

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN CAMBODIA: A REVIEW OF THE ONE WINDOW SERVICE OFFICE (OWSO) IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Public service delivery in developing countries is a fundamental component of state-building, governance reform, and poverty reduction. Cambodia's shift from a centralized post-conflict administration to decentralized governance has been characterised by considerable organisational reform. Central to these endeavours is the One Window Service Office (OWSO) programme, a local government provision system which adopts a single-agency approach to increase transparency, accountability and effectiveness in local public administration services. The article offers an account of the OWSO model in Cambodia according to IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion). This paper analyzes OWSO's performance on service quality and citizen satisfaction, based on a systematic review of research findings in academic literature, governmental reports, and international development assessments. It also argues that while the OWSO has successfully streamlined administrative procedures, reduced informal payments, and generated substantial state revenue, the ongoing effectiveness of OWSO is hampered by short staffing levels, poor digital infrastructure and enduring rural and urban divides. Comparison of regional models in Southeast Asia like Indonesia at PTSP and ARTA in the Philippines shows the importance of strong digital integration and sustained political will. The article concludes with policy recommendations aimed at furthering the public administration reform agenda in Cambodia.

Keywords: *Decentralization, Governance Reform, New Public Management, One Window Service Office, Public Service Delivery*

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of public administration in Cambodia was deep, starting from a post-war country with next-to-no institutional structure since 1979, through to a multi-dimensional developing country seeking to create democratic society while integrating more effectively economically. After the establishment of liberal democracy in 1993, the RGC undertook an ambitious programme of state-building and the re-formulation of the connection between the state and the population (Korm & Thun, 2019). Two of the most important of such efforts are the decentralization and deconcentration (D&D) reform to transfer administrative responsibilities, resources, and decision-making authority from the central government to sub-national administrations (World Bank, 2022). Rather than just an administrative overhaul, this shift from an overly centralized, top-down model is truly a redefinition of social contract, in a fundamentally new way at a democratic level in Cambodia to allow for local communities and democracy to increase from the local level in terms of empowerment, the right of local communities to vote on their own.

Central to this decentralization agenda is the need to make public service delivery efficient. Traditionally, public administration in Cambodia has been bureaucratic, lengthy, clunky, opaque, and informal payments-ridden, which in turn, have destroyed public trust and stymied private sector development (Girishankar et al., 2001). Basic documents such as birth certificates or business licenses, or land titles were required for citizens to file and secure--often requiring them to visit several provincial departments that all provided ample opportunities for rent seeking practices by the officials. In the face of these systemic issues, the RGC, together with other international development partners such as the World Bank, implemented the One Window Service Office (OWSO) system. Conducted as a pilot scheme in the municipalities of Battambang and Siem Reap in 2005, the OWSO was established as a "one-stop shop", to integrate an assortment of administrative services in one convenient venue (World Bank, 2013a).

The OWSO sits squarely in the theoretical context of New Public Management (NPM), a paradigm that arose in the late 20th century advocating the use of new types of public and private sector management. NPM focuses on citizen-centric service delivery, as well as measuring performance, cutting back on bureaucracy (Araral & Asquer, 2015), and the emergence of market-based competition in government agencies. The OWSO seeks to create a culture of accountability and responsiveness by changing employment in government from bureaucratic, authoritative "officials" to more focused on service-based "civil servants" (Neb, 2017). The mechanism is based on subsidiarity (the idea that a central authority exists in a subsidiary capacity, such that it performs only those activities which might not readily work well at a closer or local level). By bringing services down to the people the OWSO streamlines the interfaces between the state and the people, in principle reducing transaction costs at the lower levels and leading to minimized expenses on both the government and the public (World Bank, 2013b).

OWSO is also embedded within the wider policy literatures on governance and civil service reform in third world nation states. Academics like Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2017) have noted that administrative reforms in developing countries tend to induce "isomorphic mimicry" with respect to reform of governance that results in governments mimicking external effective institutions without building the functional

infrastructure that these countries currently need (Andrews et al., 2017). Cambodia's experience with the OWSO is an illustrative case to study to explore the extent that structural reforms might lead to true change in administrative culture or whether those reforms become mere symbolic façades that mask persistent institutional problems. This conflict between form and function is a central theme of the central analysis examined in this paper. However, for all of the theoretical promise and initial achievements of the OWSO, the concept and execution of these significant reforms in a developing country can be fraught with difficulties. Governance Cambodia is still struggling with significant systemic problems including local capacity weaknesses, deep political patronage networks, and a budding digital infrastructure ill-suited to the modern era of e-government (Transparency International, 2025). In addition, the OWSO, after expanding drastically over the last 20 years from a couple of trial municipalities to a nationwide coverage of the national structure, have also been the subject of controversy about its consistency in effecting it in different part of the country. Such a situation is especially pertinent in rural Cambodia, where most of the Cambodians live and the infrastructure and human resources are frequently at their weakest (World Bank, 2017). The gap between the policy architecture drafted in Phnom Penh and the reality of being implemented in these remote districts illustrates the ongoing difficulties in Cambodia's state-building process.

The purpose of this paper is to critically appraise the execution and effect of the OWSO in Cambodia. The study combines existing empirical data and analysis of government documents and policy papers, to explore the key research questions raised by prior research into: (1) How much better has the OWSO improved the efficiency, transparency and quality of public services in Cambodia? (2) What are the most prominent structural, political and capacity-related challenges that prevented the best performance of OWSO mechanism? (3) What is Cambodia's OWSO like the one-stop services model for neighboring Southeast Asian countries, and what lessons can be drawn from these regional comparisons? The following sections are organized on the basis of the IMRAD format, and contain the methodology used for the review, combined results of the implementation discussion and reflection on broader implications for the reform of (hopefully) public administration in Cambodia and in the context of other contexts currently in development.

METHOD

This study uses a systematic literature review and document analysis on the practice towards the implementation of the One Window Service Office (OWSO) in Cambodia. The research is qualitative exploratory, with the objective to reconcile information across a variety of sources in order to build a holistic view of how the OWSO operates and its challenges. Well accepted as a systematic method of combining evidence from various sources in order to discern patterns, contradictions and gaps in the existing body of knowledge, systematic literature reviews have become a well-established methodology for the research (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Data Collection

Data were extracted from multiple secondary sources to guarantee a quality and a complex-based analysis. Primary sources included: scholarly literature, governmental &

institutional reports, international development publications & media sources. The peer-reviewed research in selected field journals and conference papers, academic papers on public administration reform, decentralization, and service quality in Cambodia were identified from databases such as ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories. They also leveraged key search terms such as “One Window Service Office,” “Cambodia public service delivery,” “decentralization reform Cambodia,” and “governance transparency Southeast Asia” and official documents from the Royal Government of Cambodia (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018): Rectangular Strategy Phase IV (2018–2023), National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD), annual reports from the Ministry of Interior to give the policy context and official statistics about expansion of the One Window Service Office (OWSO) and the government revenue generation. (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018) We relied on reports, learning notes and project evaluations from world organizations—specifically with reference to World Bank's Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) Project—to provide the initial context and structure for the establishment of OWSO (World Bank, 2015). Recent Cambodian news-sources such as those in the Khmer Times, the Phnom Penh Post and other sources, reported the most recent statistics on the volume of service, the revenue and the most recent digital initiatives of 2024 and 2025 (David, 2025).

Analytical Framework

The analysis was conducted using the SERVQUAL model, which stands as a recognised model for measuring service quality by five dimensions: the tangibility, the reliability, the responsiveness, the assurance and the empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Launched by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) to assess the private sector, SERVQUAL has been translated well to assess services provided in the public sector, drawing on existing empirical evaluation of the OWSO in the case of Cambodia (Seng, 2013). This framework offers a systematic way of assessing citizen perceptions of service quality in relation to expectations, which reflects the subjective nature of any administrative reform outcomes.

In addition, the study adopts a comparative policy analysis-type approach in order to place Cambodia OWSO's context of the larger Southeast Asia context. Through observing other similar one-stop shop models in Indonesia, that of Pelayanan Terpadu Satu Pintu (PTSP), and the Philippines' Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) initiatives, the research found shared regional constraints and learning in public service delivery reform (Hasan et al., 2019). This comparative aspect advances the account by locating Cambodia's experience within a regional governance framework and indicating where Cambodia should be able to benefit from the experience of its neighbouring countries.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were chosen according to clearly defined criteria and criteria for inclusiveness and exclusion because they are essential for ensuring current relevance, and quality of the review. Literature directly contributing to the debate on the OWSO in Cambodia, that related to wider public administration reforms of the service delivery sector in Cambodia, empirical assessments of citizen satisfaction and comparison of regional

models were incorporated. Priority was given to works of 2010 to 2025 to illustrate how things are currently being implemented, with foundational theoretical publications from earlier periods being included as well. Excluding were studies that analyzed only macroeconomic indicators without reference to governance and public administration, and of old reports that didn't correspond to post-2010 D&D reform phases.

RESULTS

These findings from the literature and institutional data present a multifaceted picture of the implementation of OWSO in Cambodia. Results are organized into 3 general thematic areas: the structural scale-up and operational effectiveness of the OWSO, the effect on quality and citizen satisfaction, and recurring obstacles preventing the undertaking from being a fully functional project.

Structural Expansion and Operational Achievements

OWSO has evolved from a pilot program to become one of the major components of Cambodia's sub-national administrative environment. The OWSO was initially developed with the funding of World Bank's Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project, which envisaged the sub-national level transfers of public utility to district and city government departments with the stated goal of moving power far closer to the people who needed it (World Bank, 2015). The initiative aimed to minimize the time and cost of obtaining permits, licenses, and civil documents by setting a single window for administrative services. It took a long time for political negotiations in the early stages of the project - the provincial line ministries were not too keen to delegate administrative and fees control that they thought would be lucrative.

Though the OWSO has started off to run with some serious problems, its structural expansion has been huge and persistent. It has allowed 10 ministries to delegate 38 administrative functions of 186 specific services to the administrative and municipal regimes in district and municipalities (World Bank, 2013b). These ministries will be Commerce, Tourism, Culture and Fine Arts, Industries, Mines and Energy, Land Management, Public Works and Transport, and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests. In 2023, OWSOs were in operation in all 25 Capital-Provinces and all 204 Municipalities, Districts and Khans (MDKs) in the country (UCLG, 2023). This nationwide coverage is a large improvement in the physical access of the state to the average Cambodian citizen. Realizing that the geographical isolation of district level-offices continues to be a major obstacle for rural people, the government has aggressively sought to upgrade the services offered by OWSO to the commune level, which is the lowest tier of formal administration in Cambodia. The first 24 commune-level OWSOs were set up in May 2021 within Phnom Penh, Kep, and Kampot by the Ministry of Interior which predominantly deal with essential services including civil registry and National ID processing (David, 2025). It continued to expand aggressively and, with a further 500 communes nationwide were planned for added OWSO services in 2024 that saw the extension of OWSO to another 500 communes countrywide as a result of which vital services of the state of power in the state directly into local communities (Phnom Penh Post, 2024).

OWSO has proven operationally it has proved itself in practical workable

processes processing administrative requests and in the generation of state revenues, being fully operational, the department of the OWSO is a functional administrative unit. In the report of Ministry of Interior in 2025, more than 5 million independent services by the nationwide OWSO mechanism served residents, the Ministry of Interior reports that the service of the state in 2024, providing the Ministry of Interior with over 5 million people, of the total 141 billion Riels of total 141B Riels (approximately 35.3 million USD) in revenue (David, 2025). The distribution of these services indicates that the mechanism is not centralized, and that particular demands vary depending on the administrative layers. As far as the capital-provincial level, 885,117 services were rendered that resulted in 130 billion Riels (about \$32.5 million USD). The services that were provided tend to be more complex and tend to be higher-value transactions like major construction permits, registering commercial business, or land titling. At the city-district-commune level, 4,421,231 services were rendered, generating 11 billion Riels (roughly \$2.8 million USD) and this is in line with many everyday citizen needs such as birth and death certificates, minor local business permits, and basic legalizations (David, 2025).

Data for the month in recent times also further emphasize this volume, as well as the extent of service offered per sector. In November 2024, the capital-provincial OWSOs fulfilled more than 600,000 services, across 14 sectors and subsectors. Administrative work, agriculture as well as urban planning constituted the most active areas to the extent that they reflect the process of economic development and urbanization in Cambodian provinces today (Khmer Times, 2024a). At the city-district level, civil registration constituted the bulk of 300,000 services offered in the same month, exemplifying the pivotal role that the OWSO has in obtaining legal identity for citizens (Khmer Times, 2024a). Now, over 300 services in 17 sectors is provided and it is the basis of 36 offices throughout the country (Khmer Times, 2024b).

Impact on Service Quality and Citizen Satisfaction

It has found in most empirical studies that for the quality services delivered by OWSO, there are generally positive measures on citizens' own satisfaction which is in marked contrast with the traditional view of civil servants of Cambodia. A seminal study that applies the SERVQUAL model was conducted in the Takhmao municipality, and discovered that clients were satisfied with OWSO service delivery as indicated by positive gap between what they expected and what they found (Seng, 2013). These findings would seem relevant in other circumstances. Similar findings have been observed in other districts, indicating that the citizen-state interface has improved relatively broadly, although not uniformly. More recently, Prak et al. (2025) revealed that OWSO has resulted in simplified administrative flows and accessibility to citizens, namely in the reduction of manual steps involved in performing daily administrative activities.

The enhancement of service quality can be largely tied to a structural change in the OWSO's shape, which focuses on transparency, predictability and less discretionary power of individual bureaucrats. Among these innovations is the open counter system, whereby transactions occur at open counters in easily accessible, well-lit public offices, replacing the previous system of conducting business in closed provincial offices or even private residences, which naturally allowed for opaque negotiations and rent-seeking (World Bank,

2013). The environment is open and fosters a professional environment as well as mutual accountability between employees and citizens. In addition, a schedule of official fees and expected processing times is permanently posted on public noticeboards in every OWSO. The mandate is clearly visible in all offices: “do not pay more than the official fee” (World Bank, 2013). This transparency has been vital to mitigating the rise of informal, under-the-table payments that had marked public administration and been the regressive taxation on the poor in Cambodia (Transparency International Cambodia, 2023).

Furthermore, the addition of the District Ombudsman (DO) mechanism enhances the accountability architecture of the OWSO. It allows citizens to request information, clarification of procedures and complaint about staff performance, service delay or requesting an informal fee (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018). Having the DO is an effective deterrent to corruption and also gives citizens a place in the process to engage with the system, enhancing the overall accountability. Public launch events and market campaigns; Citizen outreach programs have been used to promote both the OWSO and the DO (Plummer & Weiser, 2015). Moreover, the intentional change in culture in organizations from the "official" to the "civil servants", has also allowed for a more comfortable ecosystem to be created in the organizational environment. Citizens commonly state that the OWSO staff are generally polite, supportive, and ready to help citizens navigate administrative and process orientations, and the system of services consolidation provides citizens with access to all services and significantly reduces transaction costs through simplification by cutting out the need to traverse different administrative departments at all levels of government (Prak et al., 2025).

Persistent Challenges and Limitations

Notwithstanding the successful structures and commendable operating statistics and encouraging citizen feedback, the review highlights some major systemic challenges on the effectiveness and sustainability of OWSO's overall operation. Cambodia is not uniquely the scene for these challenges, which are compounded by the particular historical, institutional and development context of the country.

Another, recurring and prominent theme in the literature is the challenge of inadequate staffing and capacity at the sub-national level. Administrative tasks have been legally devolved to district and commune authorities, but the skills and financial resources to transfer have frequently not kept pace with the demands of the policy (Yin, 2025). OWSO staff work under heavy workloads, with little assistance to address a high volume of diverse requests. The varied range of services that are delegated via various line ministries, given the evolving regulatory environment, requires continuous and immediate capacity building and technical capacity development for the workforce (World Bank, 2013b). The absence of performance-based incentives also makes it challenging to retain qualified staff at the local level, leading to turnover rates and knowledge loss of the institutional setting.

Even though the Royal Government of Cambodia has introduced the ambitious Digital Government Policy 2022–2035, the OWSO implementation of digital transformation is still very uneven and fragmented (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2022). Although all capital and provincial OWSOs now have access to the Payment Hub

system, and the online application portals have been trialed in 12 provincial capitals, most district and especially commune level OWSOs use manual and paper-based processes to a large extent (David, 2025). Such absence of strong digital infrastructure hinders operational efficiency, makes it more challenging to maintain data management and inter-agency information exchange and limits e-government services from being provided evenly. This dependence on paper retains weaknesses of document loss/forgery, and localized inefficiencies that compromise the integrity of the information in the administrative archive.

The implementation and quality of the OWSO is not level across the country either. Cambodia is home to a large rural-urban gap with over 90% of the nation's poor living in rural areas (World Bank, 2017). Rural citizens are often faced with significant geographical and infrastructural barriers in the ability to access OWSOs at the district-level. In addition, physical infrastructure, internet connectivity and the quality of the staff for remote offices is usually far inferior to that in city centres (Chap, 2021). Although the recent scaling up to communes was intended to overcome this closeness problem, the new rural offices in a new setting do still present an enormous problem – to make sure that they are available at least as much as the ones in cities. We could build a two-tiered system where city dwellers will benefit from efficient, digitized services while rural residents will ultimately struggle with the same quality of care.

Most importantly, while the OWSO has made some positive strides to decrease petty informal payments with transparent fee structures and open counters, corruption persists as a pervasive problem that is embedded in the larger governance framework of Cambodia. According to Transparency International (2024), Cambodia ranked 163rd out of 180 countries on the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating that there still exists severe problems. Inconsistent implementation of uniform processes and policies, insufficient protection for whistle-blowers, and persistence of strong political patronage structures may erode the integrity of the OWSO. This is particularly true in highly volatile and high-value-added areas such as land management, construction permits and commercial licensing in which there are significant stakes at stake and the pressure to circumvent traditional OWSO processes through informal means persists (Kaufmann et al., 2010).

DISCUSSION

The introduction of the One Window Service Office in Cambodia has been a major turning point on the road to modernized, democratic public administration in the nation. The results indicated of this in-depth review, by general principle it is believed, reveal that the OWSO has managed to accomplish its objective to organize administrative services so as to enhance physical availability and procedural transparency so as to expose it to the public more easily. Yet viewing these findings in terms of New Public Management and regional practice will elucidate deeper, more subtle and complex considerations of the next stage in governance reform in Cambodia.

The Effectiveness of the One-Stop Shop Model in the Post-conflict World.

The accomplishment of the OWSO to produce a large amount of state revenue and millions of transactions each year confirms the one-stop shop model which has proved to be a superior aid for the construction of states and process of institutional consolidation within post-conflict and under-developed settings. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (2009) maintain that governance reforms in such fragile environments need to emphasise a policy of repairing state legitimacy and citizens trust, both often destroyed by decades of conflict and predatory behaviour of the state (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2009). Through the shift of administrative transactions from closed doors to open counters, a consistent fee system and service timeframes, the OWSO has taken direct action against the opaqueness which underlies petty corruption and disillusionment. Data on citizen satisfaction level have come in a direct result such as the positive citizen satisfaction, according to empirical studies, such as Seng (2013), Prak et al. (2025), that the reform of this kind has had a direct impact on the public's experience of state responsiveness and fairness: these structural changes have led to an observable and durable change in the public perception of the responsiveness and fairness of the state (Seng, 2013; Prak et al., 2025).

Yet the Cambodian OWSO exemplifies a stark instance of the limitations of importing NPM principles into contexts where institutional capacity lags behind political dynamics. NPM focuses on efficacy, measures of performance, and customer orientation without necessarily taking into account baseline bureaucratic competence, strong legal structures, and political-administrative separation (Araral & Asquer, 2015). In Cambodia, the transfer of functions to the districts (administrative deconcentration) has often outpaced the development of local human resources, technical capacity, and real financial independence (political and fiscal decentralization) (World Bank, 2022). As a result, the OWSO is often a "front office" that stands for efficiency and citizens, disguising how a "back office" continues to grapple with crippling capacity constraints, outdated manual processes, and convoluted, and often resistive, inter-ministerial coordination. This dynamic aligns with Andrews et al.'s (2017) notion of isomorphic mimicry, in which the external form of a reform gets adopted without achieving the desired functional change (Andrews et al., 2017).

For the role of World Bank DFGG project and the process to fuel the OWSO is worth examining as well. International development aid played a key role in launching and growing the mechanism, however the durability of the OWSO will finally rest on domestic political will and institutional stewardship. It is an important governance dilemma for Cambodia to navigate, from donor-supported pilot to institutionalized national program. The government's decision to scale-up the OWSO to a commune level is an encouraging indication of such ownership, but it will be the quality of expansion that will determine the sustainability of the approach's sustainability (David, 2025).

Comparative Regional Perspectives: The Digital Imperative

Comparing the OWSO of Cambodia with efforts elsewhere in Southeast Asia also provides useful context and also pinpoints important aspects for further improvement in the future. Indonesia's Pelayanan Terpadu Satu Pintu (PTSP) and the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) of the Philippines have much in common in regard to their basic

objectives in the provision of enhanced government services to the citizens in the country and enhancing and reducing the friction of the bureaucracy (Hasan et al., 2019). Both models are digital transformation platforms, which have included online application portals, electronic payments, and real-time monitoring systems that have shortened processing times and enhanced user experience to a considerable extent.

One important difference in the extent of success and maturity of these regional models is the degree of full-scale digital integration. In Vietnam, the one-stop-shop system has been well-intertwined with the national e-government portals and centralized repositories where digital processing of the system is completed from end to end with digital processing of administrative procedures, payment gateway, and real-time application tracking in real-time. In comparison, the OWSO in Cambodia is in the transitional, hybrid stages. The Ministry of Interior has also introduced online complaint platforms and extended IT schemes to provincial capitals, but the bulk of OWSO service activities at district and commune level continue to be physical and paper-based (David, 2025). For Cambodia to accomplish the efficiency, data privacy and convenience enjoyed by advanced ASEAN peers, the country urgently needs to scale-up the deployment of its Digital Government Policy 2022-2035 and a full adoption of its OWSO framework where the country will transition from small scale pilots in IT, from pilot projects to a national integrated web-based digital system. According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators framework, enhanced government performance an economic variable captured by digital service delivery is positively linked with wider economic development performance, thus offering a strong strategic argument for investment (Kaufmann et al., 2010).

Addressing the Equity Gap: Beyond Physical Proximity

The recent move to extend OWSO at a commune level is a commendable and necessary response to Cambodia's stark rural-urban gap. This approach makes direct delivery of civil registration and ID processing a tool with which the government is deliberately providing immediate support to the communes that may alleviate the geographic and financial limitations of the rural poor (Phnom Penh Post, 2024). Legal identity through accessible civil registration is not just about convenience; it is a condition of all citizens' access to social services, as well as access to social service, political rights and participation in the formal economy.

However, the physical proximity would not lead to the delivery of the service in just and fair ways. Ensuring commune-level OWSOs are properly staffed by trained personnel, funded consistently, and digitally connected to national databases is essential. Without these pillars of support, we run the real risk of establishing a two-tiered service system – urban centres are supplied with high-quality, data, and digital services, while rural areas experience under-resourced, slow, and manual offices. And authentic equity goes beyond an office to an equitable sharing of state resources and capabilities for service quality regardless of geographical location. It is well-trod by the World Bank (2017) that enhancing service delivery in Cambodia involves simultaneously dealing with the three intertwined reforms of decentralization, public administration reform, and public financial management (World Bank, 2017). There is work to be done on all three fronts to close the equity gap.

Recommendations of Policy Reform for Sustained Reform.

There are several particular policy recommendations derived from the synthesized results of this review, which may be directed toward the improvement of the implementation of OWSO and the achievement of the wider goals of Cambodian public administration reform. Such recommendations are in place to cover the structural weaknesses presented in the findings, and to place the OWSO in the spotlight as a symbol of modern, fair, digital public service provision.

The RGC needs to make the quick introduction of the Payment Hub and online application systems to all district and commune-level OWSOs a priority. Creating a universal, secure national service central portal for OWSO, coupled with an integrated civil registry database, would save significant processing time, reduce duplicate entries of data, and create even fewer opportunities for informal cash payments by taking physical cash receipt out of the equation. Ongoing, targeted and institutionalized training programs such as these of OWSO personnel are also required, especially when new and complex functions are delegated from line ministries. To address the high attrition and the need of acquiring skilled employees to sub-national level, the Government would also consider the use of pay based on performance and defined career development paths into the civil service infrastructure. More operational independence and more investigative resources, together with legal protections, are required to make the job of the District Ombudsman more effective in meeting citizen complaints. Finally, sub-national administrations need to have more control over the revenues earned from OWSO offices to ensure the long-term sustainability and responsiveness of OWSO and that districts and communes retain more of what is collected and use it in local OWSO infrastructure development (technological updating) by paying for the development of new systems and maintenance of the existing operational staff.

CONCLUSION

The creation and the extension of the One Window Service Office (OWSO) is one of Cambodia's most prominent and ambitious aspects of its reform in decentralization and deconcentration. As a structural departure from the opaque, highly centralized, and often predatory administrative practices of decades past, this represents a substantial shift. We provide this thorough review to show that the OWSO has achieved its three main goals of improving the on-ground accessibility, procedural transparency, and operational efficiency of public service delivery. As a result it has built high citizen satisfaction and is a major means of state-level revenue generation, delivering over 5 million services and taking in \$35.3 million in revenue just in 2024. Through charging fees and establishing open-counter systems, and an independent grievance system for the District Ombudsman, OWSO has done well in minimizing petty corruption with the aim at restoring citizen confidence at grassroots level.

However, we are not far along the path to effective, fair and modern public service provision in Cambodia. Today, the effectiveness of the OWSO is undermined by systemic human resource shortfalls, lopsided digital integration, lack of coherent and even coverage of the digital landscape and by the general nature of entrenched rural and urban inequality.

Such a wide gap between the OWSO's compelling operation efficiency and the lives of ordinary citizens in distant rural locations illustrates the necessity of a holistic approach to reform that concerns not only physical service offices but also services' quality, accessibility, reliability and online level of innovation as well.

In order to realize that there's great potential for the 'one-stop shop' mode and to conform to the digital maturity of governance in Southeast Asia, Cambodia has to be pursuing further more aggressive reform in the overhaul of its administrative services at the national level within the digital and IT space. It also needs to reinforce its determination to build capacity and allocate resources at the sub-national level. In the longer run, the success and development of the OWSO depends on the enduring political will to shift from administrative deconcentration to the actual democratic and fiscal decentralization for the purpose of guaranteeing that the Cambodian state will engage each of its citizens fairly, efficiently and openly throughout the 21st century. Well-resourced and digitally transformed, the OWSO may be something much more than just a model for Cambodia but a blueprint for public service delivery reform in the developing world.

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