

Citizen Service Centers – Systems and Processes

Lessons from the implementation of One Window Service Offices in Cambodia

Providing transparent services through a local Citizen Service Center mechanism requires process re-engineering and the development of new management systems. This learning note describes the various systems and processes that were put in place for the One Window Service Office (OWSO) initiative in Cambodia and how they have fared in reaching the objective of delivering accountable and transparent administrative services to citizens. This is an important model for improved service delivery, not only for district government but also for other government offices providing services to the people of Cambodia.

The One Window Service Offices, financed by the Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project in Cambodia, required the development of a new generation of systems and processes. These included: the cycle for applying, processing and delivering administrative services; technical support and capacity development processes; communications/outreach processes;¹ monitoring and oversight systems; and policy-level coordination and oversight. Both internal reflection and external evaluations provided constructive feedback to the OWSO management team on the effectiveness of these systems.

What Works Well?

Service delivery work flow and transparency measures.

The service delivery system was designed to improve citizen's trust in local government and the efficiency and transparency of administrative services provision. Applications for licenses, together with supporting documents, are submitted at a front office staffed by local government personnel. The intake officer answers questions, helps fill in required forms, and ensures that the all required supporting documents are present. The applicant pays the cashier according to the displayed list of fees and is issued an official receipt. The intake officer is given a copy of the receipt and submits the application to the relevant back office staff. (Each of the ten line departments that have delegated functions to the OWSO assigns a back office staff person to process the applications under the authority of that line department.) The customer is meant to collect their license, permit, or registration at the front desk according to the posted processing times. The entire OWSO – front and back office – are visible to customers and other staff members.

This stands in contrast to the way administrative services have been provided in Cambodia in the past, where one

determined with the customer (often at the place of business); fees are often the result of negotiation rather than both parties observing official rates.



OWSO customers at the front desk, able to see into the Back Office

Technical support and capacity development. Since the approach to service delivery (both customer service expectations and the processing work flow) is new to Cambodia, it was important that all OWSO staff receive training to meet their responsibilities and internalize the Code of Conduct. As discussed in Learning Note 18, the national support team delivers a comprehensive curriculum on the expected governance standards and technical issues related to processing the services. This training is given to all new staff and local government leaders, along with study tours and internships at existing OWSO. Following the initial training, backstopping is provided by technical advisors who visit regularly to provide mentoring and oversight. Horizontal learning for OWSOs to learn from each other takes place during regular workshops. Over 90% of staff surveyed by the national team stated that the training was vital for them to be able to fulfill their new functions.

Monitoring and evaluation. Apart from the monitoring visits by national staff, each OWSO Chief and District Ombudsman (DO) is required to submit monthly reports on the OWSO's operations. OWSO Chiefs are using the M&E data to analyze demand for services and the national team uses the data to analyze, among other things, the levels and kind of complaints received by the DO. In addition to this quantitative monitoring data, the project partnered with NGOs to conduct citizen scorecards of customer satisfaction with the OWSO. Finally, external evaluators have conducted mid and end reviews to provide lessons and recommendations for improvements.

¹ See DFGG Learning Note 19 on OWSO Communications and Outreach.



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External oversight. The DO’s role is to oversee the OWSO performance and represent citizens in matters related to the local government administration. The DO physically monitors OWSO operations and accepts and investigates complaints. S/he also provides information to customers. The DO works with the OWSO Chief, the district administration and Council to address issues related to poor performance of OWSO staff. To date, DOs have received few complaints, but those that were received were treated seriously, resulting in 4 staff dismissals during the project.

Policy setting and coordination. The OWSO/DO initiative is one of the more concrete aspects of Cambodia’s decentralization policy. Reaching agreement on which services should be delegated, and coordinating between the OWSO (which is under the District administration) and the line departments (which retain authority over the back office staff and the regulations) was a crucial and challenging facet of the project. This role is played by the inter-ministerial Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which reviews and advises on new OWSO policies and guidelines including the delegation of functions, fee setting, coordinating with relevant ministries, line departments and sub-national administrations, and monitoring progress in implementation. As argued in other Learning Notes, the high level representation on the TAG, whose chair is an MOI Secretary of State, has been important to its success. At provincial level, coordination was initially conducted on an ad hoc basis through the office of the provincial governor. Recently, this role has been entrusted to the Provincial Technical Facilitation Committee² of the Provincial Council.

What could be improved?

OWSOs as a closed system. Initial expectations for the project were that the OWSO/DO model would be modified during implementation to reflect learning and different contexts across the country. In reality, the same operational setup and services are being implemented in all OWSOs despite evidence that this model may not be appropriate for all municipalities and districts. This suggests that the OWSOs and DOs are functioning as a closed rather than an open system.³ Due to legal implications and challenging collaboration among the 10 different ministries involved, process improvement⁴ and organizational learning⁵ has been difficult. Moreover,

despite efforts to measure results, the M&E framework has encountered a number of problems that have limited its effectiveness in informing managers on what areas of the model need amendment.

Efficiency gains could be increased. The delegation of functions has not been accompanied by streamlining of the regulations themselves. The omission of regulatory review during the functional assignment process means that many of the licenses, permits, and registrations provided by the OWSO are overlapping or burdensome. Another challenge is that the OWSO often does not function as a true One Stop, since some of the steps and supporting documents are not delegated. Finally, organizational efficiency could also be increased by reducing the number of back office staff. Most of the approval processes do not require highly specialized staff, and could be implemented by district staff trained to perform multiple functions.

Meaningful delegation. Finally, because approval over licenses, permits, and registrations has traditionally been associated with authority and rent-seeking, there is widespread reluctance to delegate steps, such as inspections. Conflict between line departments and OWSO staff over who has the right to regulate certain businesses (the cut off is currently determined by size of business rather than complexity of license) occurs at the provincial level. The OWSO was created partly to end onsite visits, which open the door to informal payments, but these have reemerged. Resolving this issue, preferably by delegating all licenses, regardless of enterprise size, to the OWSO, will be important to improving the system.

The Way Forward

Cambodian regulations now require that all government service delivery points begin following the OWSO practice of posting fees and processing times and issuing official receipts. This illustrates the broader impact the OWSO operations are having on public service delivery in Cambodia, but it is still not clear how other Ministries will execute this directive. Moving forward, with the completion of DFGG project financing, OWSO will need to reexamine the sustainability of training and M&E systems. The TAG is also urged to consider simplifying regulatory requirements and supporting documentation to further streamline processes.

The systems and procedures in the OWSO have set a new standard for service delivery in Cambodia that is having broader impact. This was achieved by tangible, relatively simple measures to increase transparency and accountability. Despite limitations, the new systems are also raising customer expectations for more customer friendly service delivery.

2 As defined in Chapter 3 of the Law on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans (article 123 – 126).
3 Open systems perform processes that allow them to adapt to constraints, threats and opportunities, through improving their human and physical capital, or obtaining information needed to transform capability into desired services.
4 Process improvement occurs when people analyze how they think, communicate, perform and add value to their organization.
5 “Organizational learning occurs when there is a capacity or processes within an organization to maintain or improve performance based on experience” (Edwin Nevis, Anthony DeBella and Janet Gould, from MIT Organizational Learning Center).