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# Cash Equals Education?

A Case Study of How a Scholarship to Highland Students  
in Ratanakiri, Cambodia Promotes Educational Participation

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how a scholarship distributed to upper secondary school students of ethnic minority in Ratanakiri, Cambodia has promoted educational participation. To do this, this thesis analysed students' understanding of the value of education, obstacles to participation and how the scholarship has addressed these obstacles. A qualitative approach was used where data was gathered through individual interviews and focus group discussions with students in Ratanakiri. The data was analysed in relation to the analytical framework that consists of previous research on the topic and by using thematic analysis.

The findings show that education was valued by the informants, by reference to its importance for gaining knowledge and having improved future opportunities. Obstacles to participation were found within financial resources, obstacles connected to the school and on individual, family and community levels. The informants understood the scholarship to promote educational participation through reducing expenses, increasing access to education and motivation for participation, improving opportunities to better one's academic performance, improving parental and community support for education and raising awareness about the importance of education. However, not all obstacles could be addressed by the scholarship, indicating that further interventions are needed to improve educational participation.

*Key words: scholarship, CCT, education, educational participation, upper secondary school, social protection, Cambodia, Ratanakiri, Highlanders, ethnic minority, UNICEF, qualitative research, case study, thematic analysis*

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## **Acronyms**

CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
NSPPF	National Social Protection Policy Framework
PTTC	Provincial Teacher Training College
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
UNICEF	United Nation Children’s Fund
USS	Upper Secondary School

# 1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and is often referred to as a gateway for inclusive development and peaceful societies (UNICEF 2018). Ensuring that every child gain an education is a goal for a future with sustainable development (UN-DESA 2018). Much progress has been made, with global estimates stating that 91 percent of the world’s children enrol in primary school. However, a lower attendance rate is found in higher grades, indicating that challenges remain in ensuring participation in continued education. 84 percent of children globally attend lower secondary, and for upper secondary school (USS) the enrolment rate is only at 63 percent<sup>1</sup>. This means that nearly 142 million adolescents of USS age are not attending school worldwide (UNESCO 2016:182), even though their right to do so is inscribed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by all except one of the world’s countries<sup>2</sup> (UN General Assembly 1989:art. 28; OHCHR 2018). The children most likely to be excluded from educational opportunities are children from poor households, children living in a state of emergency, girls, children with disabilities and children of ethnic minorities (UNICEF 2017).

To increase access to educational services for vulnerable children and families, Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) have been implemented as a type of social protection. Distributing a CCT is assumed to be an encouragement for families to invest in their children’s health, nutrition or education, thus being an investment in human capital accumulation (Adato and Bassett 2009:61). Evaluation of CCT programmes have shown that they have a positive impact on school enrolment, attendance and student retention (Rawlings and Rubio 2005:45-46; Filmer and Schady 2008:609-610; Adato and Bassett 2009:62; Galiani and McEwan 2013:95). Cambodia has been the target for CCT programmes for education, with similar results (Ferreira et al. 2017:269-270). One CCT for education, referred to here as a scholarship, implemented in Cambodia is a CCT distributed to USS students belonging to ethnic minority groups referred to as Highlanders, with the aim of increasing access to educational services for a vulnerable group (Chum 2018)<sup>3</sup>. The rationale is that providing cash to students will lead to a behavioural

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<sup>1</sup> Primary school includes grades 1-6, lower secondary school grades 7-9 and upper secondary grades 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> The United States of America has signed but not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Chum (2018) is an interview conducted with an Education Specialist at UNICEF Cambodia, see list of references for more information.

change in utilising educational services, given that the cash provided covers expenses connected with education (Chapman 2006:4). However, while many CCT programmes have been proven successful in increasing educational participation, little research has been made where the aim has been to understand *how* a scholarship (which usually does not cover all expenses for education) helps students overcome obstacles and increase participation, especially from the students' point of view (Yildirim et al 2014:63). Therefore, analysing the students' understanding of how a scholarship helps them attend school will be the purpose of this thesis.

### **1.1 Purpose and research question**

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the individual understanding of how a scholarship can promote educational participation. Including the scholarship recipients' perspective in research can provide important insights on the mechanisms within the scholarship that leads to positive outcomes. However, to discuss the students' understanding of the scholarship, it is important to understand how they value education. If education is not valued, the understanding of the scholarship in motivating educational participation is likely affected. It is further important to understand the students' understanding of obstacles to educational participation, for the purpose of discussing their understanding of how the scholarship has promoted educational participation by addressing obstacles – or how it has failed to do so. With this research purpose, the following research question has been developed:

*How do Highland upper secondary school students in Ratanakiri, Cambodia understand the value of education, obstacles to participation and the ways in which a scholarship may address these obstacles to promote educational participation?*

Educational participation is defined as school attendance in USS and student retention, but also grade transition and continued participation in higher education. Further, in answering the research question, the implications of the students' understanding of how a scholarship can and cannot address obstacles to participation on further measures needed to promote educational participation among Highlanders will also be discussed.

### **1.2 Delimitations**

With the stated research question, the thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on CCTs for education by understanding the students' point of view of how they promote educational



participation. However, this research will not discuss the design of the scholarship<sup>4</sup> nor test the effectiveness of the scholarship in improving educational participation or decreasing child labour<sup>5</sup>, as this has already been done. Further, the thesis will not focus on future impacts such as employment, salary or social status, though this is a topic that would need further research.

### **1.3 Thesis structure**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. After this introduction, a background chapter will describe the Cambodian and Highlander context, as well as the scholarship. Third, previous research relating to CCTs for education will be reviewed, followed by a chapter describing the analytical framework for the thesis which is based on previous research. The fifth chapter describes the methodology for the thesis, as well as limitations and ethical considerations made. The sixth chapter consists of the analysis, with the seventh chapter ending the thesis with final conclusions.

## **2. Background**

To understand the context in which the scholarship is implemented, this chapter will provide relevant background information. First, poverty and the education system in Cambodia will be discussed. The concept of social protection and social protection frameworks found in Cambodia will later be presented. Finally, the scholarship and the Highlanders, who are the recipients of the scholarship, are introduced.

### **2.1 Poverty and education in Cambodia**

After a period of economic development and poverty reduction, Cambodia reached middle-income status in 2015. Poverty rates decreased from 48 percent in 2007 to 14 percent in 2014. However, nearly 5 million people remain just above the poverty line, making them vulnerable to shocks and unforeseen costs. Further, 90 percent of the country's poor live in rural areas, showing great discrepancies in development within the country (The World Bank 2018).

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, see De Janvry and Sadoulet (2006), Bastagli (2011) or Barrera-Orsorio and Filmer (2016).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, see Rawlings and Rubio (2005), Filmer and Schady (2008) or Attanasio et al. (2010).

Cambodia has made great progress within education since their recent history of warfare. During the rule of the Khmer Rouge 1975-1979 the educational system was destroyed and most of the educated population killed. After the collapse of the regime in 1979, a restoration process was started (Keng 2004:555). Since then, Cambodia has experienced impressive progress, with primary school enrolment being at 98 percent in 2015 (UNICEF Cambodia 2016:1).

The education system in Cambodia consists of pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school. There are no tuition fees for public schools, which most students attend (Hayden and Martin 2011:37-39; MoP 2016:43). The gender division in school enrolment remains equal throughout all grades. An issue, however, is that enrolment rates at lower and upper secondary school are drastically lower than in primary school, with a gross enrolment rate<sup>6</sup> of 56 percent in lower secondary and 25 percent in USS<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, it is estimated that 22 percent of USS students in Cambodia, and 38 percent in Ratanakiri, are over-age. The completion rate for USS in the country is 20 percent, but 11 percent for Ratanakiri (MoEYS 2017:14, 39, 41, 55). These statistics show issues within educational participation in Cambodia, and especially in Ratanakiri.

There is a large divide in educational attainment between urban and rural areas in Cambodia, with the intergenerational transmission of educational disadvantage hindering a closing of the gap. Adults in rural areas are less likely to have attended school for a longer time and more likely to live in poverty, which decreases the educational opportunity for children in rural areas. The shortage of teachers in remote and disadvantaged areas is a further challenge. The number of teachers has not increased in speed with improved enrolment rates, and low teacher salaries discourages pursuing teaching as a profession. Given the low salaries, teachers often offer extra classes that are needed to pass exams for a fee, increasing costs for education among families (Hayden and Martin 2011:43-45). With these challenges, it has been important to improve access to education, with the introduction of the scholarship as one such social protection measure.

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<sup>6</sup> Gross enrolment rates refer to enrolment of students of all ages, thus not only students within the age meant for the specific grade.

<sup>7</sup> There are 7,144 primary, 1,699 lower secondary and 486 upper secondary school in Cambodia. In Ratanakiri province, there are only five upper secondary schools that teach until grade 12 (MoEYS 2017:1, 11)

## **2.2 Social protection and CCTs**

Social protection is understood as actions taken by states or other actors in response to vulnerability or risk. Changes within social protection policy has led to an extension of the protection system from focusing only on short term safety nets and basic needs to also prioritise opportunities to invest in human capital and prevent intergenerational transfer of poverty. In developing countries, social protection measures usually involve CCTs or improved access to social services (Barrientos and Hulme 2009:439-441). CCTs are income transfers to poor and vulnerable families, based on a condition of investing in human capital accumulation in their children. This usually means actions taken to improve their children's health, nutritional status or school participation<sup>8</sup> (García and Saavedra 2017:921-922).

A social protection system that protects vulnerable populations from poverty and social exclusion has been growing in Cambodia during a time of economic development and poverty reduction in the country. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) approved a new National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) in 2017. A goal mentioned in NSPPF is to further expand scholarships for primary and secondary education (The Royal Government of Cambodia 2017). The scholarship analysed in this thesis should be understood as a social protection measure that aims at increasing access to education for a vulnerable population, the Highlanders.

## **2.3 Scholarship for Highland students**

This section will describe the scholarship analysed in this thesis, but first the Highlander indigenous group will be introduced. In Cambodia, around 90 percent of the population are Khmer (Hayden and Martin 2011:44). However, there are minority groups: the Muslim minority Cham, ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese and the indigenous population in the upland north-eastern provinces<sup>9</sup> called Highlanders<sup>10</sup> (Escott 2000:239-240; Sokhom 2004:137). The Highlanders make up about 4 percent of the Cambodian population (Hayden and Martin 2011:44).

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<sup>8</sup> CCTs have become one of the most common actions taken as a social protection measure, with more than 50 countries using CCTs worldwide (García and Saavedra 2017:921-922).

<sup>9</sup> Highlanders mostly reside in the provinces of Mondulkiri, Ratanakiri, Steung Treng and Kratie (Sokhom 2004:137).

<sup>10</sup> The indigenous groups are called Khmer Loeu, meaning Highland Khmers, commonly referred to as Highlanders. Several different tribes are included within the term of Highlanders (Escott 2000:239-240; Sokhom 2004:137).

The different tribes of the Highlanders have their own languages and customs and usually live off farming and raising animals. Highland girls can get married at 15-16, and boys when they are 19-20 years old. Unfortunately, there has been a perception among other Cambodians that the Highlanders are ignorant and uncivilised, partly because of the Highlanders lack of communication with other groups in the past (Escott 2000:240-244).

Highlanders have been less likely to attend school than the Cambodia average (Sokhom 2004:142)<sup>11</sup>. The scholarship distributed to Highland students in USS is a combined effort by RGC and UNICEF Cambodia. RGC has been implementing a scholarship programme to students in secondary school belonging to families registered as poor where US\$90 per year is provided to each student.<sup>12</sup> UNICEF Cambodia complements that existing scholarship programme with additional funds to provide US\$150 to recipients. However, UNICEF Cambodia decided to target the US\$60 top-up of the scholarship to Highland students in USS only<sup>13</sup>, thus not to all students registered as poor. Highland USS students not receiving a scholarship by RGC were provided with a scholarship of US\$150 in-full from UNICEF Cambodia<sup>14</sup> (Chum 2018).

The scholarship to Highland students was first provided in 2015 and is currently in its third cohort. The scholarship is given directly to students, not to their families. Around 1600 Highlander students have received the scholarship from UNICEF Cambodia. The scholarship is only provided to grade 11 or 12 students<sup>15</sup>. There are hopes of being able to provide the scholarship to grade 10 students in the future<sup>16</sup>. The reason for UNICEF Cambodia to solely focus on Highland students was due to the low access to education among Highlanders, particularly on a secondary school level. As Highlanders usually live in remote areas, the distance to school causes many to drop out, as well as financial limitations within families. The

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<sup>11</sup> No statistics for school enrolment according to minority status have been found.

<sup>12</sup> The government scholarship is targeted towards students in poor families, irrespective of ethnicity. As this intervention was reviewed, it was suggested that the sum of US\$90 would not keep students in school and increasing the annual transfer to US\$150 was recommended (Chum 2018).

<sup>13</sup> The scholarship is distributed to Highland upper secondary school students in the provinces of Monduliri, Ratanakiri, Steung Treng, Kratie and Preah Vihear (Chum 2018).

<sup>14</sup> A UNICEF-commissioned independent review of the scholarship is currently being conducted with the aim of informing future government implementation guidelines for scholarships (Chum 2018).

<sup>15</sup> The scholarship does not cover all three grades in upper secondary school due to a limitation of resources (Chum 2018).

<sup>16</sup> A scholarship to grade 10 students could be implemented from the school year of 2018-2019 onwards.

aim of providing a scholarship in USS to these students is to encourage them to stay in school until graduating from USS. The scholarship is viewed as a social protection intervention, increasing access to educational services. A second, long-term, reason for targeting Highland students is to address the shortage of teachers in the remote north-eastern areas of Cambodia (Chum 2018). A lack of teachers who speak minority languages prevents educational participation for Highland children. Multilingual education programmes have been implemented during the first three years of primary school, with support from UNICEF Cambodia (UNICEF Cambodia 2016:2), however, these programmes cannot function without qualified teachers who speak the language. Thus, the aim of the scholarship is to encourage Highland students to graduate from USS and continue to Provincial Teacher Training College (PTTC), though this is not a condition for the scholarship. There are plans of implementing a scholarship for teacher trainees in the future (Chum 2018).

### **3. Literature review**

This chapter will provide information on existing research relating to CCTs for education, to describe the empirical context in which the thesis is placed. First, previous research on the value of education and obstacles to participation in Cambodia will be reviewed. Second, impacts of CCTs for education and previous understandings of how a scholarship can promote educational participation will be discussed. Third, this chapter discusses criticism towards CCTs for education and alternative interventions suggested to improve social protection and educational participation. The chapter will finish by discussing gaps in previous research, situating the relevance of this thesis.

#### **3.1 Value of education and obstacles to participation**

Existing knowledge on obstacles to participation are centred around financial limitations, obstacles connected to the school, or obstacles at individual, family or community level.

Edwards et al. (2014: 378) have researched determinants for educational participation in Cambodia and argue that the availability of accommodation nearby schools is important for students to be able to attend. Teacher presence and performance is also a determinant for student retention in Cambodia (Benveniste et al. 2008:66), highlighting the problem of teacher absenteeism that has arisen due to the teachers' workload and high teacher-student ratios. Kluttz

(2015:172) argues that due to inferior quality of the educational system and low teacher motivation, the perception of education as valuable is questioned among families. An education that does not reach quality standards will not result in improved capabilities, having the consequence of families questioning the value of attaining a formal education.

The family's financial situation can determine the possibility to attend school, especially in secondary school where costs are higher than in primary school<sup>17</sup>. While there is no tuition fee for attending public school (Hayden and Martin 2011:38-39), families must pay for school material and uniforms (Edwards et al. 2014: 377). Students are further charged for the tutoring in extra classes, which are common to attend<sup>18</sup>. Edwards et al. (2014:376-377) and Piquemal (2017:323) found a belief among students that if one cannot afford the extra classes, you will not be able to keep up in ordinary class. During ordinary school hours there might be teacher absenteeism, or all parts of the curriculum are not covered. Extra classes are therefore necessary for students to pass exams, and students would not be able to transition to higher grades without attending the extra classes.

Many students either start school late or drop out early because of the need to engage in income-generating work to support their families. While No et al. (2016:223) find no evidence for child labour being the cause of dropouts, Edwards et al. (2014:376) find that dropping out early to support the family is especially true for the older siblings, making it possible for younger siblings to stay longer in school. Keng (2004:560) also find that younger children in a family have a greater opportunity to attend school longer than their older siblings. However, Keng (2004:560) argues that household economic resources are not the most important determinant for school participation. Likewise, No et al. (2016:223) argue that there is no evidence for poverty being the cause of dropouts. Rather, Keng (2004:560) argues that the parents' educational background, their expectation of future employment and income for their children and their involvement in their child's education are important determinants. However, according to Piquemal (2017:321) many parents feel that they cannot be involved in their children's education due to farming activities and limited educational background.

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<sup>17</sup> The annual cost for one child to attend primary school is US\$109. For lower secondary it is US\$218 and for upper secondary the annual cost is US\$378 (1 USD = 4021,75 KHR, 4 May 2018) (MoP 2016:47).

<sup>18</sup> 72 percent of all students in upper secondary school attended extra lessons in 2015 (MoP 2016:44).

Kluttz (2015:172-173) argue that if there is a disconnect between the educational system and the needs of the labour market, graduating will not guarantee employment, nor an improved economic position. This can make families and children favour employment over education. Piquemal (2017:321) similarly states that parental belief about the value of education and the perceived social value of education are important for the children's opportunity to attend school. Families who experience a dissonance between personal and community beliefs about the value of education are vulnerable to peer influence from neighbours about letting their children drop out of school. Further, as similarly suggested by Keng (2004:560) and Kluttz (2015:172-173), Piquemal (2017:321-322) also states that the parental expectation of the economic benefit of attending school is a great determinant for school participation. Thus, if parents start to doubt the economic value of education, it could be an obstacle to continued school participation. Moreover, even when parental support for education is attained, parents don't actively prevent their children from dropping out of school if there is an understanding that the child wants to work, or if the child does not perform well in school.

Academic ability is also an important determinant for continued education, as families may choose to invest more in one child's educational attainment if he/she is performing well in school (Edwards et al. 2014:376). Keng (2004:560) and No et al. (2016:223) likewise find that academic performance can influence parental willingness of keeping a child in school. Children who start school at the recommended age performs better in school, increasing their chance of studying longer.

Obstacles for participation among Highlanders include financial barriers and the need to have children help with farming and household duties, similar to general findings in Cambodia. Scheduling conflicts between school and agricultural activities has also caused dropouts. The language barrier has further been an obstacle as Highlanders speak minority languages while lessons are taught in Khmer (Sokhom 2004:142-143). Low rates of educational attainment among Highlanders has further led to few Highland students having the opportunity to become teachers, meaning that teachers in north-eastern provinces are sometimes from other provinces and don't speak the minority languages. This has continued the language barrier to education (Escott 2000:245-246).

Due to Highlanders living in remote areas, the distance to schools, especially schools with higher grades, has created both a time-cost and higher expenses for transport to attend school.

Thus, the benefits of education have not always been felt to outweigh the substantial costs in money and time (Sokhom 2004:143). Formal education often focuses on the Khmer language and culture and academic learning, not considering the practical skills development needed for Highlanders that mainly work with agriculture. Formal education has therefore not always been considered important in Highland communities (Escott 2000:246 -247). There have further been gender disparities in school enrolment among Highlanders. Constraints in sending girls to school has included a fear for their safety caused by the long distance to school and the custom to take girls out of school early for them to get married (Sokhom 2004:144).

The presented literature has shown that the obstacles to educational participation in Cambodia are complex, and it is not obvious how CCTs could address the various factors. Understanding how CCTs have been perceived to improve educational participation in the past is thus important for being able to relate the findings in this research to the current theoretical understanding, which will be presented below.

### **3.2 Impacts of CCTs for education**

This section will present existing research on impacts on educational participation when implementing a CCT. Further, while research on how CCTs can influence educational participation is limited, previous findings on the influence on financial resources, individual motivation and family and community support for education will be discussed.

Evaluations on CCTs for education have found that providing cash results in an increase in school enrolment, attendance, reduced dropout rates and reduced grade repetition (Rawlings and Rubio 2005:45-46; Filmer and Schady 2008:609-610; Adato and Bassett 2009:62; Galiani and McEwan 2013:95). Generally, impact on school enrolment and attendance have been higher in cases where the baseline indicators were low, meaning that CCTs often have had a greater impact for secondary school students compared with primary (Adato and Bassett 2009:62).

Evaluations have found a heterogeneity in impact, where the greatest increase in enrolment is found among the most disadvantaged students. The characteristics of a disadvantaged student depends on the context in which the CCT is supplied, but can be students who are: girls, extremely poor, living in rural areas or far from school, or students whose parents have little or no education (Filmer and Schady 2008:610; Adato and Bassett 2009:62-64). Ham (2014:172)



thus holds that CCTs can decrease the inequality of opportunity for education through addressing structural inequalities.

There are, however, studies from Mexico, Colombia, and Turkey, that have found little or no impact on school enrolment in certain regions or grades, after implementing a CCT. Further, several evaluations have had difficulty in finding any positive impact on academic achievement among recipients (Adato and Bassett 2009:62-64; Filmer and Schady 2014:692), raising questions about the purpose of providing scholarships if it does not result in improved learning outcomes.

However, the assumption that cash can lead to improved educational participation has, as shown above, often been proved. Existing research on how this outcome has been achieved is limited, but often refers to the impact on economic resources. While a CCT rarely covers all expenses connected with education, Adato and Bassett (2009:62) argue that the CCT can promote educational participation by covering some expenses or to compensate for the income lost when children attend school instead of engaging in income-generating activities. In Peru, CCTs have been found to reduce the time children spend on domestic chores and agricultural work (Jones et al. 2008:263), suggesting that time spent in school could be increased.

Adato and Bassett (2009:62) further argue that when a CCT is conditional upon attending school, it provides an incentive for continued education for the recipient. Findings from Turkey similarly suggest that receiving a CCT encourages students to attend school and perform well. CCTs can also increase students' self-esteem and self-confidence, making them more enthusiastic to attend school (Yildirim et al. 2014:76). Further, findings from Peru suggest that the provision of a CCT generated greater involvement by parents in their children's education. Moreover, the CCT also resulted in a growing awareness of the importance of education in the community (Jones et al. 2008:263). However, CCTs can have varied impact on community support for education, depending on the context in which it is implemented. Culturally embedded norms which influence the possibility of attending school are sometimes more important than the cash incentive provided for families to send their children in school. In Turkey, a CCT failed to improve school enrolment in certain regions of the country, due to the constraint of sociocultural norms (Adato and Bassett 2009:64).

### **3.3 Criticism of CCTs and alternative interventions**

Having presented the possible positive effects on education when implementing a CCT, and the current understanding of how CCTs can have this outcome, this section will discuss criticism towards CCTs and present research on alternative efforts needed to improve social protection and educational opportunity. The criticism is important to understand to relate the findings of the thesis to a theoretical context which is informed by a broad understanding of CCTs.

Criticism towards CCTs highlight that the intervention might not be the most cost-effective nor sustainable solution to the problem at hand. As several countries fund CCTs through loans, the long-term sustainability of the transfer is questioned. Furthermore, there is little evidence that the cash incentives for demand are more cost-effective than strengthening the supply-side of social services to improve human capital. Rather, there is a concern that resources are being diverted from supply-side investments in social services to CCTs (Handa and Davis 2006:531). It is further argued that CCTs as a targeted intervention for improving human capital among the young population is lacking in achieving poverty alleviation since there is no focus on improving skills among parents or finding alternatives for income security among targeted households. Thus, Handa and Davis (2006:532) argue that CCTs does not extend to a sustainable local economic development beyond the termination of the transfer to the children.

Given the criticism, it is recommended that CCTs are implemented in combination with a provision of other services, relating to health, nutrition and/or livelihood security (Adato and Basset 2009:72). Jones et al. (2008:267, 269) further argue that CCTs need to be complemented by an effort to improve service quality and coverage, as well as efforts to raising awareness of economic and social rights of the population. Furthermore, Edwards et al. (2014:377) as well as Keng (2004:560) suggest that there should be an improved engagement of families in their children's education by strengthening connections between home and school. It is also suggested by Edwards et al. (2014:377) that school materials and uniforms, as well as transportation to and from school, could be provided by the government, to ensure that education really is free of charge. Providing accommodation near the school could also be an efficient way of helping more students attend school.

### **3.4 Research gaps**

The existing literature presented above provides insight to the value of and obstacles to education in Cambodia and it shows that a CCT for education can have positive impacts on

education outcomes. However, most of the findings on the value of education in Cambodia rely on parents' or communities' understanding of the benefits of education in relation to the quality of education, the accumulation of relevant skills and the perceived economic benefits of education. Research on the students' perspective on the value of education is limited. Further, findings on the impact of CCTs are much based on quantitative studies. Focus has also been to explain the effect on education outcomes, rather than explaining how this affect was achieved. While there is some research on how CCTs influence financial resources, individual motivation and family/community support for education, the findings are limited and not comprehensive for understanding the mechanism through which a cash inflow supports educational participation. Further, the research on how CCTs actually addresses specific obstacles to educational participation is limited. This opens several research gaps that this thesis aims to address. Through the stated research question, findings from this thesis can complement existing research with context specific knowledge on the value of education and obstacles for participation, and the way in which a scholarship can address obstacles for participation. However, to understand the findings, the analysis needs to be conducted in relation to theory. Thus, the analytical framework from which findings in this thesis will be analysed is presented below.

#### **4. Analytical framework**

Based on the discussion of the existing research presented above, this chapter will construct an analytical framework to interpret students' understanding of the value of education, obstacles to participation and how a scholarship can help in tackling obstacles and promote educational participation. Using background literature as a basis for the analytical framework is a common strategy when research questions originate from a gap in the existing research. While there is some criticism to this approach for its lack of linkages to grand theory (Bryman 2016:19-20), it is believed to be the most relevant approach for the purposes of this thesis, which is to address the gaps in literature from a student perspective.

The analytical framework will consist of three parts. The first is a framework for analysing students' perspective on the value of education. Previous findings on the value of education in Cambodia are informed by how parents and communities have reasoned about its importance. These understandings will be used to discuss the findings on the students' perspective and if it

is consistent with or challenges current understandings, thus adding new knowledge to existing research. The second is a framework for analysing students' understanding of the obstacles to participation. Both findings on obstacles to participation among Highlanders and in Cambodia in general will be included in the framework to ensure a broad understanding of the situation. These first two parts of the framework are included to provide an understanding of students' reasoning for attending school and their understanding of the obstacles that would hinder participation, which would guide their perception of the success of the scholarship.

The third part consists of a framework for analysing the students' understanding of how the scholarship addresses obstacles to participation and promotes educational participation, and further the ways in which it fails to do so. Previous research indicates that the scholarship can promote educational participation by influencing financial resources, individual motivation and family and community support for education. These factors will make up the framework for analysing the students' understanding, which may add to existing knowledge. The three parts of the framework are connected, as students' value of education and understanding of obstacles to participation provide an important insight to what they would need the scholarship to help them with. However, the various parts of the framework will be used separately in the analysis, when analysing the value of education, obstacles to participation, and how the scholarship can promote educational participation respectively.

Thus, the analytical framework for this thesis consists of tools that describe the current understanding in existing research. However, even though the analysis is guided by the analytical framework, the richness of the data accumulated will not be restricted by the limitations for what the theoretical base of the thesis is able to explain. Rather, the aim of this thesis is to add to existing research on CCTs for education by discussing how the students' understanding may correspond to, complement or challenge previous research. The analytical framework is presented in Figure 1 below.

<b>ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>SOURCES</b>
<b>VALUE OF EDUCATION</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Education can be of value if it results in improved capabilities</li> <li>2. Education can be of value if the skills accumulated are perceived as important for the student's future</li> <li>3. Education can be of value if it is believed to lead to future employment and an improved economic position</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kluttz (2015:172)</li> <li>2. Escott (2000:246 -247)</li> <li>3. Keng (2004:560) and Kluttz (2015:172-173)</li> </ol>
<b>OBSTACLES TO PARTICIPATION</b>	
<b>Financial resources</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The cost of education</li> <li>2. Costs for extra classes</li> <li>3. The need for children to work to support the family</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sokhom (2004:143) and Edwards et al. (2014:377)</li> <li>2. Edwards et al. (2014:376-377) and Piquemal (2017:323)</li> <li>3. Sokhom (2004:143)</li> </ol>
<b>School</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of accommodation</li> <li>2. Teacher presence and performance</li> <li>3. Language</li> <li>4. Distance</li> <li>5. Safety when travelling to school</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Edwards et al. (2014:378)</li> <li>2. Benveniste et al. (2008:66)</li> <li>3. Sokhom (2004: 142)</li> <li>4. Sokhom (2004:143)</li> <li>5. Sokhom (2004:144)</li> </ol>
<b>Individual</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Academic performance</li> <li>2. Start school at recommended age</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Keng (2004:560), Edwards et al. (2014:376) and No et al. (2016:223)</li> <li>2. Keng (2004:560) and No et al. (2016:223)</li> </ol>
<b>Family/Community</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Older siblings drop out to support younger siblings</li> <li>2. Parents' educational background</li> <li>3. Parents' lack of involvement in their children's education</li> <li>4. Parents' perception of education as valuable</li> <li>5. Value of education in the community</li> <li>6. Traditional customs of taking girls out of school for early marriage</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Keng (2004:560) and Edwards et al. (2014:376)</li> <li>2. Keng (2004:560)</li> <li>3. Keng (2004:560) and Piquemal (2017:321)</li> <li>4. Piquemal (2017:321)</li> <li>5. Piquemal (2017:321)</li> <li>6. Sokhom (2004:144)</li> </ol>
<b>HOW THE SCHOLARSHIP PROMOTES EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION</b>	
<b>Financial resources</b> The scholarship can be used to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. cover expenses for education</li> <li>2. compensate for the income lost when children are studying instead of helping the family</li> <li>3. reduce time students spend on domestic chores and work</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adato and Bassett (2009:62)</li> <li>2. Adato and Bassett (2009:62)</li> <li>3. Jones et al. (2008:263)</li> </ol>
<b>Individual motivation</b> The scholarship influences: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. school attendance as it is an incentive for participation</li> <li>2. encouragement to attend school and perform better</li> <li>3. self-esteem and self-confidence</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adato and Bassett (2009:62)</li> <li>2. Yildirim et al. (2014:76)</li> <li>3. Yildirim et al. (2014:76)</li> </ol>
<b>Family and community support for education</b> The scholarship influences: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. parental involvement in children's education</li> <li>2. awareness of the importance of education in communities</li> <li>3. cultural norms that prevent educational participation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jones et al. (2008:263)</li> <li>2. Jones et al. (2008:263)</li> <li>3. Adato and Bassett (2009:64)</li> </ol>

Figure 1: Analytical framework

## **5. Methodology**

This chapter will provide an overview on the methodological approach taken within this thesis. First, the philosophical worldview and research strategy will be presented. Later, an in-depth description on methods used within case selections, sampling strategies, data collection and analysis will be provided. The chapter will be concluded by discussing limitations within the thesis and ethical considerations made.

### **5.1 Philosophical worldview**

To understand how knowledge and reality is perceived within this thesis, the ontological and epistemological standpoint will briefly be discussed. A constructivist ontological standpoint will be adopted, where it is believed that the phenomenon under study is constructed and constantly recreated by the subject (Bryman 2016:29-30). Thus, regardless of the objective of the scholarship and the logic underlying its design, this thesis focuses on how scholarships are understood by students, which determines their perception of its effectiveness. Further, an interpretivist epistemological standpoint will be used, where focus lies on understanding the complexity of a human experience (Bryman 2016:26). This ontological and epistemological standpoint is appropriate for this thesis, as the purpose is to understand how a scholarship can promote educational participation by analysing the students' perspective.

### **5.2 Research strategy and design**

Qualitative research strategies are often used when the purpose is to understand a phenomenon through analysing the participant's interpretation of it, making it relevant for this thesis purpose (Stewart-Whiters et al. 2014:60; Bryman 2016:375). While a quantitative research strategy could also be used to analyse a scholarship, it would most likely focus on explaining the increased educational participation and retention in terms of numbers, while the qualitative study will focus on understanding how and why a scholarship may increase educational participation. As Waters (2010:687) and Yildirim et al. (2014:77) argue, qualitative research is relevant when aiming to understand the recipients' perception of the scholarship. Further, there is much quantitative research on the impact of scholarships, but quantitative research cannot identify or understand the human experience of an intervention. A qualitative approach may thus be able to contribute with new knowledge on how scholarships can have positive educational outcomes.

A case study has been chosen as the research design, which aims to analyse a specific object of interest within a specific context, using in-depth data and multiple sources (Creswell 2013:97; Bryman 2016:61). Here, the context- and time-specific scholarship distributed to Highland USS students in Ratanakiri, Cambodia is the object of analysis. This thesis will consist of an exemplifying case, as the scholarship to Highland students is not a unique case but an example within a broader category of CCTs for education (Bryman 2016:62-63). The purpose of a case study is to provide context-specific knowledge of a specific case, which adds knowledge to the research on the topic (Flyvbjerg 2006:224). Therefore, the strength of a case study is that unique features of a specific case can be found (Bryman 2016:61). External validity beyond the specific case is limited though (Gerring 2017:245), which means that case studies should not be used when the aim is to generalise findings (Stake 2000:19). However, the aim of this study is not to generalise findings to larger populations, but to engage in an analytical generalisation within this case where theoretical advancements can be drawn from conclusions (Bryman 2016:64).

### **5.3 Case selections**

This thesis will analyse the scholarship distributed to Highland USS students in Ratanakiri, Cambodia. Cambodia was chosen as country for the case study due to its remarkable history of education being connected to life-threatening danger during the rule of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s, followed by an impressive improvement in educational attendance since then (Keng 2004:555; UNICEF Cambodia 2016:1). The perception of the value of education is thus interesting in this context, as well as the perceived support needed to be able to attend school. While primary classes have reached near complete enrolment, the rates for attendance in lower secondary and USS are lacking behind (MoEYS 2017:41). Therefore, a secondary school intervention was chosen, to understand the measures taken by RGC in improving secondary school attendance. Further, the Highlanders have historically been especially disadvantaged in terms of educational opportunity in Cambodia, with lower attendance rates resulting from complex obstacles to continued education (Sokhom 2004:142-143). Their understanding of how an inflow of cash can, or cannot, promote educational participation is thus especially interesting given the various obstacles they have faced to participation. Moreover, the province of Ratanakiri was chosen as research site due to the high number of scholarship recipients in the province, and the fact that large populations of Highlanders reside there (Escott 2000:240). This was believed to be beneficial for the sampling of informants, however, it also means that

obstacles to educational participation experienced in Ratanakiri might not be the same as for Highland students in other provinces where Highlanders are in minority.

#### **5.4 Sampling strategies**

To identify informants, purposive non-probability sampling was used (Bryman 2016:408). Five USS were included in the research but will not be mentioned by name to protect the anonymity of the informants. Purposive sampling is common within qualitative research, aiming to find informants that have relevant characteristics/experiences/knowledge for the thesis purpose. A typical case sampling approach was used, where informants were selected based on them corresponding to a dimension of interest (Bryman 2016:409). The relevant characteristics consisted of the informant being enrolled in an USS in Ratanakiri that was part of the scholarship programme and for the informant to be a Highlander. All informants were between the ages of 17-23, meaning that some had started school at an older age. Further, most of the informants received the scholarship provided to Highland students. However, six informants did not receive the scholarship, as they were not yet in the right grade (grade 11 or 12) or had not yet been enrolled in the programme. Furthermore, two Highlander adolescents who had attended school but were currently out-of-school were also interviewed.<sup>19</sup> The non-recipient informants were included as their perception on the value of education, obstacles to participations and interventions needed to improve educational participation could further add to the broad understanding of these topics within the thesis<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, the exact number of informants was not decided upon beforehand, instead, research was conducted until theoretical saturation was reached, as no new findings emerged during interviews (Stewart-Withers et al. 2014:63).

While an effort was made to include an equal number of female and male adolescents in the research, this could not entirely be achieved as students who matched the criteria and were available for interviews in each school were not equally divided between the genders. Of the 19 scholarship recipients interviewed, eleven were female and eight were male. Of the six students interviewed who did not yet receive the scholarship, two were female and four were male. Both out-of-school informants were male. While Ratanakiri province is remotely placed, three of the five schools were placed in more urbanised areas of the province and two were

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<sup>19</sup> The out-of-school informants will only be referred to as not receiving a scholarship in the list of interviews, to ensure their anonymity.

<sup>20</sup> For a complete list of interviewees, see appendix 1 – List of interviewees.



rurally located. However, whereas all schools offered accommodation, one of the urban schools was a dormitory school, meaning that all students stayed at the school. Thus, most of these students were originally from rural areas of Ratanakiri. Ensuring that students from differently situated schools were included as informants was believed to ensure that a broader understanding of the topic was apprehended.

A limitation within the sampling strategy was that sampling was conducted by gatekeepers within the school. After selecting the criteria for informants, access to the schools was negotiated through contact with the Chief of the Secondary Education Office in Ratanakiri who informed the schools of my research. Thus, school management chose the individual students for interviews and focus group discussions. This can have affected the results, as students they knew to be ambitious and positive towards the school could have been chosen. However, for reasons of wanting to legitimise my presence, the assignment of selecting students was left to the school.

## **5.5 Data collection**

To collect data for the thesis, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used. Case studies often gathers information from multiple sources (Creswell 2013:97) and semi-structured interviews and FGDs are two data collection methods frequently used within qualitative research (Stewart-Whiters et al. 2014:63). Their design makes them useful to gain insight to subjective understandings and perceptions of a topic, making these methods suitable for the research question (Hammett et al. 2015:139-140).

### *5.5.1 Individual interviews*

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in December 2017 with 19 scholarship recipient students, six non-scholarship recipient students and two out-of-school adolescents, with the help of a translator. These were based on prepared interview guidelines<sup>21</sup>, which were informed by the analytical framework. An interview was further conducted with an Education Specialist at UNICEF Cambodia in January 2018<sup>22</sup> for background and context information<sup>23</sup>. All interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile phone and thereafter transcribed. The strength of data collected during interviews is that it provides an in-depth understanding of the

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<sup>21</sup> See appendix 2 – Interview guidelines.

<sup>22</sup> Referred to as Chum (2018) in the thesis.

<sup>23</sup> A pilot interview was also conducted to test if the interview questions were understood.

informant's perception of the topic. However, interviews will always provide subjective data, which could be biased (Hammett et al. 2015:147). Thus, similar to the statement that this thesis cannot generalise findings, the data gathered from informants cannot be seen as an absolute truth of external realities, rather a truth about informants' perception of the scholarship.

### *5.5.2 Focus group discussions*

Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the help of a translator in December 2017 at two of the five USS. FGDs were conducted to ensure that different data collection methods had been used, to enhance triangulation of findings (Bryman 2016:384) and to elaborate on findings from individual interviews (Creswell 2013:251). Interview guidelines had been prepared for the FGDs and five informants participated in each discussion, including both male and female students. The informants were all Highlanders and received the scholarship. Most of the participants had been interviewed individually previously. The FGDs were also audio-recorded and thereafter transcribed.

The strength of FGDs is that other aspects of a phenomenon can be understood through the interaction of participants in a group discussion (Bryman 2016:501). For this reason, the FGD was believed to add to the understanding of scholarships. A limitation of the FGD is that group dynamics might influence who speaks and who does not, and that shared ideas hinders the group from thinking critically about the topic. Thus, it was important for me as a moderator to ensure that all participants were given space to answer, though it cannot be known if there were conflicting views within the group that were not spoken. Further, sensitive views to an issue might not be dared to be expressed in a group setting. However, the individual interviews were conducted with the hope of ensuring that informants felt safe to express their thoughts (Bryman 2016:522).

## **5.6 Data analysis**

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the informants' understanding of the research question, which was done by finding reoccurring themes within the data. Thus, thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to organise the data and identify and analyse reoccurring patterns. A theme is defined as a collection of statements (or codes) which is of importance to the research question, appearing anywhere in the individual interviews or FGDs. The data was coded in a systematic manner by using nodes in NVivo, noting all interesting

sentiments irrespective of previous research. Criticism of using NVivo states that it quantifies qualitative data, and that the fragmentation of data into codes loses the narrative in interviews and the communication process in FGDs. This must be considered during analysis. Strengths of using the programme consists of being able to relate the coded text to personal information of the informants and understanding the prevalence of a phenomenon (Bryman 2016:602-603). Thus, the informants were also transformed into cases where personal information about age, sex, school, ethnic minority group and more was recorded.

This analysis uses both an inductive and a deductive approach. Using an inductive approach, the coding was initially done without the ambition of fitting the data into the analytical framework, instead focusing on finding any relevant information relating to the thesis topic. However, as the data collected is influenced by the interview guidelines which were constructed based on the analytical framework, it is to be expected that findings correspond to existing theory. Further, the findings are later analysed in relation to the analytical framework, indicating a deductive approach (Braun and Clarke 2006:82-84). However, as the thesis further aims to complement existing theory on scholarships with new findings, a mixture of both deductive and inductive approaches is used. All interviews, including scholarship recipients, non-recipients and out-of-school children, were used in the analysis to ensure that as many perspectives as possible were included<sup>24</sup>.

## **5.7 Limitations**

A limitation within this thesis is that all but two of the informants are currently attending school. Thus, informants' understanding of obstacles to participation might not be the same as understandings among adolescents who are not in school, as the informants clearly have overcome every obstacle. Thus, when discussing the way in which the scholarship has promoted educational participation, the findings are understood to be important for Highlanders currently in school. The extent to which the factors are important for Highlanders in general cannot be stated as extensive interviews with Highlanders out-of-school have not been conducted.

Moreover, this thesis will not discuss the difference between scholarship recipients or non-recipients in their perception of the scholarship. Neither will a difference in understanding

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<sup>24</sup> When analysing how the scholarship has been used and how it has influenced educational participation, only answers from scholarship recipients will be included, as the non-recipient and out-of-school informants were not asked about this.

between the genders or between the urban or rural students be analysed., as it is not believed that enough informants have been interviewed to confidently state any findings in this regard.

Relying on a translator during the interviews and FDGs means that it cannot be guaranteed whether all things said were translated, or if the translation properly conveyed the meaning behind the statement. This may have had an impact on the analysis.

### **5.8 Positionality and ethical considerations**

During the field research, I reflected upon my positionality, including matters concerning ethnicity, language, age, educational background and my connection to UNICEF Cambodia as an intern. Consideration was made in terms of clothing and belongings to bring to the field, to not accentuate a power dimension between me and the informants. Still, the informants' perception of me may have constructed a power relation during the interview that can have impacted the findings (Sultana 2007:382-383; Hammett et al. 2015:51). Moreover, their eagerness about showing me their appreciation for receiving the scholarship (considering my connection to UNICEF Cambodia) may have influenced their answers. This is important to be aware of throughout the thesis.

While there are ethical concerns with basing one's research on engagements with adolescents, it was felt that their perception of the scholarship could add important knowledge to existing research and further that excluding them from research could worsen their marginalised position within knowledge creation (Banks and Scheyvens 2014:190, 192). However, an effort was made to ensure that all participants were above the age of 16, in accordance with Lund University guidelines for research with children<sup>25</sup>.

It was important to ensure that informants were comfortable with participating. Thus, the purpose of the research was explained to them, as well as the conditions of their participation. This included their right to withdraw from the research at any point, their right not to answer a question, guaranteeing their anonymity in the research and the fact that their answers would in no way affect their education or scholarship. All participants further signed a consent form where this information was stated, to establish the validity of the conditions concerning the

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<sup>25</sup> Only 6 of the 30 informants were under the age of 18, being 17 years old.

interview and to ensure informed consent<sup>26</sup>. All informants were given a pseudonym, which will be referred to during the analysis to guarantee the anonymity of the informants. The participants were also given a pen and notebook as a token of appreciation, which was deemed appropriate as the informants were students. Moreover, knowing the sensitivity of interviewing adolescents, it was important to establish a contact with the Chief of the Secondary Education Office in Ratanakiri beforehand, to legitimise my interaction with the students (Bank and Scheyvens 2014:176, 192).

The methodological approach for retrieving and analysing data has provided an understanding for how the findings in this thesis have emerged. The next chapter will present and analyse the findings in relation to the theoretical setting of the analysis.

## **6. Analysis**

The findings from field research conducted in Ratanakiri, Cambodia will be presented and analysed in this chapter, following the structure of the analytical framework. The purpose of the research is to gain insight to the students' understanding of how the scholarship has promoted educational participation. To answer this, the students' value of education will first be analysed, which is important to understand as it would guide the students' perception of the scholarship as a relevant and successful intervention. Next, the students' understanding of obstacles to continued educational participation will be analysed. This is important for the research purpose, as it provides insight to the factors the scholarship would need to address to promote educational participation. With reference to the found obstacles, the students' understanding of how the scholarship addresses obstacles to participation and promote educational participation will thereafter be analysed, followed by an analysis of students' understanding of obstacles not addressed by the scholarship.

### **6.1 The value of education**

From the interviews and FGDs, it was understood that education was valued among the students. All students said that they like going to school and that they prefer attending school, rather than working on the farm with their families. The themes found within how the students

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<sup>26</sup> See appendix 3 – Consent form.

understand the importance of education were: 1) that it is important to have an education to find future employment and to have a better life, 2) that it is important to have knowledge and 3) that education is important to be able to help oneself, one's family, the community and the country.

There was an understanding among informants that the value of education lies in its importance for future opportunities, which relates to how the value of education was perceived in previous literature. Nakry explained: "Without education, I would not be able to have a good job in the future". Thus, while previous research implied that the possibility of education to lead to future employment and improved capabilities was doubted (Keng 2004:560; Kluttz 2015:172-173), the understanding above shows that students do recognise the importance of having a formal education to succeed later in life. Stating that education is important to find future employment and having knowledge further suggests that students believe that skills learned in school can be beneficial in the future. Moreover, findings indicate a belief in the educational system to be able to provide important knowledge, as the students related the value of going to school to gaining knowledge. This is important, as not believing that education could provide Highlander students with important skills was a factor that could lessen the value of education (Escott 2000:246-247). The understanding among students complements previous findings by showing that formal education is believed to be important for young Highlanders to have a better future. This is not saying that practical skills connected to agriculture is no longer valued, but that attaining a formal education and a theoretical skill set is nowadays also perceived as important.

The findings further complement previous research by highlighting an understanding among students that education is important "to help myself, my family and also my society" (Vibol). It suggests a belief that education is important for development, and further a will of wanting to contribute to a positive development in the community. The statement highlights the students' understanding of the value of education on an important level, namely the potential of education to be a gateway to development processes.

Thus, the findings show that education is valued among the students. This is important to understand to analyse their understanding of the scholarship, as it would likely not be perceived as an important intervention that made a difference in their lives if education was not valued. Understanding the students' perspective further adds knowledge to existing research. It should be mentioned that none of the informants ever referred to education as their right, suggesting

that while the value of education might be growing in the communities, a human rights approach for explaining the reason for attending school is not yet in place. Further, while it can be understood that education is valued among students in school, this thesis cannot state whether education is perceived to be of value among Highlanders not in school.

## **6.2 Obstacles to educational participation**

While students believed that attaining an education was of value, they also perceived obstacles to continued participation. Their understanding refers to four overarching themes of obstacles, which are the same themes as found in previous research: obstacles within financial resources for education, obstacles connected to the school and obstacles on individual and family/community levels. While factors within the different themes interrelate in creating obstacles to continued participation, they will be presented within four different sections below.

### *6.2.1 Financial obstacles*

Obstacles within financial resources was frequently mentioned among informants. Not being able to afford the expenses connected with education was a reoccurring theme: “[T]he problem is the condition of the family. We are poor. So, it’s hard for us to attend school” (Kravann). The financial possibility of the family to cover costs connected with education, such as paying for school material, uniforms or transport, was thus described as a hindrance. Given that the reasoning behind the scholarship is that a behavioural change will be encouraged through providing cash that lower costs for education, the fact that financial resources are found to be an obstacle for participation strengthens the assumption made for the intervention. Further, having to pay for extra classes after ordinary school hours was mentioned as an obstacle and there was a belief of extra classes being necessary for one’s academic success (Kolab; Kravann; Sokha), which is consistent with the arguments presented by Edwards et al. (2014:376-377) and Piquemal (2017:323). Therefore, if the family is not able to pay for extra classes, it would be hard for students to transition to higher grades, meaning that the need to pay for extra classes could hinder continued participation. Again, given that the expense for extra classes constitute an obstacle, the assumption that scholarships could improve educational participation is strengthened. However, given that tuition fees were withdrawn in public schools in Cambodia to improve attendance, the understanding that fees for extra classes are still hindering students from attending school is problematic. More so because of the practice among teachers not to cover the curriculum in ordinary classes, making attendance in extra classes necessary.

Furthermore, as extra classes are meant to help students perform better in school, the fact that they are perceived as an obstacle to continued participation instead of a support system poses a problem for equal educational participation in Cambodia. Restricting the occurrence of demanding payment for classes that are within the subject curriculum and important for passing exams could be important for increasing educational participation.

The informants further identified the need for children to support the family by working on the farm or in the household as an obstacle to continued participation. This is consistent with previous findings, suggesting that the need to support the family is a common reason for dropping out (Sokhom 2004:143). An out-of-school Highlander explained that: “I want to [go to school], but I have to work and support myself and my family too”. This could be connected to the fact that education is not yet perceived as a fundamental right among the informants. Thus, while education is valued, the need to support the family can in many cases outweigh the perceived value of attending school, perhaps not contemplating the fact that not having the opportunity to attend school is in violation of one’s rights. Understanding that the financial need of the family is perceived as more important than education provides important knowledge for further interventions to improve educational participation, highlighting the need to use a human rights approach for educational participation and further ensuring that costs associated with educational participation (such as costs for school material or uniforms) are limited, as suggested by Edwards et al. (2014:377).

The understanding of financial obstacles to participation corresponds to previous findings on the topic: that costs, extra classes and the need to support the family are obstacles to participation (Sokhom 2004:143; Edwards et al. 2014:376-377; Piquemal 2017:323), which indicates that the scholarship could address obstacles and increase educational participation. It is however interesting to mention that only a few of the informants identified the scholarship as a reason for why they still had the opportunity to attend school. This suggests that while the scholarship may have the possibility of addressing financial obstacles to participation, it is not perceived as the one and only solution for educational participation among informants.

### *6.2.2 Obstacles concerning the school*

Obstacles concerning the school were centred around accommodation near school and distance to schools. Informants stressed the importance of having quality dormitories or other accommodation available for students nearby the school: “If I don’t live in the school, [going



to school] would be a problem. But now, no problem. I am able to stay here” (Vanna). Thus, given that Highlanders often live in remote areas, not having anywhere to stay close to school was understood as an obstacle to continued participation among the informants, especially when transitioning to lower or upper secondary where the availability of schools is scarce and often located far away. Relating to previous research, having to travel far to get to the school means substantial costs for education both in terms of money and time (Sokhom 2004:143). Thus, if there is no opportunity to stay close to school, or if dormitories, including kitchens and sanitary facilities, are of inadequate quality, the possibility or will to stay in school might be limited.

Relating to the finding above, the distance to school was further identified as an obstacle to continued educational participation among informants: “I live far from here. I’m poor, so it’s difficult for me to come to school” (Pich). As the quote suggests, USS are often located far from Highlander communities, increasing costs for transportation and time spent in travelling to school, creating issues for participation. The lack of options for transportation was also highlighted by the informants as a hindrance (Montha; Nisay), especially for female students, as risks for their safety while travelling to school sometimes led parents to prevent their continued participation. The issue of safety for female students was further confirmed during an FGD: “[T]he parents think that the female student is not safe when walking far, because a lot of crime happens, like rape” (Davuth). In this regard, ensuring safe walking distances or transportation options, or that accommodation is available close to the school, could be imperative for improving educational participation in Ratanakiri. This further highlights that interventions at the supply-side of social services, or improvements in infrastructure could be as important as demand-side interventions for education, as suggested by Handa and Davis (2006:531).

The obstacles relating to accommodation nearby schools, distance to schools and safety while travelling corresponds to the previous research in the analytical framework (Sokhom 2004:143-144; Edwards et al. 2014:378). However, the obstacles concerning teacher presence and performance, and the language spoken in school were not understood as obstacles for continued participation among the informants. That language was not mentioned could be explained by the fact that it is mainly an obstacle for starting primary school. Students in USS have already learned to speak Khmer, thus it would not be a hindrance for continued participation. However, while some students mentioned that more, or better qualified, teachers would be needed to improve the quality of the education (Bopha; Montha; Nimol; Rotha), the lack of teachers was

not perceived as an obstacle for participation among the students. This does not necessarily contradict previous research, as a different understanding might have been found had more out-of-school adolescents been interviewed.

### *6.2.3 Obstacles on individual level*

The informants expressed an understanding where academic ability constituted an obstacle for continued participation. Nuon said: “If I do not perform well in school, [my parents] would not allow me to study anymore, they would prefer for me to help them with their business”. While this was not true for all informants, it does suggest a belief among families that education is valued so long as the students are performing well. Similarly, Leap explained that his parents would be upset if he did not perform well in school and would perceive his education to be “a waste of time and money”, further indicating the importance of academic performance for parental support. This also suggests how obstacles at individual and family level are interlinked and connects to the finding that the value of education lies in its potential in improving future opportunities. Likewise, students not believing in their abilities to perform well in school were believed to be more likely to drop out (Davuth; Nuon). If a student is not academically inclined, they or their families might prefer for them to work on the farm instead, suggesting that education would be a “waste” for them, as stated above. Again, it is implied that a rights approach to education is lacking, suggesting that an effort needs to be made to increase awareness about children’s rights in the communities and the intrinsic value of attending school, irrespective of one’s performance.

Findings on the individual level corresponds to previous research and the understanding of educational opportunity being linked with academic performance and self-confidence in one’s abilities (Keng 2004:560; Edwards et al. 2014:376; No et al. 2016:223). Starting school at an older age than recommended was never mentioned as an obstacle to continued education among the informants (Keng 2004:560; No et al. 2016:223). However, this might be because nearly only students who are still attending school were interviewed. Interviews conducted with out-of-school children could have generated different findings, where late school entry might have been a reason for dropping out.

#### *6.2.4 Obstacles on family and community level*

The understanding of obstacles to continued participation on a family and community level included the death of a parent, or parents being sick (Channary; Nisay), family problems (such as divorce or not being allowed to attend school) (Nimol; Kesor; Tevy), early marriage (Bopha; Davuth; Nuon) or dropping out to support the education of younger siblings (Sann), adding new factors to existing literature. Dropping out due to the death of a parent, illness, divorce or supporting a younger sibling suggests a vulnerability among families, where (unexpected) events that prevents some family members from working at the farm requires the extra help of children in school. Older children who want to make sure that their younger siblings can stay in school are often the ones who drop out, which corresponds to the analytical framework (Keng 2004:560; Edwards et al. 2014:376). This provides an insight to the needs of the family, where the survival of the household through agricultural work is more pressing than the need for all children to attend school. This suggests that to improve educational participation for all, it would be important to support secure income strategies for the families simultaneously as increasing access to education.

The issue of not being allowed to attend school suggests a lack of knowledge about the importance of education in communities, or parental/social value of education being limited, which corresponds to the analytical framework (Piquemal 2017:317). Thus, while education was understood to be valued among the students, it cannot be assumed that this perception is shared in all communities. Therefore, finding new ways of ensuring that information about the importance of education reaches, and is accepted in, communities could be imperative for educational participation. The informants further understood early marriage to be an obstacle to continued education, as indicated by the analytical framework (Sokhom 2004:144), suggesting that cultural norms and expectations have an influence on educational participation.

While students explained that parents' lack of education could be an obstacle for starting school (Rotha; Sokha), it was not understood to impact the opportunity for continued education among students. This indicates that while a lack of education or a lack of knowledge of the opportunity to attend school may hinder enrolment, it does not challenge continued participation once already in school. Further, parental involvement in education was not found as a factor for educational participation among informants, although suggested as a factor by the analytical framework (Keng 2004: 560-561; Piquemal 2017: 321-322). This could be due to using a semi-structured interview approach, where specific factors (such as parental involvement) were not

always asked for, rather informants were given the opportunity to provide their own understanding using open questions. Further, the choice of focusing on adolescents still in school may have influenced this finding.

Having reviewed the informants understanding of obstacles to participation, the next chapter will discuss how the scholarship can address these obstacles and promote educational participation.

### **6.3 How the scholarship promotes educational participation**

Findings on the value of education suggest that students want to gain an education, making a scholarship relevant. All the scholarship recipients interviewed believed that the scholarship had helped them attend school. They presented an understanding of the scholarship having an influence on participation by referring to three overarching themes: influences on financial resources for education, influences on the individual motivation to attend school and influences on family and community support for educational participation. These themes were consistent with the understanding presented in the analytical framework of how scholarships can promote educational participation. However, to gain insight to the way in which the scholarship is understood to influence educational participation, these three themes cannot be discussed separately, as they are interlinked. Rather, it is in the combination of these themes that the informants' understanding of how the scholarship can promote educational participation can be discussed. When combining the findings on financial, individual and family/community influences, four understandings on how the scholarship can promote participation were expressed by the informants. The first concerns how the scholarship reduces expenses for education. The following two concerns how the cash is used, finding that the scholarship can improve access to education, as well as motivate students and improve the opportunity for them to better their academic performance. The fourth understanding concerns how the experience of receiving a scholarship has an influence on educational participation.

#### *6.3.1 Reducing expenses for education*

As the scholarship essentially is a cash transfer, it is to be expected that a scholarship promotes participation by covering costs associated with attending school. Kolab explains: "The benefit of the scholarship is that it helped my family reduce the expense for me to go to school." As the quote shows, many informants felt that the scholarship had helped them participate in

education through reducing expenses, relating to the argument presented by Adato and Bassett (2009:62). It further shows how the scholarship can address the financial obstacle of participating in education identified above.

Moreover, since the scholarship is provided directly to students, there was an understanding that scholarship recipients do not have to rely as much on their parents' support for education, which resulted in parents worrying less about the costs linked to educational participation (Arunny; Davuth; Sokha). The informants explained that the scholarship had supported their education by covering costs for school material, extra classes, dormitory, food and transportation. It was understood by the informants that when these costs do not have to be borne by the family but are reduced by the scholarship, it promotes continued educational participation. As expenses are reduced, families and communities might feel that it is easier to support educational participation (Chea; Kolab; Reach). For instance, some scholarship recipients explained that their parents no longer had to work for other employers to support their education but could focus on their own farm (Davuth; Rotha), which could increase willingness to support educational participation. Kolab explains that: “[The scholarship] really made [my parents] more willing to send me to school, because receiving the scholarship helps them not to spend too much on me”. As the quote shows, more than just improving the financial possibility of attending school, the fact that the scholarship reduces expenses can further strengthen parental support for educational participation.

These findings strengthen the assumption that an inflow of cash can positively influence educational participation. Not only because of the extensive costs associated with education, but further because of the increased parental and community support for education connected to a relief in expenses. Informants further believed that through reducing expenses for education, the scholarship had the possibility of promoting opportunities for continued educational participation in higher education (Botum; Nuon). This can be understood as the scholarship helping students graduate from USS by reducing expenses, thus making it possible for them to transition to university/college. However, most of the informants did not think that they would be able to attend university without a scholarship, questioning the actual possibility of the scholarship to support continued education.

Relating to the analytical framework, the finding of scholarships promoting participation through reducing expenses for education can be understood through the argument by Adato and

Basset (2009:62). However, the findings in this thesis further adds to their results, by focusing not only on how a reduction of expenses improves financial opportunity, but also on how it improves family and community support for participation. Further, the informants never referred to the scholarship as compensating for income lost when children attend school, rather than work, as suggested by Adato and Basset (2009:62). This does not mean that scholarships do not have this affect, rather that the case selection for the thesis may have influenced the findings. First, the scholarship chosen is distributed directly to the students, making it hard to discuss the scholarship in terms of “compensating” families for lost incomes, as families often do not receive any of the money. Second, most of the students interviewed had attended school without any break since they were young, meaning that they had never contributed with any substantial income to the family which could be compensated by the scholarship.

Davuth, Kolab and Nuon further explained that the scholarship has reduced their time spent on income-generating work, while Malis and Pich explained that they did not have to work on the farm as much since after receiving the scholarship. While this thesis will not discuss the impact of the scholarship on work or household chores, these findings suggest that scholarships do have the potential of promoting educational participation by reducing the time adolescents spend on household or income-generating work, as suggested by Jones et al. (2008:263).

This section has discussed how the scholarship reduces expenses for education and how that can promote participation. The next two sections will focus on the way in which the scholarship was used and how that influenced educational participation.

### *6.3.2 Improving access to education*

When describing how they spent the scholarship, students mentioned that they had paid for accommodation or transportation: “The scholarship helps students who live far away from school. So, they could live here in the dormitory, or if they don’t live here in the school, they can use the money they receive from the scholarship for transport” (Sokha). This quote implies that the scholarship can be used to improve Highlanders’ access to education, by addressing the obstacles connected to accommodation and transportation found above. As described in the literature review, the fact that Highlanders often live far away from secondary school is an obstacle to educational participation (Sokhom 2004:143). Thus, being able to use the scholarship for transportation means that students can get to school and further that they have options for safe transportation (such as being able to pay for their own motorbike). Or, the

scholarship can be used to pay for expenses to enable a student to live closer to school, such as rent or food. If a student has a safe means of transportation, or lives close to school which shortens the commute, parents would further be less worried about their children's (especially daughters') vulnerability for assaults when travelling to school, which could increase parental willingness for allowing children to attend school (Sokhom 2004:143-144). Thus, it is understood that the students believe the scholarship to be able to increase access to educational facilities and further that this factor is connected to an increased parental willingness in allowing children to attend school. Other than the argument of scholarships lowering costs for education, this finding cannot be understood through the analytical framework, which does not present any previous findings on scholarships influencing participation by enabling students' use of dormitories and safe transportation methods. The finding might be contextually specific, as these are issues for educational participation that are very prevalent among Highlanders, due to the remoteness of their communities.

### *6.3.3 Motivation and opportunities for improved academic performance*

Besides paying for accommodation and transportation, students explained that they used the scholarship to pay for school material, extra classes and uniforms. Chea explained that: "Sometimes, when I don't have enough, I always feel like I want to leave or drop out of school. [...] After I receive the scholarship, it's an encouragement for me". The quote indicates that being able to have what is needed for one's education motivates educational participation. In the analytical framework, it was understood that the scholarship could increase school attendance by being an incentive, as receiving the cash is conditional upon participation (Adato and Bassett 2009:62). This finding further adds to that argument by holding that the increased motivation for participation can also be a result of being able to show that one has what is needed for educational participation, such as a uniform, books and pens, indicating how the scholarship's influence on costs for education and individual motivation are interlinked.

Students further recognised the potential of the scholarship to improve academic performance, by being able to pay for school material and extra classes: "[The scholarship] really motivates me and helps me. If I were not able to take extra classes, I would not be able to follow the others in class" (Boran). Boran's statement suggests that the scholarship has improved individual motivation for education by providing recipients with an opportunity to improve their academic performance. While this thesis cannot determine whether recipients' learning outcomes are improved, the belief among students that a scholarship can help better one's academic

performance is important, especially as academic performance was understood to impact the opportunity to attend school. Referring to the literature review, academic performance was further found to influence parental support for education (Keng 2004:560-561; No et al. 2016:223). Thus, if students perform well, both individual motivation and parental support for education can be increased. If the scholarship is understood to contribute to this by helping students improve their academic performance, it can improve educational participation among recipients. Thus, the potential of a scholarship in improving participation is understood not only through its potential in reducing costs, but also through its potential to help students improve their academic performance. It was similarly suggested in the analytical framework that the scholarship could be an encouragement to perform better (Yildirim et al. 2014:76), however the informants' understanding adds to that statement by holding that the scholarship not only encourages improved performance but provides the means for affording the support needed to improve one's academic performance. The understanding in the analytical framework further held that scholarships can increase self-esteem and self-confidence (Yildirim et al. 2014:76). Findings in this research indicate that informants argue for their increased self-confidence in terms of having material, a uniform and improved opportunities to better one's academic performance. Moreover, the informants believed the scholarship to be able to support their future participation in higher education by providing opportunities for them to improve their academic performance (Davuth; Pich). By ensuring that students can attend extra classes now, they are able to graduate and transition to higher education.

It has been argued how the scholarship promotes educational participation in terms of reducing costs and how the scholarship has been used. The next section will discuss the influence on participation not in terms of how the cash has been used, but in terms of how the individual and community experience of receiving a scholarship can promote educational participation.

#### *6.3.4 Receiving a scholarship*

The experience of receiving a scholarship was understood to have an influence on the motivation or support for educational participation on an individual, family and community level. These influences are interlinked in improving the opportunity for. On an individual level, receiving a scholarship was understood to increase a sense of belonging in school (Botum; Malis; Sann). The fact that someone else, in this case RGC and UNICEF Cambodia, cared enough about the individual student and his/her opportunities to provide them with a scholarship, created a sense of encouragement among students to go to school. Nimol



explained: “The way that the scholarship encourages me is that now I know that [the Government/UNICEF Cambodia] is taking care of me, like they worry about me, so it gives me strength”. This finding suggests that providing scholarships has a value in itself, as individuals’ right to education is recognised. Thus, besides reducing costs, having a scholarship can improve participation through showing each recipient that their continued education is important. Further, it may also indicate to others that Highland students have the right to education. Some of the Highland students felt that the scholarship had provided them with an improved status in the school: “Now [the Highland student] has the scholarship, so she must be a good [student], the others think” (Peou). This implies the importance of recognising every student’s right to education and encouraging their participation. While this is achieved through scholarships in this case, a long-term solution could focus on finding sustainable ways of ensuring that each student feels that his/her educational participation is valued. Further, besides being connected to the argument that scholarships increase self-confidence (Yildirim et al. 2014:76), this finding goes beyond the scope of the analytical framework in explaining how a scholarship influences educational participation, thus adding to existing knowledge. Why such a finding has not been found in previous research could be explained by it being context specific for the experience of the scholarship to Highlanders. However, believing that the feeling of being valued when receiving a scholarship is a universal sentiment, the lack of this finding in previous research could probably better be explained by the broader research gap within this topic - namely that recipients themselves have rarely been the focus of analysis when evaluating scholarships.

Moreover, the informants presented an understanding of families and communities being proud of the fact that their children are scholarship recipients, which increased their encouragement of educational participation. Davuth explained that: “[My parents] are happy and proud that I could have a scholarship. [...] They advise me to try hard to study”. This further implies that recognising students through scholarships does not only increase individual motivation, but also parental and community support for education. The informants felt that the scholarship had been an incentive for families and communities to encourage continued participation:

After they learned that there is someone helping them, the ethnic minorities, they always hope that their kid will receive the scholarship like others. So, that helped change their thought, to push their kid to go to school, in the hope that the kid will receive the scholarship. [...] They feel like someone is helping them (Chea).

The quote implies that families feel encouraged to support continued educational participation as they feel the support from the scholarship provider in caring about their community and helping their children attend school, which relates to how the scholarship was believed to increase individual motivation. The understanding in the analytical framework can thus be complemented by stating that the scholarship does not only incentivise attendance among students (Adato and Bassett 2009:62), but further incentivises parental support for education in the hope that children will receive a scholarship. This further shows how the influence of the scholarship on individual, family and community level is interlinked in promoting educational participation.

Moreover, by implementing a scholarship for Highland students, it was believed that the awareness of the importance of education in the communities had been increased. Sokha explained that: “The scholarship is motivating the adults in the community to think that education is important”. Sokha’s statement implies that by indicating that USS education is important enough to provide support to Highlanders to ensure their participation, communities learn about the importance of attending school. In this sense the scholarship could be a tool for increasing awareness of the importance of educational participation where needed, although the informants believed that education was already valued in most communities. Moreover, by having students who receive the scholarship in communities, the informants believed that more families could learn about the importance of education. The recipients would in this sense be “good examples” in the communities, providing encouragement to families to support their children’s continued participation (Sokha).

In this regard, the scholarship was believed to increase awareness of the importance of education in communities, a finding which can be supported by the analytical framework (Jones et al. 2008:263). A further explanation for how scholarships could increase parental support for education in the analytical framework, was through increased parental involvement in their children’s education (Jones et al. 2008:263). Apart from stating that parents were more encouraged to support participation, the findings in this thesis cannot support this argument. However, that does not discredit the validity of the argument. As mentioned above, the lack of this finding might be because of the use of open questions, where increased parental involvement was not specifically asked for. Further, as the scholarship in this thesis is distributed directly to the students, the parents are not conditioned to ensure that their children

attend school. With this design of the intervention, this scholarship might not have had an influence on parental involvement in education.

While the findings above indicate that a scholarship can promote educational participation by addressing obstacles to participation, it cannot be stated that the scholarship is able to be a solution for all obstacles connected with attending school among Highlanders. Thus, the next section will discuss the informant's understanding of obstacles which the scholarship cannot address.

#### **6.4 Obstacles to participation not addressed by the scholarship**

The scholarship was believed to promote educational participation by reducing expenses for education. However, the informants believed that if a family is very poor, the scholarship would not be enough to enable children to attend school (Nuon; Reach). Due to its limited amount, the scholarship cannot completely cover all expenses for education, meaning that the financial obstacle to education remains for the poorest. This finding problematises the purpose of the scholarship as a social protection intervention, which aims to increase usage of social services amongst the most vulnerable populations. If the scholarship fails to support the poorest of the poor, instead only enabling the children that are not as vulnerable to attend school, it can further create a divide in opportunities where the most vulnerable children are lacking further behind. This finding has implications for how future scholarships could be designed, re-evaluating the transfer amount and targeting approach.

It was further believed that while the scholarship in some instances can address financial obstacles to participation in USS, the opportunity to attend higher education is still restricted by financial resources within the family. As mentioned, most of the informants believed that they would not be able to attend university or college without a scholarship. Still, the purpose of this specific scholarship is to enable more Highland students to graduate from USS for them to enrol in PTTC. If support is not provided in higher education, the success of the intervention can be limited.

Further, the opportunity to attend school could rely on the possibility to find accommodation nearby the school. While a scholarship could reduce expenses for accommodation, it was understood by the informants that receiving a scholarship cannot improve educational participation if the obstacle to participation is a lack of dormitories or accommodation (Sokha).

This highlights the importance of improving the supply-side of educational services, simultaneously as demand is increased through scholarships (Handa and Davis 2006:531).

Further, the informants believed that receiving a scholarship could not always improve educational participation, if the obstacles to participation were based in family problems (Malis; Mony), not being allowed to attend school (Arunny; Bopha; Chea; Kesor), the need to work to support the family (Nimol; Tevy) or early marriage (Malis; Nimol). Thus, there are many obstacles at family and community level that could not be addressed by the scholarship. Having a scholarship was not believed to be enough to promote participation if adolescents were really not allowed to attend school: “If [my family] do not want me to go to school, although I get the scholarship, I can’t” (Bopha). This shows the importance of parental support for education, and the need to implement further actions together with the scholarship to improve awareness about the importance of education. Malis further explains: “Some families force their kids to get married, or work on the farm, rather than stay in school.” This statement indicates the difficulty of the scholarship to address cultural norms which influence the possibility to attend school, a finding that can be supported by the analytical framework (Adato and Bassett 2009:64). Thus, further measures to improve educational participation among Highlanders would need to be specific for the obstacles that they are facing, recognising the occurrence of early marriage and the prioritisation of the financial survival of the family. A more comprehensive social protection framework and further measures to improve income security in communities could also be needed to decrease poverty rates and build support for educational participation to prevent that education is interrupted in the face of family problems. In the following concluding chapter, the research question for this study will be answered based on the analysis presented.

## **7. Conclusion**

Improving educational participation in secondary school is a challenge for many countries, including Cambodia. Scholarships are believed to promote continued education, but a students’ perspective of how scholarships actually addresses obstacles for participation is not prevalent in existing research. Thus, the aim of this thesis has been to explore how Highlander students understand the value of education, obstacles for participation and how a scholarship can address obstacles to promote educational participation. Data from individual interviews and FGDs were analysed in relation to an analytical framework consisting of previous research on the topic.

In the first part of the analysis, it was understood that informants perceive education as valuable. This indicated that they were motivated to remain in school, making it possible for the scholarship to be accepted as a relevant intervention. They argued for the value of education by stating that it is important to have knowledge, find employment and to be able to help oneself, one's family and society, referring to both the intrinsic value of education and its potential in resulting in improved future opportunities. Thus, this thesis was able to contribute to existing research by adding the students' perspective on the value of education.

In the second part of the analysis, it was argued that Highlander students experience a complexity of obstacles to educational participation. The informants understood that obstacles for participation exists in terms of costs for education, including costs for extra classes, and the need to support the family by working. Schools being far away, creating costs and safety concerns for transportation, and not having enough accommodation for students nearby schools were perceived as obstacles that limited access to education. Further, on both an individual and family level, one's academic performance was important for continued motivation and support for education. Death or illness in the family, divorce, not being allowed to attend school or having to drop out to support younger siblings' education were understood to be factors within the family that could hinder continued participation. Further, the cultural norm of early marriage could lead to students dropping out of school. Much of these findings corresponded to previous research, however, the obstacles connected to death, illness or divorce in the family complemented existing knowledge through providing an insight on the vulnerability of household survival when certain family members can no longer work or are no longer present. This often led to children having to drop out of school, which suggests that a social protection framework that further protects vulnerable families from shocks could be needed to improve educational participation.

In the third part of the analysis, the informants' understanding of how the scholarship could address obstacles for participation included the ability of the scholarship to reduce expenses connected with education. This indicates that the assumption made of an inflow of cash leading to educational participation could be supported. While this finding could be understood through previous research, it was also argued in the thesis that a reduction of expenses could increase parental support for education. Further, by understanding how the cash from the scholarship was used, it was argued that the scholarship could increase access to education by covering

costs for accommodation and transport. By being able to pay for school material and extra classes, the scholarship was also understood to increase motivation for participation and opportunities to improve one's academic performance, which could be a determinant for continued participation. Moreover, this thesis contributed to existing knowledge by arguing that the implementation of a scholarship leads to increased motivation to attend school, and increased family and community support for education, as the scholarship signals a recognition of the importance of Highlanders' educational participation to the communities. Thus, an important component of the scholarship lies in its ability to show the recipients that someone cares about their continued education.

However, the informants' understanding of the scholarship also highlighted gaps in its ability to address obstacles to participation. The implication of this understanding is that further measures are needed to improve participation among Highlanders, such as ensuring that accommodation close to school is available simultaneously as increasing demand for education. The scholarship was not understood to be able to address all obstacles for participation at family and community level. This implies that further interventions are needed to raise awareness about the importance of education in communities through the use of a rights approach to education. Other context specific and culturally sensitive interventions are also needed to address cultural norms that prevent participation. Further, to increase support for education in communities, it is understood that a focus on secure income strategies for families and a more comprehensive social protection framework, that priorities the inclusion of the poorest among the poor, is needed. With the aim of decreasing poverty levels and making families less vulnerable to shocks, this could promote educational participation for more Highlanders.

However, as this research is almost entirely based on the perspective of students who are still in school, it would further be important to conduct research with out-of-school Highlanders to gain their perspective on how an inflow of cash could or could not improve educational participation. Out-of-school adolescents could have a different perception of the interventions needed to enable them to attend school, which could complement the findings of this thesis. Interviewing Highlanders who have received a scholarship but still dropped out of school could further add to the understanding of the ways in which a scholarship needs to be complemented with other interventions to improve educational participation.

Lastly, many of the informants did not believe that they could continue to university or PTTC without a scholarship. Therefore, to achieve the goal of this scholarship in ensuring that more qualified teachers who speak minority languages are available in the region, it would be important to consider the possibility of providing support to Highlander students throughout their teacher training. By doing so, cash could equal continued educational participation.

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## 9. Appendices

### Appendix 1 – List of interviewees

The list of interview and FGD participants are presented as one, as FGD participants who were not individually interviewed would otherwise be easily identified.

Interviewee #	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Scholarship	FGD participation
1	Arunny	Woman	17-18	Yes	No
2	Bopha	Women	17-18	Yes	No
3	Boran	Man	22-23	Yes	No
4	Botum	Man	19-21	Yes	No
5	Channary	Woman	19-21	Yes	No
6	Chea	Man	19-21	Yes	No
7	Chhay	Man	17-18	Yes	Yes
8	Daevy	Woman	22-23	Yes	No
9	Davuth	Man	19-21	Yes	Yes
10	Jorani	Woman	17-18	No	No
11	Kesor	Woman	17-18	Yes	Yes
12	Kolab	Woman	17-18	Yes	Yes
13	Kravann	Woman	19-21	Yes	Yes
14	Leap	Man	17-18	No	No
15	Malis	Woman	17-18	Yes	No
16	Montha	Man	19-21	No	No
17	Mony	Woman	17-18	No	No
18	Nakry	Woman	17-18	Yes	Yes
19	Nimol	Man	17-18	Yes	Yes
20	Nisay	Man	19-21	No	No
21	Nuon	Woman	17-18	Yes	Yes
22	Peou	Woman	22-23	Yes	No
23	Pich	Man	22-23	Yes	No
24	Reach	Man	17-18	No	No
25	Rotha	Man	19-21	Yes	No
26	Sann	Man	19-21	Yes	No
27	Sokha	Man	19-21	Yes	Yes
28	Tevy	Woman	19-21	Yes	Yes
29	Vanna	Man	22-23	No	No
30	Vibol	Man	17-18	No	No

## **Appendix 2 – Interview guidelines**

The following is an example of an interview guideline for scholarship recipients, which was the interview most frequently conducted during the data collection.

1. Do you like going to school? Do you think it's important to go to school? Why/Why not?
2. Describe your family situation (where do you live/with whom/do you have siblings/are your siblings in school?)
3. Describe the circumstances around you starting school
  - a. How old were you when you started school?
  - b. Did you feel like you had support to start school? Why/why not?
  - c. Were there any obstacles for you starting school?
  - d. Why do you think you had the opportunity to go to school?
  - e. Did your parents go to school?
4. How do you travel to school? How far is it to school?
5. Do you feel like you belong in school?
6. How did you use the money from the scholarship? Why were those things important for you?
7. Has the scholarship helped you to attend school, and if so, how?
  - a. Would you be going to school if you did not receive the scholarship? Why/why not?
8. How has the scholarship influenced your motivation for going to school?
9. How has the scholarship influenced your parents' support for education?
  - a. Did your parents want you to go to school before receiving the scholarship? Why/why not?
10. Is there anything that you feel like you should be doing instead of going to school?
  - a. If so, why do you think that you go to school anyway?
11. What would you be doing right now if you didn't go to school? Would you rather be doing that?
12. In what way has the scholarship influenced your daily chores in the household?
13. Has the cash transfer helped you family, or changed anything in the daily lives of your parents or siblings? In what way?
14. How has the cash transfer changed the value of education within the community?

- a. Does your community think that education is important?
  - b. Has this changed since after the cash transfer was implemented? How?
  - c. Do you think that boys and girls are equally encouraged to go to school?  
Why/why not?
15. Is there any other way in which the cash transfer has helped you, your family or the community?
16. Do you think that scholarships help students attend school? Why/why not?
- a. Is a scholarship the best way to help children attend school?
  - b. Are there other obstacles that prevent people from going to school that are not addressed through the cash transfer? What are these?
  - c. Is there something about the scholarship that would need to change to make it better?
17. Do you think that other forms of help or changes within the school or the community are needed for more students to come to school? What are these?
18. What do you want to do after graduating from upper secondary school?
- a. Has your or your families' idea of what you can/will do after graduating from secondary school changed because of the scholarship? How and why?
  - b. Do you think that the scholarship has improved your future opportunities?  
Why/why not?
  - c. Is formal education important for what you want to do in the future? If not, what would be important for you to have learnt instead?
  - d. Are there still obstacles for you to do what you want to do in the future? What are those?

### Appendix 3 – Consent form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby consent to be a participant in Ms. Maria Svensson’s research on school scholarships distributed to Highland students in Ratanakiri, Cambodia.

I have been informed of the purpose of the research and am aware that participation is completely voluntary, and that I can withdraw my participation at any time.

I am aware that my answers will be used for the purpose of the research, but that I will remain anonymous in the thesis and that my answers in no way affect my employment, education or scholarship (when applicable).

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

School/Place of work: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_