Decentralization Facilitation

A study of decentralization in Cambodia with specific reference to education

Prepared
by

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BMC	Budget Management Centre
DST	District Supervisory Team
EQIP	Education Quality Improvement Project
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
ESSP	Education Sector Support Program
HCMC	Health Centre Management Committee
LCSC	Local Cluster School Committee
LTA	Lead Technical Assistant
MoEF	Ministry of Economics and Finance
MoEYs	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
NCSC	National Cluster School Committee
PAP	Priority Action Program
PED	Provincial Education Department
POLA	Provincial Office of Local Administration
PIU	Project Implementation Unit (EQIP)
PPIU	Provincial Project Implementation Unit (EQIP)
PRDC	Provincial Rural Development Committee
PST	Provincial Supervisory Team
SEILA	Social Economic Improvement Agency Program
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
TTC	Teacher Training College
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

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1. DECENTRALIZATION

1.1 Decentralization: Promises and Disappointments

Decentralization has acquired universal popularity among governments and aid agencies during the past decade. It is perceived as an integral component of good governance and a necessary step for efficient and effective public sector management. It promises both enhanced democracy and improved levels of living. However, results have not necessarily matched expectations. There is no one reason for such disappointments. Inadequate planning, unfounded assumptions, insufficient human resources, too rapid rates of change and poor funding models are typical explanations of why decentralization can fail to live up to expectation.

Developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been caught up in decentralization fever but to differing degrees and with contrasting results. Some have rushed headlong into radical decentralization programs while others have exercised great caution while expressing interest in following the decentralization path. In Papua New Guinea, the 1995 Organic Law on Provincial and Local-level Governments gave considerable authority for service delivery, including education up to grade 10, to provincial and local-level governments (May 1999; Turner and Kavanamur 2002). Unfortunately, the resource implications were not well-planned. Revenue has not been up to the assumed levels thus leaving subnational governments with less funds than anticipated. Thus, the government's policy of increasing school enrolments and retention levels may well be unsustainable as provincial governments are unlikely to be able to afford the increased expenditure. In addition, poor accountability has meant leakage of funds and inequitable spending patterns. Skilled human resources have been in short supply while local-level planning has failed to produce the anticipated developmental outcomes. Links with central agencies have sometimes been weak while funding shortages have incapacitated the national monitoring agency.

In Indonesia, the government's ambitious decentralization program has been described as a 'leap of faith' rather than the product of a coherent planning strategy fitting with government capacities (ADB 2002). Until 1999, Indonesia was a highly centralized authoritarian state but the overthrow of this regime created the policy space for the introduction of a radical decentralization law which gave numerous functions to district governments. Education was one of the decentralized functions requiring the transfer of over 1 million teachers from central to district governments. The implementation schedule was extraordinarily rapid – barely 18 months for changes on a massive scale. Such speed resulted in many implementation difficulties and gave little or no opportunity for popular participation. There was no time to anticipate the many problems which have emerged – inequitable funding, no monitoring system, the emergence of 'money politics', disputes about the degree of district control of the economy, unclear implementation regulations, failure to address cross-boundary matters and no framework for training public servants. That the transition to decentralized

government has occurred in Indonesia is a major achievement but making it work for the benefit of the people has yet to take place.

In the Philippines decentralization appears to have worked. Under the 1991 Local Government Code a range of service delivery functions, such as health, agriculture, public works and social services, was decentralized to provincial, city, municipal and community *(barangay)* governments (Tapales 1996; Turner 1999). At each of these levels elected councils were put in place while there were provisions for additional representatives of specific sectors such as youth, women and workers. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also given a role in local development through their necessary incorporation into local planning bodies. Implementation of the reforms was well planned and realistically phased. Many rules and regulations were written and officials at all levels kept informed of what was happening. The transfer of functions was accomplished with little disruption. Councils were elected and began operation with minimal fuss. Most observers see the Philippine decentralization reforms as a success although it is difficult to determine how far they are directly responsible for developmental gains. Education was not among the decentralized functions.

Among Cambodia's neighbours there has been a greater reluctance to embark on major decentralization programs. The one-party states of Laos and Vietnam have viewed decentralization with caution (Keuleers and Sibounheuang 1999; Vasavakul 1999). Laos's experience with debilitating decentralization following the introduction of market reforms in the late 1980s persuaded its leaders to recentralize to ensure the integrity of the state and the economy. Subsequent moves to decentralize have been modest and incremental. In Vietnam, there has been a longstanding tension between central and local authorities with some power given to subnational territories but there is no suggestion of radical reforms. In Thailand, the 1997 Constitution contained much decentralizing sentiment but ensuing actions have been slow and have yet to mark any significant shift of power from the centre (Wongsekiarttirat 1999). In all three countries, embedded patterns of hierarchy are evident within government and society and appear to work against effective decentralization.

1.2 Types of Decentralization

It used to be a simple matter to define decentralization. There was either devolution (political decentralization) or deconcentration (administrative decentralization). The regional examples in section 1.1 are restricted to these types of decentralization. But, things are very different now as additional activities have been incorporated under the decentralization label and others have been broken down into separate subcategories. The World Bank provides the most elaborate classification involving political, administrative, fiscal, and market decentralization (http://www.ciesin.org/decentralization/English/General/different_forms.html). Administrative decentralization is then further divided into deconcentration, delegation and devolution while economic or market decentralization can be either privatization or deregulation. A related but simpler OECD (1997) model includes deconcentration, delegation,

devolution and economic decentralization. Some approaches can be distinctive. For example, decentralization can be viewed in terms of three strategic choices: (i) political decentralization and/or administrative decentralization, (ii) competitive or noncompetitive decentralization, and (iii) internal decentralization or devolution (Pollitt et al. 1998).

All of these classifications are acceptable although not necessarily amenable to mixing. They are simply systematic attempts to deal with a central theme of governance: *where should power and authority be located?* For this report, a classificatory model of decentralization developed by Turner and Hulme (1997) will be adopted. This model overlaps with many other leading classifications (see Table 1). It uses two dimensions of decentralization: the basis of delegation and the nature of that delegation. Cross-cutting these are two bases for delegation: territorial and functional.

Territorial delegation is whereby authority is placed at lower levels in the territorial hierarchy such as from centre to province or district. Functional delegation transfers authority to an agency that is functionally specialized: for example, the creation of an agency to deliver a service formerly provided by a central ministry or the privatization of state-owned enterprise. Complementing the *basis* for delegation is the *nature* of delegation. This dimension has three forms: (i) within formal political structures, (ii) within public administrative or parastatal structures, and (iii) from state sector to private sector.

This mode of classification enables us to distinguish six distinctive types of decentralization – nine ways in which power and authority are delegated by the state. Each country develops its own particular model of decentralization according to its political dynamics, institutional structures and other forces in the environment. There will be variance in the combination of types of decentralization and different degrees of decentralization within each type. However, broad comparison is made possible by such models while description and analysis are facilitated by applying the classification.

In describing and analysing decentralization in Cambodia, we are essentially concerned with how the nature of delegation is represented on the territorial dimension. Three types of territorial decentralization are evident: devolution, deconcentration, and privatization. Devolution or political decentralization occurs when authority is transferred to a subnational government that is electorally accountable to the population in its territory. This is the type of decentralization most favoured by aid agencies and contemporary authors in the field. For those who place democracy as the most important objective of decentralization then devolution is the only true form of decentralization. It is manifest in Cambodia in the commune council system.

Deconcentration refers to situations where authority is delegated by a central agency to subnational offices of that agency. Appointed officials in the field are given greater responsibilities for their activities. This mode of decentralization is currently evident in the education sector in Cambodia in such things as the Priority Action Program (PAP), the Education Quality Improvement Project

(EQIP) and the policy to decentralize the timetable and school calendar. Privatization incorporates a range of techniques whereby responsibility for a function is shifted from the public to the private sector. The techniques include contracting out, deregulation, the divestiture of local government enterprises, and public–private partnerships. Only the last one is evident in primary education in Cambodia, and even then to a limited extent involving NGOs. In higher education privatization is well under way and is set for future expansion.

Table 1: Forms of Decentralization

Nature of Delegation	Basis for delegation[a]	
	Territorial	Functional
Within formal political structures	Devolution (Political decentralization, Local government, Democratic decentralization)	Interest group[b] representation
Within public administrative or parastatal structures	Deconcentration[c] (administrative decentralization, field administration)	Establishment of parastatal structures and quasi-nongovernment organizations (quangos)
From state sector to private sector	Privatization of devolved functions (deregulation, contracting out, voucher schemes)	Privatization of national functions (divestiture, deregulation, economic liberalization)

[a] In this study, geographical decentralization, such as the establishment of a new capital city or the transfer of parts of headquarters offices to locations outside of the capital city, is not included. This is because such activities merely involve relocation not delegation.

[b] This form has not received as much attention from writers on decentralization as other forms.

[c] Rondinelli and his associates (e.g. Rondinelli and Nellis 1986) often call this form "delegation". However, this is somewhat confusing as all forms of decentralization are, at least in theory, delegations.

Source: Turner, Mark and David Hulme1997. *Governance, Administration and Development: Making the State Work.* London and West Hartford: Macmillan and Kumarian, 153.

1.3 Why Decentralize?

If so many countries have engaged in decentralization or are considering it there must be some compelling reasons to persuade them to do so. Cambodia is one such country. However, there appears to have been very limited debate and analysis about what can be expected from decentralization, why such benefits will occur and what are the risks. One basic argument used to explain decentralization's popularity rests on the idea of pressure to conform. Everybody is doing it so we should too. There may be an element of truth in this when one considers the lack of clear rationale in some decentralization initiatives. However, there is a battery of claimed advantages which are held to derive from decentralization. They find theoretical expression in politics, economics and management. For political scientists the focus is empowerment and participation. For economists the benefits of decentralization revolve round greater ease of aggregating preferences and creating conditions for competition to satisfy them. For managers, efficiency considerations dominate. It is easier to respond to the preferences of smaller groups of people.

Various authors have provided lists of the advantages which should be available from territorial decentralization (eg Smith 1985; Rondinelli 1981). A selection of these advantages is set out below indicating the types of territorial decentralization which provide each advantage. It should be appreciated that in practice these advantages overlap and interact with each other. Their separation below is an analytical device designed to demarcate what gains are potentially available from territorial decentralization

Choosing leaders: through popular elections it becomes possible to choose local leaders and remove them. Thus, local populations are able to determine who will fill important decision-making positions. The scope of those decisions depends on how much authority is decentralized *(devolution).*

Political socialization: local populations gain greater experience of politics through elections and the activities of local councils *(devolution).*

Political stability: popular participation in local politics through voting and other practices can strengthen trust in government and encourage political stability *(devolution).*

Political equality: popular participation in the local political process will reduce the likelihood of the concentration of power. As political power becomes more broadly distributed this should lead to greater concern with the needs and aspirations of the poor and disadvantaged *(devolution).*

Popular participation in decision-making: people can be brought into decision-making processes on matters which directly affect them. For example, they can be consulted about the planning and implementation of projects. The strength of such participation can vary considerably from communities simply being supplied with information by officials to communities seeking government support for community-generated projects *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Accessibility of officials: officials are available for consultation, advice and complaint. As local officials can exercise decentralized authority, they make the decisions and do not pass them up the line to distant central offices *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Enhanced accountability: due to their accessibility officials are more easily made accountable for their actions. A commitment to transparency in decision-making should be easier to patrol. Consumer surveys, client charters guaranteeing service delivery and performance measurement are managerial techniques that can be mobilized to assist in promoting 'good practice' *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Mobilization of local resources: it is easier to identify local resources, both human and physical, and then mobilize them in the pursuit of locally determined developmental purposes *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Rapid response to local needs: officials are better placed to respond rapidly to local needs as they are in the territory and fully aware of local conditions *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Orientation to the specific local needs: because officials know the local conditions they are well placed to make decisions and allocate resources which fit with the specific conditions prevailing in a particular territory. Each subnational territory may have some unique features which can be taken into account when planning and allocating resources *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Motivation of field personnel: appointed government officials are more motivated to perform well when they have greater responsibility for programs they manage *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Inter-office coordination: coordination between offices dealing with different functions is more easily achieved at the local level where officials are physically close together and are often familiar with each other *(devolution/deconcentration).*

Central agencies: the decentralization of service functions relieves central agencies of routine tasks. Responsibility for these has been passed down to the local level. Central agencies can thus focus on improving the quality of policy. Monitoring local-level performance is a key element of this *(devolution/deconcentration).*

But the attainment of such desirable characteristics is by no means assured. If it were we would not have seen so many problematic decentralization experiments in developing countries. Many difficulties can emerge to prevent the achievement of the claimed benefits. In Cambodia as elsewhere there will be problems. Some can be anticipated in designing decentralization. Others will arise in implementation. The capacity to deal with them depends on management capacity, political processes and resource availability. A poorly designed and badly implemented decentralization program can be disastrous for service

delivery and democratization. Typical problems of decentralization are listed below:

Political elites: local elites can manipulate the local political process to their own advantage. They make decisions which suit their own interests but not necessarily those of the poor and disadvantaged. These groups may remain unorganized and without 'voice' to influence decision-making.

Participation: local populations may be only engaged in weak forms of participation and fail to influence significant decisions. Official views of participation may be confined to minor consultative activities where government officers simply inform local populations what is to happen or direct them. There may also be a false assumption that populations are eager to join participatory processes so favoured by aid agencies and NGOs. Traditional patterns of authority may not coincide with Western democratic ideals. This is not to say that people want to be dominated. Rather they may hold expectations of leaders and interact with them in different ways than are found in some participatory processes. Participation may mean different things to different people and may be awarded different priorities. Perception of legitimate authority and power demonstrates cultural variance.

Inadequate resources: the arrangements for decentralization may not provide enough resources for local officials to maintain or improve service delivery. Such decentralization becomes an exercise in function-shedding by the centre. Blame for declining performance of government is then directed at local officials.

Plans inconsistent with resources: there is an assumption that local officials and populations will make the best choices about what resources are available and how to use them. This may not occur in practice and plans may be inconsistent with resources leading to local disappointment with decentralization.

Inadequate skills: there may be shortfalls of skills needed to make decentralization work. The technical capacities and management expertise may be thinly spread and unable to cope with the new demands of decentralization.

Embedded practices: it is an unreasonable assumption to expect established management structures and processes to change overnight. Officials may still retain attitudes which focus on compliance with central directives. They may see local knowledge as inferior. Organization structures may not change to fit with local circumstances. Innovation may be in short supply where traditional practice has been to follow routines and bureaucratic procedures.

Innovation: there may be limited motivation to innovate. Familiar practices are seen as safer while a perceived lack of incentives may work against support for new initiatives. Mini bureaucracies with dysfunctions inherited from central bureaucracies may come to typify local management.

Scale: where decentralization focuses on small territories the gains of intimate local knowledge may be offset by lack of scale economies. Governance may

become more costly. There may be an unwillingness to introduce cooperative solutions involving other local governments.

Central agencies: there is no guarantee that central agencies will reorient themselves to their new role. They may not engage as facilitators and monitors of decentralization. In some circumstances they may even attempt to maintain control through the regulatory process.

Accountability: measures to enhance local accountability may not be introduced or may not be seriously regarded by local officials. Traditional accountability has usually been upward. Under decentralization even this may weaken while local decision-makers may not put new measures for popular accountability in place or fail to properly operationalize those in formal policy documents.

These are very real risks associated with decentralization initiatives and can seriously undermine decentralization leaving populations with few developmental gains and in some instances with declining levels of service delivery. But this raises the question of how do we measure the results of decentralization? There are some major difficulties. Firstly, there may be differential results. For example, political participation may increase while service delivery may not improve. Secondly, there may be data problems. Data may not be available or particular indicators of performance are selected without explanation of why these and not others. Thirdly, there are cause-effect issues. It is often very difficult to attribute an improvement or decline in the provision of a service to a particular activity or policy. For example, increased school enrolment may be more influenced by people's economic welfare than education policies. Better access to information and analysis through the media may enhance learning as well as improved classroom practice. This does not mean evaluation of decentralization is impossible. It just makes it more difficult as it increases the range of interacting variables.

2. DECENTRALIZATION IN CAMBODIA

2.1 Decentralization in Cambodia: Historical Background

The overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime left Cambodia without the apparatus to run a state and with virtually no educated personnel to staff new state institutions. The state barely existed. Its major qualification to being a state was that its boundaries were recognised internationally. The new regime running the state was slow to gain full international acceptance. Its priority task was to reconstitute the organizations of the state to restore stability, order and some semblance of governance to a ravaged society. The model which evolved was one of bureaucratic centralization, perhaps conceived with reference to history and to the practices of surrounding countries. Decentralization was not considered an option for state reconstruction even if it operated de facto because of the central state's difficulty of extending its control. Gradually and with international assistance a functioning state apparatus was put in place and succeeded in

extending its control and capacity to deliver rudimentary services. But there was still no thought of decentralization.

The territorial hierarchy established by the government followed tradition. Beneath the central government were provinces, districts and communes each under the control of appointed officials. As political stability has increased and threats to the regime have diminished so government has looked at the possibilities of decentralization. There has been considerable caution in considering decentralized models of governance as state institutions are still fragile and elements of state weakness are easy to identify. Society still makes many of the rules which govern everyday life and local officials must often conform to expectations from society rather than act strictly according to the bureaucratic regulations promulgated in the national capital.

By the late 1990s aid agencies began to promote decentralization. They noted the 'highly centralized structure of civil administration' and that there was 'no local civil administration directly representing the people' (ADB 2000, 43). This resulted in rigid organization structures, inefficiency, leakage of funds, problems of getting money to the right place at the right time and no mechanisms for popular community representation. Local administration needed greater decision-making powers and local communities needed channels to have their voices heard and taken seriously. Government agreed that service delivery could be improved if more authority was delegated to subnational territories. There may also have been thoughts that decentralization might be useful for political consolidation and order.

The result has been the incremental evolution of a decentralization policy which features both devolution and deconcentration. There is no grand policy document which sets out an overall decentralization strategy – nothing equivalent to Laws 22/99 and 25/99 in Indonesia or the 1991 Local Government Code in the Philippines. But the Cambodian government is undoubtedly committed to decentralization as was clearly indicated by the Prime Minister in a conference address on 16 May 2002 (*The Cambodia Daily* 17 May 2002). Government intent is to continue experimentation with decentralization, but in increments. Such a policy has both strengths and some potential weaknesses. The strength lies in the realization that major decentralization programs such as found in Indonesia, the Philippines or Papua New Guinea require considerable state capacity. Such initiatives require strong institutions, ample skilled personnel and the proven ability to deliver services. Cambodia is weak in all these areas and would risk many of the problems listed in the previous section and which can be seen in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and Laos at the time of the market reforms. Therefore, a cautious approach is well advised. A decentralization initiative which is radical and rapid would be courting disaster.

A piecemeal approach may also bring problems. It could result in the emergence of a multiplicity of approaches to decentralization. There will be numerous modes of decentralization and no one integrated system. Such a situation may inhibit efficiency and effectiveness in public sector management if little thought is given to interrelationships between the modes. The persistent lack of

demonstrated progress in public administration reform despite initiatives dating back to the mid-1990s adds to these concerns.

2.2 Devolution in Cambodia

There are three possible subnational territories to which power could be devolved: province, district and commune. The government has decided that only one, the commune, will be the focus of its devolutionary policies. Public debate on the matter has been limited and discussions about devolution have remained largely within government. Thus, planning for commune decentralization has been an official business with little reference to the public. There appear to be no thoughts about political decentralization to provinces and districts. Governors and District Chiefs will continue to be appointed by the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and sectoral ministries will continue to operate through their own officials in the province and district. These subnational territories are set to remain as administrative arms of central government to which deconcentration policies can be applied.

The basic legal instrument for political decentralization is the Law on Administration and Management of the Commune/Sangkat (19 March 2001). The communes are rural territories accounting for over 80 per cent of the country's population while the *sangkats* are urban areas. A series of implementing regulations have been produced by the MoI and elections were held in the country's 1621 communes in February 2002. Voting was by parties, and in each commune/sangkat between five and eleven councillors were elected according to population size. The first name on the most popular party's list became the Commune Chief while deputy chiefs were drawn from the next most successful parties. The winning candidates have terms of five years. The proportional representation by party has meant several parties sharing power in the nation's communes. Hopefully this will encourage them to cooperate in pursuit of the community's benefit rather than engaging in debilitating inter-party squabbles.

The commune council has to 'serve general interests of the residents' by choosing 'appropriate and effective methods for the development of its commune' (RGC 2002). The list of functions is broad and general, covering such matters as law and order; promoting social and economic development; the 'comfort and contentment of residents'; environmental affairs; and dispute settlement. The council is also instructed to 'arrange for the provision of necessary public services and ensure the proper implementation of the services' (ibid.). However, such provision of services is an impossible task for the commune. It has neither the budget nor the personnel for service delivery. In addition, sectoral responsibilities have not been devolved by ministries. Thus, the commune council should actually function like the Philippine *barangay* (community) or Indonesian *desa* (village) primarily as a mechanism for 'interest articulation' and as the planner and implementer of minor public works. The small budget and lack of capacity of the commune council is likely to make it a weaker version of its Philippine and Indonesian equivalent.

The only administrative officer assigned to the commune is the clerk who is an employee of the MoI. They have been given a long list of administrative duties which they will find difficult to fulfil (MoI 2002). They will encounter limited facilities in terms of buildings and equipment. Simple communication tasks will be problematic in remoter communes. Many clerks will need to learn on-the-job how to organize and run meetings, how to prepare agendas and write minutes, how to develop filing systems, how to construct and run a budget, and how to report to the MoI. The operating grant for commune councils in 2002 is miniscule, between US$1,000-2,000 making finances 'desperately tight'. More funds are being put into commune rural development. Of the US$6 million allocated to commune councils in 2002, 80 per cent is earmarked for approximately 500 communes already under the existing program of the Social Economic Improvement Local Agency (SEILA). Whether dividing commune council responsibilities between MoI and SEILA will lead to undue complexity in operating commune councils remains to be seen. It is a risk but the considerable experience of SEILA in the field of local planning may overcome this.

The most important issue for educational development relating to commune councils is how they can contribute to improving educational access, equity and quality in schools which lie within the commune boundaries. There are several possibilities relating to primary education. Firstly, commune councils can perform monitoring roles, not by inventing new formal processes but by maintaining contact with schools and parents. It should be feasible for the commune council to enter into partnership with the schools. It may even be possible for schools to send to commune councils copies of the regular reports they prepare for the MoEYS. Commune council could also establish relationships with the district education officials who have responsibility for schools in the commune. Accountability of schools may also be strengthened through the council's monitoring role. The incorporation of the Commune Chief, along with village chiefs and chairpersons of the village development committees, into the proposed "Local Cluster School Council," intended to provide broader community support to the Local Cluster School Committee, would help to facilitate this process.

Secondly, the school-council partnership can be an effective channel of two-way communication. As communes have small populations, their councils will have intimate knowledge of the people who live there and will be able to explain such things as why some children do not attend school or why their attendance is irregular. Schools may acquire better understanding of their pupils and their parents with the help of the councils. For example, the councils will know who are the children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, parents may gain more knowledge of schools through their council members. Thirdly, the commune council may be able to mobilize additional funds or support-in-kind from their communities. Education could become a consideration in the commune's development plans. It could also become a regular item for discussion at council meetings. School directors could be invited to attend council meetings and respond to questions. Finally, there may be some specific roles for commune councils to perform. If scholarships were available the

commune council might be best placed to select appropriate students. Commune councils could award modest prizes for educational achievement. They might also organize literacy initiatives mobilizing their own and external resources.

Commune councils cannot be expected to make a major contribution to primary education. The responsibility for providing the service rightly remains with the MoEYS. But constructive engagement of the commune councils with all stakeholders in local education can make a modest but potentially significant contribution to getting the system to work better. By acting as the focal point of a network of local stakeholders the commune council can enhance vital communication and in some circumstances may be able to inject or coordinate small but desired investments in educational improvement. A US$10 million ADB loan for decentralization will assist the commune councils to function more efficiently through investment in mapping, training and capacity-building, and council office buildings and essential equipment.

2.3 Deconcentration in Cambodia

By far the most important mode of decentralization in Cambodia is deconcentration. Government's declared policy intent is to promote deconcentration as a means to improve the delivery of services. According to Prime Minister Hun Sen 'Although deconcentration has made great progress, it is still slower than decentralization [devolution]' (*The Cambodia Daily* 17 May 2002). It is incorporated into the government's aid-sponsored public administration reform program but as the Prime Minister observed, actual examples of deconcentration initiatives are relatively few and are generally left to the initiative of individual ministries. There is no coordinated plan for deconcentration and the progress of ministries in introducing decentralization initiatives is highly variable. There have been some experiments in sectoral ministries such as health and agriculture but the most significant efforts have been in education, through the Educational Quality Project (EQIP) and the Priority Action Program (PAP), and in local-level planning through the Social Economic Improvement Agency Program (SEILA) which now straddles both deconcentration and devolution. EQIP and PAP will be dealt with in detail in the next two sections. This section will briefly review some of the developments in the Ministry of Health (MoH) and SEILA to determine what lessons can be learned from these deconcentration experiments.

The MoH has focused its decentralization efforts on deconcentration to health centre management committees (HCMCs) and feedback groups. Health centres have introduced user fees. Forty-nine per cent of the amount collected is devoted to salary supplements, the remainder going to purchases of items needed by the centre. The fees are very low and appear to have been accepted by communities who see better services as a result. Health centre utilization rates have increased by up to 60 per cent. The salary supplements mean that health staff are likely to devote more time to their official duties. When monthly salaries might be only US$15 per month an extra US$10 makes a considerable difference. Also, the health centres are able to purchase items that they determine are needed.

The HCMCs are comprised of seven people and have strong community involvement. Four members are drawn from the community the other three from the health centre. They determine how the revenue is used. Complementing them are feedback groups. Each village selects two persons who attend a half-day meeting each month at the health centre. Each health centre covers between 15-20 villages. The feedback groups communicate the health concerns and issues of the village population and disseminate information back to the village from the health centre. This two-way communication helps to encourage responsiveness in the health centre to local health matters.

The MoH is keen to deconcentrate budgets to its budget management centres (BMCs). There is one BMC in each of the country's 74 health districts. These do not correspond to the MoI districts but are based on the distribution of population. The objective of the MoH is to move towards giving BMCs considerable control of budget on the grounds that these local entities are more knowledgeable about local conditions than the central headquarters and are therefore better able to make appropriate decisions about the allocation of resources. While still significant there is lesser emphasis on the Priority Action Program (PAP) approach in the MoH than in the MoEYS . Currently only seven provinces receive PAP funding for health. The hopes for full financial deconcentration reportedly rest on budgetary reforms in the MoEF which can facilitate desired MoH actions.

Accompanying the MoH's hopes for financial deconcentration are plans for administrative reforms. These would include functional analysis of subnational health units. Typical issues would include listing the activities supposedly performed by health districts; delineating tasks that each subunit in a district should perform; and identifying the personnel needs to perform these tasks. Clear job descriptions could then be written, personnel requirements identified and maldistribution of health personnel rectified. Attention to these basic matters should help the MoH to promote efficiency and effectiveness in personnel allocation, fitting staffing patterns in health districts to the individual requirements of those districts. The introduction of performance budgeting and performance auditing would then be introduced to complement both the administrative reforms and fiscal deconcentration to BMCs. Ideally the performance orientation would promote improved resource utilization and enhanced accountability.

SEILA began operation in 1996 as an experiment in decentralization planning, financing and management. There was no decentralization policy. Rather SEILA would contribute to the development of a policy through a learning process. Working in five provinces and with 240 communes SEILA was concerned with promoting local capacities in development planning, accessing resources, contracting the private sector and interacting with government agencies. It built subnational management systems to accomplish these objectives and modified them according to experience. During its first phase (1996-2000) it presided over the disbursement of US$75 million, US$15 million of which went directly to the communes.

SEILA has now entered a second five-year phase (2001-2005) in which its prime objective is to create 'a resource mobilization and coordination framework for support to decentralization [devolution] and deconcentration'. Under multi-donor financing arrangements it facilitates the allocation and transfer of resources to seven ministries, seventeen provinces and 506 communes. For this second phase there has been a commitment of US$95.2 million by multilateral and bilateral donors.

A major achievement of SEILA is the development of an integrated structure for subnational planning involving both provincial and commune levels. A Provincial Rural Development Committee (PRDC) acts as a provincial development assembly to provide final endorsement of plans. However, it is the PRDC's Executive Committee where much of the facilitation, negotiation and coordination takes place. This committee is chaired by the Governor and is comprised of provincial directors from the ministries of Women's Affairs, Rural Development, Treasury, Economics and Finance, Planning and Agriculture. The MoEYS and the Ministry of Health (MoH) are not involved in the PRDC Executive Committee. The newly established Provincial Office of Local Administration (POLA) of the MoI is necessarily involved as the Governor is an MoI appointee. It provides the provincial and district facilitators for the commune planning process.

The provincial level committees are concerned with all investment expenditures in the province although most funds remain under the control of the separate ministries. The allocation of block grant funds which come to the SEILA provinces are determined by these committees and are in the range of US300,000-500,000 per province. Communes follow the other planning levels in having a very broad five-year vision and a three-year rolling plan. The planning calendar commences in July-August when communes review and update their plans with the knowledge of what they will receive from the Commune/sangkat Fund. In October there is a District Integration Workshop at which commune councils in a district meet with government agencies, NGOs and the private sector operating in the district to display their plans and seek additional resources to implement them. This 'development marketplace' is the meeting of the district development community and even though some investments are known in advance it nonetheless provides the opportunity to strengthen relationships and knowledge, and perhaps to pick up some additional resources. In December, plans and budgets are finalized, with entrepreneurial communes sometimes managing to double their allocated funding through external investments. From January to June, the primary implementation of the commune plan is undertaken before the cycle recommences.

The SEILA initiatives represent a long-term commitment to decentralizing planning and resource allocation at subnational levels. Starting when communes were administrative units SEILA now operates with the newly devolved commune councils as well as with the provincial administrations across a range of ministries. SEILA has initiated a significant move from a situation where there were no resources for subnational territories to allocate to one in which some

funding is coming under both provincial and commune council control. Building the framework and capacity to manage these resources efficiently and effectively has been the task of SEILA, one which it has pursued incrementally through a learning process. Like EQIP and PAP in the education sector it has demonstrated that some responsibility for planning and management can be decentralized to produce desirable development outcomes. It is anticipated that the system will continue to develop and expand nationwide. However, like most development initiatives in Cambodia it is dependent on donor funding and it attracts its skilled personnel through salary supplements. The sustainability of the structures it has built will largely depend on continued resource flows for investment.

2.4 The Prospects for Decentralization in Cambodia

Cambodia appears to be committed to decentralization but to a modest degree and in an incremental fashion. Political decentralization (devolution) has been introduced through commune councils while ministries are being encouraged by the highest levels of government to promote administrative decentralization (deconcentration). Complementarity of devolution and deconcentration is assumed. These initiatives are accompanied by SEILA's efforts to build provincial capacity. How these initiatives for decentralization will be integrated or if integration is a consideration is not clear. Deconcentration initiatives are generally planned and implemented by separate ministries without reference to each other. For example, the MoH and MoEYS have adopted different types of deconcentration. Even within ministries decentralization experiments can be planned and implemented quite separately. For example, in the MoEYS the development of PAP and EQIP has proceeded independently. Then there is SEILA which cross-cuts ministries and incorporates commune councils whose interaction with ministries is still to be worked through.

The situation can be described as piecemeal decentralization. The risk of a piecemeal approach is that no system emerges but that there are multiple modes of decentralization which may not be complementary. Such a situation could eventually lead to inefficiencies in coordination especially where intersectoral matters are concerned. The SEILA project goes some way to address this problem through its efforts to institutionalize cooperation and coordination at the provincial level and to link commune councils to ministry and NGO activities. On the positive side, the potential advantage of the incremental piecemeal approach is that it does not force ministries to go beyond their capacities. Ministries can develop what is appropriate for their activities and what is feasible according to their resource limitations. However, this assumes that ministries will choose good practice models which are feasible and which are reflected in improved performance.

3. DECENTRALIZATION IN CAMBODIAN EDUCATION

3.1 Decentralization in Education Policy

The government's leading statement of policy intent on education is the Education Strategic Plan 2001-2005 (ESP). The document is especially concerned to indicate educational priorities and attempts to link strategies with targets. References to decentralization are much in evidence and in some parts decentralization is itself the objective. The rationale for decentralization is not clearly elucidated and the risks involved not identified and evaluated. While this document is perhaps not the place for such analysis such consideration would be a useful foundation for decentralization. What should be decentralized, what should be retained, what are the gains, what difficulties can be anticipated and why? What the ESP does undoubtedly reveal is a major commitment to decentralizing certain aspects of management to provinces, districts, communes, clusters, schools and communities.

The ESP is 'based on an assumption of increased participation of all stakeholders in defining priorities, implementing them and monitoring how effective the programs have been' (ESP 2001, 1). This will fit with government's broader program for gradual 'decentralization [devolution] and deconcentration plans for public service management' (ibid.). One of the 'key priorities and targets' is Institutional Development and Capacity Building for Decentralization. Eight targets are identified across the whole education sector although some lack clarity. Later in the document it is emphasized that 'the fundamental strategy will be to build up the capacity of government planning and management systems, rather than parallel ones' (ibid., 14). This will be achieved by delegating authority within the ministry, information management, equipment, training and monitoring systems. Legislation and regulations will 'underpin' the system.

The ESP was followed by the publication of the Education Sector Support Program 2001-2005 (ESSP) which reiterated the commitment to decentralization. It incorporated comments and criticisms of an earlier draft and set out the Priority Action Programs (PAPs) which would be used to achieve sectoral objectives. Once again it was light on rationale but it was strong on setting out a clear framework of what would be done and at what level in the ministry.

The ESSP adopted a five-year rolling plan allowing for annual adaptation according to resource availability, lessons learned and emerging priorities. The planning processes were to be 'strategic'. The ESSP stressed MoEYS 'partnership' with a range of stakeholders including donors, other government agencies, NGOs and civil society. There would be a 'broad ownership' of reforms and a greater 'results-orientation'. Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) would be strengthened and there would be a selected delegation of responsibilities to districts, clusters, communes and schools. Some of these are listed in the individual PAPs. The anticipated gains from such deconcentration were not spelled out but it can be assumed that greater efficiency was the key objective. And through such efficiency gains the MoEYS would be able to make progress towards achieving its long-term goals for the education sector.

The ESP and ESSP are strong on management systems but demonstrate less explicit concern with education quality. The term 'quality' does appear in the documents but is not directly addressed in any depth. The leading objectives of getting more children into schools and keeping them there are certainly appropriate for Cambodia. However, what they actually do there and what they learn are also of great importance. The ESP and ESSP certainly provide opportunities for quality improvement in their programs of activities but appear less concerned with what happens in the classroom than outside of it. They are documents which focus on educational management. This is not to deny the importance of such concerns. A well structured and managed system should be expected to pay dividends in terms of educational quality. However, linking quality directly with efficiency would be welcome inclusions in the ESSP as it rolls on. More specifically, the expected quality gains from decentralization are worth elucidating.

The ESP and the ESSP appear to mark a turning point for the MoEYS and educational planning and investment in Cambodia. They represent a significant improvement on earlier planning efforts and provide an accessible and realistic framework for educational development. The ESP and ESSP are products of wide consultation although perhaps less so at subnational levels. They identify objectives and ways in which to achieve them. Priorities are clearly spelled out. The adoption of a rolling plan approach means that modifications can be made as appropriate while the declared orientation to results is welcome. Like all planning documents of this sort they contain both implicit and explicit assumptions about the effects of particular actions. This is to be expected in a country where environmental turbulence has been considerable and stability in governance has been elusive. Predictability has been difficult. However, the situation is changing and environmental stability has improved The ESP and ESSP reflect these changes and provide the framework for positive educational development in Cambodia which will be of widespread benefit to the population.

A final policy note on educational decentralization concerns the development of a education sector policy matrix. In May 2002, this document was in draft form for committee discussion. The matrix is organized according to the four leading policy objectives of the MoEYS. One of these is 'Enhanced management and de-concentration of educational services'. As with the other programs there is a list of 'policy areas and medium term objectives'. Each has the actions to be taken by February of years 2003-2006 and provides a valuable guide to what achievements are anticipated. This concise guide to educational policy will be an important reference for both MoEYS and donors in delineating and monitoring progress in policy implementation. It will also give further impetus for commitment of the MoEYS and its partners to ensuring that the policy intent expressed in the ESP and ESSP is fulfilled in practice.

3.2 The Experience of PAP

The PAP is a method of allocating resources to priorities in the education sector. Policy goals are reflected in the identification of priorities and in the choice of activities listed under the priorities. The ESSP lists eleven PAPs:

PAP 1: Education teaching service efficiency
PAP 2: Basic education quality and efficiency
PAP 3: Improved primary education progression
PAP 4: Upper secondary quality and efficiency
PAP 5: Technical and vocational education and training quality and efficiency
PAP 6: Higher education quality and efficiency
PAP 7: Continuous teacher development
PAP 8: Sustainable school instructional materials
PAP 9: Expansion of non formal education
PAP 10: School/youth AIDS awareness
PAP 11: Scholarships/Incentives for equitable access

These original PAPs have subsequently undergone slight modification demonstrating the evolving nature of the system. The PAPs are amenable to change according to such factors as perceived efficiency and altered circumstances. Thus, the amended list for 2002 is as follows:

PAP 1: Education teaching service efficiency
PAP 2: Primary education quality and efficiency
PAP 3: Secondary education quality and efficiency
PAP 4: Technical and vocational education and training quality and efficiency
PAP 5: Higher education quality and efficiency
PAP 6 Continuous teacher development
PAP 7: Instructional materials and textbook development
PAP 8: Expansion of non formal education
PAP 9: AIDS awareness: in school
PAP 10: AIDS awareness: out of school
PAP 11: Supplies, capacity strengthening and provincial monitoring

Decentralization is not a PAP in itself. It is a theme which is integral to the overall program. Without it the PAP will not work. The decentralization occurs in a context where until recently there was little or no money for institutions and subnational education offices to spend. Basic recurrent costs, consisting almost entirely of salaries, were covered by central government. To reach teachers, the salaries passed through provincial treasuries. Provincial education officials merely assisted in the administration of the salaries. But provinces, districts, clusters, schools and other educational institutions did not have funds for investment. They had little incentive to plan as the resources were unavailable.

There have been only two sources of non-salary funding for schools and other primary educational institutions: donor-funded projects and 'parental

contributions'. Donor funding has provided a large volume of support for education for many years but has been accompanied by a predilection for building parallel management structures which largely by-pass the normal ministry structures. When projects end so too do the parallel structures. Project managers may return to regular MoEYS positions with enhanced skills or move on to other better-paying jobs. This pattern of events has done little to build overall management capacity in the MoEYS and has contributed to managerial underdevelopment in the ministry at both national and subnational levels.

With no regular cash flow to schools along MoEYS channels, schools have had to rely on 'parental contributions'. Without these household and community inputs some schools would have been unable to function. This discouraged the very poor from enrolling and contributed to high drop-out rates. According to Bray (1998, 36) 'household and community financing maintains [and/or] exacerbates the inequalities between regions, between rural and urban areas, between individual schools, and between socio-economic groups'. However, the reliance on such financing may have generated a stronger community interest in education than if all funding had been provided by government. It also means that schools do have experience in handling money. But even this positive feature should be tempered with the realization that many schools lacked skills in planning and expenditure management.

While the reliance on donor funding remains, the PAP has dramatically altered the situation in two important ways.

Firstly, the abolition of the school registration fee has contributed to an unprecedented increase in enrolments in primary education. In the first year of PAP, then being trialled in ten provinces, Grade 1 admission rates in the trial provinces increased by an average of 21 per cent, from 57 per cent in 1999 to 79 per cent in 2000. The following year PAP was extended to all 24 provinces and municipalities and was supported by a concerted Ministry information campaign which encouraged parents to take advantage of the changed situation and enrol their children. The results were dramatic. Overall primary school enrolment increased from 2.35 million in 2000 to 2.68 million in 2001, an increase of 14%. Grade 1 enrolments increased by 5% and at the same time, due to improved promotion rates from Grade 1, the Grade 1 share of total primary enrolment dropped from 32% to 29% - a significant gain in efficiency.

Reports from the field indicate that attendance can often be poor. This may, in part, reflect the persistence of other 'parental contributions' and the difficulty poorer families have in affording them.

Secondly, government funds have started flowing direct to schools. This innovation has created new needs for management training at provincial, district and school levels to administer such unprecedented funding. Much more capacity-building remains to be done.

While increased enrolment is a policy objective, in some circumstances its achievement may adversely affect the quality of education. More children in

...has often meant bigger classes, sometimes as many as 70 children in one class. In such circumstances teachers are unable to monitor individual progress and ensure the participation of all pupils as would be the case for smaller groups. There may even be problems of inadequate numbers of books and other materials for the unexpected additional pupils. Such conditions could have a negative impact on achievement levels.

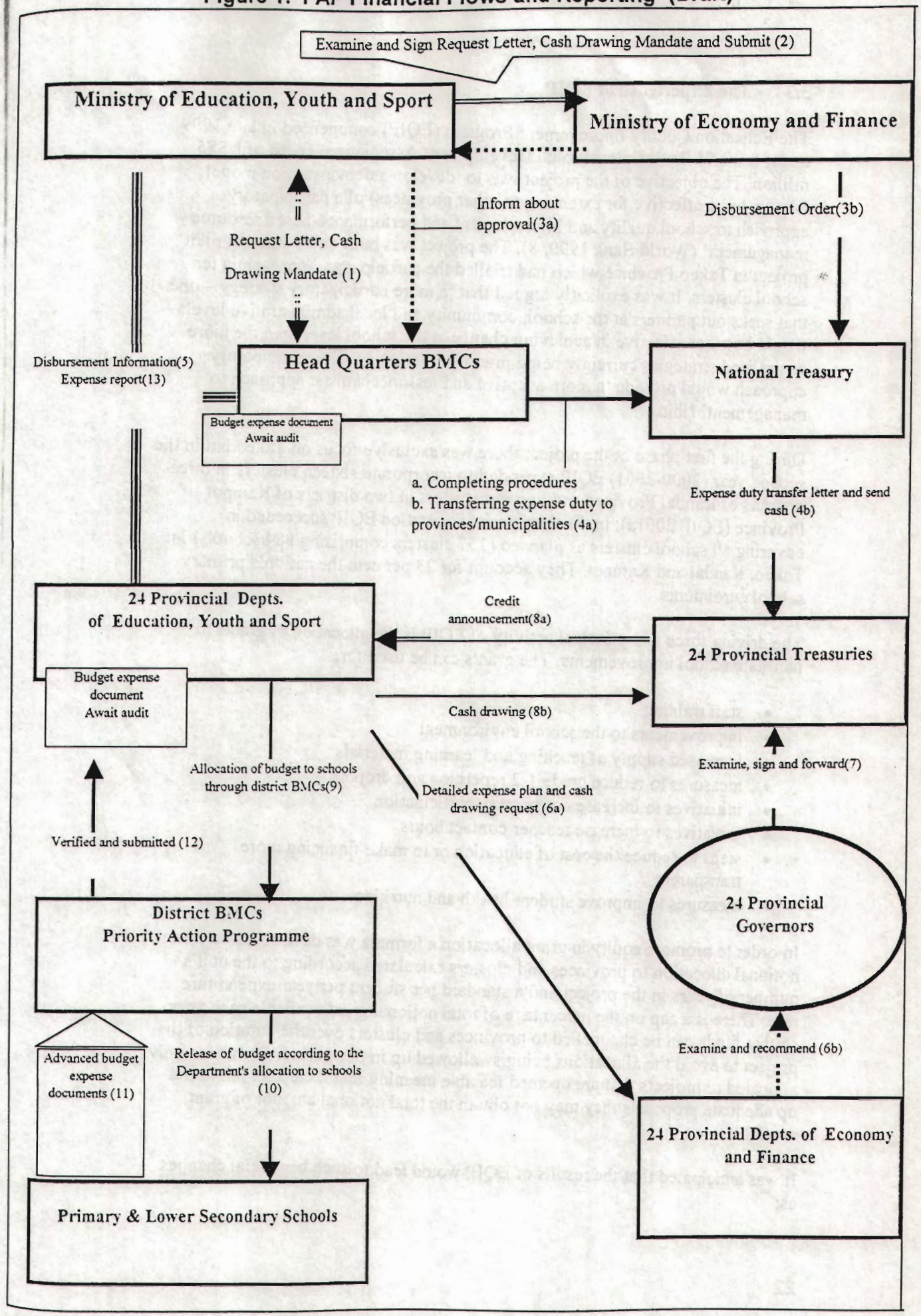
While effective educational priorities have been determined at national level their full implementation will rely on the successful deconcentration of authority and accountability.

The commitment of the government to education can be seen in the increasing share of the country's recurrent budget devoted to the sector. In 2000, government identified education as a priority area along with health, agriculture and rural development. During the early and mid-1990s education accounted for less than 10 per cent of government expenditure. This was under 1 per cent of GDP compared to 3.1 per cent for other developing countries in East Asia (Bray 1998, 36). The prioritization of education resulted in increased recurrent budget for the MoEYS: 14 per cent of expenditure in 2000, 15 per cent in 2001 and a projected 18 per cent in 2002. However, if investment budgets are factored in, the growth in the share of education in total government expenditure may well be less impressive.

But the improved financial support is not without problems. Disbursement of the educational budget is unevenly distributed between quarters. It is heavily skewed towards the final quarter of the year. In 2001, 53 per cent of education's budget was disbursed in the final quarter. The PAP has suffered from similar cash flow problems. Promised funds have arrived consistently late. While PAP advocates point to improvements there is still a distance to go to provide funds predictably and on time. In mid-May 2002 disbursements for 2001 PAP were approaching 100 per cent but no funds from 2002 PAP had been disbursed. The introduction of a 'mandate' system will help to guarantee that funds allocated will eventually arrive, even if in the following year. However, it will not facilitate predictable planning at local levels and may lead to some disillusionment with the system.

A system for managing financial flows from the MoEYS has been introduced (Figure 1). It has yet to handle the large volume of funds anticipated when all PAPs are operational. Reports so far indicate that the system of getting money to schools has functioned efficiently. It involves some different processes than EQIP which delivers money to clusters rather than to individual schools, and which makes use of its parallel project structure.

Figure 1: PAP Financial Flows and Reporting (Draft)



3.3 The Experience of EQIP

The Education Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) commenced in late 1999 under a World Bank (International Development Association) credit of US$5 million. The objective of the project was to 'develop a demonstration model (shown to be effective for extension to other provinces) of a participatory approach to school quality and improvement and performance-based resource management' (World Bank 1999, 8). The project was built on an existing pilot project in Takeo Province which had trialled the participatory approach in ten school clusters. It was explicitly argued that 'a more participatory strategy – one that seeks out partners at the school, community and local administrative levels – would be more effective in achieving change at the school level than the more centralized strategies currently being practiced' (ibid., 4). The participatory approach would provide 'a more adaptive and less mechanistic approach to management' (ibid.).

During the first phase of the project there was exclusive focus on Takeo but in the second year (2000-2001) EQIP expanded to incorporate sixteen clusters in three districts of Kandal Province and thirteen clusters in two districts of Kampot Province (EQIP 2001a). In the third year of operation EQIP succeeded in covering all school clusters as planned (157 clusters comprising 984 schools) in Takeo, Kandal and Kampot. They account for 23 per cent the nation's primary school enrolments.

The driving force and principal activity of EQIP is the allocation of grants to facilitate school improvements. The grants can be used for:

- staff training
- improvements to the school environment
- increased supply of teaching and learning materials
- measures to reduce grade 1-2 repetition and dropout
- initiatives to increase community participation
- initiatives to increase teacher contact hours
- steps to reduce the cost of education or to make financing more transparent
- measures to improve student health and nutrition

In order to promote equity in grant allocation a formula was devised based on notional allocation to provinces and clusters calculated according to the unit's number of years in the project and a standard per student per year expenditure rate. There is a cap on the percentage of total notional grant available each year so that funds can be channelled to provinces and clusters over the duration of the project to avoid the allocations being swallowed up in one period. Grants are only allocated to projects that are deemed feasible meaning that if clusters fail to put up adequate proposals they may not obtain the total notional amount of grant available.

It was anticipated that the results of EQIP would lead to such beneficial changes as:

- increased teacher and pupil questioning
- more pupil activity and interaction eg through group work
- cost-effective investment of teacher time in the production and use of the newly available materials to produce and use quality teaching aids
- increasing school enrolments
- reducing drop-out and repetition rates
- a system for getting money to school clusters
- getting schools in a cluster to decide on priorities and take control of spending to achieve them
- transparency in the acquisition of funds and accountability for their utilization
- cooperation between schools in a cluster to improve education in all schools in the cluster
- monitoring and evaluation to feed back into local and national decision-making

In order to achieve such results and ensure accountability a complex system of project management has evolved as a parallel project structure attached to the MoEYS. A Project Implementation Unit (PIU) is located in the Department of Planning at the MoEYS. It sits on top of Provincial Project Implementation Units (PPIUs). These are staffed by a co-ordinator, a lead technical assistant (LTA). an accountant, an interpreter and animators. The latter are key players in the project and each animator services one or sometimes two districts. Their role is to facilitate understanding of the project, give assistance to clusters and generally act as the catalysts for innovation. Local Cluster School Committees (LCSCs) comprised of primary school directors, teachers, school secretaries and a community representative determine the clusters' proposals and coordinate cluster monitoring. The Revised Cluster School Guidelines propose the establishment of an additional set of Local Cluster School Councils (LCSCIs), community-based bodies which are being introduced to provide advisory input. There is much reporting to be undertaken by the clusters which is then coordinated through the PPIUs for the PIU. Reports are both financial and on activities undertaken. Provincial Supervisory Teams (PSTs) and District Supervisory Teams (DSTs) monitor progress along with the LTA. There are expatriate volunteers (the full complement of twelve in May 2002) from the British Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in each province to assist in the facilitation of innovation.

Evaluation and appraisal reports indicate a successful project – and in extraordinary detail (eg EQIP 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b). The World Bank (2001) mid-term report sums up the achievements as follows:

- Educational quality has become an important concern in the delivery of educational services
- Schools have unprecedented levels of responsibility and access to resources

- A shift in education management is taking place from a 'control and inspection' role to a school support role
- Education policy is more adaptive and better informed by experience

The World Bank mid-term report also lists various lessons that have been learned:

- The gradual expansion of the project has been instrumental in creating the necessary conditions for successful implementation
- How resources are provided is as important as what is being provided
- Capacity building activities and the development of a school support network have been essential ingredients for educational quality enhancement

The World Bank's assessment of EQIP corresponds with those expressed by officials and teachers to the author of this report in his visits to POEs, DOEs and schools in the three project provinces. There was widespread enthusiasm for EQIP among those interviewed and a desire to build on the progress already made. Decentralization issues featured prominently. Stakeholders welcomed the opportunity EQIP provided for making decisions at local levels. Being able to decide what to purchase for a cluster through a cooperative process at that level was greatly appreciated. It was recognised that the actual process of making decisions at provincial, district and cluster levels was developing skills in prioritizing, planning, budgeting and reporting. Local networks of cooperation and inter-dependence were developing. Teachers and officials reported that they had adopted 'child-centred learning'. Officials were proud of what they had achieved. When asked what was the most important achievement of EQIP, the most popular answer was that it gave finances for priority needs in a timely and predictable manner. Enormous value was placed in this achievement. Previously there had been no resource flows from the MoEYS to schools and little if any to the provinces.

In addition to such anecdotal evidence of EQIP success there are quarterly and annual reports from PPIUs and the PIU. The effort put into monitoring has been substantial and voluminous records of financial, managerial and educational achievement have been built up. A consultancy on monitoring and evaluation conducted in 2001 clearly demonstrates the considerable amount of effort this involves (Baumgart 2001). Twenty monitoring instruments were listed in his report. Financial reporting has been able to promote accountability of a high order while detailed records of activities show what has been done eg training conducted, numbers of teachers involved. Educational outcomes are more difficult to measure because: they are not easily amenable to statistical expression; cause-effect relationships are tenuous; and assessment on normative scales may be heavily influenced by cultural values. However, annual grade 4 testing in literacy and numeracy could be good statistical bases for evaluating educational improvements generated by EQIP.

Reporting for EQIP has been frank and problems have been acknowledged and addressed where possible. Sometimes remedial action is not possible as when

cluster directors and some school directors were removed from their jobs for several months to work on preparations for the February 2002 commune elections. There will be a repeat of this for the national elections in 2003. This is the year designated for EQIP 'consolidation'. In year 3 (2001-2002) the project increased the number of clusters covered to the maximum of 157 and doubled animators from 16 to 32. But another important question is being raised concerning sustainability (EQIP 2002a). This is dealt with in the next section.

4. ISSUES FOR DECENTRALIZING EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

4.1 Asking the Fundamental Question About Decentralization

Progress on decentralization in Cambodia, both in general and in education, would benefit from consideration of fundamental questions. There has been much attention to the mechanics of decentralization. Officials have discussed at length how systems should be structured, what authorities should be deconcentrated and to whom. However, there would be benefit in considering what benefits decentralization will bring. The primary question is why delegation of management responsibilities should bring desired outcomes. In short, there is a need for policy analysis which attempts to predict the consequences of actions.

A second aspect of improved policy analysis for Cambodia is giving attention to where policies can go wrong – what has been described as 'anticipating policy failure'. A first step is to ensure that the resources are available to implement a chosen policy. A policy which lacks the required resources is not a good policy. Close attention should also be paid to the implementation phase of the policy process. Implementation feasibility is an essential component of policy analysis. This involves not only technical matters (eg whether there are the trained personnel to undertake particular tasks) but also assessment of the political resources required to make implementation successful. For example, educational reforms can be stalled by treasuries which don't release money on time or in the promised amount; officials who feel threatened by change; teachers who see no incentive in new initiatives; regulations which are not changed to fit with new policy requirements; or governments which switch priorities leading to the diversion of funds allocated for education into unbudgeted alternative activities.

This is not a call to employ the complex techniques of rational policy analysis. Their utility has been questioned in their countries of origin in the West. Their appropriateness in developing countries such as Cambodia is even more suspect. What requires institutionalizing is an attitudinal change involving continual asking of the question: 'what could go wrong?' Using the negative question can provide a very positive output in terms of improved policy.

Policy-making for education in Cambodia has come a long way in a short time. The ESP and the ESSP represent major advances in thinking about policy and how to organize to achieve priority goals. They are recent initiatives which incorporate a strong deconcentration theme. To assist in making this

deconcentration work it would be useful to improve ministry skills in policy analysis. Officials will be better able to judge what can be expected from particular reform initiatives, why deconcentrated structures will provide better educational outcomes, and what reforms are feasible.

4.2 Seeing the Whole Picture

Formal decentralization in Cambodia is recent and piecemeal. There are initiatives in both devolution and deconcentration. As yet it is unclear as to what overall 'system' is emerging. Initiatives are often planned and implemented in relative isolation from each other. Thus, it is not always clear to policy-makers and stakeholders how the pieces actually fit together. This has not been a leading consideration but it is an emerging one.

There appears to be a growing awareness of the importance of 'seeing the whole picture'. SEILA is leading in this regard as it realizes the need to coordinate local planning by commune councils with increasingly deconcentrated structures of ministries. For education, it is vital that the MoEYS clearly delineates what decision-making powers are being decentralized to what levels or institutions. In addition the linkage to commune councils requires elucidation as does the relationship between provincial governors and the MoEYS. Finally, there should be clear channels through which NGOs and community organizations can interact with the MoEYS at various levels on educational matters. In January 2002, 26 NGOs involved in education combined in a formal partnership to facilitate their dealings with the MoEYS.

These matters are receiving attention in the MoEYS. Sometimes it may be simply a matter of endorsing existing practice. Other links may require considerable thought and negotiation. For example, the relationships between the MoEYS headquarters, the POEs and provincial governors is a key concern. The POE is the focus of MoEYS deconcentration and there needs to be clarification about precisely what decision-making authorities are being decentralized. Substantial institutional strengthening of POEs is vital if they are to be effective units of deconcentrated government. But there must also be attention to the evolving role of the provincial governor, the development of provincial planning and the emergence of commune councils and how they may impact on POE responsibilities and operations.

4.3 Supporting the PAP

The PAP is a new concept and practice for Cambodian education. It marks a break with policy processes of the past. It is the means to achieve the priorities of education policy and to build management capacity across the whole system, from central headquarters to individual schools. Decentralization is embedded in the PAP. For it to be effective authority must be decentralized. It promises to build structures and processes which will both benefit the delivery of educational

services and which will make use of the potential of deconcentrated MoEYS personnel. This potential has been underutilized until now.

Much effort has gone into the PAP and it deserves endorsement and support from stakeholders. But it is as yet in its infancy and there are problems. There is complexity which means that even in the MoEYS there is often incomplete understanding of it. Growing familiarity with PAP and constant communication among ministry officials is essential to build greater knowledge and confidence in the PAP. It must not be seen as a project, but as part of a policy framework through which objectives are identified and actions taken to achieve them.

There has been criticism of PAP cash flow. This has been unpredictable with allocated funds often failing to reach their destinations in the expected amount and at the right time. This should not be a surprise. PAP is novel. Previously, there have been extremely limited resource flows to subnational and institutional Budget Management Centres (BMCs). They have had little or nothing to manage. There is little experience at the centre or in deconcentrated units of managing cash flows for a variety of educational expenditures.

The major problem has been the timely release of the budgeted funds. However, advocates for the PAP report that the situation is changing. Almost 100 per cent of 2001 funds have now (May 2002) been disbursed and mandates have been submitted for the release of 50 per cent of the first tranche for 2002. The MoEYS has engaged the MoEF in discussions about improving disbursement mechanisms. The donors, acting in unison, could also put their weight behind the MoEYS push for the timely release of budgeted funds. As there is considerable donor funding in the pipeline from the ADB, World Bank, European Community, Belgium, SIDA and NGOs they should have considerable influence. The Council for Administrative reform might also consider ways of encouraging the National Assembly to fulfil a stronger accountability role in ensuring that government expenditure follows the approved budget.

If the cash flow can be guaranteed then it is vitally important that the capacity is present in the MoEYS at various levels to ensure that it is administered efficiently and with accountability. As the PAP funds are budgeted to almost treble in 2002, from 24.5 billion Riel in 2001 to 75 billion Riel in 2002, it is essential that the BMCs, the processes and the skilled staff are in place. This is appreciated in the MoEYS and the enormity of the task realized. Some training and process reengineering has occurred but much more needs to be done. All stakeholders are aware of this. These matters require careful monitoring to identify problems and weaknesses so that remedial actions may be taken.

One potential area of concern for PAP relates to its expansion into large numbers of activities across eleven programs. Will there be coordination or compartmentalization? The MoEYS appreciates that there are complementarities between PAPs. For example, capacity-building in one PAP can have an effect on performance in another. This means attention must be paid to coordination. Information-sharing among departments is essential with responsibility resting with the director-generals and departmental heads. Compartmentalization occurs

where departments act in isolation from one another. This leads to inefficiencies and has reportedly occurred in the past. It is to be avoided in the PAP era, and current indications are of improved dialogue across the MoEYS.

4.4 The Future of EQIP in Educational Decentralization

EQIP has been a successful project according to its regular and detailed monitoring reports. It has moved money to school clusters in a predictable timely manner; it has created the conditions under which the quality of primary education can be improved; it has contributed to changing classroom practice; it has provided training in pedagogy and management; it has encouraged cooperation between schools in clusters; and has contributed to improved educational outcomes. It has accomplished these achievements within a framework of decentralization.

Some personnel in the MoEYS have expressed strong interest in extending the EQIP model nationwide. The World Bank and EQIP staff had not planned for such rapid and massive expansion. They believed a more modest extension of the project was desirable. However, the model advanced by some MoEYS officials involved extending to two districts in all 24 Cambodian provinces in 2003 and then on to all districts and the country's 757 clusters. This would involve a support structure of regional offices and PPIUs for each province – seven times as many as now exist. The PIU would necessarily expand to cope with the massively increased administrative demands. An extra 42 animators would be needed in the first instance and considerably more after that. There are currently only 32 animators. Twenty-one more LTAs would be required while decisions would have to made on the role of expatriate volunteers. There are currently twelve VSO workers in just three provinces. It is unrealistic to expect that such structures and personnel could be put in place at such short notice and be effective. The 'big bang' approach to replication is not advisable. It could quite possibly be a disservice to decentralization.

This is a typical dilemma for projects. Ideally, there should be an 'adaptive administration' approach (Rondinelli 1983). This involves moving from experiment to pilot to demonstration and eventual replication and dissemination. EQIP has completed the first two stages but has not made much progress on the third although a recent report from EQIP Takeo (EQIP 2002) and a May 2002 workshop in that province shows that thought is being given to the development of a sustainable model. EQIP is certainly not yet ready for nationwide replication. This is not unusual situation for development projects.

There are several problems which hinder the replication of EQIP. Firstly, EQIP is managed through a parallel structure. Critics believe this is resource intensive and thus unsustainable especially when scaling-up. When the project ends so does the parallel structure. But there is currently no indication of how it can be absorbed into mainstream MoEYS structures and processes. Cambodia has a history of donor-funded parallel structures associated with projects. They appear and later disappear. Secondly, EQIP was introduced before the ESP, ESPP and PAP had

been conceived. The objective of ensuring that educational investment contributes to strengthening MoEYS capacity was not policy at the time of EQIP inception. Thirdly, some MoEYS personnel believe that parallel structures are 'capacity draining' and to be avoided. They remove good quality personnel from the MoEYS thus reducing capacity. Fourthly, there is the question of whether investment on the scale required to replicate EQIP nationwide is justified in relation to the educational return.

If the big bang expansion is high risk and inadvisable then what other options are available? A modest expansion of the same structures that have evolved to date may only postpone the problems associated with parallel structures and sustainability. A compromise may be in order. This could involve alignment with the PAP; a realistic nationwide expansion program; identification of what has greatest value in EQIP and should be retained; gradual removal of parallel structures and incorporation of activities into mainstream MoEYS structures; work in concert with other capacity building initiatives within deconcentrated units of the MoEYS; and constantly seek efficiencies.

EQIP might also look outside to incorporate new partners. Immediate candidates are school inspectors and the teacher training colleges (TTCs). There was a donor-funded program to train school inspectors in the UK and France. Approximately 200 primary school inspectors, 75 provincial secondary school inspectors and 20 headquarters secondary inspectors were trained. The animator role could be assumed by these trained personnel. They could combine the management and educational inspection roles which are currently split. There would be efficiency gains and a network of decentralized inspectors could form the basic framework for facilitating good teaching practice as envisioned under EQIP.

TTCs can also act as decentralized nodes for the provision of in-service teacher training. There was a five-year project under the Programme d'Appui au Secteur de l'Education Primaire au Cambodge (PASEC) which reportedly performed well but was not sustainable with its parallel structure. A network of dedicated trainers could be set up at the TTCs. These trainers would be able to deliver a suite of courses for which there would be an identifiable need across Cambodia. Clusters could draw upon these trainers and their courses, picking items from the training menu as appropriate. It could be argued that this goes against decentralization's claim to respond effectively to the unique conditions and needs of each cluster. However, the general underdevelopment of education in Cambodia means that there are many common needs across the system. Providing a menu of relevant courses delivered by effective trainers would still permit local prioritization and choice in what training would take place. Some stakeholders in EQIP have reported poor quality in much of the training delivered so far.

4.5 The Need for Regulations

When decentralizing authority there is a need for a regulatory basis to clearly elucidate just what is being decentralized, to whom and with what accountability

measures. The regulations can give clarity and legal authority. In some instances they may take the form of guidelines, in others precision may be required. To be effective the regulations need to be well considered, clearly written and socialized among stakeholders. The personnel in the system, especially those to whom authority is being delegated, must have the confidence to take decisions according to the regulations.

The MoEYS is aware of the need for regulations to determine the operation of deconcentrated systems of management. Some work has been done and some regulations issued. Some are reportedly not well drafted and may be poorly publicized. Even when regulations are issued, embedded patterns of behaviour may limit their application. This is demonstrated in a MoEYS regulation on the decentralization of school timetables and calendar. This gives POEs the authority to modify timetables and school calendars to match local circumstances. However, the regulation provides extremely limited options for local choice on the timetable. There has also been a reluctance to alter the established school calendar even where annual flooding considerably reduces the number of days taught in a school year. Where EQIP funding has established or improved school libraries, they can be underutilized because there is no formal library period in MoEYS rules. Behaviours of local officials are based on caution. Even if the regulation authorizes local decision-making there may well be a reluctance to act on it. Thus, inappropriate practices may be retained because officials are scared to make changes or because they believe the existing practices to be inviolate.

The ESSP indicates a number of regulations that are needed and some work has taken place. It is not clear as to how well coordinated the work is and how much consultation has taken place. There should be a coordinated effort at the MoEYS to define the basic regulatory requirements for deconcentration which set down the framework of the deconcentrated system. Lesser regulations can deal with particular processes and issues. But they will be of limited value if they are not widely publicized. Such publicity must be led by the central ministry and must include repeated assurances that the authorities are being decentralized. Local officials may need considerable persuasion.

4.6 Educational Quality and Decentralization

One of the objectives of educational development in Cambodia is to improve quality. However, the issue of quality has been overshadowed by getting management systems right and expanding enrolment. What goes on in the classroom has been of a lower priority. Even at the EQIP provincial workshop (5 May 2002) on the design of the next World Bank credit for primary education there was little discussion of learning. The focus was management design. The ESP and ESSP documents likewise contain a strong emphasis on the management of education and how to get more children into school and through the grades.

There is no denying that these are important priorities but the quality of education seems to require a little more attention. While initiatives such as EQIP and the PAP provide the necessary conditions for improvement in quality they are not

sufficient. What goes on in the classroom must also be incorporated. EQIP appears to have addressed this in its promotion of the 'child-centred' approach to learning. However, some educationalists and my own observations raise questions about how this actually improves learning. The methodology which is practised under the 'child-centred' label may be of limited value. It would perhaps be better to think more in terms of what is good practice teaching, what competencies are desirable in teachers and what teaching aids are needed. The development of grade 1 readers by one of the EQIP VSO workers in Kompot and the broader interpretation of child-centred learning by the LTA in Kandal represent good steps in this direction and should be encouraged and disseminated.

4.7 School Clusters in Decentralization

School clusters are integral components of primary education in Cambodia. The concept was introduced into Cambodia in 1991 with pilot schemes run by UNICEF between 1992 and 1995. In 1993 the MoEYS formed the National Cluster School Committee (NCSC) and in 1995 all POEs were required to group all primary schools into clusters (NCSC 1995; Geeves 1999). Each cluster should be comprised a core school and up to eight satellite schools although there some clusters reportedly have up to eleven schools. In 2000-2001 MoEYS statistics there were 5,468 primary schools in Cambodia divided into about 760 clusters.

The aims of the cluster school approach were to improve access, quality and administration; to encourage strong schools to assist weak schools; and to enhance community contribution to schools. They were a decentralized form of organization under the MoEYS. Geeves (1998, 6) reports that 'the most conspicuous results of eight years of cluster school activity in Cambodia have been physical and bureaucratic-structural'. He also reports divided opinion among stakeholders as to the efficacy of the cluster experience. These and other issues will be analysed in depth in a 2002 Cluster Review Study. This report will briefly deal with several issues relating to decentralization.

The cluster is not an official administrative division of the MoEYS. At subnational level these are province, district and school. The cluster does not make many appearances in the ESP and the ESSP. In the PAP it is the schools to which money flows and not the clusters. The cluster may be less favoured in the MoEYS than in earlier days. However, EQIP is organized around the cluster. The project is based on getting funds to clusters and for the stakeholders there to determine cluster priorities and take expenditure decisions collectively.

This raises the question of whether the decentralization of PAP fits well with that of EQIP. Are they complementary or contradictory? There are several issues. Firstly, PAP and EQIP disburse funds by different systems. Is this efficient? Can some integration of the administration be introduced? Secondly, PAP tries to address equity through its funding formula whereas PAP relies on the clusters to address inequities. This may not always work. Weak schools may remain weak. Thirdly, with the introduction of commune councils there is an opportunity for

their involvement in education. However, cluster boundaries do not necessarily fall within commune boundaries. Fourthly, clusters rarely work unless donors inject additional resources and stimulate activity. Otherwise they remain inoperative. Fifthly, clusters can be a useful mechanism for collective decentralized decision making in conditions of resource scarcity whereas a focus on individual schools would not promote any such cooperation.

4.8 Central Government's Role in Decentralization

One of the most commonly overlooked issues in decentralization is the role of central government. There is a tendency to focus on what is decentralized and to forget about the role of the central agency. In worst case scenarios central agencies are only loosely connected to decentralized territories and units. Alternatively they are overly concerned with securing compliance through regulation thus undermining the rationale for decentralization.

It is vitally important that such scenarios do not occur in Cambodian education. The MoEYS will need to adopt a dual role which is concerned with both traditional compliance matters but also with the facilitation of educational improvement at subnational levels. The MoEYS should be able to focus more on policy using information it gains from an efficient monitoring system. It appears to be doing this although there may be opportunities for some rationalization of its information-gathering activities. Information is only useful for policy if it is timely, manageable and actually put to use. There is a danger of goal displacement where the processes of gathering information take over from the reasons for them. Also, the MoEYS should provide assistance to its deconcentrated units both in improving management and as a source and disseminator of educational practice. Rethinking its role as the coordinator of education is essential for the MoEYS and there are grounds for optimism in this regard.

4.9 Salaries and Supplements

The most commonly cited problem in education in Cambodia is the low salaries of teachers and educational administrators. The prevailing wisdom is that low salaries have an adverse effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. Decentralization does not directly impact on this but low salaries could affect the success of decentralization. Deconcentration demands changed systems and behaviours but if there is not the motivation among deconcentrated officials to make the new arrangements work the decentralization will bring few if any gains. Given these circumstances the success of projects such as EQIP may owe more to their salary supplementation, per diems and travel allowances than to any other single factor.

If this conclusion is accepted then one of the keys to making decentralization work in education will be the provision of remuneration to administrators and officials which gives them motivation to perform well and to be open to change.

This is not a matter which is restricted to education but is characteristic of the whole system of public sector management in Cambodia. Low salaries and overstaffing are endemic. They are also facts recognized by the Council for Administrative Reform (CAR), MoEF and MoEYS. It is encouraging that the steps have been taken to improve public sector salaries across the whole system and that the MoEYS has introduced measures to provide pay increases and incentive payments although the funds have yet to be released. Also, progress on public sector reform has moved at glacial pace since 1995.

It is highly desirable that salary increases are paid and that effective incentives are introduced and delivered. If there can be linkage to actual performance this will mark a step forward and assist effective decentralization. Donors and the MoEYS should accept that incentive payments and supplements will be necessary to secure support among implementers and target personnel. Such opportunities for additional income are associated with donor-funded projects in Cambodia and have become expected. The challenge for policy-makers intent on improving education through strengthening mainstream ministry structures will be how to allocate the incentives to achieve desired educational outcomes.

4.10 Bringing in the Community

Much decentralization literature and donor statements on the subject celebrate the participatory nature of decentralization and seek ways to secure participation. Experience shows that some forms of participation are actually very weak. Even NGOs have been accused of directive behaviour. Local elites have often also become beneficiaries of decentralization while the majority have missed out. For Cambodia, it would be interesting to know what 'community participation' actually means. A report from Takeo EQIP (EQIP 2002c) notes that 'the role and importance of parents in the school and the school's responsibility to encourage is not yet fully appreciated by the majority of LCSCs'. EQIP officials refer to the 'shyness' of parents. The formal committees organized under the EQIP project incorporate a familiar list of community dignitaries but it is not clear how many people participate, in what and how often. What do they expect from participation what is the social etiquette participation. The power and status hierarchies of local communities have often been misunderstood in aid-funded projects. This note is simply a warning that the whole notion of participation and the concept of community may be worthy of some anthropological attention. It can be dangerous to make assumptions about community harmony, functional complementarity and willingness to participate based on some universal abstraction of what a community should be.

5. CONCLUSION

The government of Cambodia has embarked on a policy of decentralization which incorporates both devolution and deconcentration. It is a new policy and a cautious one. The degree of decentralization both politically and administratively is limited. This is wise as relative stability is recent. Thus, incrementalism is a

sensible path. The political and administrative institutions and structures as yet lack the strength to cope with more radical initiatives which have been introduced in ASEAN neighbours such as the Philippines and Indonesia.

Progress on decentralization is encouraging. Commune councils have been elected and have begun to function. Ministries such as health and education have made initial steps to deconcentrate responsibility for their activities. The SEILA program continues to extend capacities in local planning and to bring together different stakeholders in government and society. Donors are also backing the moves with grants and loans dedicated in whole or part to decentralization.

There are risks associated with decentralization as can be seen from the experiences of many developing countries. Cambodia's incremental approach will help in this regard. Proceeding slowly and in a well-planned manner means that remedial actions are more easily instituted and that weak organizational capacities are not overtaxed. Coordination and monitoring of the whole field of decentralization will increase in importance while there needs to be greater attention to the rationale and anticipated developmental gains of decentralization.

In education the approach has been characteristically top-down with the centre determining priorities and operating systems. This may be necessary in the initial stages because of embedded local attitudes of compliance with the centre and limited local capacities. However, as the experience of decentralization increases and the confidence of local officials grows so they and the communities they serve should start to take greater roles in determining the operation and even structures of decentralization. The MoEYS must gradually reinvent itself and become a facilitator and not simply an issuer of instructions and securer of compliance. It also needs to ensure coordination of its various activities and how it fits with other stakeholders and actors at all levels. The experiences of EQIP and of PAP provide some useful lessons for the future of deconcentration in education. It is important that they are learned and acted upon.

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