that now the MoSVY policy is concrete; any deviation would result in severe penalties for the institution. Today the process involves a family assessment, completed by the institution's social worker as well as by local authorities and by a social worker from MoSVY. In terms of how institutions learn about the needs of the community and a child's need for institutional care:

- 8/10 institutions are contacted by either local authorities (commune and village chiefs) or MoSVY social workers in order to determine the possibility of admitting a child. In other words, these six institutions do not "advertise" their services within the community; they are approached by authorities and aid organizations.
- 2/10 institutions (both religious) do "outreach" work in the community; they might do family assessments out in the villages and give needy families information about their respective institutions. However, even in these cases where MoSVY/aid organizations aren't approaching the institutions first, these institutions still must go through the proper protocol with MoSVY and local authorities before officially admitting a child.

NUMBER OF ORPHANS IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

The following table shows the number of orphans—as defined by UNICEF—currently residing at each institution. In only 2 institutions, 75% of the children are orphans. 2 other institutions claim that "most" of their children are orphans, but they do not provide a figure to substantiate this claim.

Name	Reason parents/guardians place child in institutional care
Institution 1	"Most"/110; exact figure not provided. 10% (11) have lost both parents.

Institution 2	12/24. The other 12 with parents come from highly abusive households.
Institution 3	1/5 (lost both parents)
Institution 4	27/35; 15/35 have one parent, 12/35 have lost both parents.
Institution 5	“Unclear”
Institution 6	22/52
Institution 7	16/ 52; 9/52 have lost both, 7/52 have lost one
Institution 8	25/33; 19/33 lost one parent, 6/33 lost both parents
Institution 9	“Most” have lost father
Institution 10	About 30% (~8/28)

PERCEPTION OF RISE IN INSTITUTIONS

- 4/10 institutions cited “expansion of religious institutions” as a reason why institutions have expanded in number over the past ten years. These four directors had a negative view of the increase in religious institutions and remarked that the main objective of these institutions was to proselytize Cambodian children, particularly those from the countryside. These directors also added that they were skeptical of claims made by religious institutions that children were not forced to practice Christianity. In total, three of the institutions included in this study are religious in nature: two Christian institutions and one Muslim one. Of these three, only one has multiple branches in Battambang. The other Christian institution was established in the 1980s. The Muslim institution only focuses on children within the Muslim community; so again, there is no real converting element to its work. None of the directors of these religious institutions cited an objective to convert children as a reason for admitting children or for establishing another institutional branch.
- 4/10 institutions cited people leaving to find work abroad as a reason why children are institutionalized. One director explained that institutional care is better than kinship care in these cases because with kinship care there is no guarantee of the child’s education.
- 3/10 institutions cited low level of education of parents as a reason why so many children are institutionalized. These parents do not know how to take care of their children and do not provide them with educational and health care needs. 1/10 institution directors reasoned that the vicious cycle of orphanage-dependence began after the war: orphanages were first established to meet the need of orphans in the aftermath of the Pol Pot regime; over time parents came to rely on these institutions to provide the basic needs of their children.

EDUCATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CARE

- 10/10 institutions cite education either as a reason why parents have sent their children to the institution, a reason why the institution was founded (the need of the community was for a child to have access to education), or as the perceived reason why there are so many

new institutions in Battambang (new institutions are created specifically to meet the educational needs of children, especially those from the countryside).

- 5/10 institutions cited “better access to education at an institution” as the, or one of the, perceived reasons why the number of institutions in Battambang has increased over the years. These directors explained that institutions provide a better life for poor children, especially children from the countryside whose uneducated parents do not know the value of education.
- 2/10 institutions cite “lack of educational opportunity” as the reason why parents send their children to live in institutions.
- 7/10 institutions cite “poverty”/“inability to provide adequate care” as the reason or one of the reasons why children are sent to live in institutions. Because public education in Cambodia is not technically free—students must pay for part-time classes (see appendix B)—education, in addition to basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare—is one of the services poverty-stricken families are unable to provide for their children.
- 1/10 institutions in many ways appears to operate as a boarding school: parents of children who are sent to this institution must pay a small amount of money each month or provide a food donation (ex: rice) to the institution. Orphaned children do not need to contribute monetarily or otherwise to their residence at the orphanage.
- 1/10 institutions was established specifically to meet the education needs of the community. While the original goal of this institution was to support all children through high school and even into college/vocational training, the new MOSA policy has made it nearly impossible for poor children to remain in institutional care unless there is no other recourse (i.e. family or community-based care). Fewer children are placed in institutional care, but through community outreach work, this institution still provides for the educational needs of children who were reintegrated into their families/community.

RESPONSE TO NEW MoSVY RULES

Over the course of the interviews, five of the ten institutions brought up the subject of MoSVY’s new policy to limit institutional expansion. All five institutions feel that MoSVY and UNICEF are correct to prefer that children be raised by their biological parents, but these directors recognize that the on the ground reality is that many children are at-risk in their current living situations (whether at home or in their communities). These directors argued that if MoSVY insists on keeping children with their parents, then follow-up by MoSVY and UNICEF will be required to ensure that the basic needs of children (according to the Convention of Children’s Rights) are being upheld. One institution, which lamented the lack of institutional funding to follow-up with all the children forced to reintegrate into their families, argued that UNICEF should provide NGOs with funds to monitor and follow-up with children and their families for a period of three years: one year is not sufficient to assess whether the emotional, physical, and educational needs of a child are met.

4. DISCUSSION

NATIONAL POLICY AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION DISCREPANCY

The national government and UNICEF are correct to question why the number of institutions in Cambodia has rapidly increased while the number of Cambodian single and double orphans has decreased. As presented in the findings section, only two of ten participating institutions are comprised mostly of orphans as defined by UNICEF (around 75% of the children at these institutions are orphans). The other eight organizations provide services to orphans in addition to mostly poor and vulnerable children; one of these organizations works specifically with trafficked children and street children. However, based on discussions with directors, there is clearly a discrepancy between the national policy to curb the expansion of orphanages and the implementation of this policy at the local level. Each participating institution cited close ties with local authorities (village and commune chiefs) as well as with MoSVY social workers in Battambang province. Furthermore, none of these institutions can admit children without official approval from local authorities and MoSVY, which further suggests perhaps a gray area between national policy vis-à-vis institutional expansion and the implementation of this policy at the local level. It would not be incorrect then to note that local authorities and MoSVY in Battambang appear to be key players in perpetuating the current trend of orphanage expansion despite the 2006 national policy to limit institutional expansion. This is not to say that local authorities and MoSVY are the cause of institutional expansion, but rather, that they facilitate this expansion rather than work to curb it.

Given this disconnect between national policy and on-the-ground realities, the frustration of directors (whose institutions support reintegration of the child into the community), who are now forced to rush the process of reintegration of vulnerable children into “potentially at-risk” families/communities, is understandable. Half of the directors introduced the issue of the national “crackdown” on institutions during the interview, without prompting by the principal investigator. These directors believe that determination of what’s in the child’s best interest should be done on a case-by-case basis, rather than a blanket policy that could potentially harm the child in the long run. One director expressed disapproval at MoSVY’s “overnight” policy, which the director attributes to UNICEF, and recommended that if UNICEF truly understood the realities of the situation, it would provide reintegration funding for longer than one year. According to this director, at least two or three years of child follow up is necessary, especially if the child has been reintegrated into a vulnerable neighborhood or into a family that is not his/her own. The concern some directors voiced, and a concern that has been addressed in a recent UNICEF report on community-based informal care,¹¹ is that without kinship ties or obligations the reintegrated child is at risk of abuse or exploitation. The UNICEF discussion paper on informal community-based care cites instances where wealthy families make servants of the children they provide care for. Furthermore, “the child’s presence in a non-kin family in the community may cause shame to the birth family” and could damage the relationship between the child and his/her parents and siblings.¹²

Better communication between local authorities and the national government and/or between directors and national authorities on this issue might help to illuminate which situations merit institutionalization of a child rather than reintegration into the family or community. Clearly local authorities are aware of the reasons why children are admitted to institutions, as a child’s

¹¹ http://www.unicef.org/protection/Informal_care_discussion_paper_final.pdf

¹² *ibid*

admittance to an institution is contingent upon approval from local authorities and MoSVY in Battambang province. In short, most institutions have indicated reintegration as a main objective and will only admit children on a case-by-case basis (and usually only as a last resort); these institutions, which demonstrate that reintegration into the community is not in the child's best interest, arguably make the case for the merits of a policy of institutional care on a *case-by-case basis*.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION AND EXPANSION OF ORPHANAGES

Almost all institutions cite the lack of access to education as a reason why children are sent to residential care. Some institutions—2/10—cited a lack of infrastructure in certain villages as the reason for restricted access to education. The remaining institutions cited a lack of money on the part of the family to pay for school supplies and part-time classes as the reason why parents opted to send their children to institutions. While children in Cambodia should be able to attend public school for free, primary and secondary teachers are so underpaid that they are forced to supplement their incomes by charging students to take informal part-time classes after school hours. These classes are not mandatory, but students who do not pay for part-time classes will not be able to keep up with the coursework (teachers purposefully do not teach all course material during official school hours) and will usually fail their classes or drop out of school. Please see appendix B for a detailed explanation of the part-time education system and the resulting inability of poor families to provide educational support to children. The data suggests institutional expansion cannot be attributed to the lack of educational opportunities for children, especially since a child's admittance to an institution must be approved by local authorities ("lack of access to education" would not be a legitimate reason to separate the child from his/her family); however, abject poverty has been grounds for admitting a child, provided institutional care is a temporary solution. It is likely that a child who comes from a poverty-stricken family was not provided proper access to *education*—among other basic needs such as food and healthcare—prior to institutionalization, given that public education in Cambodia is not free.

In its 2011 report, UNICEF acknowledged the financial barriers to education, but maintained that institutions cannot place a child's right to a primary education (as dictated by the Convention on Children's Rights, and one of Cambodia's Millennium Goals for 2015) with the basic right of the child to be raised by his/her biological parents. Institution directors who cite provision of educational services as a reason for admittance of children to institutions view education as the key to a child's future success. In their minds, it is more important for children to grow up away from home but with the provision of a quality education than to be brought up in a neglectful household, deprived of an education (and any future job prospects) and at risk of abuse, child labor, etc. Some of these directors (3/10) also argue that a lack of education on the part of parents is one of the reasons why children end up in institutions.

Three of the institution directors interviewed for this study described educational goals and living arrangements akin to those of boarding schools. Reintegration is not the main objective of these institutions; instead, parents opt to send their children to these institutions to receive a better education than would be possible in their respective communities. Children maintain close ties with their parents/families: they are able to visit their families during the holidays, and one of the institutions allows parents to stay at the institution for a one or two night visit provided

they provide a one-day advanced notice of their arrival). One of these three institutions asks families who are able to contribute \$1.5 per month or rice/food; children who are orphans do not have to pay/provide supplies to the institution, and they are provided all services (including school supplies and clothes) free of charge. These institutions might consider redefining themselves as boarding schools rather than orphanages: this could ease some of the tension surrounding the national government's inquiry into the legitimacy of Cambodian orphanages and the subsequent new, stringent policies on orphanages. Boarding schools are recognized worldwide as acceptable and respectable institutions for education, and students at boarding schools still maintain strong bonds with their families. This redefining of institutions could be helpful as the government and UNICEF work to identify institutions that

If the Cambodian government is to prioritize keeping a child with his/her family or community over institutional care, then better efforts need to be made by the national government, UNICEF, NGOs, and local authorities to ensure that education is accessible to all regardless of financial status. This might entail supplementing teachers' incomes while simultaneously eliminating the part-time class system¹³, providing direct financial assistance to vulnerable households, following up with students who have dropped out of school, and enforcing child labor laws to ensure each child's right to a primary education.

RELIGION AND CHANGING CULTURAL DYNAMICS

MoSVY's new reintegration policy stipulates the prioritization of a child's reintegration into the family/community: Attempts should first be made to reintegrate the child with his/her parents. If there are no parents, then relatives or kinship care is the second choice. If there are no relatives and no family or friends in the community willing to take the child, then the next preferable option is in a pagoda or a church within the community. Institutional care is the fourth and final recourse.

Of the 42 officially registered institutions in Battambang province, half, 21, are religious institutions. Of the 24 institutions that have been established within the last decade, 17 are religious in nature. One institution is Buddhist, one institution is Muslim, and 15 institutions are Christian. Given this expansion of religious institutions in the province over the past decade, MoSVY's reintegration policy, which prioritizes placement of the child in a religious institution over a secular institution, is surprising. While traditionally pagodas have sheltered orphans and vulnerable children¹⁴, it is unclear how other religious institutions, particularly those that seek to alter the religious makeup of the province, can be viewed as preferable to non-religious residential care. The preference of religious institutional care over secular institutional care is further brought into question by the remarks of several directors, which identify Christian, proselytizing churches as the root cause of institutional expansion over the past decade.

It was unclear from discussions with religious directors why Battambang has seen a substantial increase in religious institutions over the past decade. One director of a multiple-branch

¹³ Unfortunately, the part-time class system has become so systematized that effective "elimination" of the practice of paying for classes would require a monitoring and evaluation effort to ensure that students are not forced to pay for classes, test papers, and the school's utility costs.

¹⁴ http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Study_Attitudes_towards_RC.pdf

religious institution simply stated that there was a “community need” for the new institutions and that local authorities approached his/her institution to find placement for a vulnerable child, rather than the institution contacting local authorities to reach out to vulnerable communities. Given the rate at which religious institutions have increased in Battambang province since 2000, local and national authorities should equally evaluate not only the merits of secular institutional care, but also those of religious institutions as they work to implement the new MoSVY policy in the province.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the data obtained from ten Battambang institutions appears to confirm the UNICEF study that the majority of children in institutional care are not double orphans. While many of the participating institutions established before 2002 were founded specifically to meet the needs of *orphans* in the community, the needs of the community have since changed, and older institutions have adapted to meet the current needs of children who are not orphans. Abject poverty and the inability of parents/families to ensure proper access to food, healthcare, and education, have resulted in institutions accepting children from poverty-stricken households, in addition to orphans, sexually-trafficked children, victims of domestic violence, HIV positive children, etc. Specifically, directors identified education as an important reason why non-orphaned children are sent to live in institutions: many parents recognize the importance of an education (in addition to other basic needs, such as healthcare) and send children to institutions where they believe they will have a better life. Some of these institutions strongly resemble boarding schools, where the primary goal is to provide the best possible primary and secondary education for vulnerable communities; children who come to live in these institutions maintain a close relationship with their families and communities. These institutions would do well to redefine themselves as MoSVY and UNICEF investigate the legitimacy of *orphanages* in the country.

As MoSVY and UNICEF work to implement the 2006 Policy on Alternative Care for Children, it is important to note that all Battambang institution directors cited close ties with local authorities and the Ministry of Social Affairs prior to accepting a child to institutional care. Given the varying, unique reasons why children come to live in Battambang institutions, admittance is done on a case-by-case basis. All interviewees explained that they currently undertake all the necessary protocols before admitting a child. Better communication of the expectations of the 2006 MOSA Policy and the institutional requirements to accept a child are needed to ensure the emotional and physical wellbeing of the child.

Finally, several interviewees stressed that if MoSVY and UNICEF seek to reintegrate all children in institutions into families within the community, then extended follow-up of each child is essential. Currently, UNICEF provides institutions with enough funding to follow up with a reintegrated child for one year; however, given the fact that many children come to live in institutions precisely because their families cannot sufficiently provide for their basic needs and/or because they are from at-risk communities, one year is insufficient to monitor the emotional and physical development of the child. Specifically, if MoSVY and UNICEF envision the ultimate closure of all Cambodian institutions, then follow-up to ensure that the child’s basic

right to education is upheld and to evaluate the suitability of the family should performed over a period of several years.

Appendix A

Case Interview Questions for Battambang Institution Directors

1. How long have you been working at this institution?
2. What year was the institution founded? How did this institution come about? What were some of the reasons cited at the time for its opening?
 - Was it built based on needs indicated by the community?
 - Did you seek funding?
 - Was there a more pressing need in this community versus others?
3. Where does this institution receive its funding?
4. How many children currently live in this institution?
5. How many children are admitted each year?
6. How has the number of children residing in this institution changed over the years?
7. What is the breakdown in age of the children currently living in this institution?
8. At what age were the children sent to the institution?
9. How many children have been in the institution more than 5 years?
10. For what reasons do children typically leave your institution?
11. Do you stay in touch with children who have left your institution?
12. UNICEF and global partners define an orphan as a child who has lost one or both parents. How many of the children who live here have lost one or both parents?
13. What screening process/policy do you have before accepting children to your institution?
14. Are efforts made on your part to reintegrate the children with their families?
15. What kind of community outreach does this institution do to target orphans and vulnerable children
16. Who usually brings the children to your institution?
17. What reasons do these individuals (parents, caregivers, etc.) cite for sending the children to your orphanage?
18. What services does your institution provide for these children?

19. What other services do you think are important that you'd like to extend to the children if you had additional funding?
20. In general, how would you describe the academic performance of the children who reside at this institution?
21. In general, how would you describe the temperament and emotional development of children who reside at this institution?
22. Do the children living here have outlets to know what family life is like?
23. Why do you think that today there are more than twice as many orphanages in Battambang as there were 10 years ago?

Appendix B

Background to educational inequality in Cambodia

Cambodia is one of the least developed countries, and as such, requires special attention to achieve the 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG). These internationally recognized goals focus largely on the rights of the child. Specifically, the second of the eight MDG seeks to achieve universal primary education: “To ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls are able to complete a full course of primary schooling.”¹⁵ In Cambodia, the government does not provide enough basic needs to its population, in particular with regards to universal, quality education—9% of the national government’s annual budget is allocated to education; however, 83% of these funds are directed towards “servicing remunerations and operation expenses.”¹⁶ While statistics indicate that 90 and 87% of males and females, respectively, are enrolled in primary education, a closer look at primary graduation rates reveals that only 43% of children enrolled have actually completed primary education.¹⁷ In many rural areas, the lack of schools and/or a complete grades 1-6 curriculum serves as an impediment to equal access to education. Poverty is another reason why many children are forced to forgo a primary school education: with more than half the population living under the poverty line, many children are required to work to supplement the family’s income. According to the International Labor Organization, almost 20% of children ages 5-9 are employed as child labor, and only 45% of children ages 5 to 17 have the opportunity to attend school.

A third factor that hinders a child’s access to quality education is the informal, part-time class system. This corrupt system of paying for lessons, widely accepted as a “fact of life,” stems from the fact that public school teachers in Cambodia are grossly underpaid. The average salary for a primary school teacher is \$50 a month, but can be as low as \$25 in some rural areas. In order to supplement their measly incomes, teachers over the years have resorted to charging students small fees to attend daily “part-time” classes after public school hours. These classes are optional; however, the reality of the matter is that teachers will withhold critical elements of course curriculum, refusing to teach all the material during school hours. Students who pay the daily 500 Riel fee to take daily part-time classes (up to 6 times a week) after school stand a chance of passing their exams and moving on to the next grade level. Students who cannot afford to pay these fees generally fall behind and are either forced to repeat the level or dropout of school entirely. This part-time class system exists at the primary, middle, and high school level; the further a child progresses in his/her education, the more expensive these classes become. For example, a part-time high school class generally costs 1000 Riel per day (25

¹⁵ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml>

¹⁶ C. Tan (2010) Education trajectory in an era of globalization, UNESCO, pg 7

¹⁷ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cambodia_statistics.html

cents/day, \$1.25/week, \$6.25/month). More advanced classes, such as physics and math, are even more expensive, with some high school students paying upwards of \$40 a month for extra classes. This increase in part-time classes fees over time is matched by an increase in school dropout rates: only 55% of youth attend secondary school

Unfortunately, this practice of paying for part-time classes is now so entrenched in the Cambodian education system that even organizations that provide direct assistance to families (food staples, money for education, etc.) and/or residential care to orphans and vulnerable children are resigned to paying the fees for the children and families they serve. There is currently no government entity or NGO working to address the problem of unjust teacher wages and the consequential part-time classes system. These barriers to primary education (as well as to secondary education,) which result in high dropout rates especially in rural areas, place children at great risk of child labor, sex trafficking, and stunted emotional and social development, must be addressed.

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