

Invisible Children in Cambodia and Senegal: Contributing Factors and Ethical Implications

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Abstract

This article focuses on invisible children – like those who are not registered at birth and do not exist in the eyes of their countries. It examines the underlying causes of invisibility in Senegal and Cambodia. Each of these causes implies different levels of severity in terms of invisibility. Beyond examining the various causes of invisibility, this article also explores the ethical issues surrounding childhood invisibility, the ethical frameworks that can be applied to address the issue of invisible children, and the steps that these countries have taken and are currently taking to reduce childhood invisibility.

I. Introduction

The issue of childhood invisibility remains prevalent on the global scale, primarily in some of the least developed countries. Even in modern times after many advances in human rights declarations and international regulations surrounding children’s issues, and even with the ratification of various human rights conventions and UN initiatives, countless children remain invisible. When children are invisible, it typically means that they are denied access to crucial resources including health care, education, and financial assistance. Children are often considered invisible, when forced to adopt adult roles due to involuntary involvement in the workforce or marriage. Child labor and child marriage are large contributors to childhood invisibility that are often independent of the issue of birth registration, though missing birth registrations continue to increase the risk of children becoming invisible.

This article examines the prevalence of childhood invisibility in Cambodia and Senegal by examining fertility rates, birth registration, childhood employment, children living with HIV, and child marriage. Both countries continue to struggle with invisible children for different reasons, though there are also some similarities evident between the two countries. Following the examination of the key factors related to invisible children, this article then analyzes the ethical issues and frameworks that are currently surrounding the issue of childhood invisibility, which exhibit once again similarities and differences between Cambodia and Senegal.

Following this introduction (Section I) there is a brief literature review (Section II) that briefly summarizes six publications that focus on the experiences of invisible children in Cambodia and

Senegal. Section III reviews the socio-economic background of the two countries by looking at the evolution of GDP per capita, life expectancy, and literacy rates. It is critical that the socio-economic background of each country is understood in order to provide further insight into how they continue to struggle with and attempt to solve the issue of childhood invisibility. Section IV analyzes specific factors in Cambodia and Senegal that directly influence childhood invisibility. These factors are examined in two subsections, with Section IV.1. analyzing fertility rates and birth registry, and Section IV.2. analyzing children in employment, children living with HIV, and girls married before adulthood. Section V is an ethical analysis of the issue with a focus on the school systems in Cambodia and Senegal. Section VI serves as a conclusion.

II. Literature Review

There is a great deal written about invisible children as a whole, however only a small portion of that literature is specific to Cambodia and Senegal. Xinhau (2005), Rubenstein and Stark (2016), and Baker-Munton (2019) focus on what it looks like to be an invisible child in Cambodia, as well as the implications of that lifestyle and the disabilities that often come with it. Berfini (2018), Rodriguez (2020) and Ryan (2012) focus more on sub-Saharan Africa and the immense number of invisible children in that region. They each look at how poverty rates and education levels in parents really affect whether or not a child is registered or becomes invisible, all while emphasizing the importance of being registered as a child in the first place.

- Xinhau (2005) wrote about how there is an epidemic of invisible children in Cambodia. In the capitol alone, there are more than 1,000 children living in the streets while between 10,000 and 20,000 more children work those streets. Because most of these children are not formally registered, these children are ignored by local and national governments, and they are therefore ineligible to receive government benefits of any variety, including education to health care. On top of that, invisible children in Cambodia are much more likely to become victims of sex trafficking as the government is not looking out for them. More than 30 percent of sex workers in Cambodia are between the ages of 12 and 17, and they regularly face extreme sexual violence.
- Rubenstein and Stark (2016) talk about the fact that while there have been a lot of improvements in poverty reduction programs in low- and middle-income countries, these programs fail to acknowledge invisible children in their outreach. The situation is particularly challenging for Cambodia where there are an incredible number of invisible children living outside of traditional households due to disability and lack of resources. Rubenstein and Stark (2016) then go on to discuss the various implications that this life can have for these children, as well as some of the action taken by the Cambodian government in an effort to aid the situation.
- Baker-Munton (2019) detail how countless invisible children are constantly shut out of Cambodia's education system. In Cambodia, there is another layer to depriving these children of an education and government resources. The invisible children in Cambodia are, unfortunately, often in that position because an overwhelming number of them are disabled. The country already has a high disability rate, and parents often think that their disabled children are not suited to education and normal social activity; thus, incredibly high numbers of disabled children face invisibility. They are the population that needs

government benefits more than most, yet they have no access to these resources as they remain unregistered.

- Berfini (2018) states that there are over 600,000 children in Senegal under the age of 5 years, who are technically invisible. Often times this is because parents either do not understand the importance of registering their child or economic hardship is preventing it. These invisible children then become much more likely to be sex trafficked or in forced labor, in addition to missing out on schooling, healthcare, and other government benefits. Societal abuse and disadvantage are inherent for many of these children who struggle with their invisible status, according to Berfini (2018) primarily because of registration issues that must be resolved.
- Rodriguez (2020) examines the epidemic of invisible children in sub-Saharan Africa. Government representatives from Senegal touch on the importance of being registered in the eyes of your country to help ward against child labor and early marriage, while also helping to make sure that one is given any of the government benefits, they need or qualify for. In Senegal, the problem of invisibility is centered around the fact that parents do not register their newborns. This is primarily due to a lack of accessibility. Rural areas have registration rates of 35 percent compared to the 65 percent rate of their urban counterparts, and poor households have much lower registration rates than rich ones.
- Ryan (2012) focuses on why so many invisible children remain that way in Senegal due to an extremely flawed school system. When parents send their children to urban areas so that they can become educated, often times families lack the money they need to actually get an education for their child. Many times, students are beaten horribly when they fail to pay their teachers prior to each lesson in the Koranic school system. This essentially forces children, which were sent away to receive an education, to sleep on the streets and beg for money until they either have enough to afford reentry into an abusive system or give up entirely on getting an education. Therefore, the problem of invisible children continues to perpetuate itself as children are not able to get an education in order to begin breaking the cycle.

III. Socio-Economic Background

Cambodia has undergone a notable socioeconomic transition over the last few decades, which should be noted on the global scale. It has become one of the fastest growing countries in the world, with an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 8 percent over the 20-year period from 1998-2018. GDP growth has remained strong in the last few years, coming in a bit lower at approximately 7.1 percent-7.4 percent. Because of this growth, the country reached lower middle-income status as of 2015 and is aiming to progress to the upper middle-income bracket by 2030. Cambodia's poverty rate has also plummeted from 47.8 percent (2007) to 13.5 percent (2014). This is a notable accomplishment as the country met the MGD of halving poverty, but the majority of people who escaped poverty barely did so, falling back into it with very little exposure to economic shocks.¹

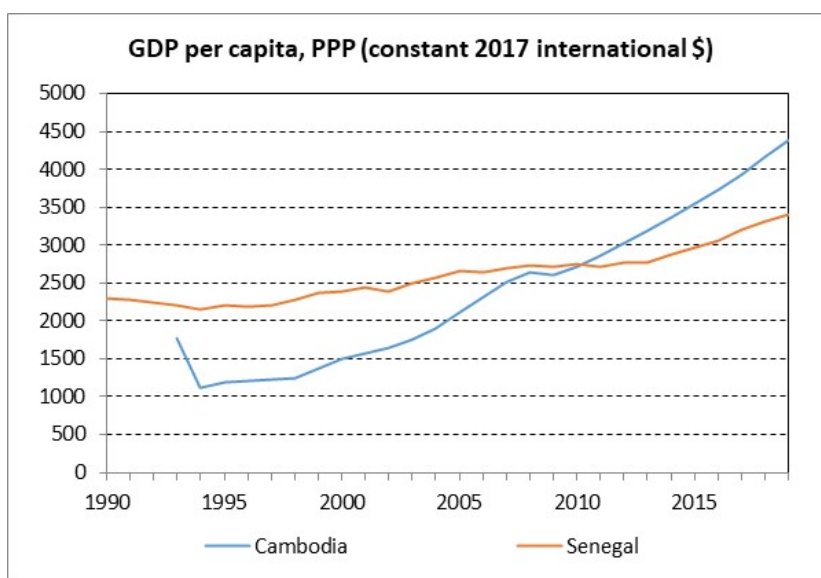
Senegal, on the other hand, has not experienced growth rates as rapid as those seen in Cambodia. It does, however, possess some of the highest growth rates in Sub-Saharan Africa due to its relative

¹ The data in this paragraph is based on World Bank (2020a).

political stability, with major power transitions being peaceful since the country gained its independence in 1960. The average growth rate in Senegal has been between approximately 5.3 percent and 6.3 percent in the last decade, while it was slower than that over the last 20-30 years.² With this growth and help from the international community via various aid programs, the poverty headcount ratio for extreme poverty (measured as the percent of people living below \$1.90-a-day) has been slowly but steadily decreasing in Senegal from 68.4 percent in 1991, to 57.4 percent in 1994, to 49.1 percent in 2001, to 38.3 percent 2005. It then increased marginally to 38.5 percent in 2011, which is unfortunately the latest year for which such data is available for Senegal.³

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, purchasing power parity (PPP)-adjusted, in constant 2017 international dollars, in Cambodia and Senegal. The growth rates mentioned above are directly visible in the slopes of the lines. Even though the slope of Cambodia’s line is notably steeper than Senegal’s, both countries still saw increases in their GDP per capita over time. Cambodia’s GDP per capita increased from \$1,764 in 1993 to \$4,389 in 2019, while Senegal’s GDP per capita increased from \$2,296 in 1990 to \$3,395 in 2019. Hence, even though Cambodia’s GDP per capita was below that of Senegal in 1993, Cambodia caught up with Senegal in 2010, and surpassed Senegal subsequently, with Cambodia continuing to grow faster than Senegal, even though Senegal’s growth rates have increased in the last decade.

Figure 1: GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2017 international \$), 1990-2019



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

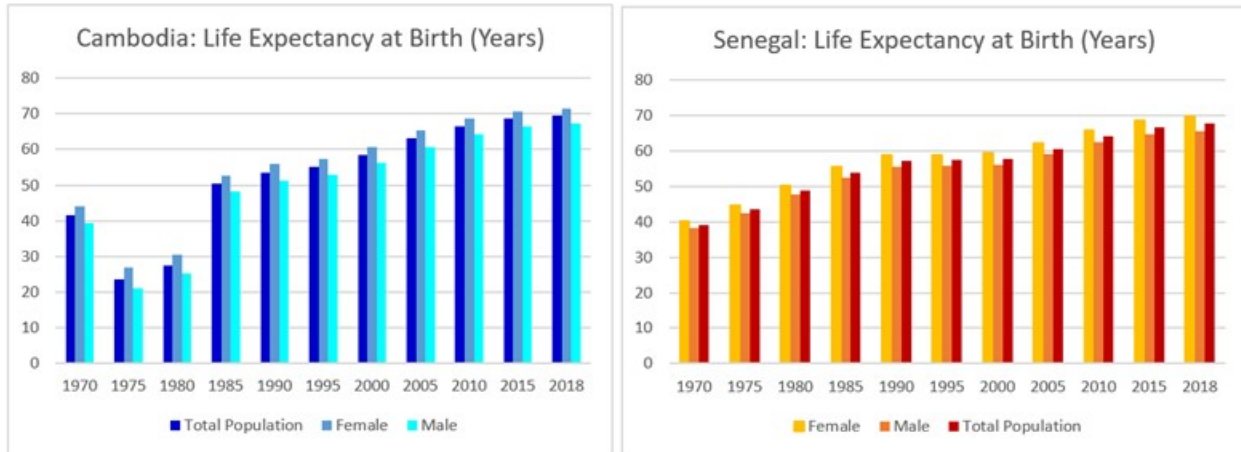
Figure 2 shows how life expectancy has evolved in each country with data for both men and women separately, as well as the total populations. In general, the life expectancies in Cambodia and Senegal evolved very similarly from 1970–2018, with both countries reaching a life expectancy of about 70 years by 2018. Despite the overall similarity in the trends, there was a big difference between the respective countries’ life expectancies from 1975–1985. Cambodia’s life

² World Bank (2020b).

³ World Bank (2021).

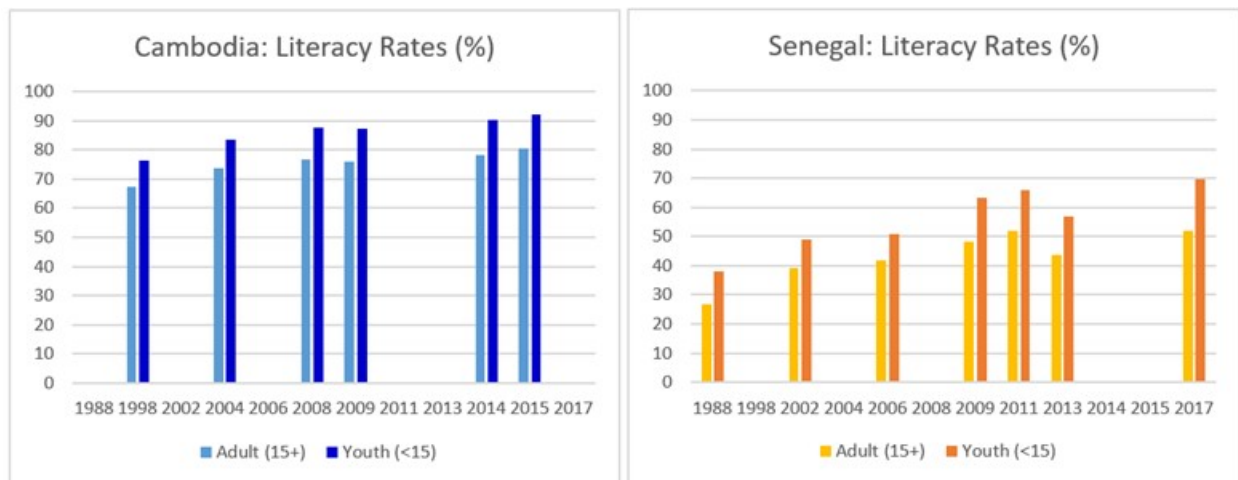
expectancy experienced a severe decline due to an incredibly brutal regime ruling the country, ultimately trying to create a new master race and resulting in the deaths of over 2 million people.⁴ Senegal’s life expectancy continued to increase during this period.

Figure 2: Life Expectancy at Birth (years), 1970-2018



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

Figure 3: Literacy Rates (percent of population), available years



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

Figure 3 compares the recorded literacy rates in each country for both the youth and adult populations. The collection of reliable literacy rates has been limited in both countries, with various data gaps present for Senegal and Cambodia. The data does show, however, that youth literacy rates remain higher than adult literacy rates in each nation, and literacy rates have overall increasing trends in each country regardless of age group. The adult literacy rate in Senegal increased from approximately 26.9 percent (1988) to 51.9 percent (2017), and its youth literacy

⁴ History.com (2018).

rate increased from 37.9 percent (1988) to 69.5 percent (2017). In Cambodia, the adult literacy rate increased from 67.3 percent (1998) to 80.5 percent (2015), while the youth literacy rate increased from 76.3 percent (1998) to 92.2 percent (2015). While Cambodia’s overall literacy rates are much higher than Senegal’s, it is important to note the significant increase seen in the rates of each country.

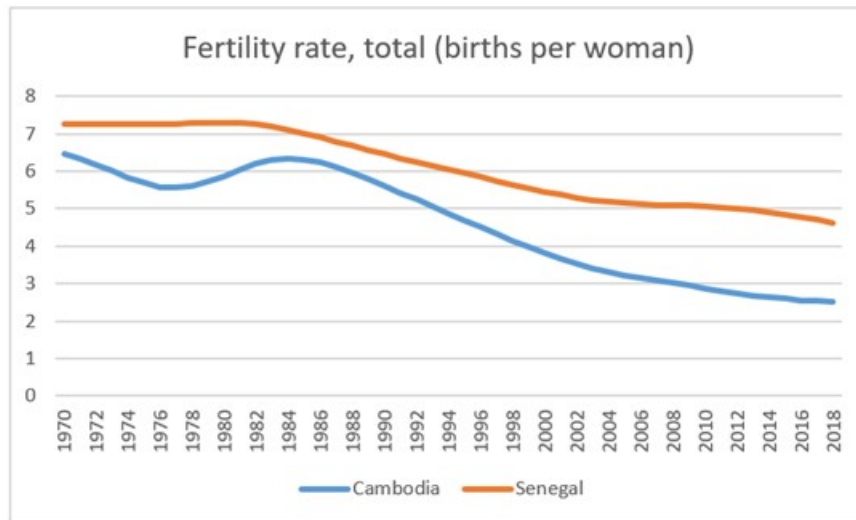
IV. Analysis of Facts

This section analyzes five key factors that impact the visibility of children in Cambodia and Senegal. The first subsection will focus on the fertility rate and the completeness of birth registration in each country. The second subsection will focus more specifically on children in employment, children living with HIV, and girls who were married before reaching adulthood.

IV.1. Fertility Rates and Birth Registry

Figure 4 compares the evolution of fertility rates in Cambodia and Senegal. Each country started with high fertility rates in 1970: Cambodia’s was 6.5 births per woman and Senegal’s was approximately 7.3 births per woman. In the period of time between 1970 and 2018, both countries experienced success in decreasing those fertility rates. Cambodia was able to bring it down to 2.5 births per woman in 2018, which is also the current average global total fertility rate.⁵ Senegal was able to reduce its fertility rate to 4.6 births per woman: a number still notably higher than the global average.

Figure 4: Fertility Rates in Cambodia and Senegal, 1970-2018



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

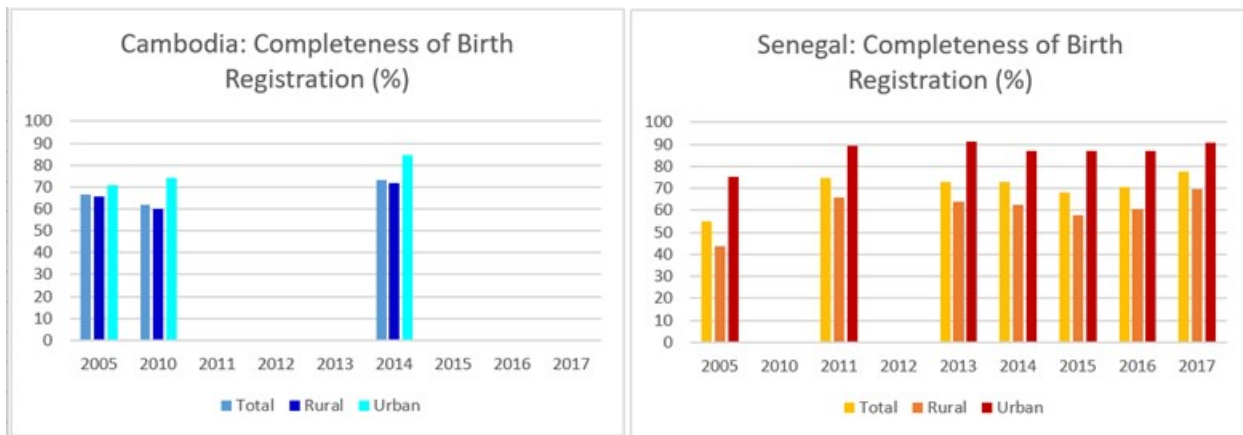
These fertility rates and their overall decline in each country are important as fewer children per woman means fewer unwanted or invisible children in the workforce, on the street, or in impoverished households that are not capable of adequately caring for them. In Cambodia, this

⁵ World Bank (2021).

overall decline in births per woman can be attributed to women gaining more access to family planning resources and various birth control methods including the pill, injectables, intrauterine devices, condoms, and female sterilization.⁶

Figure 5 shows the completeness of birth registration in each country in total as well as specifically in rural and urban areas. There is less data recorded for Cambodia than for Senegal, with percentages of birth registration only being reported by the World Bank (2021) three times since 1970. In comparison, Senegal has records for seven years since 1970. It is difficult to set up proper registration systems to begin with, especially in developing countries. Despite the many challenges that comes with the registration process, whether there is a lack of knowledge or accessibility, there have been improvements in both Cambodia and Senegal’s birth registration percentages over time. Cambodia’s total birth registration increased from 66.4 percent (2005) to 73.3 percent (2014), and Senegal’s increased from 54.9 percent (2005) to 77.4 percent (2017). It remains one of the most important objectives to end registration incompleteness, even just as a practical, statistical matter, in order to add onto the improvements that have already occurred in reducing childhood invisibility.⁷

Figure 5: Completeness of Birth Registration in Cambodia and Senegal, 2005-2017



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

When children are not registered, they technically grow up invisible. They many times do not have access to various government benefits including critical education, health, and vaccination resources. When children grow up invisible to their governments, they are not going to have their human rights protected and upheld by the state.⁸ In addition to this, unregistered children are more likely to become victims of sex trafficking, kidnapping, and illegal child labor because they are not identifiable on a state level.⁹

⁶ Population Reference Bureau (2003).

⁷ Shapiro (1950).

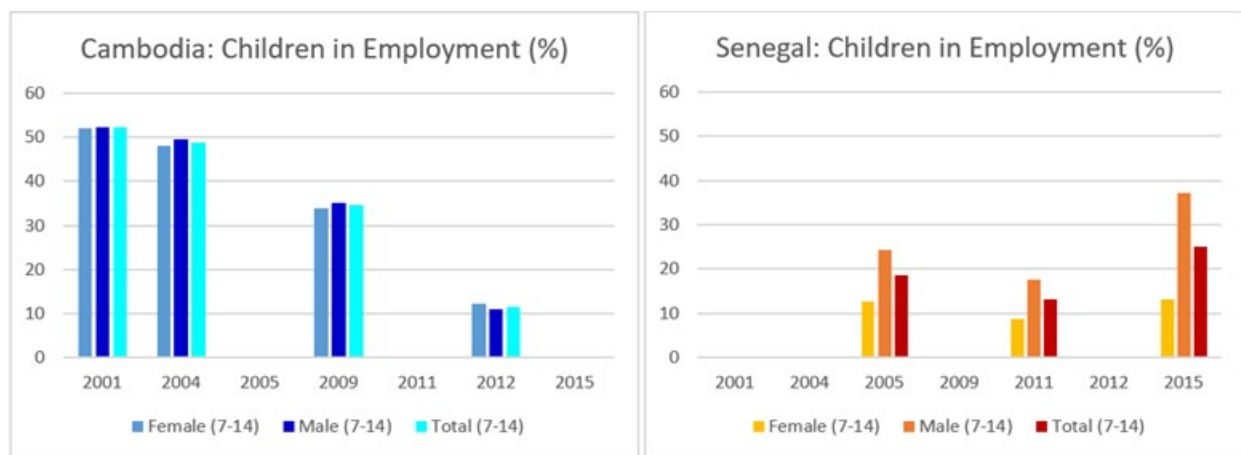
⁸ Selim (2019).

⁹ Berfini (2018).

IV.2. Child Work, Children Living with HIV, and Girls Married Before Adulthood

Figure 6 shows that relative to Senegal, Cambodia had a larger percentage of its children in the labor force but also experienced a greater decline in the percentage of children in the labor force. The percentage of children in the labor force in Cambodia declined from an average of 52.3 percent (2001) to 11.5 percent (2012).¹⁰ While there is still work that needs to be done in reducing this even further, this slightly more than 40 percentage points decrease is significant. The Cambodian government has worked to implement more laws regarding the regulation of child labor – despite still failing to implement features such as a minimum working age or a compulsory education age – and this legislation is likely the key in these visibly decreasing numbers.¹¹ Changing child labor percentages look different in Senegal, however, with the previously low average of 13.1 percent (2011) spiking to a high of 25.13 percent (2015).

Figure 6: Childhood Employment (percent) in Cambodia and Senegal, Ages 7-14



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

When a child goes into the workforce at a young age rather than being educated, they become invisible as they are no longer treated as children on a societal level. From mining gold in dangerous conditions to participating in sex work and forced begging, child laborers undergo some of the most difficult, harmful jobs one can be subject to.¹² On top of the danger, the act of child labor in itself - whether forced by familial pressures, need, human trafficking, or lack of options - directly competes with a child's ability to get an education. It impedes a child's ability to be a child. When children disappear into the work force, they are effectively acknowledged as adults, if by no one else, at least by their employers. Work conditions are rarely "good" either, and risk of injury, disease, or death are prevalent in many child labor sectors in both Cambodia and Senegal.¹³

Figure 7 shows the number of children living with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases. The number peaks just above 6,000 in Cambodia and just below 6,000 in

¹⁰ World Bank (2021).

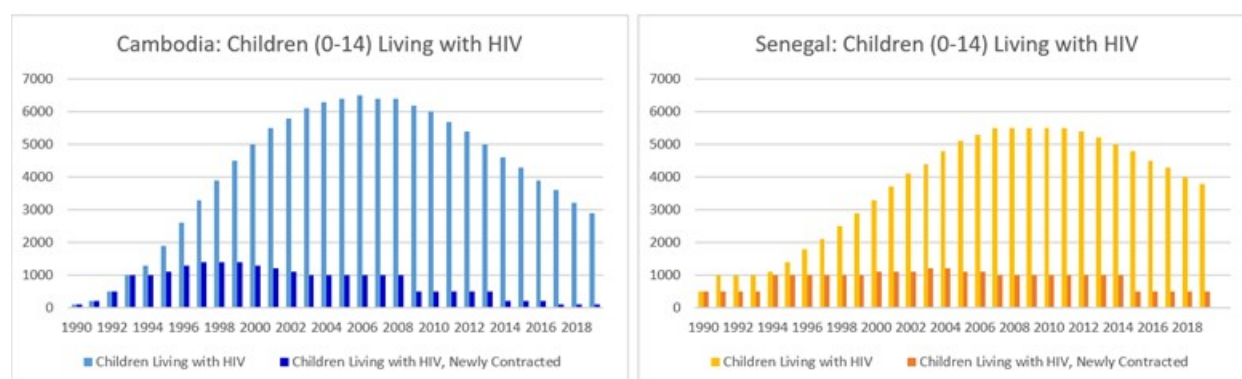
¹¹ Bureau of International Labor Affairs (2017).

¹² Department of Justice

¹³ Bureau of International Labor Affairs (2017).

Senegal. These high numbers were reached after a steady incline from 1990 to 2006, and subsequent declines. It is not only crucial to look at total numbers of children living with HIV, but also the number of newly contracted cases in that age group. In Cambodia, the number of children with newly contracted HIV increased from approximately 100 in 1990 to its height at approximately 1,400 in 1997, before decreasing back down to an average of 100 newly contracted cases per year in 2019.¹⁴ In Senegal, the number of children living with newly contracted HIV rose from around 500 in 1990 to a peak at 1,200 in 2004, and then decreased back to an average of about 500 children in 2019.¹⁵

Figure 7: Children (0-14) Living with HIV in Cambodia and Senegal, 1990-2019



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

Looking at children who are living with HIV is actually a better indicator of childhood invisibility than one may initially think. While it is possible that some children may be born with it or contract it from their mothers, hence the case count starting from age zero, the majority of newly contracted cases come from sex work, human trafficking, and an overall lack of sanitation and basic hygiene. All these factors that contribute to cases of HIV in children are directly related to the conditions in which children often find themselves when they are invisible. HIV in children also causes delayed physical and developmental growth with poor weight gain and bone growth; these are only more ways a child’s societal status is lessened and the need for resources they cannot obtain due to invisibility increases.¹⁶

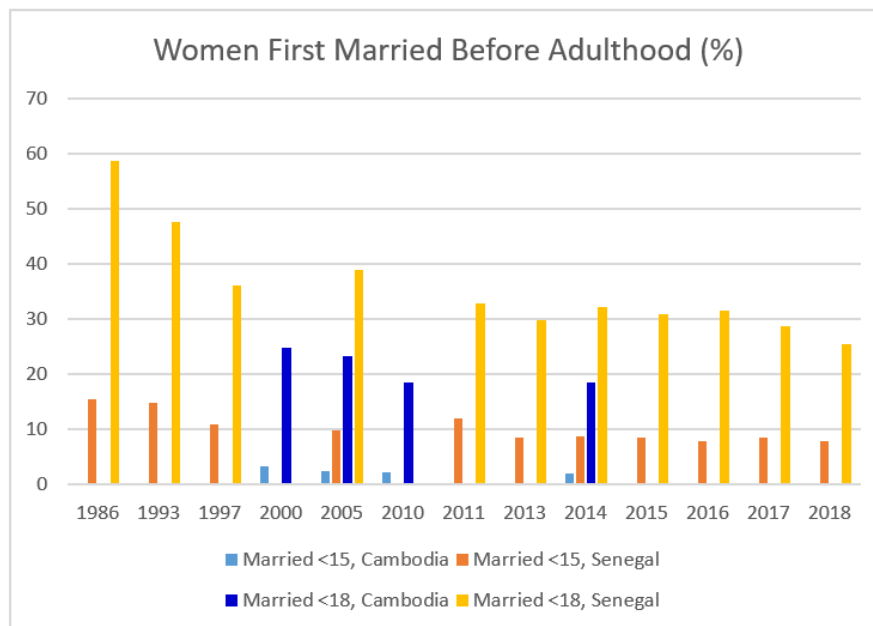
The final figure of this section, figure 8, examines the percentage of women married prior to reaching adulthood. There are higher percentages of girls marrying before age 15 in Senegal than in Cambodia, with a peak of 15.4 percent in 1986 in Senegal compared to a recorded peak of 3.3 percent in 2000 in Cambodia, which is unfortunately the first year such data is available for Cambodia. The relationship is similar when it comes to women being married prior to 18, with Senegal having higher overall percentages. In Senegal, the high was 58.8 percent in 1986, but has since declined to 25.6 percent in 2018, while the very limited data available for Cambodia shows a high of 24.8 percent in 2000, which then decreased to 18.5 percent in 2014.

¹⁴ World Bank (2021).

¹⁵ World Bank (2021).

¹⁶ Stanford Children’s Health (undated).

Figure 8: Women First Married Before Adulthood in Cambodia and Senegal, 1986-2018



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2021).

If one is married this early on, before turning 18, she is technically still a child. Once married however, certain state benefits that come from being a child – a public education, for example – are taken away from these girls. They are no longer seen as children and they have to assume the role of an adult. Children are then having children before they are adults themselves. Child marriage directly causes girls to become invisible simply because it no longer allows them their childhood. They become invisible children because they are no longer seen as children.

V. Ethical Origins and Existing Ethical Structures

V.1. Failing School Systems and Mass Disabling Events

In Cambodia between 1975 and 1979, there was significant conflict caused by the rise of the Khmer Rouge (KR), which ultimately led to a mass-disabling event that has crossed generational barriers. Not only have those alive during the KR regime suffered the consequences, but also their children and grandchildren after them. It is due to this unusually high disability rate in Cambodia that the school system there fails so many children and leaves so many others invisible.¹⁷ In Senegal, the failed school system has not been caused by a mass disabling event but is instead caused by rampant corruption amongst teachers and school administration.¹⁸ The historic and continued failure of these countries' school systems is a primary factor that feeds into the epidemic of invisible children.

¹⁷ Sonis et al. (2009).

¹⁸ Ryan (2012).

V.1.a. Disability and Failed School Systems in Cambodia

For the duration of the KR regime, Cambodians experienced genocide and had an onslaught of both physical and mental disabilities forced upon them by circumstance. With the KR in power, approximately 20 percent of the population was killed and millions more were forced into slave labor. As a result, this was a time period that inspired incredibly high levels of mental and physical disability throughout the population – no age group was excluded. Presently, the general likelihood for people to develop debilitating PTSD is at an overall rate of approximately 11.2 percent, with a rate of around 8 percent for young people (below age of 35 years) and 14 percent for older people (above age of 35 years). In addition to this, the population percentage of those afflicted with other mental disabilities is approximately 40.2 percent in Cambodia, and the percentage of those with physical disabilities is around 36.9 percent. These are much higher rates when compared to the global averages of 7.9 percent and 20.1 percent respectively.¹⁹

The high disability rates shown above are not exclusive to adults, either. They impact children on a much wider scale in Cambodia than they do globally, and that is why it is so important for the country to have a school system that accounts for said disability levels. Thus, the overall lack of adequate schooling systems is magnified. The regular classroom setting in Cambodia usually falls short when it comes to serving its disabled students, and they are often just left physically present in the classroom, unable to truly access the curriculum due to a lack of support.²⁰

Many parents do not even register their disabled children for school in the first place because they know that their disabled children will be ignored or even harmed. School registration numbers are relatively low regardless, with only 40 percent of children ages 3-5 years registered for PreK and kindergarten. Out of those 40 percent, though, none are disabled. Disabled children fade into invisibility at a disproportionate rate. Given the lack of birth registration, in many cases, school registration is how children in Cambodia become registered and recognizable to the government. But if they are not registered at all for school, we see these children become permanently invisible. Because their parents do not believe that they can succeed in the school system or even a social setting due to disabilities, they are not even given the chance to do so.²¹

V.1.b. Failed School Systems in Senegal

In Senegal, the school systems do not only fail disabled students. Most of those who are let down by this system are children coming from rural areas or poor households, sent to seek out an education in order to better their own lives and their families' lives. Oftentimes, these children are sent in order to pull themselves out of invisibility and begin to break the cycle that is perpetuated by poverty, a lack of resources, a lack of acknowledgement, and a lack of education. Unfortunately, many of Senegal's schools do more harm than good in this process.

The relationship that teachers have with their students in Senegal is usually transactional. When students come into urban environments in order to acquire a more formal education than they would have been able to get elsewhere, they literally have to pay for it. Teachers demand fees from their students each day in exchange for an education, and if a student comes to class without enough money to pay, they are badly beaten. Most parents who send their children are often unable to pay these fees, so this practice forces children onto the streets to beg for money and food.²²

¹⁹ The data in this paragraph is based on Sonis et al. (2009).

²⁰ Baker-Munton (2019).

²¹ Baker-Munton (2019).

²² Ryan (2012).

According to Human Rights Watch, more than 100,000 boys face horrible abuse in Senegal's schools if they fail to fill the quota their teachers set for them when begging on the streets for money, food, rice, and sugar.²³

Hundreds of thousands of Senegalese children are sent into towns and urban areas by their parents so that they can get an education. However, due to the abusiveness of the education system as it exists in Senegal, an education is not necessarily the bright light showing the way to a life out of invisibility and poverty. When one's options are either to be abused on the streets or in school, children often choose the streets. It is a path that they do not have to scrounge up money to get on in the first place. Young children who were sent by their parents to secure a better future become invisible street urchins forced to beg for the bare minimum they need to live. The boys who get enough money to go to school for a day are the lucky ones. It is a common view in Senegal that the way children will not remain invisible on the street is if they are able to attain a good education. Why, then, is that such an impossible task?²⁴

V.2. Existing Ethical Structures

It is critical that we acknowledge the steps in the right direction that each country has taken from an ethical standpoint and look at the relative progress that has followed. In 1990, the United Nations' Conventions on the Rights of the Child officially entered into force after being ratified in 1989.²⁵ The Conventions on the Rights of the Child uses the rights approach as it is based off of the idea that the most ethical action is that which upholds, protects, and respects the inherent moral rights of those affected.²⁶ In this case, those affected are children. The Conventions on the Rights of the Child protects their right to an education, national registration, and protection by the state from "all forms of physical or mental violence, [and] injury or abuse."²⁷ These are just some of the many rights protected by the Conventions on the Rights of the Child. These UN conventions have been ratified in both Cambodia and Senegal in 1992 and 1990, respectively.²⁸ Even with ratification, however, each of the rights laid out in the Conventions on the Rights of the Child are not always upheld and the conventions are not always implemented by the state.

In Cambodia, we see an effort to better uphold the rights and conventions laid out in the Conventions on the Rights of the Child with the addition of more schools dedicated specifically to children with disabilities and special education needs, thus making the path out of invisibility for these children much more accessible alongside the education itself. The first such school to open was the Centre for Adaptive and Response Education, and it works to provide children who were previously unable to succeed in the average classroom with the tools and accommodations that they need in order to get a successful education.²⁹ With this increase in accessibility, it could be argued that both the fairness approach to ethics and the common good approach are being employed by Cambodians.

²³ Human Rights Watch (2020).

²⁴ Ryan (2012).

²⁵ United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) (1989).

²⁶ Santa Clara University (2009).

²⁷ United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) (1989).

²⁸ United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) (1989).

²⁹ Baker-Munton (2019).

The fairness approach applies focuses on treating all human beings equally, and if unequally, then fairly based on a defensible standard.³⁰ What is seen with this accessibility to schools is precisely that – unequal treatment on the defensible standard of an equally sufficient quality of education, regardless of a child’s disabilities. The common good approach implies that life in a community is good when individual actions and collective conditions are also good.³¹ Thus, when Cambodians improve upon their education system in order to benefit the disabled members of their society in order to make them more productive and less invisible, they improve their society and its total function as a whole.

In general, there is a lack of action from the Senegalese government in fixing their corrupt, abusive school system. This is primarily because most of the teachers are also Islamic religious leaders with whom government leaders have very complicated relations.³² Despite this, there are various efforts in Senegal to improve their school system as independent organizations try to make it more accessible and less abusive. The Maison de la Gare, for example, is an organization that provides around 250 children with food, healthcare, and education as they try to get themselves out of the street and out of the abusive schools.³³ It can be argued that this action calls upon the utilitarian approach to ethics. This approach focuses on causing the least amount of harm relative to good, and that is what The Maison de la Gare accomplishes.³⁴ It does not directly contribute to stopping the abuse that continues to harm countless children in the Senegal school system, but it does provide a better, safer alternative for some. It is an organization that truly does good for many children while still failing to fully condemn and commit to dismantling systematic harm.

VI. Conclusion

This article has sought to give a thorough examination of the factors that influence childhood invisibility in Cambodia and Senegal, as well as the ethical issues behind said factors. Looking at each country, one is able to see some commonality in how they have each evolved over time from a socio-economic standpoint. Both Cambodia and Senegal have seen notable increases in GDP per capita, despite the fact that Cambodia is experiencing a higher growth rate in GDP per capita. In addition to that, both countries have also experienced increasing life expectancies and literacy rates, showing that Cambodia and Senegal are reaching higher levels of success on the international scale.

On top of that, the way that each country has continued to respond to the factors that cause child invisibility (as analyzed in Section IV) is shown by the overall improvements that have been seen in many areas, though they may not initially be evident. This is additional proof of how Cambodia and Senegal are increasing the ways in which they are actively upholding and respond to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which they officially ratified in the 1990s.³⁵ This therefore adds both relevance and agency in the ethical structures and the frameworks they uphold. As improvements are made by citizens and governments in each country with regards to invisible children, these ethical structures and frameworks are also applied to further aid these issues.

³⁰ Santa Clara University (2009).

³¹ Santa Clara University (2009).

³² Ryan (2012).

³³ Ryan (2012).

³⁴ Santa Clara University (2009).

³⁵ United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) (1989).

The Cambodian government has taken more direct action than the Senegalese government, however that action still falls short. While the addition of schools that specifically cater to disabled children has been a very important threshold for the Cambodian government to cross in order to decrease overall childhood invisibility, the number of such schools is still very low. In addition to that, there need to be more resources publicly made available to invisible, disabled children who do not have access to these schools. In Senegal, the government simply must take more action. Yes, non-governmental organizations can do a lot of good in providing safe spaces for invisible children, but they cannot do nearly enough when it comes to fixing the inherent abuse and corruption that are engrained in the Senegalese public school system that leave so many children invisible. Action must be taken at a higher level. In each country it cannot be denied that nonprofits, human rights initiatives, and independent organizations have been helpful; but the problem of invisible children, the abuse they face, and the resources they are denied cannot yet be adequately solved without the addition of greater government intervention.

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