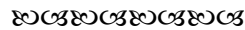


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Session 3:

ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND E-GOVERNMENT

AN OVERVIEW OF CAMBODIA’S EXPERIENCE

Introduction

Trust is earned over many years and is the result of myriads of big and small endeavors that reinforce one another. A coherent, holistic, inclusive and sustained approach to improving governance is essential. Cambodian ownership and leadership of the reforms will be a key to success. Information technology will play a determinant role.

Context

The world evolves rapidly and people live in a state of permanent change and uncertainty. Nurturing and building trust between government and the population has become an obligation of governments for them to meet their political agendas. Trust is seen as a necessary condition to achieving sustainable development, social justice and poverty reduction. Official documents of the Royal Government such as the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), the Governance Action Plan II (GAPII), the Strategy for Reforms in Deconcentration and Decentralization (SRDD) and the National Programme for Administrative Reform (NPAR) specify policy and programming priorities. Each of these strategies, in its own ways, seeks to transform government into a trusted development partner and effective provider of public services:

- the NSDP by focusing government actions on priority development goals and the MDGs to reduce poverty
- the GAPII by prioritizing actions to improve governance in government affairs
- the SRDD by bringing government closer to the people and empowering local communities
- the NPAR by transforming the Administration to serve people better

Information Technology can be a powerful instrument of reform, both in enhancing efficiency (doing more with less) and changing the way government delivers services and even redefining what it does. One can describe the role of ICT in terms of a continuum, ranging from simple efficiency enhancement, at the one end, to uses of technology that fundamentally change the nature of the relationship between government and its clients, or even changes the functions of government, at the other end of the

spectrum. In the middle, one finds uses of ICT to enhance capability - such as improving access to information and the integration of service delivery systems. In time, efficiency gains would become a secondary benefit.

Lessons learned around the world show that the adoption of information technology entails risks that must be managed. It could be very costly and prone to vagaries and uncertainties much like any innovation. Government's use of ICT depends on other institutions in society deploying the assets that government applications will use. Information technology evolves very rapidly and necessitates constant updating. Inter-connectivity, compatibility, progressiveness and openness become critical elements of any ICT strategy. This is particularly so in a country, like Cambodia, where financial and human resources are so constrained.

The Royal Government has established the National Information Communications Technology Development Authority (NiDA) as a national body to set the ICT strategy and policy for Cambodia and to spearhead and monitor their implementation. In particular, it sets the standards and parameters for the deployment of ICT in Cambodia across all sectors. The Council for Administrative Reform is responsible for the articulation of a strategy, policy and program to introduce ICT within the Public Administration within the framework and standards set by NiDA.

The Administrative Reform

The Royal Government vision is to transform the Civil Service into an effective provider of public services and a trusted development partner. To realize this vision, the National Programme for Administrative Reform – Serving People Better is articulated around four policy thrusts:

- a) Improving service delivery
To improve the quality and delivery of public services, service by service, using a mix of tools ranging from privatization and contracting out to the use of alternative delivery processes such as one window service centers and special operating agencies
- b) Enhancing pay and employment
To enhance performance within the Administration through adequate and sustainable compensation and the effective deployment, management and control of the establishment.
- c) Developing the capacity of people and institutions.
To enhance performance within the Administration through the use of a mix of tools ranging from training to a better use of available technical assistance and the use of ICT.
- d) Promoting Information and Communications Technologies
To rapidly enhance the responsiveness and efficiency of service delivery processes both in the “back office” and the “front office”. It is also to enhance the transparency and accountability of those processes.

The ICT strategy

With a view to take advantage of globalization opportunities, the Royal Government committed to build a people-centered information society where people can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge. It is a matter of efficiency and productivity. Cambodia is still at an early stage and is confronting daunting challenges. Investments in necessary infrastructure and to enhance the capacity of people to use ICT are staggering and will take time to come to fruition.

Information technology evolves very rapidly and necessitates constant updating. Inter-connectivity, compatibility, progressiveness and openness become critical elements of any IT strategy. This is particularly so in a country, like Cambodia, where financial and human resources are so limited.

The government has elected to adopt a progressive, staged approach, taking advantage as much as possible of proven techniques and practices and to apply them in most urgent areas and where the course can be sustained. As for the reform program itself, the approach seeks to set solid foundations first where it matters most.

In a first phase, the government sought to introduce measures that will do what has been done by hand, faster and more efficiently, in ways that are less prone to human error. Technology is to be used primarily as an efficiency tool such as compiling statistics, processing large quantities of data (such as the payroll) and facilitating access and ease of use. The technology is being applied to doing more, faster, cheaper, with less error and more easily.

Then attention turned to improving service delivery and internal communications. Obvious early priorities in this area were to enhance the effectiveness of communications among ministries and between central and provincial administrations in line with the Government's decentralization and deconcentration strategies and programs, improving the delivery of health and social services and enhancing the effectiveness of Cambodia's legal and judiciary system. The pace of change and the scope of the approach depend on the nature and quality of available resources.

The program of actions is articulated along four thrusts:

1. Measures to develop and implement requisite management tools (back office)

This set of activities primarily focuses on building on the existing data base through the development of applications that facilitate the quantitative management of the workforce in the first instance and then enhance its qualitative management. Applications will be gradually developed to complement those applications already operational so that government has access to a full-fledged Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS). Another early priority was automating the payroll of the police and the military.

The HRMIS will be complemented with a data base on administrative procedures and practices relating to other corporate processes such as budget planning and control, administration, planning and inspection so as to facilitate work in the back office.

2. Measures to enhance the quality of service delivery (front office)

Two sets of measures are envisioned to bring services closer to the people, to improve their transparency and to generally enhance quality. The first one consists in developing a comprehensive database on administrative procedures and practices relating to services provided to

the public, for example the issuance of permits and licenses. This data base would be accessible by public servants to improve their effectiveness and to the public to enhance its understanding of its rights.

The second set of measures would consist in building a network of facilities to improve access to the database by the general public. Initially they would consist of points of entry where clients could go to access the database with the help of officials. Eventually, this information would also be made accessible through the Internet.

3. Measures to enhance communications

The primary measures consist expanding the use of the internet and in the development of an intranet to facilitate communications among ministries and between the central and provincial administrations. Applications include e-mail and information sharing capabilities, support to decision-making and to the dissemination of decisions and the development of various specialized data banks (for example, a compendium of laws, decrees and regulations, an electronic version of the Official Gazette). When fully operational, this system will provide the necessary infrastructure for the development of user-friendly glossaries of technical terms, real-time lists of meetings, seminars and workshops. It will also allow sectoral ministries to disseminate information relating to their programs and to develop sectoral applications to further the attainment of their program objectives. The standardization of Khmer fonts is a critical element of this thrust.

4. Measures to develop human capacity

These measures focus on developing computer literacy. They include the establishment of the Internet Plaza and the construction and operation of a distance learning center to anchor an eventual internal learning network. The center will also provide facilities required to leverage the effectiveness of distance learning programs such as those being put in place by Japan and the World Bank and that of networks such as the ASEAN Resource Centers.

An exhaustive training program for civil servants will complement the above measures. Such a program is critical to the effective computerization of the Administration. In a first phase, trainers will be trained and a core group of technical experts will be trained to operate and maintain the IT system.

The experience to date

Progress is being made on a broad front with the support of development partners. In this context, the contribution of the Republic of Korea is noteworthy. Following are examples to illustrate how Cambodia leapfrogs into the future:

The networking of government ministries

All 27 government ministries at the national level and the municipality of Phnom Penh are now online. The network will be gradually extended throughout the country to cover all provinces, districts and communes.

The Cambodia-Korea Internet Plaza

The plaza offers broadband internet access to the public and training to government officials and to military and police personnel

The piloting of e-government services

The Government Administration Information System (GAIS) is being introduced gradually to enhance access to government services. Operational applications include the registration of vehicles, residents, real estate and motorcycles.

The Human Resources Management Information System

The HRMIS is a fully operational and upgradeable system to facilitate the management of civil servants. Applications include a comprehensive data base on civil servants, automated pay, establishment control, skill management.

The distance learning center

The center is being established to link Cambodia to world learning networks such as the GDLN and JICAnet and bring training opportunities to the provinces

The Official Gazette

The OG is being computerized for ease of access by stakeholders and to facilitate research and documentation

Land management

ICT is being used to facilitate land registration, the management of dispute cases and to resolve conflicts using the GPS when needed.

Revenue collection

A multi-millions dollars program has been initiated to computerize revenue collection and management.

Internet kiosks

A programme to establish a network of internet kiosks is being implemented to increase access by the general public to the internet.

Conclusion

Cambodia is systematically applying the lessons learned by others and drawing on their experience. The approach is focused and prudent taking into account internal infrastructure and human capabilities. Whenever possible, opportunities to leapfrog stages of ICT development and e-government will be seized. The pace of progress will in large part be dependent on the nature, quality and timeliness of available means. ICT is at an early stage of development and deployment in Cambodia. Yet, it is already having a significant impact on the way the government is working. Future progress will be in lockstep with the development of the national backbone infrastructure and of Cambodianized applications and the development of human resources.