

## Issues and Options for Staffing Citizen Service Centers:

Lessons from the One Window Service Office initiative in Cambodia

In order to achieve the underlying reform objectives of citizen service centers, it is necessary to ensure that staff are appropriately selected, trained and managed. This learning note sets out the staffing approach taken in the DFGG funded One Window Service Office initiative in Cambodia, describing the elements of the staffing, and setting out what worked, what didn't work and the steps that are being considered to address the problems of staffing that are arising during implementation.

One of the primary elements of the *One Window Service Office* (OWSO) citizen service center initiative in Cambodia is human resources. The staff are the backbone of the operation, central to the quality, reliability and integrity of the service provided. Recognizing this, the implementing agency, the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development Secretariat (NCDD-S), has made every effort to plan and manage the staffing of the district OWSO's in order to meet these multiple objectives.

During the establishment phase of the OWSOs, each OWSO has been staffed with 12 officials divided into back office and front office roles. Staff work under the supervision of the OWSO manager, the oversight of the District Governor and strategic leadership from the national OWSO team in the NCDD-Secretariat. Front office staff interface with customers, receiving and redirecting requests. Back office staff, delegated from participating line ministries, process the administrative services previously available at their home departments.

The skills required for these two roles are vastly different, but the overarching principles to which staff must adhere, are one and the same – transparency, accountability and integrity. To this end, staff are expected to follow the prescribed rules and regulations and sign a code of conduct. The intention is that staff arrive on time, work a full day, treat customers with respect, and refrain from taking bribes or using the office for personal or political gain. The Governor conducts a staff performance assessment on an annual basis.

Prior to the opening of a OWSO in a given district, officials are trained in these key principles and practices (e.g. good governance concepts and practices, staff roles and responsibilities, information campaigns, and the role of the district ombudsman). They also participate in a study tour, an internship in one of the more established OWSOs, and receive technical training from their own Ministries.

In the design stage, the Bank agreed with the government that officials would be paid a salary incentive – at that time called the Merit Based Pay Initiative (MBPI/PMG). Doubling formal salaries, this payment provided between \$80-110 per month for staff to carry out their roles in accordance

with performance requirements. Although this payment ceased in December 2009, a similar payment, called the Priority Operating Cost (POC) was reinstated in January 2011, and is planned to continue to the end of the project.<sup>1</sup>

### Results

The independent monitoring that took place midway through the project, notes that staff performance has improved to some degree.

- A 2011 survey<sup>2</sup> carried out by a local consultancy, indicated that out of a sample of 79 respondents, 93 percent were satisfied with the OWSO service; 5 percent of the sample responded that they made informal payments (a marked reduction).
- Monitoring conducted by an NGO<sup>3</sup> in 3 districts nevertheless showed that citizens can be both satisfied and dissatisfied, staff friendly and unfriendly, and informal payments are still being made in some offices.
- An internal national assessment of OWSOs carried out in 2011 noted that staff behavior improves within 6 months of an OWSO office opening, faster than originally envisaged. The assessment noted improvements in line ministry official performance with respect to rules and regulations: (i) starting work on time, (ii) working the full day, (iii) fulfilling roles and responsibilities. It has also been noted that in the same time period, appointed officials have improved internal collaboration and client orientation – serving citizens, instead of acting as patrons (an attitude engrained for many years).

### What works?

**Leadership:** Evidence suggests that if the OWSO Manager has set a good example, staff tend to follow suit. This trend is enhanced if the Municipal/District Governor also pursues high standards of service in the OWSO and oversees compliance with the code of conduct. This was noted in all of the seven OWSOs assessed.

**Threat of sanction:** When misconduct has been identified, it has been quickly sanctioned by warnings and dismissal. The clear enforcement of rules has been key to establishing standards.

**Threat of complaint:** Although the District Ombudsman (DO) role is still emerging as a complaint handling mechanism, it is nevertheless reinforcing an expectation of transparency and client orientation. OWSO staff know the DO is always available for clients to report unofficial

<sup>1</sup> The termination of the MBPI/PMG and establishment of the POC is documented elsewhere and is beyond the scope of this note.

<sup>2</sup> Baseline – Midline Survey in 5 districts conducted by Green Goal in 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Democracy Resource Centre for National Development (DND) presentation. Information compiled from exit surveys and citizen report cards.



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payments and unacceptable behavior, and that the DO is overseen by the District Council.

**Modernization:** Government efforts to decentralize and deconcentrate functions and strengthen the districts through the OWSO initiative – combined with new functions, buildings, equipment has established a “wind of change”. Within this overall reform environment, staff have become more committed to performance standards.

**Flat staffing structure:** Removing some of the hierarchies found in most agencies has supported, not thwarted, accountability. Apart from the OWSO manager or deputy manager, all staff in OWSOs are the same grade, removing the hierarchical relationships that underlie rent-seeking behavior. When they wish to opt out however (e.g. for promotion) they have returned to their own ministries.

### What doesn't work?

A number of factors affect staff performance:

**Decentralized locations.** Decentralization processes that require the transfer of staff to sub-national administrations frequently undergo staffing difficulties. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in those OWSOs that are located in districts well away from the provincial capital, a number of staff – unwilling to incur the time and cost of travel – requested a transfer back to their provincial line department offices. This has created a staff turnover and training effort beyond that originally envisaged.

**Changing attitudes and behaviors.** The concepts of customer orientation, transparency, accountability and integrity are not able to be developed in the short-term training and refresher courses provided. Moreover, the attitudes of others tend to influence OWSO staff behaviour. (e.g. OWSO staff have been asked by senior officials to carry out tasks regularly in their home departments, compromising the time spent and service available in the OWSO).

**Selection criteria.** The delegation of staff by line ministries means that “insiders” process requests (more efficiently), but in many cases the officials delegated were not as skilled as those that remained in the ministries. Staff are also not selected from a group that had previously shown a propensity for executing transparency principles in their work life. Education, skills and experience for the technical position are the main criteria used in selection.

**Salary incentives.** Like other projects in Cambodia, salary supplements in DFGG/OWSO are highly problematic – sustainability, equity and delays to structural compensation reform are all in question. Reports of a slowdown in 2011, when the incentive was not paid, and government reports that donor incentive payments are vital, are countered by indications that OWSOs did not stall without salary incentives (staff did not leave en masse without the salary incentive and the number of

transactions did not significantly decline in the more established offices). While it may be too early to tell, there is currently little evidence to conclude that paying this incentive was an essential ingredient of the reform – there is more to suggest that piloting a sustainable staff compensation package for OWSO staff would have been preferable.

### Recommendations for improvement

As the OWSO ‘project’ become institutionalized as a national office of the OWSO in the Ministry of Interior (MOI), staffing decisions will become critical and will likely result in trade-offs. The difficult decisions currently on the table are as follows:

**District staff.** At this stage the MOI are proposing to staff OWSO positions locally, especially in remote locations, to reduce turnover caused by travel difficulties and create one district level staff cadre. Two problems might arise. There is a risk that officials are more likely to show favoritism and take gifts for speedy or preferential service to fellow district residents. There is also a strong likelihood that district employees – that do not benefit from knowing the ministry systems and people – will not be able process transactions so easily at provincial offices.

**Compensation packages.** The MOI is also considering paying staff performance incentives from the fee revenues of OWSOs. While this government (rather than donor) payment is a step forward, paying officials salary supplements for positions in OWSOs is likely to cause asymmetries within district administrations – just as the district emerges as a key level of sub-national administration. Broader compensation reform is urgent.

Other activities might also be considered:

**Capacity building.** Capacity building needs to focus more intensively on the principles of accountability and transparency that OWSO staff have signed on to in their roles. Training needs to be structured, long term, and supplemented by strong messages and sanctions when principles are not upheld. The appointment of more women in front offices may be an approach (successful in public utilities elsewhere) that OWSO could pilot to see if integrity goals are more easily achieved.

**Awareness raising.** Training and awareness campaigns should focus on the principles of transparency, accountability and integrity. In conjunction with enhanced NGO support for outreach, the role of the OWSO staff could be stepped up to build staff commitment and establish community expectation, and reinforce the service contract between staff (service providers) and users.

*The DFGG Learning Note Series provides quick summaries of the lessons learned in the DFGG project. The information is obtained from progress reports, meetings, workshops and World Bank implementation support. It is anticipated that end evaluations will provide further reflection on the issues identified.*

*DFGG Learning Note 6 is based on lessons documented in the OWSO Annual Progress Report (2011) and World Bank field trips. Written by Janelle Plummer with the OWSO team.*