The Private Costs of Public Schooling: Household and Community Financing of Primary Education in Cambodia;

Cambodia is one of the least developed countries in the world, and one of the poorest. Four out of ten households live below the poverty line, in a country whose annual GDP per capita is about US$300. Government pays an average of US$20 per teacher per month, or an average of US$6.48 per pupil per annum. Education receives about 10 per cent of the national budget, almost all of which goes to pay salaries. It is understandable that schooling has had to depend on assistance from sources beyond the government, although primary school education in Cambodia is officially free. While the vast majority of primary schools in Cambodia are public, a large proportion of their financial support comes from non-government sources. The book details the full costs of such schooling: exercise books, stationery, uniforms, travel to school, supplementary tutoring, and the opportunity costs of foregone income. It estimates that the resource inputs into primary education are: Government (12.5%); politicians (10.4%); NGOs and external aid agencies (18%); households and communities (59.9%); school generated income (0.1%).

The author has carried out a number of consultancies within Cambodia in recent years, and the book benefits from the broad knowledge and understanding he has gained, as well as the cooperation he was able to secure from the education authorities at central, provincial and school levels. He conducted a number of workshops in selected provinces with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport as well as UNICEF and UNESCO, and the book provides a wealth of data on the costs of schooling, based on this field work as well as extensive literature research within Cambodia principally. The text is supported by a number of small case studies, showing the impact of private financial support on students, teachers, and parents.

The book is simply written and neatly arranged. It provides a comparative overview of household and community financing of education, examines the nature of

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butions are mainly disguised government financing. Government has lacked not the capacity but the will to increase the share of the education budget from 10 per cent since 1994. There is a fundamental need for a greater push for government to develop a more efficient and reliable taxation system in order to increase its own revenue, to control its own official budgetary expenditures, and to implement its own plans to increase education’s share of the budget.

The book is a useful contribution to the financing of primary education in Cambodia, and the issues it raises have repercussions also for secondary and higher education in terms of fees, supplementary tuition, and equity of access. Many other countries which face problems similar to those of Cambodia will benefit from the analyses presented in this book. Those with similar problems but which lack the same range of data should be inspired to follow this model of data collection and analysis.

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