

Changing attitudes:

The key to improved service delivery in citizen service centers in Cambodia?

The One Window Service Office and District Ombudsmen initiative in Cambodia seeks to provide more efficient, transparent and accountable administrative services at the district level. Achieving this requires a significant change in the mindset of government staff at central and sub-national level as they learn to share licensing authority and re-orient themselves from an attitude of administrator to one of service provider as explicitly called for in Cambodian government policy. This implies a whole new mindset around transparency, accountability, customer-orientation and of course, rent seeking. At the same time, customers, whether individual citizens seeking civil registrations or small businesses obtaining commercial licenses, must also change their expectations and attitudes, becoming more willing to demand better services, avail themselves of complaint mechanisms when necessary, and comply with regulation voluntarily. This Learning Note discusses the role that attitudes have played in achieving results to date and examines the remaining challenges.

What changes are required?

For OWSO staff, there is an adjustment from the low expectations common in most government offices to an attitude of professionalism and customer service orientation being fostered in the OWSO (One Window Service Office). In contrast to common practices in the civil service, the standards of professionalism expected in the OWSO include: arriving on time, working the full business day, providing friendly and respectful service, not demanding informal fees, and working as part of a team. Importantly, the new orientation to serving customers also requires a shift by staff to see their role in a facilitative and positive light, rather than as a way to control citizens' activity or extract personal benefits.

To support this change in attitude, OWSO staff receive training in the service standards and Code of Conduct at the time they are appointed. They also engage in study tours and internships before the OWSO opens, so that new staff members meet and learn from their peers working in an established OWSO. But for sustainable results, more important than training is their motivation to participate in this higher level of service delivery. Staff report that their willingness to join the OWSO and uphold the more rigorous work ethic include: the opportunity to learn something new, their enjoyment of the team spirit (OWSO staff are expected to help each other), and a strong sense of pride in helping establish a new, improved model for administrative services in Cambodia.

For OWSO leadership at district level, important attitude changes include a willingness to enforce the new standards, and take disciplinary measures if required. In particular, the District Governor and OWSO Chief's leadership is vital to achieving and maintaining the customer service orientation and standards of transparency. It is important that s/he sets an example of excellent behavior, particularly being accountable, and shares an attitude with staff that the OWSO is an opportunity to better serve the citizens of Cambodia, and build a better government.



Local leadership must also display a willingness to engage with citizens – through partner non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society groups – and solicit and respect community feedback and oversight. Feedback may come in the form of complaints to the District Ombudsman (DO), through the social accountability tools such as citizen scorecards conducted by the NGOs, or through the monthly 'citizen hours' the District Governor holds to meet with the public. Because accountability mechanisms in Cambodia are generally weak, engaging openly and actively in these activities is an important example of the kind of new attitudes that are contributing to the OWSO success. Local leaders are motivated by the opportunity to better serve their community, and they also view the OWSO as an opportunity to demonstrate the competence of the district administration and prove that they are capable of taking on progressively greater authority under Cambodia's sub national democratic development (decentralization) framework.

For central government officials, an important adjustment is acceptance of the benefit of sharing authority and delegating functions to lower levels of government. Initially, many of the departmental managers argued that districts would not have the competence to successfully handle



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delegated functions to the OWSO. As the roll-out progressed and customer feedback came back overwhelmingly positive, the attitudes of at least some of these officials changed. For those decision-makers represented in the inter-ministerial Technical Advisory Group (TAG), there is clear acceptance that the OWSOs are doing a good job and that if anything, it is the line departments which now need to adopt higher standards. A collaborative attitude among line department staff, at central and provincial level, has also been important in trying to problem solve as the OWSO initiative moved forward.

For citizens and small business owners, changes in attitude include expecting and demanding better service. Citizens traditionally have simply avoided government regulation when they were able, or paid bribes of necessity to get things done (facilitation or speed payments). The OWSO program's outreach activities worked to raise awareness that citizens should expect fast, transparent services and that they have the right to complain to the DO if they find that service standards aren't up to the agreed standards. Citizens are slowly starting to avail themselves of the DO if they are not satisfied with the treatment they receive from OWSO staff, or if deadlines aren't met on time. This bodes well for more systematic changes in how citizens expect to be served by government offices.

Remaining Challenges

Some businesses remain reluctant to adopt the new systems. While better service may seem intuitively attractive to customers, it implies refraining from offering informal payments for special treatment, and it means *voluntarily* complying with regulatory requirements. Both of these may incur higher costs in the short-run. Businesses in particular continue to have a mindset that by paying extra they can get things done faster, since for them time is money. And many business owners resist coming to the OWSO voluntarily since they are used to having the line departments come to their place of work and act as a "one stop" there, be it accompanied with coercion and/or solicitation for informal payment.

Citizens are still building trust in complaint mechanisms. In general, the number of complaints on OWSO performance is still very low. This is partly a reflection of the general satisfaction with the OWSO, but it may also be a result of continued hesitation or lack of familiarity with the idea of holding government accountable. After Cambodia's troubled history, critiquing government performance does not come easily to citizens. Overcoming fear of providing open feedback is key to the development of accountability and responsiveness, and demanding better service that will evolve over time.

Heavy dependence on salary incentives to generate improved performance. While OWSO staff have shown changes in mindset, it has been difficult to maintain better standards by relying solely on intangible rewards. Government leadership commonly justifies the low service standards in Cambodia to the low levels of civil service pay. When the salary incentives received by OWSO staff lapsed in 2013 as a result of a broad-based donor decision, the attitude of many OWSO staff was that the old behaviors should become acceptable again. Many OWSO Chiefs were unwilling or unable to enforce the improved standards in the absence of salary top-ups. Although OWSOs still provide a significantly improved service over a year on, this issue demonstrated the embedded attitudes towards good service as an "extra" rather than the standard operating procedure of government or the normal right of citizens.

It has been difficult for some OWSO staff to adopt an attitude of experimentation. OWSO support from the DFGG project was also meant to provide space for learning and development of these new models, but the traditional top-down framework meant that this innovative model was replicated according to strict rules. Reflecting on lessons learned in ongoing activities, and adapting the model to different circumstances has sometimes been difficult for the national team and line departments to accept or encourage. Experience suggests that this was one innovation too many, given the attitudinal change already envisaged.

Some decision-makers still view OWSO as a competition for power and rent-seeking. Reaching agreements on the scope of delegation to the OWSOs has been a major challenge. At both central and provincial level, staff of line departments have an interest in maintaining control of regulatory administration. Occasional conflict between provincial line department staff and OWSO staff over the right to issue licenses to businesses demonstrates the gap that remains in changing the mindsets of officials – towards facilitation rather than control. Turf disputes of this nature still remain, even at the central government where the MOI has been engaged in negotiations with various line departments to expand the scope of OWSO functions. Continued reforms will depend in part on the high level of support the decentralization agenda receives in the future.

Attitudinal change is key to sustaining transparent, customer-oriented and corruption free services. These changes are required on the part of government staff in the OWSO, central government line ministries delegating functions to the OWSO, but also by customers. These changes are reinforced by the proof of impact on the ground but this will take time to become established.

The DFGG Learning Note Series provides quick summaries of the lessons learned in the field. The information is obtained from progress reports, workshops and World Bank Implementation Support.

DFGG Learning Note 18 reflects on lessons learned by the OWSO team. Written by the Office of One Window Service Affairs with Erin Weiser. Series Editor, Janelle Plummer