

On School-to-Work Transitions in Cambodia: Young People Navigating Opportunity Structures and the World of Work

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Young people's transitions into working life are critical to their individual life courses but also to the political and economic development of Cambodia. Embracing a rapidly growing economy but challenged by weak state institutions in managing school-to-work transitions, the country needs to better understand its young people's experiences of entering and coping with the world of work. This paper contributes an analysis of how young working Cambodians navigate the differentiated opportunity structures when entering the labour market by drawing on Cambodia School-to-Work Transition Survey 2014, qualitative interviews with policymakers and program administrators and focus group interviews with young people across Cambodia. It demonstrates that family resources, particularly economic, are critical to the timing, preparation, employment outcomes and future perspectives of young people. The differentiated beginnings set young people onto different paths of accessing and building different types of resources upon transition into working life and beyond. The paper concludes with a remark on how social context, differentiated beginnings and patterns of accessing and using resources are likely to widen wealth and social gaps.

10.1 Introduction

Young people's transitions into the world of work are critical to their individual life courses but also to political and economic development, especially in transforming or reproducing social inequality structures (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). This is even more pronounced in many developing economies given their situation of youth bulge, raising generalised concern about whether they can grow rich before growing old (Du and Yang 2006; Qiao 2006; Hou 2011; OECD 2013). For Cambodia, a large youth population and rapid economic growth but weak institutions and poorly educated workforce (Peou and Zinn 2015) pose crucial issues for young people, particularly regarding their education, employment and well-being. This paper complements existing understanding of the situation of Cambodian young people, and of youth research more broadly, by contributing an analysis of how young Cambodians navigate differentiated "opportunity structures" – interrelationships among family and societal factors (Roberts 1968; 2009) – in the working world and the country's volatile social space.

In youth sociology, school-to-work transition is a prominent focus. Generally drawing on Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology of welfare capitalism, literature in this area has documented how education, labour market experience and welfare support shape young people's transitions into working life in nationally specific ways (see, for example, Allmendinger 1989; Shavit and Müller 1998; Raffe 2009). More broadly, the interest in transition into work and assumption of "successful" transition into adulthood hinge on the tripartite training-working-retiring "normal" life course of modern Western societies (Kohli 1986). In education and labour market research, interests are often directed at how social mobility and socioeconomic background, such as gender, family wealth and educational attainment, affect labour market and later life outcomes (Graham, Shier and Eisenstat 2014).

Knowledge of Cambodian youth in relation to education and labour market outcomes generally draws on large-scale socioeconomic surveys, particularly the Cambodia Socio-Economic Surveys, for policy analysis and development program design. The only large-scale data specifically focused on education-to-employment transitions comes from the School-to-Work Transition Surveys (SWTS) conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2012 and 2014. The SWTS 2012 results reported by Heang, Khieu and Elder (2013) give a broad picture of the ways in which young Cambodians experience their transitions into work. Up to 74 percent of Cambodians aged 15–29 are in employment. Although the youth unemployment rate is low at about 2.1 percent, vulnerable and poor-quality employment is concerning given the substantial proportions of young workers earning below the average

wage, working in informal and/or irregular employment, underqualified for their job and working excessively long hours. Surprisingly, 90 percent of them are reportedly “satisfied” with their current job. The results also indicate a strong connection between education and transition outcomes of young Cambodians, including a shorter transition period and higher likelihood of stable employment among the relatively better educated. With an average school leaving age of 16, many young Cambodians enter the labour market early and poorly equipped with appropriate skills.

The SWTS 2012 results suggest transition inequality along gender and educational lines, the latter linked to family economic situation and area of residence: young men having a significantly shorter average school-to-work transition than young women, better educated youth experiencing shorter transition periods than their less educated peers, and urban residence and greater household wealth resulting in better transition outcomes (Heang, Khieu and Elder 2013). The employment-to-population ratio among people aged 15–24 is higher among young women than among young men, and higher among rural than urban youth (ADB and ILO 2015), suggesting female and rural youth are more likely to work and less likely to have the opportunity to build knowledge and skills necessary for working life.

The aim of this paper is to complement this broad knowledge of young Cambodians’ experiences of school-to-work transition by focusing on how they navigate such experiences and the contexts they experience, mainly through qualitative data. In youth studies, the changing nature of youth transitions, especially the increasingly complex transition patterns and uncertain transition outcomes (Shanahan 2000; Settersten and Ray 2010; Buchmann and Kriesi 2011), has increased interest in understanding how young people subjectively understand and deal with changing social conditions, that is, how they negotiate emerging opportunity structures (Furlong 2009; Furlong, Woodman and Wyn 2011). These individual experiences can help shed light on not only the structural conditions but also the institutional settings that shape young people’s understanding and experiences.

The analytical strategy in this paper draws on a sociological life course approach that takes into consideration individual agency, linked lives and larger societal context (Elder 1994; Heinz et al. 2009). This approach gives importance to individual agency and lifelong progression, such as ageing and cumulative (dis)advantages on the one hand, and the structural, institutional and normative context of Cambodia on the other (see Peou 2016 for elaboration). The paper therefore emphasises qualitative insights and experiences expressed by young people themselves while attempting to construct the social conditions of such insights and experiences through quantitative data and interviews with key

informants. In the following, we describe the data used for the analysis. We then demonstrate how three analytically distinct social contexts shape school-to-work transitions: socio-structural, institutional and normative contexts. We next analyse how young Cambodians navigate the opportunity structures in their early working life based on the resources accessible to them, focusing on their entry into full-time work, appreciation of work and aspirations, and future perspectives. This demonstrates that family resources, particularly economic, are critical to the timing, preparation, employment outcomes and future perspectives of young people. The differentiated beginnings set young people onto different paths of accessing and building different types of resources upon transition into working life and beyond. The paper concludes with a remark on school-to-work transitions in Cambodia in relation to cumulative (dis)advantages experienced by young Cambodians.

10.2 The data

The paper draws on three datasets. The first is the Cambodia School-to-Work Transition Survey 2014 developed by the ILO and conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) from July to August 2014 with a representative sample of 3,396 people aged 15 to 29 in all provinces of Cambodia.¹ All analyses of SWTS 2014 data in this paper are based on weight count to represent the whole population.

The second set comes from interviews with 23 policymakers and program administrators at state, public and non-government institutions (see Table 10.1), conducted between September 2016 and February 2017. These interviews provide insights and information often inaccessible to the public and researchers outside policy and program circles. The data was used to aid the analysis of the social and institutional contexts of school-to-work transitions, as well as to understand the structural conditions of young people's individual experiences.

The third set comes from focus group interviews with 20 groups of people aged between 15 and 30 (Table 10.2), conducted between September 2016 and February 2017: 6 in industry, 10 in services and 4 in agriculture. Each focus group comprised 4 to 9 people, totalling 139 participants. Six groups were classified as in "professional" or "highly skilled" jobs, including engineer, auditor, economist, lawyer, university lecturer, journalist, designer and medical professional. Fourteen groups were classified as in "low-" or "non-skilled" jobs, including smallholder farmer, construction worker,

¹ The explanation of the survey methodology and measures of key concepts can be found on the ILO website: www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/WCMS_191853/lang--ja/index.htm.

factory worker, restaurant worker, salesperson, receptionist, secretary, bank teller and cashier.

Table 10.1: Institutions of interviewees

| Government and public | NGO | International development partner |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| National Employment Agency (1) Directorate General of Youth, MOEYS (1) Dept. of Youth, MOEYS (1) Dept. of Labour Information, MOLVT (1) Dept. of Training, MOLVT (1) Dept. of Policies and Strategies, MOLVT (1) Dept. of Vocational Orientation, MOEYS (1) National Polytechnic Institute of Cambodia (1) Battambang Institute of Technology (1) Regional Polytechnic Institute, Battambang (1) National Vocational Institute of Battambang (1) Regional Polytechnic Institute, Takeo (2) | Plan International (1) Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (1) Don Bosco Technical School (1) Pour un Sourire d'Enfant Institute (1) Passerelles Numériques Cambodia (1) | UNDP (3) UNESCO (1) ILO (1) |

Note: Number of interviewees in brackets. MOLVT: Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training; MOEYS: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

Table 10.2: Groups of people interviewed (aged 15–30)

| Broad skill category | Industry | | Services | | Agriculture | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | Number of groups | Main occupation | Number of groups | Main occupation | Number of groups | Main occupation |
| Highly skilled or Professional | 1 Female 1 Male | Engineer | 2 Female 2 Male | Auditor | N/A | N/A |
| | | | | Economist | | |
| | | | | Journalist | | |
| | | | | Lecturer | | |
| | | | | Trainer | | |
| | | | | Designer | | |
| | | | | Lawyer | | |
| | | | | Medical professional | | |
| | | | | Receptionist | | |
| | | | | Teaching assistant | | |
| Low-skilled or Non-skilled | 2 Female 2 Male | Construction worker Factory worker | 3 Female 3 Male | Secretary | 2 Female 2 Male | Smallholding farmer |
| | | | | Bank teller | | |
| | | | | Salesperson | | |
| | | | | Merchandiser | | |
| | | | | Masseuse | | |
| | | | | Restaurant worker | | |
| | | | | Manual workers at various facilities | | |

The participants were recruited through the professional and personal networks of the research team. Each focus group interview took between two and three hours, with one member of the research team facilitating the session. The facilitator opened each session with an invitation for the participants to reflect on their life stories from childhood or school years to the present. Subsequent questions were mainly open ended to get them to describe their experience of schooling, transition into work, employment and future perspectives; follow-up questions were used to probe specific issues of interest as well as to encourage the participants to compare and contrast their experiences. The group interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed to identify emerging subthemes within the broad, predetermined themes of education, school leaving, entry into employment, experience and meaning of work, and thoughts about the future.

Among the 139 participants, education ranged from incomplete primary schooling to university completion, working experience from a few months to 15 years, and number of jobs worked from one to seven. Fourteen of the participants were working full time and studying at university at the time of data collection. The diversity in socioeconomic background, schooling and work life provided a diverse picture of transitions and employment experiences. Instead of providing a representative picture mirroring the patterns of transition shown in the SWTS data, this qualitative data is meant to add insights into lived experiences and complexities, thereby supplementing the SWTS data.

10.3 Social and institutional shaping of school-to-work transitions

Diverse transition and employment experiences are shaped by multiple factors, which can analytically be categorised as socio-structural, institutional and normative contexts. These contexts are interrelated and mutually influencing but are distinctive in the nature of their influence on transitions into working life. Socio-structural context distributes resources, choices and risks to young people, such as employment opportunities, based on their social position. Institutional context refers to regulations within laws, policies and programs that enable or restrict options for young people, including those on wages, work eligibility and social protection. Normative context includes values and usual expectations of the society and community that provide reference for families and individuals in forming transition choices and meanings.

10.3.1 Socio-structural context: economic and labour market structure

Changes in economic structure and related developments, such as urbanisation and labour market shifts, shape options for transitions into work for young people. The shifting economic structure of Cambodia directs the path of

transitions. The decreased contribution of agriculture in both GDP and employment share and the offset of this decrease by industry and service sector growth in the past 15 years (Table 10.3) have directed large numbers of rural young people into the industry and service sectors. The quick growth of urban population, from 16 percent in 1998 to 21 percent in 2013, partly supports such rural-urban channelling of young people during their transition into working life (Table 10.3).

Table 10.3: Change in economic and labour market structure in Cambodia (percent)

| Indicator | | 1998 | 2013 |
|------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| Agriculture | % of GDP | 46.3 | 33.5 |
| | % of employment | 77.5 | 48.7 |
| Industry | % of GDP | 17.4 | 25.6 |
| | % of employment | 4.2 | 19.9 |
| Services | % of GDP | 36.3 | 40.8 |
| | % of employment | 18.2 | 31.5 |
| Urban population | | 15.7 | 21.4 |

Sources: Cambodia Population Census 1998, Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013, World Bank Development Indicators 2016

The SWTS 2014 shows that less than half of the youth population worked in agriculture, 22 percent in industry and 31 percent services (Table 10.4). Compared to 2004, the figures suggest that young people are turning away from agriculture during their transition into working life.

Table 10.4: Youth (15–29) employment by economic sector (percent)

| | 2004 | 2014 |
|-------------|------|------|
| Agriculture | 60 | 47 |
| Industry | 17 | 22 |
| Services | 23 | 31 |

Sources: Authors' calculation of Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2004 and SWTS Cambodia 2014

Coupled with this structural shift, the sustained GDP and GDP per capita growth rates over the past two decades have also meant increased opportunities for young people during their growing up, ranging from consumption to improved livelihoods. However, the current context has created pressure on families and young people in rural areas for teenagers to quit school early in order to earn money (Bylander 2015; Peou 2016). This is corroborated by the life stories from many of the focus group participants, remarks from

several program administrators interviewed and data from SWTS Cambodia 2014. A large majority of Cambodian youth are employed, with a very low unemployment rate and relatively low “inactive” rate (Table 10.5). Given the lack of state welfare support, unemployment is a luxury and remaining labour-inactive to pursue education is a privilege, more often afforded to urban youth.

Table 10.5: Youth labour market indicators, by sex and birthplace (percent)

| | Youth population | | | Youth labour force participation rate | Youth unemployment rate |
|-------------------|------------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Employed | Unemployed | Inactive | | |
| Sex | | | | | |
| Female | 80.1 | 2.0 | 17.9 | 82.2 | 2.5 |
| Male | 86.9 | 2.1 | 11.0 | 89.0 | 2.4 |
| Average | 83.1 | 2.1 | 14.9 | 85.2 | 2.4 |
| Birthplace | | | | | |
| Rural | 86.5 | 1.5 | 12.0 | 88.0 | 1.7 |
| Urban | 69.5 | 4.4 | 26.2 | 73.8 | 5.9 |
| Average | 83.1 | 2.1 | 14.9 | 85.2 | 2.4 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Poverty is a critical problem, especially for people in rural areas. Although the national poverty rate has declined significantly, from 45 percent in 2007 to 17.7 percent in 2012, up to 40 percent of Cambodians still have to survive on less than USD2 per day (ADB and ILO 2015). The large majority of the poor reside in the countryside. The predicament of rural livelihoods is further pressed by small and insecure landholdings (Pilgrim, Ngin and Diepart 2012; ADHOC 2014). For many rural young people, moving into full-time work also means emigrating to find labour (Peou 2016), a common experience shared across Asia (Yeung and Alipio 2013).

Two significant trends pertaining to youth transition are noticeable with this labour and economic shift: increased physical mobility by subsistence agricultural workers to become employed in labour-intensive and informal economic activities in urban areas or even abroad (CDRI 2007; Morris 2007; Hing et al. 2012; Peou 2016); and upward social mobility to become skilled, professional or office workers in the private sector, government bureaucracy and non-government sector through increased formal qualifications (UNDP 2011; World Bank 2012; Peou 2017). These trends reflect the expansion of the new working and middle classes, towards which youth transitions into working life and associated identities are increasingly shaped.

At a general level, based on the life trajectories of focus group participants and existing literature, it has become apparent that those with few family resources take up the former path and those with substantial family resources

the latter (although some exceptions and other options exist). This emergent stratification will become even more established as the national economic pursuit is geared towards industrialisation and services to accommodate diversification and sustained economic growth, as evidenced by recent policy initiatives, especially the Industrial Development Policy and National Employment Policy.

Overall, the Cambodian labour market is characterised by vulnerable employment, defined as being an own-account worker or family contributor as opposed to the presumably less vulnerable salaried or waged employment. Data from SWTS Cambodia 2014 shows that nearly 70 percent of Cambodian youth (15–29) are in vulnerable employment. Rural youth in particular (69 percent, compared to 55 percent of urban youth) fall into this category (Table 10.6).

Table 10.6: Youth employment by occupational status (percent)

| | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|-----------------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Waged and salaried workers | 31.1 | 34.3 | 30.2 | 44.3 | 32.5 |
| Employers | 0.1 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| Own-account workers | 17.7 | 14.7 | 16.4 | 15.5 | 16.3 |
| Contributing family workers | 51.2 | 50.3 | 53.0 | 39.5 | 50.8 |
| Not classified | - | 0.1 | - | 0.3 | 0.01 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

10.3.2 Institutional context: education, training, employment and social protection

Policies, programs and structures of education, training, employment and welfare systems are influential in shaping the transition paths and options of young people (Leisering 2003; Blossfeld et al. 2005). The current policy orientation involving youth transition into working life is twofold: (1) promoting human capital through formal qualifications for skilled and professional employment as well as lifelong learning and entrepreneurial attitudes, and (2) upgrading the basic social security net and remedial (institutionalised) skills training programs for the large vulnerable youth population in labour-intensive or unskilled or low-skilled employment. Policies and institutional initiatives are aplenty, for instance National Policy on Youth Development, National Employment Policy, Labour Migration Policy, Women Development Centres, National Employment Agency, Provincial Youth Centres and National Youth Development Council. However, interviews with key informants across government and non-government sectors show that implementation of institutional mechanisms is lacking due to institutional and individual incapacity as well as a lack of coordination and political will.

10.3.2.1 Education system

The Cambodian education system is characterised by fragmentation and deficits due to its historical development. Over the last 30 years, the structure and content of the educational system have frequently changed to suit political and structural realities (Ayres 2000; Duggan 1996; 1997; Dy 2004; Pellini 2005), and continuing changes are likely due to the rapidly shifting economic and technological context. The overall condition of Cambodia's education has therefore been unable to provide established educational and career pathways. Such fragmentation and deficits generate weaknesses in providing guidelines for transition into working life.

A major issue with general education is its inability to provide high-quality training and to retain young people in school due to infrastructure and institutional limitations. National assessments of grade 3, 6 and 9 students also show disappointing results in cognitive skills in language and mathematics. While the net enrolment in 6-year primary school is 94 percent, the net enrolment rates for lower secondary and upper secondary school (or high school) are only 39 and 17 percent, respectively, according to data from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS). As a result, young people leaving school are poorly prepared for work in terms of skills and knowledge.

The SWTS Cambodia 2014 gives an overview of educational attainment among Cambodian youth. The majority of young people leave school before completion (Table 10.7). A significantly higher proportion of rural youth do so than their urban peers, and a slightly higher proportion of female than male.

Table 10.7: Educational attainment, by sex and birthplace (percent)

| Educational attainment | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|------------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Currently in school | 24 | 33 | 24 | 41 | 28 |
| Completed school | 16 | 16 | 15 | 21 | 16 |
| Left before completion | 56 | 49 | 57 | 35 | 53 |
| Never attended school | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

A further issue is the lack of vocational orientation and stratification within Cambodian general education. In 2008, the government attempted to restructure the upper secondary level into two different tracks – science and non-science – by forcing students to choose one track upon entering high school. However, the pilot stratification program was abandoned two years later because it was not able to finance the human and financial resources needed for proper implementation. In recent years, MOEYS has attempted

to provide more vocational focus in the school curriculum by emphasising entrepreneurial and soft skills. Using the Community-Based Enterprise Development and Know About Business curricula developed by the ILO, MOEYS has also launched provincial youth centres, as well as the province-based Youth Development Councils. However, the coverage remains marginal, and little impact assessment has been done.

Higher education has been in a paradoxical situation. With rapid growth in the past 20 years, it has been credited for preparing large numbers of young people for employment, with gross enrolment rates rising from 5 percent in 2004 to 20 percent in 2014, according to the Cambodia Socio-Economic Surveys. However, the lack of regulatory oversight has left higher education ineffective in producing skills and qualified professionals. Skill gaps and employment uncertainty upon graduation are high (Peou 2017).

10.3.2.2 Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

TVET has been a major focus of policy attention in recent years, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training leading the agenda with substantial support from the Asian Development Bank and ILO. The National Employment Policy was produced to set framework and strategy, and an interministerial committee set up to implement it. The National Employment Agency was created to help ease transition into work by providing employment information and skills training and connecting job seekers and employers. Thirty-nine TVET establishments are now in place across the country to train youth, mainly school dropouts, in vocational skills. Several non-government organisations have been implementing their own initiatives in this sector. However, TVET still plays a marginal role in facilitating school-to-work transitions due to its limited coverage (Table 10.11) and institutional capacity.

TVET is seen across the board as a second-class option, according to interviews with policymakers, program administrators, representatives of major development partners and young people. First, degree programs at TVET institutions are tailored for economically disadvantaged youth, with lower fees and inferior resources compared to universities. Second, secondary-level TVET programs are aimed at school dropouts and focused on traditional skills associated with “second-class” occupations such as farming, tailoring and mechanical repair. Third, curricula and training equipment have failed to catch up with developments in the labour market and are not directly informed by overarching policies such as the Industrial Development Policy and National Employment Policy. Fourth, TVET leadership is limited, either due to internal incapacity or constraints on the

effective exercise of leadership, in undertaking initiatives and enhancing TVET programs.

A particular challenge for public TVET institutions is the focus on financial sustainability. With limited financial support from the government, offering degree programs is seen as a must to generate necessary funds. This has transformed many TVET institutions into competitors with universities. Scholarships exist to waive tuition fees for degree and non-degree programs, and sometimes to provide minimal living allowances. However, TVET institutions remain unable to attract significant numbers of disadvantaged young people due to the focus on degree programs and absence of a strategic approach to reach them. As the leader at one TVET centre put it when asked about the effort to reach out to disadvantaged rural youth:

It's normal for inequality to exist in the development process. It's like flowing water. The area close to the water source gets wet first. TVET opportunities are no different. People living in town will get them first.

10.3.2.3 Employment practices and social protection

The Cambodian labour market is weakly regulated due to the existence of a large informal economy, the absence of a welfare state and a lack of institutionalised contract security. The unemployment rate is low due to the absence of a welfare state and stigma associated with joblessness (World Bank 2012). Employment practices can be discussed in terms of three different types: state employment, professional or clerical occupations in the private and non-government sectors, and labour-intensive employment.

State employment, despite low salaries, remains an aspirational category for those hoping for job security or attempting to move up into an elite circle, mainly through personal connections and/or opportunistic profitability. Many state employees have to engage in other income-generating activities through moonlighting or corrupt practices. In state employment, recruiting is carried out for entry-level positions and competition varies from strong to weak, depending on the area of work. Although poorly paid, state employment can provide a relatively clear framework of upward mobility within the career trajectory. However, it is common knowledge that entry and upward mobility into prestigious or lucrative positions depend largely on practices such as nepotism and bribery. Some also enter state employment to enhance connections and political status in order to gain advantages in their other endeavours, such as entrepreneurial and social activities (Peou 2017). In terms of non-salary benefits, civil service pensions and service-related cash benefits have long existed. However, pensions and benefits

are far from meeting the basic needs of decent livelihoods. Attempts to better insure state employees have been discussed in recent years, although implementation is far from satisfactory. The National Social Security Fund for civil servants was established in 2008 and started operating in 2009, attempting to cover 180,000 civil servants and their families for disability, maternity, occupational injury and funerals in addition to providing pensions. However, the implementation of the scheme has been neither well received nor effective due to state institutions' structural deficits.

Professional or clerical employment, generally attained through higher educational qualifications, in the private and non-government sectors has become important and popular. The private sector has grown rapidly over the past two decades, and, in the absence of strong state institutional capacity, the non-government sector has thrived in numbers and importance. Although some degree of nepotistic hiring is common, employment relationships in this group are open to competition and characterised by wage competition. The movement of professional or clerical workers between firms and organisations is frequent due to prospects of higher wages and other incentives, and recruitment is open to all levels of positions. In-house training is frequent to upgrade productivity, and employment may be either fixed-term or casual due to labour market volatility and program-based funding in the non-government sector.

For labour-intensive workers, in both waged and non-waged employment, job insecurity is high due to the abundance of available labour and weak state capacity to ensure contractual employment practices. There are, however, exceptions in a few industries, garment manufacturing in particular. The economic and political importance of garment manufacturing has created some unionisation (Beresford 2009; Arnold and Toh 2010), resulting in constant contract renegotiation and relatively high employment benefits compared to other industries (though generally long hours of repetitive work with constant supervision may be discouraging). Overall, however, this group of workers is diverse and very vulnerable to job and social insecurity. In addition, reliance on informal networks of friends, neighbours and relatives to ensure or find a job is strong. Formal welfare support remains almost invisible despite a lot of pressure to develop the institution for this group of workers. The National Social Security Fund was set up to provide benefits for retirement and occupational accidents and disabilities through employer contributions. However, the program is only partially operational, and its coverage is marginal and focused mainly on garment workers.

SWTS Cambodia 2014 does not provide figures for these three main employment groups. However, standardised categories of formal versus

informal and skill-based occupations suggest that the large majority of young Cambodians are employed in labour-intensive jobs.

Excluding agriculture, more than 90 percent of young people are informally employed (Table 10.8). In terms of skill-based occupations, using ILO categories, more than 60 percent of young people work in manual-labour-intensive occupations, mainly in agricultural and fishery work and crafts and related trades (Table 10.9).

Table 10.8: Informal/formal sectors (excluding agriculture), by sex and birthplace (percent)

| Informal/formal | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|-------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Formal employed | 7.0 | 6.6 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 6.8 |
| Informal employed | 93.0 | 93.4 | 93.3 | 93.2 | 93.2 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Table 10.9: Youth employment by occupation (ISCO-08) (percent)

| Occupation | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|---|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Legislator, senior official and manager | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 0.4 |
| Professional | 3.4 | 2.9 | 2.7 | 5.5 | 3.2 |
| Technician and associated professional | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 2.1 | 1.5 |
| Clerk | 2.1 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 3.6 | 1.6 |
| Service, shop and market worker | 25.8 | 13.6 | 14.9 | 46.9 | 20.2 |
| Agricultural and fishery worker | 42.8 | 47.8 | 51.2 | 14.7 | 45.1 |
| Crafts and related trade worker | 18.7 | 17.3 | 18.3 | 17.0 | 18.1 |
| Plant/machine operator and assembler | 0.4 | 4.5 | 2.1 | 3.2 | 2.3 |
| Elementary occupations | 4.7 | 10.4 | 7.5 | 6.3 | 7.3 |
| Armed forces | - | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.3 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Overall, employment is characterised by insecurity due to a lack of long-term work contracts, economic restructuring and labour market developments, as well as the absence of established career paths. State institutional capacity to improve the situation remains limited, and unemployment benefits are absent. The lack of employment security, established career paths and institutionalised social protection also means that rural youth and young women are particularly challenged.

10.3.3 Normative context

Norms and values also shape transitions of young people into working life by providing them and their families with knowledge, preferences and resources. In Cambodia, a number of normative expectations inform young people's

perspectives on transitions and anticipation of life course outcomes, including the ideal of education and upward mobility, particularly for rural people, and the sociocultural expectations for women.

Particularly relevant for rural people and those with few resources are a deep sense of place within a given social order and a deep-rooted perception of hierarchy and mobility. Ingrained lopsided relations can be attributed to the powerlessness of people's living experiences, but one can also point to the Buddhist understanding of "merit making" in the Cambodian context, whereby "people thought that they owed their position, viewed in vertical terms, to the meritoriousness of their former lives" (Chandler 1979, 415). Despite such a deep sense of place and fate, upward mobility through personal industry is also cherished in both religious and secular terms. While the merit-making ideal of Buddhism can be fateful in one sense, it can also encourage personal industry as an ethical principle for life conduct (Steinberg 1959). With the expansion of modern education and bureaucratic careers in the 1950s and 1960s, upward mobility through education became an emergent ideal for Cambodians and their children (Ebihara 1973; Martin 1994). The political and social upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s brought a hiatus in such social mobility but turned it into an idealised path. This sociocultural orientation is still prevalent and has propelled rapid growth in participation in tertiary education despite its insufficient vocational orientation. The desire for higher education is so strong that sometimes it does not have to link to employment outcomes. As a TVET leader working in the sector for over 30 years remarked, "Cambodian people really desire higher degrees. It is even okay to do low-level jobs as long as they hold a high degree." Such ideal notions of education and upward mobility can become a basis for (rural) people to justify their poor employment – or "fate" – through their lack of education and formal qualifications (Peou and Zinn 2015).

Young women can be particularly disadvantaged in their transition experience by sociocultural expectations. While such expectations may have shifted to some extent in recent times, the literature suggests they continue to constrain young women's experience of work (Brickell 2011b). Constraints are often linked to the expectation of women's ties to domestic work and the upholding of female moral virtues (Heng et al. 2016). Cambodian women are often expected to be responsible for keeping the household in order (Ledgerwood 1994; Brickell 2011a), so it is socially acceptable for them not to "work" for income, and income-generation activities can create a double burden. Recent studies on young migrant women show their double burden of care work and earning, subtly for spousal legitimacy and communal respect (Derks 2008; Peou 2016). In

addition, mobility and work outside the domestic sphere still often cause anxiety about young women's physical and moral safety (Derks 2008; Brickell 2011b), limiting their economic options.

Certain expectations broadly shared in the society also serve as normative references for decisions regarding life and work. One particular instance is expectations regarding career choice for TVET programs. While TVET programs are considered a second-class option for quality and career prospects, there is a broader social value at play. As a TVET program administrator put it, "Cambodian society gives less value to technicians than to generalists with high academic qualifications". In addition, entry paths into work shared by social groups also create a transition reference or pressure for young people to follow suit.

10.4 Navigating working life

The above socio-structural, institutional and normative contexts, together with the immediate conditions of young people's family and community, form the "opportunity structures" (Roberts 1968, 2009) they navigate during their transition into working life. These structures present resources but also constraints and risks. From a life course perspective, how young people deal with them depends on individual agency but also on the accessibility of resources. Resources can be classified into three types of capital: economic (basically, wealth and material possessions), cultural (in both embodied forms of knowledge and appreciation, and institutionalised forms of qualifications) and social (real or potential, within social networks) (Bourdieu 1986). These different forms of capital are cumulative and inter-convertible. The following analysis focuses on how such resources are used by young people and lead to employment consequences.

10.4.1 Transition into full-time work

Although "transition" is a contentious term, with debates about its conceptual and practical utility highly visible in youth literature (Woodman and Wyn 2013), the SWTS uses the following working definition of school-to-work transition:

- "Transited" refers to someone currently employed in (1) a stable and (subjectively reported) satisfactory job, (2) a stable but non-satisfactory job, (3) a satisfactory but temporary job or (4) satisfactory self-employment.
- "In transition" refers to someone currently (1) unemployed, (2) employed in a temporary and non-satisfactory job, (3) in non-satisfactory self-employment or (4) inactive and not in school with an aim to look for work later.

- “Transition not yet started” refers to someone either (1) still in school and inactive or (2) currently inactive and not in school, with no intention of looking for work.

Although, as Table 10.10 shows, up to 80 percent of youth have transited by the above definition – a positive sign – two aspects of transition stages point to the disadvantages of rural and female youth. First, urban youth are afforded more time – supposedly mainly to prepare themselves – before making the transition into work, with about 21 percent of urban youth but only 5 percent of rural youth not yet started their transition. Second, a higher proportion of males than females have transited.

Table 10.10: Transition status, by sex and birthplace (percent)

| Occupation | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Transited | 77.0 | 83.6 | 82.9 | 67.7 | 79.9 |
| Stable and satisfactory job | 19.6 | 23.5 | 19.8 | 27.6 | 21.3 |
| Stable and non-satisfactory job | 0.8 | 2.2 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.4 |
| Temporary and satisfactory job | 4.2 | 3.8 | 4.7 | 1.6 | 4.0 |
| Satisfactory self-employment | 52.4 | 54.0 | 57.1 | 37.2 | 53.1 |
| In transition | 14.9 | 7.9 | 11.9 | 11.6 | 11.8 |
| Unemployed youth | 3.6 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 5.5 | 3.3 |
| Temporary and non-satisfactory job | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.2 |
| Non-satisfactory self-employment | 2.9 | 3.1 | 3.3 | 1.5 | 3.0 |
| Inactive non-student with future work aspiration | 8.2 | 1.7 | 5.6 | 4.4 | 5.3 |
| Transition not yet started | 8.1 | 8.6 | 5.2 | 20.7 | 8.3 |
| Inactive student | 7.7 | 8.4 | 4.9 | 20.4 | 8.0 |
| Inactive non-student without future work aspiration | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.3 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Given weak institutional support to keep young people in school, the family plays a crucial role as an enabler or restrictor of their transition. The enabling and restricting character of the family mainly refers to the economic resources accessible through the family, but also relates to social and cultural resources, such as networks and advice, used by young people.

10.4.1.1 Timing and preparation for working life

The family has a strong impact on young people's entry into full-time work in terms of timing, preparation for working life and nature of work-study combination. Young people from a resource-poor family enter full-time work

faster than those from a resource-rich family. As the SWTS Cambodia 2014 shows (Table 10.10), a substantially higher proportion of rural youth, who are generally relatively resource poor, than urban youth have already transited (83 percent versus 68 percent). A higher proportion of urban youth than rural youth can afford to delay the start of their transition (21 percent versus 5 percent).

This quantitative picture might suggest that young people from rural or poor families quit school to work simply out of economic necessity. Although that is generally true, our qualitative data suggests a more complex interplay between family economic shortage, family structure and individual agency:

Deun: They [other families] had resources. They had everything. When their children needed a bicycle, they could buy it. When the school was far away, they could afford to buy a motorbike for them to go to school. When I saw them ride a motorbike to school, I felt embarrassed. So I didn't feel like going to school. Also, I pitied my parents. They were poor and in debt. And when I went to school I had to take money from them. That's why I quit. (*Focus Group 14, male, construction worker*)

Lida: My family was in a tough [financial] situation. We didn't have the head of family [father] to support us. My siblings were all studying, so my mom alone couldn't do it. I sacrificed and helped her to support my siblings to go to school ... Boys couldn't do it. They weren't good at doing [helping my mother with] business. I was a girl so I could help my mom better. (*Focus Group 17, female, waitress*)

These two young people quitting school at grade seven and nine, respectively, pointed out that their tough family economy was a main reason for them to start working full time. For the first case, the financial situation at home was tough, but he emphasised it was he who made the call to quit. In the second case, rationalisation about gender and family responsibility made her quit. In both cases, they quit to help shoulder the family burden when coming of age.

Table 10.11: Completed formal education/training, by sex and birthplace (percent)

| Education level | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|-----------------------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Not completed elementary level | 1.8 | 1.5 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 |
| Elementary level (primary) | 43.9 | 39.3 | 44.5 | 29.3 | 42.0 |
| Vocational school (secondary) | 1.8 | 0.8 | 1 | 3.1 | 1.4 |
| Secondary level | 46.7 | 51.7 | 48.1 | 52.1 | 48.8 |
| Vocational school (postsecondary) | 2 | 1.4 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| University (undergraduate) | 3.8 | 5.2 | 2.9 | 12 | 4.4 |
| Postgraduate, postdoctoral | - | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Family economic situation clearly is linked to how a young person is prepared for working life. Previous studies show that going to university is normal for young people from families that have the resources to support them, especially in a context where university entrance often has virtually no selection requirement (Peou 2017). The SWTS Cambodia 2014 shows that a larger proportion of urban youth than rural youth completed higher education (12 percent versus 3 percent; Table 10.11).

Presumably, higher education gives young people knowledge and skills for higher paid jobs. Our qualitative data further investigates the utility of higher education beyond the knowledge and skills it may provide. Rather than a straightforward experience of obtaining knowledge and skills necessary for work, university experience generally gives time and space for young people to develop and/or refine a career perspective and a sense of competence for a working life, a privileged transition preparation available to only a minority:

Socheat: I think university is a big turning point for everyone. The most important aspect of university probably is practical skills and internship ... After graduation, we felt that we had a real experience and were confident enough to move to working life ... It built my confidence in myself. (*Focus Group 1, female, journalist*)

Sarun: I worked hard on my English because there was a guy from my home town who did well to get a scholarship to Germany ... [at university] I chose finance and banking at UC. I didn't know why I chose it or what I really wanted to study. [But] I passed to study at both UC and IFL [majoring in English teaching]. After six months, I reassessed [the situation]. I knew I didn't like maths, so why finance and banking? ... My friend told me to study international relations because I could become a diplomat. I started to think it would be interesting to travel a lot. So I switched [from finance] to international relations. Now I threw it away. I'm not using [that degree]. I discovered I don't have a passion for that. My passion is education now. (*Focus Group 2, male, English lecturer*)

While many agree with the first extract, which emphasises the skills and knowledge imparted by university, the second extract illustrates the extended benefits of university education in preparing young people for working life. While school subjects and internships give practical and technical preparation, many participants explained that friends, role models in the form of lecturers and seniors, travelling, community service and time to reflect on their interests and competence have given them the space needed to discover what they can or would like to do in their working life.

10.4.1.2 Work-study combination

Work-study combination can be harmful for schooling given competing demands for time and attention. A case in point is that of Ousa, who finally quit work-study during her lower secondary school because she lost concentration on study:

Ousa: It was tough when I was young. After school, I went around the village to do things for others to get paid ... [I quit] since I couldn't study well. My parents wanted me to continue but I didn't want to ... My mind wasn't focused anymore and I was last in the class. When I liked studying, I was among the top five. (*Focus Group 18, female, masseuse*)

The negative effect of work-study in general education is perhaps most felt among rural young people, whose family economic conditions demand shared responsibility in earning. The SWTS Cambodia 2014 supports such an assessment (Table 10.12).

Table 10.12: Work-study combination and attending school/training, by sex and birthplace (percent)

| Work-study combination | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|---------------------------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Work during school season | 6.7 | 6.0 | 7.2 | 3.2 | 6.4 |
| Work outside school season | 9.2 | 8.4 | 9.0 | 8.1 | 8.8 |
| Work during and outside school season | 62.4 | 64.9 | 67.0 | 49.7 | 63.5 |
| Not working during schooling | 21.8 | 20.8 | 16.9 | 39.1 | 21.3 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Work-study also reflects family economic disparity among university students. Fourteen of the focus group participants were working full time while studying at university at the time of interview. For them, working affected their academic performance as their job demanded the majority of their time and effort. In contrast, those free of financial needs described the privilege of not having to work parttime and/or of pursuing academically or professionally enriching work or volunteer opportunities:

Daly: My dad was the only one earning income, so it was quite tough. We had to pay tuition fees. If I had had to rent a house, he wouldn't have been able to afford it. So I had to live with my aunt ... I wanted to work part time. But my father said that if I worked, it could affect my study. He wouldn't allow me to work. (*Focus Group 3, female, engineer*)

Ryna: I found a [part-time] research job with my friend. I felt I liked it. I could meet people and travel to places ... I also started to do social work and event management ... I also got selected for an exchange program overseas. (*Focus Group 1, female, National Bank officer*)

10.4.1.3 Beyond family economic resources

Family-based resources facilitating the transition into work go beyond the financial. In a context of weak institutional mechanisms to ease transition, especially by linking skills training to employment, school leavers (from dropouts to university graduates) rely heavily on their networks for introduction to jobs, knowledge about jobs and career advice.

The SWTS Cambodia 2014 confirms the importance of informal networks in job searching among young Cambodians, the majority relying on personal networks and the family to find employment (Table 10.13). The data also shows that rural youth rely more heavily on relatives, friends and acquaintances than do their urban peers.

For those dropping out of school to find unskilled or low-skilled work, relatives and fellow villagers are almost always used for information or to take them to a job. Such social resources are critical because the types of jobs accessible to them have few skill barriers, making personal introduction most effective. In addition, social networks also provide a sense of security, especially for women's physical and moral security when finding work involves moving away from home.

Table 10.13: Employed youth's job search method, by sex and birthplace (percent)

| Work-study combination | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Registered at an employment centre | 0.52 | 0.93 | 0.59 | 1.32 | 0.71 |
| Placed/answered job advertisement | 2.24 | 3.07 | 1.85 | 6.58 | 2.62 |
| Inquired directly at factories | 4.58 | 2.64 | 4.06 | 1.81 | 3.70 |
| Took a test or interview | 7.75 | 3.05 | 4.11 | 13.37 | 5.62 |
| Asked friends, relatives, acquaintances | 27.85 | 41.26 | 35.18 | 27.61 | 33.94 |
| Waited on the street to be recruited for casual work | - | 0.08 | 0.04 | - | 0.04 |
| Sought financial assistance to seek work or start business | 2.02 | 1.48 | 1.77 | 1.78 | 1.77 |
| Looked for land to start own business or farming | 6.79 | 4.88 | 6.20 | 4.50 | 5.92 |
| Applied for permit or licence to start a business | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.09 | 0.17 | 0.11 |
| Joined the family establishment | 48.15 | 42.41 | 46.06 | 42.87 | 45.54 |
| Others | - | 0.08 | 0.05 | - | 0.04 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

For those finishing university, formal job search channels such as job announcements are more common, but referral to a job through relatives and networks is also common. Family and relatives can also provide knowledge resources such as advice on job expectations.

10.4.2 Appreciating work

To assess how young people appreciate their work, pay and satisfaction are important aspects. Three out of four workers aged 15–29 are paid below the national average (Table 10.14). Rural and female youth are particularly worse off. In addition, almost half of employed youth expressed the desire to change their job (Table 10.15), the biggest reason being “to earn higher pay” (Table 10.16).

Table 10.14: Youth employment pay compared to national average (percent)

| | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|------------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Above national average | 19.6 | 32.0 | 22.7 | 35.8 | 25.4 |
| Below national average | 80.4 | 68.0 | 77.3 | 64.2 | 74.6 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Table 10.15: Want to change current job or activity (percent)

| | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|-----|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Yes | 50.7 | 55.7 | 53.3 | 51.3 | 53.0 |
| No | 49.4 | 44.3 | 46.7 | 48.7 | 47.0 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Table 10.16: Motivation for desire to change job (percent)

| | Total |
|--|-------|
| To earn higher pay per hour | 44.1 |
| Present job is temporary | 26.6 |
| To improve working conditions | 12.7 |
| To use better your qualifications/skills | 6.1 |
| To work more hours paid at your current rate | 4.6 |
| Others | 5.6 |

Source: Authors' calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Ironically, according to SWTS Cambodia 2014, almost all young workers (94 percent) reported being satisfied with their current job (Table 10.17).

Table 10.17: Youth satisfaction with current job (percent)

| Work-study combination | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|------------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Very satisfied | 51.3 | 45.9 | 49.4 | 46.0 | 48.8 |
| Somewhat satisfied | 43.8 | 47.7 | 44.8 | 49.6 | 45.6 |
| Somewhat unsatisfied | 4.4 | 5.3 | 5.1 | 3.8 | 4.8 |
| Very unsatisfied | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.8 | 0.7 | 0.7 |

Source: Authors' calculation using SWTS Cambodia 2014

Among young workers in labour-intensive jobs, given the high level of satisfaction with work and relatively high level of intention to change jobs, “satisfaction” should be interpreted as feeling grateful to have a job and income. Participants from low- and non-skilled discussion groups often expressed a mixture of contentment about being able to earn and resignation about work:

Ty: At home, I depended on my parents. Here, I don’t. I can earn money and support myself ... In Phnom Penh, people look good and cool. I want to be like them. So I need to earn ... In my province, there are just a few job opportunities, unlike in Phnom Penh. (*Focus Group 20, male, waiter*)

Deun: People who got to continue their studies further have knowledge. So they don’t have to do physical work. They can use their knowledge to earn a lot of money ... I don’t have any knowledge. If I don’t rely on my physical strength, I won’t have anything to do. (*Focus Group 14, male, construction worker*)

These extracts show that youth may or may not be satisfied with their current work situation, but they are grateful to have a job and an income given their circumstances. Hence, assessment of job satisfaction needs to include the larger life course context, such as qualifications, self-efficacy, sense of identity, and family well-being.

10.4.3 Aspirations and future perspectives

Young people’s experiences of school-to-work transition and early working life are meaningfully linked to their aspirations and future perspectives about jobs and careers. In addition, future aspirations can also suggest the unequal resources and circumstances encountered by young people. Particularly in Cambodia and many Asian societies, family livelihoods and a sense of family security – in both economic and psycho-social senses – are often prioritised or tied to individual thoughts and goals (Peou and Zinn 2015). A good future, for example, can be equated with a good family life, which includes a decent livelihood and being physically together, and this can also sometimes counsel moderation in forming a future goal, given constrained circumstances (Peou 2016).

Table 10.18: Future aspirations, by sex and birthplace (percent)

| Main life goal | Sex | | Birthplace | | Total |
|----------------------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Rural | Urban | |
| Being successful in work | 13.3 | 18.5 | 13.7 | 23.3 | 15.6 |
| Making a contribution to society | 5.8 | 7.5 | 6.2 | 8.2 | 6.6 |
| Having lots of money | 26.9 | 27.9 | 26.8 | 29.6 | 27.4 |
| Having a good family life | 53.9 | 46.1 | 53.3 | 39.0 | 50.5 |

Source: Authors’ calculations using SWTS Cambodia 2014

The SWTS Cambodia 2014 found that half of Cambodian youth – more rural than urban and more female than male – identified their main life goal as a good family life (Table 10.18). In addition, more urban and male youth identified being successful in work as their main life goal, which suggests a stronger sense of capacity to develop a stable and successful career.

Gendered perspectives regarding future careers are also evident in focus group interviews. For many of the young female unskilled workers interviewed, their future thoughts are focused on returning to their home village or that of their future spouse and running a small business at or near home. This is to reconcile domestic obligations for care work with income generation:

Da: I want to earn enough money and will do business. I want to save enough money to run a business ... He [her fiancé] wants to bring me to his home village ... My mom also wants me to learn hairdressing ... I also want to. I haven't decided yet. If I can run a grocery business at home, I'll do it. But if I can run a hairdressing salon, I'll do it too. I can be close to home. (*Focus Group 18, female, guard*)

For highly skilled female professionals, this perspective is uncommon but possible. The case of Moniroth, an engineer at a large manufacturing plant, is an example:

Moniroth: I'm not sure. I have two different ideas. If I continue to work, I could be promoted to engineering supervisor. It'll depend on how hard I work and how well I perform. If I'm not working here, in five years I want to run my own business and have a family. If I have a family, it'll be very hard to continue working here because it's far [from Phnom Penh] ... (*Facilitator: Why run a business at home?*) ... So that I can stay at home looking after my children ... I'm willing to sacrifice for my family. (*Focus Group 3, female, plant engineer*)

The two extracts above point to another interesting aspect of future perspectives and early working life experience, that is, the lack of established career paths to which young workers can refer. For highly skilled workers, future career perspectives are generalised in terms of success in their area of specialisation or in entrepreneurial activity. For low- and non-skilled workers, career perspectives are limited to saving enough for a financially and socially improved life or learning a common skill or trade to achieve that.

Previous research links absence of career paths to uncertainty and unequal access by young people to resources. A lack of established career paths, due to economic structural and labour market changes, and weak institutional framework, means future careers are uncertain. Those with substantial family resources, both financial and social, are more likely to feel more secure and

become more resilient in the face of an uncertain future. Those with few family resources are more likely to face a future relying on an outdated framework for action and solutions (Peou and Zinn 2015). The following two extracts exemplify such contrasting perspectives:

Kosal: I chose to work at KPMG after my graduation because the work was related to law and English, my two majors ... I'm now waiting for a position to be available in the government so that I can apply. My parents can still support me financially if I get a government job. Working there [at KPMG] has made me realise how big the world is ... I've learned the way business operates. If I have the capability, I'll do my own business. But switching to a local company would be great to learn more too. (*Focus Group 2, male, legal translator*)

Keak: I'll continue earning money for now ... In the future, I think I can sell groceries at home, so I can be with my family. I don't want to have to go far. But going to Thailand, I can learn some skills. (*Facilitator: What kind of skills?*) ... Mechanic. In Thailand, we can learn and get salary ... But it's too far from home. I want to stay near home. (*Focus Group 19, male, labourer*)

10.5 Conclusion

Family resources are critical to young people negotiating their transition into the world of work. These resources are often economic, financial support to obtain the highest possible qualifications and a sense of financial security to pursue career interests, but also social and cultural, in terms of networks and knowledge to minimise risks and enhance prospects. From a life course perspective, these types of resources or capitals create advantages and disadvantages that accumulate over a life. These cumulative (dis)advantages are critical to the reproduction of social inequality (DiPrete and Eirich (2006).

The socioeconomic conditions of the family during children's schooling play a major role in deciding whether they leave school and enter full-time work in their late teenage years. Well-resourced families are able to delay their children's transition into work by supporting them through high school and university, allowing them to accumulate knowledge, skills, ideas, a sense of competence and networks to better manage their transitions into working life.

Economically differentiated beginnings have long-lasting effects on school-to-work transitions and life course outcomes. Young people from families with few economic resources, especially rural ones, are limited in their knowledge and networks, which pulls them into labour-intensive jobs. Over the early working life, these jobs offer young workers little sense of a career or occupational path, and they very often feel that returning to the village at some point, often after marriage and parenthood, is the most likely scenario. In contrast, young people supported financially through university by

their family often build knowledge, connections and confidence, which stand them in good stead for getting better-paid jobs with better conditions. These experiences are further converted into additional knowledge, confidence and networks for career ladder climbing or switching to even better options.

Throughout the early life course of the participants in this study, these different types of capitals are inter-converted by young people when negotiating the opportunity structures surrounding their lives. For the resource poor, the lack of economic capital prevents them from harnessing cultural capital, that is, knowledge and skills, through education and employment. It hastens their transition into full-time work and limits their early working life to earning a livelihood by using only their social capital, or networks of family, friends and fellow villagers. For the resource rich, economic capital allows them to delay transition into full-time work and enhance social and cultural capital in expanded networks, knowledge and skills through university study. Upon entry into working life, they translate these social and cultural resources into better-paid jobs with better conditions, upon which they continue to expand their base of economic, social and cultural capitals.

Young people in Cambodia are perhaps satisfied with their current work, as reported in the SWTS Cambodia 2014, or more accurately, grateful for their current work situation. However, many face a future of uncertain work (Peou and Zinn 2015). This makes the family extremely critical in young people's transition into work. This also has a larger implication for social reproduction. Given the absence of a welfare state, wealth and social gaps are likely to widen over the life courses of young people.

The Cambodian case presented in this paper reflects the weak state institutions that manage school-to-work transition. TVET is still playing a marginal role and struggling to improve. State welfare support is extremely limited. Career paths are only just emerging. In this context, state institutions need to prioritise policies and programs that reduce not only inequality in life outcomes but also uncertainty in transition and career pathways, including a well-defined vocational focus in the education system, systematic incentive schemes for targeted skills and careers guided by an overarching national development plan, and social security mechanisms to support skill-based career paths.

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