Global Network
Social Protection for Migrant Domestic Workers in Cambodia: A Case Study
INDEX

1. Introduction: ................................................................. 3
2. Social Protection in Cambodia: ........................................ 3
3. Social Protections Specific to Migrant Workers: ........ 5
4. Conclusions: ................................................................. 9
5. Sources .......................................................................... 10
6. Appendix....................................................................... 11

THE GLOBAL NETWORK

With the aim of achieving decent work for all, the Global Network works to empower women and men who are activists in NGOs, trade unions, associations of informal workers and grassroots movements to build capacity, exchange experiences and coordinate joint actions, at both regional and international level.

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1. Introduction

In order to understand present day Cambodia it is imperative that one understands the country’s past. In 1975, the Khmer Rouge rose to power with the intention of turning Cambodia into a communist utopia. In order to achieve this, Pol Pot and other high ranking Khmer Rouge cadres decided to recreate Cambodian society from “year zero.” The results of this were disastrous; within four years, one third of the Cambodian population was dead and the country had been destroyed. In real terms, “during the 1,364 days of Khmer Rouge rule, two million people died as a result of their policies, approximately 1,466 people a day” (Dunlap 189). After the Khmer Rouge was overthrown in 1979 Cambodia was thrown into a time of civil war. The next fifteen years was a period of intense turmoil, during which the country’s social and material infrastructure continued to erode. In the early 1990s Cambodia embarked on the path towards peace, signing the Paris Peace Accords in 1991 (Tola p.7). Since 1993, Cambodia has seen a great deal of progress, particularly in economic sectors. For four years following 2004, Cambodia experienced annual growth at an average of 7% (Ministry of labor p3). That upward trend continued with annual growth of 11% until 2008 (ibid). Despite Cambodia’s economic growth, the country faced fairly widespread unemployment. According to a study conducted by the Cambodia Development research institute (CDRI) in 2005, 23% of the population was unemployed. Cambodia’s unemployment problem was exacerbated by the global economic crisis in 2009 and the fact that there are 250,000 people entering the work force annually. The national unemployment problem has resulted in many Cambodians turning to migrant work.

In 2007, Cambodia officially sent 9,334 workers abroad (Sopha 2009). However, this number does not take into account the vast number of undocumented Cambodian migrant workers, many of whom are domestics. The life of Cambodian migrant domestic workers is an incredibly difficult one. Domestic migrant domestic workers often face abuse at home from recruiters and abroad by employers. Female migrant domestic workers face a range of abuse including verbal, physical and sexual. A particularly telling moment illustrating the challenges faced by migrant workers and the frequency of their abuse, came about during a conversation with a 22 year old Cambodian woman named Vanti. Vanti remarked that while in Malaysia her boss lent her out to work for friends, which is illegal. Though renting people out is illegal the current laws for migrant workers do not protect domestics. Even if these laws did cover household workers it is highly unlikely they would be enforced, since Cambodia does not have the rule of law. Additionally, Vanti mentioned nonchalantly that she would get slapped whenever she did the slightest thing wrong. The detachment in Vanti’s voice regarding the violence she endured was evidence that her experience was not Compounding this notion was the fact that Vanti intended to return to work in Malaysia despite the beatings.

The goal of this case study is twofold. First, this research aims to provide an understanding of the many difficulties migrant workers face. Second, this report seeks to examine the path to overcoming the previously stated challenges. The first chapter explores social protections in Cambodia. After a broad examination of social protections in Cambodia the focus is narrowed to those social protections affecting migrant workers. The subsequent chapter looks at the story of a woman named Vann Sinoun who was a Cambodian migrant worker. Vann Sinoun’s story illustrates in a very human way the hardships migrant workers face. The final chapter looks at the different advocacy strategies undertaken on behalf of migrant workers. The study concludes with a brief discussion of the steps that need to be undertaken to ensure social protections for Cambodians.

2. Social Protection in Cambodia

In order to truly understand the nature of social protections in Cambodia, it is important to first define “Social Protection.” The Asian Development bank (ADB) defines social protection as “the set of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people’s exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and the interruption/loss of income” (Tola p.13). Using the ADB definition, Cambodia is severely lacking in social protections for its people.
On the Social Protection Index (SPI) for Asian Countries, Cambodia ranks 25th out of 31 (Tola p.3). The average SPI for Asia is 0.36 while Cambodia’s SPI is 0.18. Cambodia’s SPI value is slightly lower than other countries which ranked LOW on the Human Development Scale (HDI) (Tola p.3). What these numbers show is that there are very few effective social programs in place. In 2005, Cambodia spent only 78 million US$ on social protection which is about 1.4% of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) (Tola p.4). Though the Cambodian government has increased its social protection budget in recent years, this amplification has been insufficient. Less than half of Cambodia's poor receives help from some sort of social protection program (Tola p.5). The number of impoverished Cambodians who receive help goes down dramatically if one does not count micro-financing as a social protection (Tola p.5). Put another way, the average per capita RGC (Royal Government of Cambodia) spending on Cambodia’s poor is a little over $10. This is far too little money, considering the endemic poverty in Cambodia. There are of course many more statistics that point to the same conclusion; Cambodia is in dire need of greater funding for social protections (Tola).

A lack of funding is not the only explanation for weakness of social protections within Cambodia. The other reason for Cambodia’s weak safety net derives from a lack of law enforcement. In order to understand this claim it is important to understand that there is a duality to Cambodian law; that is, that many laws in Cambodia exist only on paper. In the broadest and most extreme sense, this means that laws are often unenforced and only used to shield those in positions of authority from criticism. More specifically, this means that in the Cambodian Constitution there are a number of social protections but few of the laws have been actualized. For example, Article 72 of the Cambodian Constitution states that, “the health of the people shall be guaranteed. The state shall give full consideration to disease prevention and medical treatment. Poor citizens shall receive free medical consultation in public hospitals, infirmaries and maternities” (Constitution). This article declares that all Cambodians should receive treatment when they are ill. The reality is that most Cambodians do not receive treatment when they are sick. The main reason for this is that Cambodian public hospitals are becoming increasingly privatized and many Cambodians cannot afford the cost of treatment at a private hospital. Many private hospitals will refuse treatment if the patient cannot afford it. This reality adds up to a broken promise of healthcare. Healthcare is one of many promised social protections that have not materialized.

Another example of a social protection existing only in words is Article 46 of the Cambodian Constitution. It says, “The commerce of human beings, exploitation by prostitution and obscenity which affect the reputation of women shall be prohibited...The state and society shall provide opportunities to women, especially to those living in rural areas without adequate social support, so they can get employment, medical care, and send their children to school, and to have decent living conditions,” (qtd. in Tola p.16). The reality in Cambodia is that women are often easy targets for exploitation. Although prostitution is illegal in Cambodia there are a number of brothels, some of which are mere blocks from government buildings. Additionally the opportunities this law requires be provided to women are often exploitative. Migrant work is often viewed as an opportunity for the advancement of Cambodian women. The reality of migrant work (especially in domestic sectors) is that women are often treated like slaves. Many female migrant workers are denied medical care, a better future for their children and adequate living conditions, the very things Article 46 promises. The social protections enshrined in Article 46 of the Cambodian constitution are a fallacy. The truth is that women, especially those living in rural areas, are without safety nets and have few prospects for advancement.

Other examples of social protections that are not actualized include Article 75 and Article 36 of the Constitution. They state, respectively, that “The state shall establish a social security...” and “The state shall ensure that the material and spiritual culture of the Cambodian people is protected...” (Constitution). The reality is that the state has not established a social security system or protected the material and spiritual culture of the Cambodian people. The state is not providing the necessary funding to establish these protections or protecting the culture from outside influences.

1 The calculations for the social protection index were “derived from four component indicators (SP expenditure, SP coverage, SP distribution/poverty targeting and SP impact on outcomes)” (Tola p.1). The purpose of the SPI is to find a way to quantifiably compare Social Protections in various countries (Tola p.1). See Table 1 in Appendix.

2 Insufficient law enforcement in Cambodia is a result of lack of political will, not inadequate funding.
system for workers and employees” and “Every Khmer citizen shall have the rights to obtain social security and other social benefits as determined by law. Khmer citizens of either sex shall have the right to form and to be member of trade unions. The organization and conduct of trade unions shall be determined by law,” (qtd. in Tola p.16-17). To refer to Cambodian Social Security as a system would be incredibly generous. The reality is that Cambodian Social Security currently only exists as workers compensation for injuries suffered on the job and pensions to former civil servants (Tola p.24). The benefits provided through social security are miniscule. In 2005, the government spent approximately 16.5 million on pensions for an estimated 120,000 people (Tola p.24). This adds up to roughly 138 dollars a year, or less than a dollar a day. When considering this number, it is important to note that those receiving pensions are not necessarily poor (Tola p.24). Regarding the trade unions mentioned in Article 36 it should be noted that those unions not aligned with the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) face great difficulty. This was particularly evident in September 2010 when two of the non-aligned garment worker unions went on strike in order to raise the minimum wage. When the striking was over, many of the more high profile people were not allowed to return to work. 4 In addition to being barred from work, a litany of threats was issued from the government against union leaders. This is proof that while Cambodians can form unions those that would speak out in opposition are quickly suppressed. This means once again that this article of the constitution remains largely inspirational.

National Social Security Fund (NSSF) has been designed in the purpose of promoting social protection for vulnerable, marginalized and low-income people. However, this National Fund has been mainly covered only workers or employees who are employed in formal or registered sector only. However, the construction workers who are working in formal sector have not been benefited from National Social Security Fund since many construction project sites, contractors, sub-contractors have been required to register yet.

3. Social Protections Specific to Migrant Workers

With regard to migrant workers there are three key and interrelated obstacles, towards social protection: laws are unenforced and outmoded, they do not apply abroad, and those in a position to fix things are not particularly interested in doing so. The first problem with current social protections for migrant workers is that the laws are outdated and unenforced. Part of this relates to the broader issue of laws, existing on paper but not in practice. There are a number of labor laws which should in theory protect migrant domestic workers but are not enforced. Many of these laws can be found in Sub-decree 57, which was created in 1995 and is the most comprehensive law dealing with migrant workers. Article 3 of sub-decree 57 states that a Khmer individual must be at least 18 years old in order to be eligible for migrant work (Sophal p.38). The reality is that many Cambodian migrant workers are underage, and many recruitment agencies are aware of this. A Cambodian NGO worker sheds light on the situation, saying “companies sometimes have video confirmation (stating that the workers legal age is 18, for example) and there is no will by the companies to prevent discrepancies. These companies also have counterparts in their host countries, who help them cover up such discrepancies” (Prasad, p.15). In addition, parents of workers often contribute to the problem of underage recruitment, by lying about their child’s age.

Underage recruitment is but one of the unenforced laws concerning migrant workers. Another illegal practice regarding Cambodian migran workers is illegal detention. It is quite common for employees to be “locked up during pre-departure training” (qtd. in Prasad p.15). Such unlawful detention is clearly a violation of human rights but because there is no oversight, it continues to happen. The other issue regarding social protections for migrant workers is that the laws are

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3 CPP is the ruling party in Cambodia and is headed by Prime Minister Hun Sen. Hun Sen holds the distinction of being the longest serving leader in Asia. Additionally under the category of longest ruling world leaders, Hun Sen ranks number 11 (Vrieze).

4 At the time of this case studies publication 94 garment worker have still been bared from returning to work (Mom 2010c)
outmoded, meaning that people have worked hard to find and exploit the loopholes which are prevalent in Sub decree 57. Some improvements have been made since 1996 but numerous gaps still remain. For example, Sub decree 57 states the responsibilities of the primary employer but fails to mention the responsibilities of the sub-contractor, i.e., recruiting agency (Prasad p.15). This technicality is exploited by recruiting agencies, who “are under no legal obligation to promote or uphold Human Rights” (Prasad, p.15). If there was adequate government or external oversight, recruiting agencies would not be able to skirt the law on a technicality. Another example is that while sub-decree 57 states what needs to be included in a contract it fails to necessitate that the signing party be literate. The result of this is that “even licensed agencies are getting individuals to thumb-print their contracts; these are the same documents which workers are unable to read and understand, and now they are legally bound to it” (qtd. in Prasad p.15). The reason for thumb printing a contract rather than signing, is that the signatory is unable to write their name and therefore illiterate. The fact that the practice of thumb printing is increasingly common is problematic; it shows an acceptance that people are signing things they cannot understand. It is upsetting though unsurprising, that this oversight has not been remedied in 14 years.

The other problem with Cambodian laws for migrant workers is that they don’t apply abroad; meaning any social protections Cambodian workers receive domestically disappear when they leave the country. This principle is clearly laid out in the Cambodian Labor Code, whose first article states that “the law governs relations between employers and employees resulting from employment contracts to be performed within the territory of the Kingdom of Cambodia, regardless of where the contract was made and what the nationality and residents of the contracted parties are” (qtd. in Prasad p.18). In simpler terms, all contracts taking place in Cambodia are subject to Cambodian law but contracts written in Cambodia but implemented abroad are not. The laws which govern Cambodians working abroad are MOU’s (memorandums of understanding) which are non-binding agreements between countries. The larger implication of this is that Cambodian social protections have no bearing on migrant workers. Thus, it is impossible to fully understand the social protections available to Cambodian migrant workers without a detailed understanding of the receiving country context.

These are problems which could be rectified with relative ease if the respective governments were interested in doing so. Unfortunately, attempts on behalf of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to increase oversight, particularly regarding female migrant workers, are often thwarted by the Cambodian government. Many recruiting companies have the support of people in the government and as a result when NGOs try to intervene they are often threatened with prosecution for incitement, disinformation and/or defamation. A conviction for incitement can result in high fines and jail time. It is a crime of which where the accused is typically found guilty.5 This clearly speaks to the widespread corruption that is so prevalent in Cambodia. Particularly telling of the Cambodian government’s indifference to those in need of social protections was Hun Sen’s recent request that Ban Ki-Moon fire the head of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights office in Cambodia. The reason given was that “Mr Peschoux is not a UN official working on human rights issues with the government, but as a spokesman for the opposition party” (Strangio & Sokha). The problem with this explanation is that Hun Sen and the CPP are uninterested in human rights while the “opposition” has shown a strong believe in them. Additionally, the statement ignores the fact that members of the opposition parties are elected government officials. However, this indifference is not only a problem in Cambodia, but it is also prevalent in Malaysia (a major recipient of Cambodian migrant workers). Upon hearing about the abuses Cambodian workers endure in Malaysia, Raja Saifful Ridzuwan, an official at the Malaysian embassy in Phnom Pehn said, he was “very surprised” and that “reports of abuse of Cambodian workers in Malaysia [were] quite new to us” (qtd. in Channyda & Lewis). The reality is that reports of abuse are anything but new. Ridzuwan claimed that Cambodian workers in Malaysia could contact officials or go to their embassy in Kuala Lumpur. This is a feat easier said than done, given that most Cambodians do not speak Bahasa Indonesia, making it difficult to reach their embassy or ask for help (Channyda &Lewis). Additionally it is not uncommon for

5 This is especially true when the accusation of incitement comes from anyone in a position of authority. It is quite common for people in power to threaten or bribe the courts to ensure the verdict comes out in their favor.
abusive employers to detain workers or take away important documents. In Malaysia some employers confiscate their worker’s passports and working papers; making it impossible for employees to leave the country or prove they are in the country legally. The bottom line is that those in power are not interested in improving social protections for migrant workers.

Vann Sinoun: A Case Study

In the spring of 2010, a middleman who worked for VC Manpower approached Vann Sinoun, a thirty year old divorced mother of five children from Battambang province in Cambodia regarding a job. The promoter (also referred to as a middleman) told Sinoun that the job entailed three months of training in Phnom Pehn at a nice facility, complete with entertainment. Upon completion of the training Sinoun was told she would spend two years working in Malaysia as a domestic worker or “housemaid,” in the official parlance. Sinoun was saddened that taking the job meant leaving her children behind but ultimately decided that accepting the position was the best way to provide for her family. Sinoun arranged to leave her children with the neighbors for the duration of her absence. With regard to the position’s salary, the recruiter told Sinoun that she would receive two hundred and fifty dollars, five bags of rice and a telephone once she completed her registration. This promise proved false. Sinoun received only ten thousand riel of rice (roughly $2.38) and one hundred dollars. Additionally, Sinoun was forced to pay her own transportation to Phnom Pehn, a fact which the middle man conveniently failed to mention. The trip to Phnom Pehn left her with only seventy-five dollars. Sinoun ignored her initial misgivings and remained optimistic that the situation would be remedied upon her arrival in Phnom Pehn.

Upon her arrival at the training center in Phnom Pehn, it became abundantly clear that the recruiter for VC Manpower had lied to her. The promised lovely training center with fun activities turned out to be a prison, as Sinoun and the other trainees were forbidden to leave it. The trainees were locked inside of the building and not even permitted on the ground floor. The center’s inhabitants were forced to sleep on the hard floor of rooms shared by twenty to thirty other women. In addition, the trainees received little food and no mosquito nets. Sinoun explained that they only received two small meals a day and were often hungry. The compound was home to one hundred women, each of whom were given only two to three minutes of running water a day. These poor living conditions were further exacerbated by a grueling work day which consisted of mandatory study, cleaning, cooking, and construction, washing and ironing. The work day for Sinoun began at five am and ended between ten and eleven pm. Another problem the women faced as a result of their being forced to sit for long periods of time was atrophying of the leg muscles as well as numbness. During Sinoun’s first month, she encountered additional health problems in the form of chronic bloody noses and headaches. Sinoun was not the only trainee to endure such ailments and like others she was forced to pay for their treatment herself. Despite the many problems, Sinoun had to contend with in the training facility she persevered.

As time went on, things got worse for Sinoun. In July, Sinoun was able to make a phone call to her neighbors in which she received bad news. The neighbors explained that since Sinoun was unable to send money for food they would have to put the children in an orphanage. Sinoun did what she could to remedy the situation and was able to place two of the children in their father's custody. However, this was not enough and her three year old son was placed in an orphanage overseen by a local NGO. Given all the trouble Sinoun was having at home, she made a reasonable request to go visit her children. Sinoun was told that in order to visit her children, she would need to leave behind eight hundred US dollars (an exorbitant amount) as a deposit. The complications with Sinoun’s children only served to strengthen her resolve to go to Malaysia. Sinoun firmly believed that continuing her training and ultimately going to Malaysia, as a domestic was her best chance to provide for her children.

As the days turned to months, Sinoun was greeted with even more upsetting news. She was told that though she would be working as a maid in Malaysia for two years, she would only be paid for seventeen months. Though Sinoun was troubled by the news, she pushed it to the back of her mind and remained intent on going to work abroad. After three months, Sinoun remained in training because VC Manpower had some problems, which forced them to suspend
human exporting. It was around this time that Sinoun received a final piece of disturbing news, confirming the rumors of harsh treatment towards female domestic workers by their Malaysian employers. The information came from another migrant domestic worker who had been brought back to Phnom Penh because she had disappointed her boss in Malaysia. The women had stolen a morsel of food because she was starving and her boss retaliated by cutting off her finger. It was this horrifying story that finally convinced Sinoun not to go to Malaysia.

Sinoun was left with only one option, a dangerous escape. Sinoun’s chance for escape presented itself on Sunday, September 5th 2010. That evening Sinoun’s boss assigned her the duty of cooking which allowed her onto the third story veranda. Sinoun realized she might not get the opportunity to flee again and so seized it. Sinoun took her scarf and tied it to the bars of the balcony. She then grabbed the lose end of the scarf and hung from it. As Sinoun was dangling precariously from the end of her scarf, she noticed a pipe. Sinoun quickly formed a plan in her mind and proceeded to leap from the scarf onto the drainage pipe. Once she got a firm grip on the pipe she began to shimmy down it and for a few seconds all seemed to be going well. That is until the pipe broke and Sinoun was thrown into the air many meters above the street. As Sinoun hurtled towards the hard pavement below she was certain that death was only seconds away. Sinoun’s head bore the brunt of the impact as she hit the ground and subsequently lapsed into unconsciousness.

Two days later, Sinoun regained consciousness; she was startled to see three policemen standing above her taking pictures (S. Vann, personal communication with help of translator, September 8, 2010). Sinoun had been moved to a clinic where she was watched over by a relative of the company’s owner. Sinoun was told she would have to pay for her own medical treatment as the injury was her fault. In the three days since her admission to the clinic, she had received seven stitches on her chin and was on an IV drip. Days after Sinoun’s daring escape, the entire left side of her face remained severely swollen. Despite the severity of her condition VC Manpower expected her to return to work and had requested her back only two days after her admission. The clinic’s doctor said she needed a CAT scan of her head to ensure that there is not more serious damage. Getting the procedure was a challenge because the clinic did not possess a CT scan and Sinoun could not afford it. When VC Manpower was warned of a potential lawsuit regarding its abusive treatment of Vann Sinoun, the company agreed to pay for her treatment and allow her to return home. When Sinoun was finally able to get CT scan, it showed no additional head trauma and she was released about a week later. Following her release Sinoun returned to her home.

Despite the fact that Vann Sinoun never made it to Malaysia as a domestic migrant worker her story is still quite valuable. Vann Sinoun’s tale is a perfect example of the mistreatment faced by many potential domestic migrant workers during pre departure training. The narrative illustrates what happens when social protections are absent. In the case of Vann Sinoun the missing policies include basic labor interventions, child services, and social assistance. The case study of Vann Sinoun paints a picture of hardships that would be easily preventable with the implementation of social protections.

Strategies for Improving Social Protections in Cambodia

One of the most successful strategies for improving social protections involves directly dealing with legislators to create better laws and infrastructure to enforce them. This is typically done through forums or workshops attended by experts on the subject of migrant workers and the relevant political figures. At many forums, migrant workers are given a chance to share their grievances with people in a position of power. These workshops give CLEC and other NGOs an opportunity to put forward their policy recommendations. Such forums have been very useful in the past because they provide an environment where activists have the ear of the government and can put pressure on officials to enact better laws. For example, the workshop

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See figure 1 in Appendix.

Organizations like CLEC spend much of their time conducting research. The research takes into account the larger social issues as well as evidence from individuals. The results of such extensive research are turned into recommendation for new policies.
on Formulation of Foreign Employment Policies for Cambodia, which consisted of 3 sessions held over a period of 8 months, begun in May and concluded in December of 2009 (ILO). The result of the forum was a joint policy paper produced by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Cambodian Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MOLVT). Subsequently, many of the ideas from that policy paper were turned into a "draft sub-decree designed to protect migrant workers and better regulate the labor recruitment industry," which was finalized on September 14th 2010 (Channyda & Lewis). The strength of this type of advocacy can be seen in the creation of a new migrant worker law.

Public awareness promoting program should be designed for community and in particular those who are vulnerable and marginalized groups on their rights of access to social protection. NGOs should play complementary role in promoting public awareness on rights of access to social protection. The program should be designed to empower through education, awareness materials and campaign.

Legal aid program should be designed to provide legal supports to vulnerable and marginalized groups who victimized from any mistreatment or lacking enforcement of law and policy. Legal consultation, representation and defenses should be made quick access to those victimized groups. Legal empowerment is still important program that community, vulnerable and marginalized groups still need. Therefore, the program should be designed and supported.

Social safety nets have been found out to be the most important program to promote social protection in the country. In regard to the problem statement, the program should be developed and served by both government and NGO partners. The service must be developed and provided to beneficiaries within transparency and accountability. The main purpose of the program should be designed to directly benefit to those vulnerable and marginalized groups.

4. Conclusions

What happened to Vann Sinoun is a tragedy but unfortunately it is not a unique occurrence in Cambodia. Rather, it is an illustrative example of the problems which are endemic for migrant workers. Migrant workers in Cambodia continue to be denied the most basic social protections. This lack of social protections is a huge problem for which there are no simple solutions. Given the current economic and political climate in Cambodia, piecemeal changes are the easiest way to improve the lives of migrant workers. However, the trouble with changing things on a small scale without solving for the larger pattern that a particular incident exemplifies is that it fails to fix the larger problem. Michelle Prasad explained this predicament well when she said, "Although much help is available to address the short term needs of workers, ideally I would recommend a restructuring of existing power–relationships" (Prasad p.24). The reality is that under the current political regime, big changes are nearly impossible but they are the only kind of shifts that significantly improve social protections for migrant workers.

Having stressed these challenges I recommend a renewed focus on education. Education has the potential to be transformative in the lives of many Cambodians. In order to understand the power of education to transform and improve social protections in Cambodia a little background is required. First and foremost education is a social protection in Cambodia which is sorely lacking. The Cambodian government provides free primary and secondary education to its citizens. The problem is that many people living in poor and rural areas cannot afford the secondary costs of education, i.e., materials and transportation (Tola p.10). In addition, many families cannot afford the immediate loss of income that would result from their children going to school and not working (Tola p.10). These families live paycheck to paycheck and so do not have the liberty of thinking about the long term benefits of education. For the most part, migrant domestic workers come from rural areas and poor families and as a result are poorly educated; this works to the advantage of those in charges but to the detriment of workers. As previously mentioned, one facet of this lack of schooling is that domestic migrant workers often sign contracts without knowing what they say, simply because they cannot read. This reality speaks
to the need to improve the basics of education. This is a place for NGOs to play a strong role, by incentivizing education. This can be done by funding the extra costs of schooling, creating subsidies for those families that send their kids to school and by increasing the value of education. Improving the education of Cambodia’s most vulnerable citizens, particularly young people, dramatically reduces their risk to exploitation. Better education is about more than literacy; it is about empowering Cambodia’s youth. Here too NGOs can take an active role, by helping to develop and implement new curricula fundraising and creating new schools. It would involve creating classes on political activism, legal rights, critical thinking, history and economics. It is about changing the way students learn from rote memorization to actively engaging with ideas. By teaching children that they have the power to change their circumstances, they become empowered to take on the challenges in their lives. Education has the unique ability to give a voice to people who thought they were mute. Change needs to be focused on empowerment and the enforcement of new and existing laws, both of which can be gained through an educated populace. This is not to say the road will be easy, but education is a way to solve for pattern while focusing on a singular issue.

5. Sources


MOLTV. (June 2010) *Labor Migration Policy Document*.


6. Appendix

Table 1: SPI Formulation for Cambodia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPI component</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>E &amp; SE Asia</th>
<th>Low HDI</th>
<th>All Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MCF</td>
<td>MCF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure on SP (SPEXP)</td>
<td>Total expenditure as % of GDP</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage of SP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unemployed/underemployed</td>
<td>Beneficiaries as % of total of unem-/underemployed</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The elderly</td>
<td>Elderly receiving assistance as person of population aged 60+ years</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sick</td>
<td>% of population with health insurance or in receipt of subsidies</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poor/social assistance</td>
<td>Population receiving some social assistance/welfare as % of poor population</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poor/micro credit</td>
<td>Population receiving micro-credit as % of poor population</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The disabled</td>
<td>Disabled beneficiaries as % of disabled population</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with special needs (CSWN)</td>
<td>CWSN receiving assistance as % of poor children aged 5-14 years</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall coverage indicator (SPCOV)</td>
<td>Weighted average of coverage sub-components*</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributional Impact (SPDIST)</td>
<td>% of poor population who receive some assistance</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP Impact on incomes (SPIMP)</td>
<td>SP expend. per poor person as % of annual per capita poverty line</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall SPI Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*MCF = Micro Financing; Source (Tola p.4)