

Decentralization reform for unified administration in Cambodia

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Abstract

This paper examines the imperative of restructuring the governance framework at the Subnational Administration (SNA) level in Cambodia to enhance responsibility and operational coordination. The purpose of study advocates for a unified administrative structure, driven by the delegation of functions and resources through deconcentration and decentralization by the central government. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research draws on observation and literature review to analyze the current governance practices. The findings highlight that the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has been actively promoting democratic development via decentralization, implementing organic laws for administrative reforms across different levels. The anticipated benefits of this restructuring include improved public service delivery, heightened accountability, better governance, enhanced fiscal decentralization, empowered local authorities, increased community participation, capacity building, and

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greater inclusivity. The process aligns with existing laws and regulations, bolstered by factors such as regulatory support and human resource development. Nonetheless, the study identifies challenges such as the timing of regulatory issuance and human resource allocation that must be addressed to optimize the restructuring efforts.

Keywords: Decentralization, Reform, Unified administration, Cambodia

1. Introduction

The decentralization in Cambodia is a sign of democracy, advancing management modernization and boosting socioeconomic development. In Southeast Asia's Indochinese peninsula's southern region, Cambodia, which has a population of over 17 million people (Worldometer, 2023) and covers an area of 181,035 square kilometers, is surrounded by Thailand to the northwest, Laos to the north, Vietnam to the east, and the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest. Cambodia is divided into 24 administrative provinces, with the capital, Phnom Penh, being one of the largest, Capital city is divided into 105 Sangkat and 14 Khans (municipal/district equivalents). 28 administrative municipalities make up the province, which is divided into 246 Sangkat. The remaining region is divided into 162 districts and 1406 communes. With a capital city, 25 provinces, 204 administrative municipalities-district-Khans, and 1652 communes, the sub-national level is composed (RGC, 2021). Naturalistic research which are also referred to as qualitative research are high-quality research techniques that concentrate on gathering and analyzing data in natural environments (Sugiyono, 2014) as data of Cambodia and regions involving.

The national election prepared by UNTAC in 1993 serves as practical proof of Cambodia's democracy. In the interim, the second mandate of the national election in 1998 saw Cambodia's Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) lead the

country using a Win-Win policy. The commune/Sangkat council elections in 2002, which granted local government more power, functions, and resources, was conducted by elections in the following five years: 2007, 2012, 2017, and most recently in June 2022 (RGC, 2001).

The vision and mission of Cambodia to promote local economic development through bring public service delivery closer to citizens by decentralization reform policy in unified administration pattern at sub-national administration.

2. Historical the evolution of Cambodia's decentralization policy at the sub-national level

Sub-national where level to work closely with citizens in the local area. The RGC holds democratic decentralization power to sub-national terms such as commune/Sangkat (the equivalent of subdistrict is used in the city) council, district council, and municipal for responsible for work by themselves.

After the commune/Sangkat council election by law on the election of commune/Sangkat council, RGC created the law on the capital council, provincial councils, municipal councils, district councils, and Khan councils in 2008 for managing in good structure and good governance at the sub-national. In the meantime law on the administrative management of the capital, provinces, municipalities, districts, and Khans (the equivalent of district level is used in the city) in 2008, and the law on the administrative management of the commune/Sangkat in 2001 that both laws called organic law to prepare the organizational structure at sub-national to follow to decentralization policy in Cambodia. For the management and implementation of decentralization and deconcentration (D&D) policy, the RGC established a National Committee for sub-national Democratic Development (NCDD) on 31 December 2008 by royal decree

which is the inter-ministerial mechanism there are leading by the minister of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) as chief of NCDD for promoting democratic development through D&D reforms (Norodom Sihamoni, 2008).

The main goal of NCDD is a national program for democratic development at the sub-national level phase 1 (2010-2019) and phase 2 (20221-2030). For good governance of D&D the royal government of Cambodia issued 2005 a strategic framework with the goal of governance reform and improving management structure at the sub-national level. This framework aimed to enhance governance reform in the capital, provinces, municipalities, districts, and khans. The National Program of Administrative Reform (NPAR) and the Public Financial Management Reform Program (PFMRP) were established to promote democratic development and enhance public service delivery at the subnational level (Royal Krom, 2001).

3. Transferring of functions and resources process to sub-national level

Decentralization, which involves the central transfer of power to local government, is divided into three parts: fiscal, administrative, and political decentralization. While the political dimension considers appointing a political executive as the head of local government. The financial dimension focuses on financial management. and expenditures between local and central governments(Dick-Sago, 2020).

Reforms involving decentralization, in whatever form, degree, and scope, are profoundly political changes because they affect how resources and power are allocated. Although there are many technical details involved, the political aspect of such reforms should not be overlooked. What is frequently referred to as "political will" (or rather, the "lack of political will") is typically an impediment within the political-administrative system brought on by opposing organizations and alliances' conflicting interests and agendas. Understanding the goals and

justifications of reform measures, as well as the opposing responses brought on by the reforms, requires an understanding of the priorities and interests of such groups and alliances. The administrative aspect of decentralization focuses on the laws, institutions, and procedures used to carry out and implement the decisions of the elected representative body (Rohdewohld et al., 2022).

The transferring is following the role to support the work to be more efficient. The municipality's administration has autonomy in its choice of duties. With two such Mandatory and elective duties that provide public services and local development. The transfer of roles is the duty that has been assigned and delegated roles according to the rules, and distinguish each ministry and institute that has transferred roles to local governments.

Function refers to activities that are associated with the provision of public services. Infrastructure and various facilities in local governments. Resources refer to assets, finances, revenues, personnel, and capacity. Transfers refer to duties transferred to them and duties delegation. (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2012)

4. Reason for organizational restructuring as unified administration by decentralization policy

Changing the administration system environment to enhance the efficiency of administration management, public service delivery, and local development at the municipal administration level, Khan's level, and district level. About commune level is conducted by law on the administrative management of the commune/Sangkat.

A new method of administrative operation work in decentralization and deconcentration (D&D) reform or another called democratic development reform at the sub-national level for organizational restructuring and public administration

management system depend on good governance policy as to be representative/ownership, participatory, feedback efficiency, transparency, accountability, rule of law, social equity and inclusion.

Beyond appearance on public service delivery and strengthening organization structure at sub-national level for enhancing on capacity on local development to be a part in the economic development of Cambodia's vision to be high middle income in 2030 and high income in 2050 (Hun Sen, 2020).

Modernization of structure and public administration management system to strengthen organization's capacity and promote integrity in public administration, improve workplace effectiveness and innovation, and streamline the process of providing public services to the people.

5. Types of organizational restructuring under unified administration

According to their level and kind, sub-national administrations' (SNAs) structures, systems, powers, and responsibilities will be precisely defined. Depending on the peculiarities of each SNA, these systems will change. For instance, urban SNAs will differ from rural SNAs in their characteristics. In order to support successful management and enhance internal and external communications of SNAs, information technology systems will be integrated.

Determine clearly on power, function, role, and responsibility of the organization or ministries. This is an important thing for the organizational restructuring of each administrative level as follows, ministry or institute at the national level, and sub-national level are provincial administration, the municipal city district, and commune/Sangkat administration, and municipal administration of Phnom Penh capital will be shown in the table below.

| Type | Level of administration | To be new structure and management system | Functions |
|------|--|---|---|
| 1 | Ministry or institute | National administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Researching and developing skills. - Drafting and continuously updating binding policies and laws, - Provision of technical support for monitoring and evaluation. - Implementation of key national strategic functions. |
| 2 | Provincial administration, | Regional administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acting as a representative of the RGC and ministries. - Providing technical expertise and capacity development to SNA. - Taking responsibility for certain province-wide functions or projects as unified administration. |
| 3 | Municipal, district, commune and Sangkat | Local administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responding to the needs and wishes of the citizens (planning, solution, respective local situation, and implementation of social accountability). |

| Type | Level of administration | To be new structure and management system | Functions |
|------|-------------------------|---|---|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing and providing quality service and local development. - Arranging effective accountability mechanisms for public administrations through SNA councils. |
| 4 | Capital administration | Metropolitan administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phnom Penh will be a principle of unified administration it can perform region-wide functions as well as local functions. - Should have sufficient resources to promote quality, effective, and efficient development in its territory as well as sub-regions cut from bordering provinces. - Responsibilities will include urban planning, developing public transport and other urban infrastructure. |

Table 1: New structure and functions of ministry, provincial, municipal, district, commune/Sangkat, and capital administration

Source: National program of democratic development for sub-national level phase 2 (2021-2030)

The Royal Government of Cambodia wishes to strengthen and adjust the structures, management systems, and functions of the district, municipal, and Khans (DMK) and commune and Sangkat (CS) administrations to ensure that are operated as local administrations in accordance with specific characteristics of urban and rural administrations. The structure, management system, and functions of provincial administrations are reviewed and revised to operate as regional administrations in accordance with the principle of a unified administration. The structure, management system, and functions of the Phnom Penh capital administration are reviewed and revised to operate as a metropolitan administration in accordance with the principle of a unified administration. The working relationships and accountability of SNAs are strengthened, revised, and implemented. The Leadership Capacity of SNA councils is strengthened citizen participation is enhanced to ensure people's trust in SNAs. The administrative management Systems of SNAs are modernized through the development and operation of digital Systems internal control system and external systematic inspection mechanism for SNAs is developed, revised, and implemented (RGC, 2021).

6. Managing a workforce during organizational restructuring by unified administration system

The decentralization and deconcentration (D&D), Cambodia try to manage the administration system in a unified administrative at the sub-national level for controlling all activities which provide public service to citizens to be on time and the needs of the organizational restructure of each local administration such as the municipality, district and Khans administration.

| Local administration | Number of new offices during decentralization | Chief of office | Deputy chief of office | councils |
|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Municipality | 14 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| District | 14 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| Khans (PP) | 12 | 1 | 2 | 6 |

Table 2: Number of workforces at MDK administration in Cambodia

Source: Sub-decree no.182, 183, and 184 of the Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019

The national committee for sub-national democratic development (NCDD) coordinates the efforts of the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) and related ministries to ensure that the personnel of the municipal administration are included in the specific statute of each body and are encouraged to apply for management positions, professional positions, higher-level positions, and other personnel benefits. According to each employee's professional qualifications and experience as stipulated in the specific statute of each body, the civil service employees of the municipal, district, and Khans administration must be in a body.

The organization chart of municipal administration during the restructuring. The number of employees in each office and unit of the municipal, district, and Khans administration shall be suitable in light of the location, population makeup, job scope, and available resources of each municipal administration. According to each municipal administration's needs and in accordance with national policy promoting gender equality, the municipal administration shall employ the proper amount of female employees. The number of employees for each municipal administration will be decided in cooperation with the ministries of the interior and of economy and finance, with input from the municipal administration, and under the coordination of the NCDD. The ministry of civil service will also assist the municipal administration in the management, execution, and utilization of municipality personnel(RGC, 2019a).

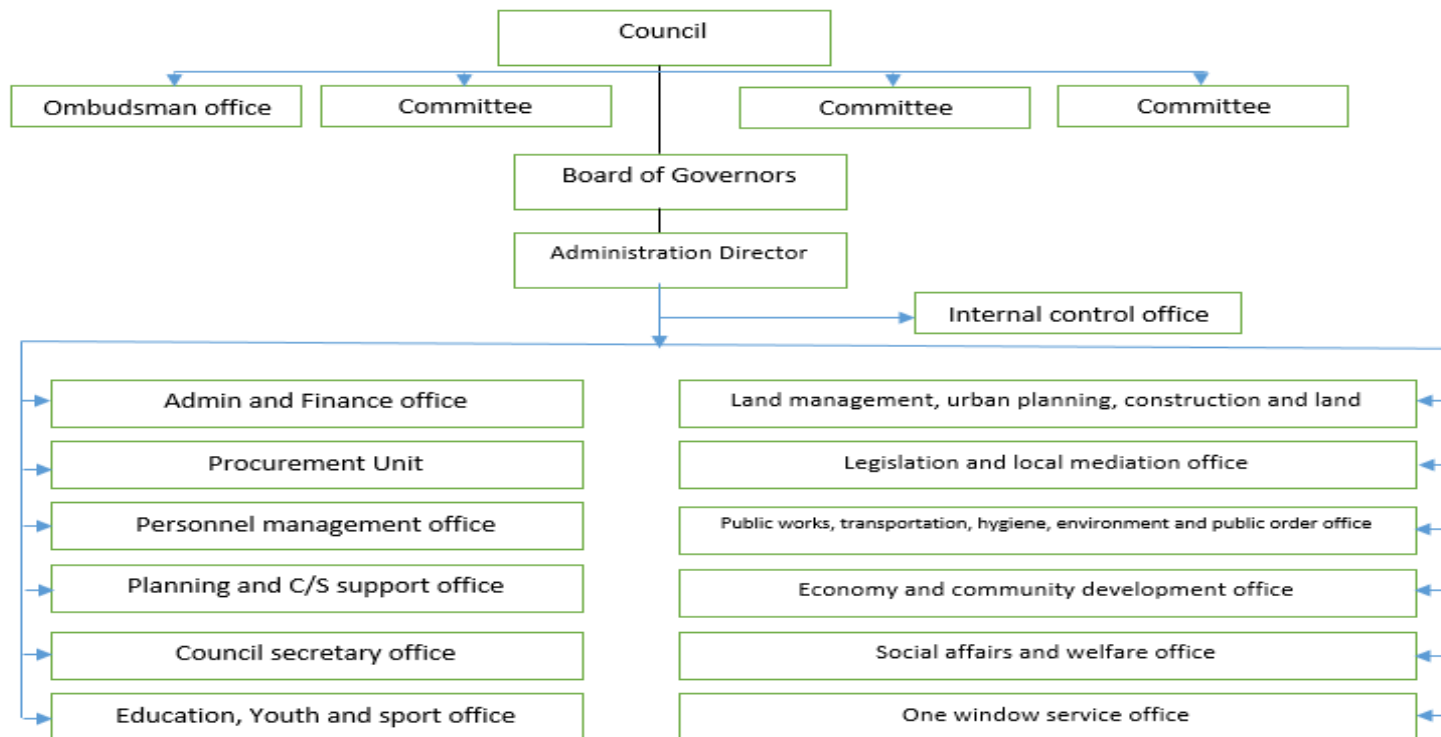


Figure 1: Municipal and district administration structure after restructuring in Cambodia

Source: Sub-decree no. 182 ANK.BK of Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019 (RGC, 2019a). Sub-decree no. 184 ANK.BK of Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019 (RGC, 2019c).

The municipality administration organization chart is managing 13 offices that were decentralized in 2019, especially the Ombudsman office was established in 2017. The problem is the previous structure is not smooth in the national program phase 1 and pushing to national phase 2 to restructure again on organization structure.

The structure of municipal and district administration is the same organizational chart but activities following as representative of structure management, Furthermore, by decentralizing authority, reevaluating funding, cutting back on public services, introducing cost-effective services, customer orientation, benchmarking, and streamlining rules, David Osborne and Peter Plastrik highlight the success of reinventing government. They contend that reimagining government entails shifting objectives, incentives, accountability, power dynamics, and culture rather than restructuring or privatizing the system. They recommend that the foundation of these reforms be cost-effectiveness and person oriented (Osborne & Plastrik, 1997).

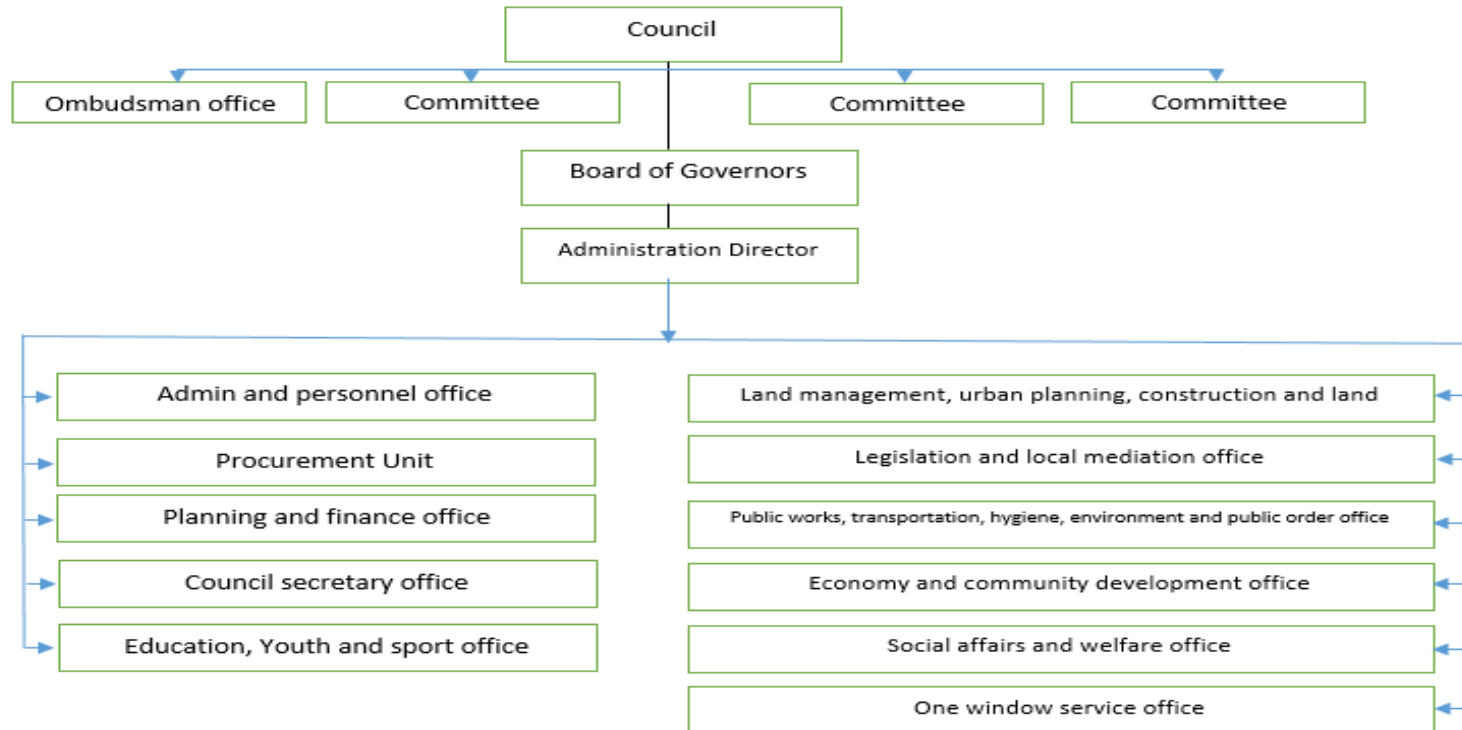


Figure 2: Khans (in Phnom Penh) administration structure after restructuring in Cambodia.

Source: Sub-decree no. 183 ANK.BK of Royal Government of Cambodia, 2019 (RGC, 2019b).

The Khans administration has not internal control office and combines the personnel office to an administrative office and without a procurement unit because Khans are under control directly from municipal Phnom Penh city.

7. Research Method

This study explores the use of qualitative research to understand organizational reorganization within a unified administration. It uses naturalistic research methods, focusing on data collection in natural environments as observation of the current governance practice and administrative process at the SNA level and literature review as a thorough review of existing literature, including official records, research article, and relevant theories, is conducted to gather secondary data and contextual information. The methodology includes a scope of study focuses on the concepts of decentralization and deconcentration as implemented by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), and analysis, data synthesis as content analysis is used to interpret the data and draw meaningful conclusions. The analysis aims to understand how the RGC's decentralization efforts impact public service delivery, accountability, governance, fiscal decentralization, local authority empowerment, community participation, capacity building, and inclusivity. Limitation of the study acknowledges potential limitations, such as the scope of content, time constraints, and possible biases in data collection and analysis. These limitations are addressed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Time resistance of the study takes into account any potential time-related challenges to ensure the findings remain relevant and applicable over time. And research tools as various qualitative research tools, including content analysis techniques and observation checklists, are employed to collect and analyze data. These tools are detailed to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the research process. The goal is to provide

a nuanced understanding of the organizational restructuring process, combining qualitative insights with formal records and established theories.

8. Results

The evolution on decentralization reform in Cambodia as in the 1993 national election marked the beginning of Cambodia's reorganization of the government, and commune elections held from 2002 until 2022 provide factual support for the decentralization theory. In 2002, Cambodia implemented a major administrative decentralization reform, moving from a centralized to a decentralized structure. The goal of this change was to improve the nation's democratic and efficient systems of government. The adoption of the Strategic Framework on Decentralization and Deconcentration in 2005 and the approval of organic laws in 2008, which aimed to foster democratic and unified administration, are significant turning points in this reform process. A national program for sub-national democratic development was undertaken in Cambodia between 2010 and 2019, with a focus on several important concepts like accountability, transparency, equality, equity, local autonomy, integrity, and fighting corruption. By representing the dedication to democratic values and good governance, these principles sought to promote responsible and successful local governance.

The process of unified administration in Cambodia demonstrated on decentralization has been a hallmark of democratic values and good governance principles. Although progress has been made, implementation issues underscore the complexity and continuous nature of administrative reform. Cambodia's restructuring path is a reflection of its commitment to strengthening public service delivery, empowering local people, and improving governance. Reform can be aided by regional institutional innovations. In order to strengthen public service delivery, empower local communities, and improve governance, Cambodia is

currently going through a reorganization process. In order to increase public knowledge and foster acceptability, the approach incorporates regional institutional innovations including civic education and citizen participation. In order to gain a better understanding of technology, markets, and emerging issues, regional government organizations strive to alter structures, beliefs, attitudes, and values.

The unified administration system is the main goal of the initiatives to reform is to restructure the government and public administration by implementing a methodical and strategic approach. Decentralization is a key component of this reform process, with the overall objectives being to increase local government, service delivery, and community empowerment.

These comprehensive reform initiatives have given priority to several crucial facets: 1) Governance and Administration: Evaluate how well local decision-making, accountability, and transparency are improved by decentralized government arrangements. 2) Service Delivery: At the subnational level, assess advancements in the provision of public services, including infrastructure, healthcare, education, and local economic growth. 3) Fiscal Decentralization: Analyze modifications to municipal budget allocation, revenue creation, and financial management techniques. 4) Local Authorities' Empowerment: Assess the degree to which local authorities are able to organize, carry out, and oversee local development projects. 5) Community Participation: Evaluate the extent to which the community is involved in local decision-making, taking into account avenues for public comment and accountability. 6) Building Capacity: Assess initiatives aimed at enhancing institutions' and local governments' ability to carry out their mandates and duties in an efficient manner. 7) Equity and Inclusivity: Examine how decentralization has affected social cohesiveness and inclusivity

among various demographic segments, as well as how it has reduced regional inequities.

To sum up, the implementation of decentralized government arrangements is crucial for improving a number of facets of public administration and governance. Decentralization encourages more responsibility and openness in communities by strengthening local decision-making processes. Localized financial management and budget allocation are made possible by this transfer of power to the local level, which also enhances service delivery. Decentralization also encourages community involvement, strengthens local government, and makes capacity building programs easier. Decentralization improves social cohesion and inclusivity by incorporating citizens in decision-making processes. This lowers regional inequities and fosters public confidence and responsibility in governance.

In general, decentralization is shown to be an essential tactic for improving administrative effectiveness and addressing social injustices at the same time. Its importance as a mechanism is highlighted by the favorable effects it has on governance structures in unified administration system in Cambodia.

9. Discussion

Cambodia's governance and democratic decentralization reform began in 1993, with administrative changes in 2002. The Strategic Framework on Decentralization and Deconcentration was adopted in 2005, followed by organic laws in 2008. A national program for sub-national democratic development was implemented between 2010 and 2019, focusing on accountability, transparency, and corruption.

However, Cambodia's transition to a decentralized and democratic government represents a substantial change in the country's administrative structure. The continued efforts to enhance public service delivery and governance align with the New Public Service idea, which emphasizes the importance of serving citizens with a focus on seven guiding principles: strategic and democratic thinking, prioritizing civic involvement and public service over organizational interests, serving citizens rather than self, ensuring accountability, respecting people, and adopting a service-oriented approach (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). To further enhance the effectiveness of decentralization reforms, it is crucial to adopt or modify strategies that increase public awareness and acceptance. Citizen involvement, civic education, and monitoring strategies play a vital role in this process. By implementing measures such as transparency initiatives, citizen report cards, participatory planning and budgeting, complaint and appeals boards, and other mechanisms, local governments can initiate a downward accountability process (Smoke, 2015). The principles for reinventing government, as proposed by David Osborne and Peter Plastrik, also highlight the importance of decentralizing power, reevaluating funding sources, enhancing public services, prioritizing cost-effective solutions, adopting a customer-centric stance, benchmarking performance, and simplifying regulations. These principles represent a fundamental shift in objectives, incentives, accountability, power relationships, and organizational culture. Adaptive organizational restructuring, which focuses on addressing structural weaknesses and optimizing functions, can significantly increase productivity and efficiency in public organizations.

Cambodia's transition to decentralized and democratic governance, while facing execution challenges, marks a significant transformation in its administrative framework. Continued efforts to enhance public service delivery and governance, guided by principles of the New Public Service and strategies for reinventing

government, are essential for achieving the goals of decentralization and fostering a more inclusive and accountable governance system.

Cambodia's implementation of decentralization aims to strengthen public service delivery, empower local communities, and improve governance. The process involves regional institutional innovations, such as civic education and citizen participation, to increase public knowledge and foster acceptability. These efforts are designed to alter structures, beliefs, attitudes, and values within regional government organizations. The reform initiatives seek to restructure government and public administration through a methodical and strategic approach, focusing on decentralization to enhance local government functions, service delivery, and community empowerment. The priorities include governance and administration, service delivery, fiscal decentralization, local authorities' empowerment, community participation, capacity building, and equity and inclusivity. By evaluating the effectiveness of decentralized government arrangements, these initiatives aim to improve local decision-making, accountability, transparency, and capacity, while addressing regional inequities. The principles for reinventing government, as proposed by David Osborne and Peter Plastrik, align with Cambodia's decentralization efforts. These principles emphasize decentralizing power, reevaluating funding sources, enhancing public services, prioritizing cost-effective solutions, adopting a customer-centric stance, benchmarking performance, and simplifying regulations. This approach is not merely a reorganization or privatization process; it signifies a fundamental shift in objectives, incentives, accountability, power relationships, and organizational culture.

Adaptive organizational restructuring is crucial in this context, as it can increase productivity and efficiency in public organizations by addressing structural weaknesses and optimizing functions. Regional government groups aim to alter institutions, beliefs, attitudes, and values to gain insights into technology, markets, and emerging issues (Tarore et al., 2019). This adaptive approach enables the government to respond more effectively to the needs and challenges of decentralization. The combination of strategic decentralization and principles of reinventing government offers a comprehensive framework for improving public governance in Cambodia. By focusing on enhancing local decision-making, accountability, and transparency, and by empowering local authorities and communities, Cambodia can build a more inclusive and effective governance system. These efforts are essential for reducing regional inequities and ensuring that public services are delivered efficiently and equitably across the country.

Cambodia's decentralization reform, backed by innovative governance principles, is transforming the country's administrative and governance landscape. Despite challenges in capacity building and implementation, efforts to empower local communities and improve governance hold promise for a more accountable, transparent, and effective public service delivery system. The New Public Service idea encourages strategic thinking, civic involvement, and accountability.

10. Conclusion

The implementation of Cambodia's shift to a decentralized, democratic system of government has been fraught with difficulties, particularly in terms of capacity building and structural adjustment. Through local governments, the New Public Service concept seeks to promote sound administration and the execution of central government policies. The guiding concepts include accountability,

serving residents, civic engagement, and strategic thinking. Raising public knowledge and acceptance can be achieved through putting monitoring, civic education, and citizen involvement into practice. Rethinking government is based on a set of ideas that include decentralizing power, improving public services, reevaluating funding sources, giving priority to cost-effective solutions, and adopting a customer-centric mindset. In public companies, adaptive organizational restructuring can boost output and effectiveness. To governance and administration, service delivery, fiscal decentralization, empowerment of local authorities, community participation, capacity building, equity, and inclusivity to enhances public service delivery in decentralization reform concept.

11. Recommendations

Based on the text you provided, here's a structured breakdown of recommendations:

1. Policy Recommendations for Government

- Invest in Capacity Building: Prioritize capacity-building projects for local governments to enhance technical expertise, leadership skills, and administrative efficiency.

- Assure Structural Adjustment: Evaluate and reorganize administrative structures to align with decentralized governance principles, aiming for operational enhancement.

- Embrace New Public Service Principles: Focus on accountability, citizen-centric service delivery, civic engagement, and strategic planning to foster transparency and innovation.

2. Operational Suggestions for Relevant Agencies

- Promote Public Awareness and Acceptance: Implement comprehensive monitoring mechanisms and civic education campaigns to increase public involvement in policy processes.
- Rethink Government Processes: Decentralize power to local governments, improve public services, and adopt cost-effective, customer-centric strategies to meet citizen needs.
- Utilize Local Resources: Explore creative funding options and prioritize efficiency and continuous improvement in service delivery.

3. Suggestions for Future Studies

- The impact of decentralized governance on educational outcomes.
- Strategies for enhancing local community involvement in governance policy.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives in administration.

These recommendations and suggestions aim to support effective governance, enhance service delivery, and promote inclusive development through decentralized approaches.

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