

Beneficiary and Third Party Monitoring of District Services:

Enhancing the performance of One Window Service Offices through monitoring and awareness building

Beneficiary and third party monitoring of government services is new to Cambodia, but recent efforts at the district level have paved the way for local NGOs to venture into this field successfully. As a part of an initiative to provide transparent and accountable administrative services at the district level, a DFGG grant stimulated a partnership between the One Window Service Office (OWSO) and a provincial NGO. This partnership is unique in so much as it supported government in promoting awareness of citizens through outreach and mobilization activities. At the same time the arrangement provided an important monitoring and feedback mechanism. Although this dual role creates a complex set of activities and a multi-sided relationship with the One Window Service Office (OWSO) and District Administration, it has been very effective in improving accountability and responsiveness. The approach is now being replicated to OWSOs in 24 provinces – not only through grants to NGOs, but also by OWSO directly contracting NGOs.

The design of the Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project included a non-state actors component that channeled grants to NGOs to conduct social accountability activities. “Partnership grants” were established to facilitate improved collaboration between non-state actors and those state institutions engaged in the DFGG project. The goal was to extend the reach, scope and effectiveness of a state institution’s efforts and to support independent monitoring and assessment of the activities they were undertaking.

In 2011, in the first phase of funding from the non-state actors component, the local NGO, Democracy Resource Center for National Development (DND), developed and implemented a partnership with OWSOs (citizen service centers) in three districts (Soug, Kompong Cham, Kratie Municipality, Kratie, and Peam Ror District, Prey Veng Province) with a budget of US\$98,500. DND’s support to the OWSO initiative had both governance and service delivery objectives:

- To strengthen community participation in sub-national administrative reform in project areas
- To create a sustainable model for citizen feedback and dialogue with district authorities and increase citizen trust
- To increase the quality, effectiveness, accessibility, transparency and accountability of services.

Approach. The approach adopted by DND was undertaken through four social accountability strategies. The first strategy aimed to promote citizen awareness and **access to information** about the principles and practice of the OWSO initiative in participating districts. This was under-

taken through semi-annual/annual forums, by conducting periodic information campaigns, and through a baseline to evaluate citizen awareness. The second strategy empowered citizens to engage in the monitoring of the services provided. DND employed **community scorecards** (CSC) to gather feedback from citizens on staff behavior, punctuality, level of service, fees, service quality, transparency and the accountability of the front and back office staff. Comparing the results of the first and second CSCs enabled community discussion with OWSO officials. This reporting mechanism was supplemented by random visits to the OWSOs to monitor any change in the services provided. The third strategy mobilized and empowered citizens to feedback these findings through “**citizen’s bodies**”. These citizen’s organizations were briefed in the principles of decentralization, social accountability, good governance, democracy and other aspects of governance, and encouraged to engage in direct feedback of OWSO performance in the monthly “citizen’s hours” with district governors. The fourth (supply side) strategy included capacity building to improve the **complaints handling mechanism**, to specifically support the District Ombudsman (DO) and assistants, and build capacity of the District/Municipal Councils. This included the facilitation of “**partnership meetings**”, together with the national support team and the municipal/district administration.



Results. In December 2011, an external evaluation measured some of the results achieved in the targeted OWSOs. The awareness of OWSOs had increased dramatically. Citizen awareness of OWSOs increased from 20% to 60%, and income increased by 300% from one quarter to the next. The citizen’s bodies (with a membership of 90 citizens by the end of 2011) proved



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effective as a means to effectively and rapidly share information on OWSOs, and enabled citizens to raise their grievances and concerns to the OWSO, DO and Municipal/District councils. The partnership meetings and workshops also enabled peer learning across OWSO offices – officials could share best practices and discuss challenges. Overall, the scorecards reflected an increase in the number of transactions that were provided in a speedy, transparent and accountable manner and improvements in the friendliness of the OWSO staff.

Citizen's empowered to voice their views: Most importantly, the process facilitated citizen voice. The monthly "citizen's hours" hosted by the District Governors' in 3 districts provided 20-30 citizens with the opportunity to highlight what worked and what didn't in their local OWSOs. For instance, citizens noted that: some services were not yet fully 'one-stop' (e.g. the customs import certification process necessary for motorbike registration was not yet under the same roof), some procedures were still not clear, and that the process of obtaining some licenses was still overly long and unpredictable. Users also noted that staff turned-up to work late, making citizens/service users wait. These reports and perceptions were fed back to the OWSO support team and action was taken to improve staff performance. As the citizen's hour is a platform for dialogue between government officials and citizens, accountability and responsiveness are key. In one district, the Governor agreed to send an official letter to a Ministry to improve the way the service was delegated.

Independent monitoring assists the OWSO improve performance: The monitoring conducted by DND (one day per month) in the three districts was also effective. As users exited the OWS offices, DND asked their opinions – particularly on fees paid, transparency and staff behavior. This exit survey highlighted areas of good and poor performance. Users noted how well they were assisted to notarize documents and to obtain licenses (*"the legalization service works well - it is easy and quick, and fees are low"*), and also that OWSO officials were generally friendly. However, exit surveys also provided further verification that officials were often late for work, informal fees were still being solicited and/or paid on occasion, and that staff were not always available to provide the services intended. (A back office post was vacant for 6 months in one district making it impossible to obtain these services).

The partnership initiative was also very successful in helping the national management of the OWSO to improve efforts to establish transparent and accountable administrative services at the district level. More specifically, monitoring was used as a channel for citizens to feedback information to OWSO management that a district OWSO Manager had requested citizens to make informal payments for out-of-hours services. The beneficiary complaint was handled promptly by the host

ministry at a senior level. Not only was the official fired and replaced, but the OWSO also agreed to introduce signs in all OWSO front offices warning users against the payment of unofficial fees. This action sent a strong message to OWSO staff that the accountability principles of the OWSO were to be upheld.

Overall, these monitoring and feedback processes, and the subsequent actions at the national level, produced significant change in the target districts. The NGO report indicated that the payment of informal fees reduced by 60-70% from the first to the second quarter of 2011. Furthermore, citizen feedback showed that after six months of project implementation the number of OWSO staff that were late for work dropped from 46% to 13%.



Through the development of a home-grown social accountability mechanism, the initiative developed by this local NGO helped improve service delivery. It promoted awareness of the delegated services available and the accountability and transparency citizens should expect, as well as providing an avenue for monitoring and feedback that encouraged citizens to voice concerns. As a result, OWSO officials also better understood, and were more driven to meet, the objectives of accountable service delivery. This awareness building and monitoring initiative is now being expanded to all functioning OWSOs both through grants and by direct contracts to NGOs. This will create a platform of state and non-state agencies in Cambodia with experience of citizen/NGO monitoring of services.

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 the end evaluations of each component will provide further reflection on these issues.

DFGG Learning Note 3 reflects on lessons learned in the OWSO and non-state actor's components. It is based on experiences reported in the April 2012 Quarterly Progress Reports and an earlier World Bank field visit. Written by Janelle Plummer and Andreas Dolk.