

Better Governance: Human Resource Policy within Cambodia's Public Administration

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Introduction

Soon after the United Nations-organized democratic election in 1993, political leaders in Cambodia have decided to pursue state reconstruction through pragmatism of the 'Asian model' – where the economy is given first priority. As such, political stability has been made the prerequisite and the foundation for the nation's progress. The World Bank (2004) reveals that 44% of all post-conflict situations revert to conflicts in the first 5 years of reconciliation. While about 50 percent of those countries fall back to civil wars in the first decade of peace (Collier et al. 2003: 7; Junne & Verkoren 2005). In this regard, Cambodia represents a success story to all post-conflict nations in modern time, as the country has been able to maintain its remarkable stability and its continuity of reconstruction for the last two decades. In turn, Cambodia's economy has experienced significant growths in recent years as its business climate improves. Researches have indicated that democratic and economic development has been progressing steadily (Prum 2005; Ojendal & Lilja 2009; Kim 2012).

Accordingly, public sector reform has been vigorously designed and implemented by the Royal Government of Cambodia to enhance good governance – a central element to the government's Rectangular Strategy-Phase II aimed at poverty alleviation (Royal Government of Cambodia 2008). The strategy includes a number of major state reform initiatives, such as: legal and judicial reform, military reform, anti-corruption initiative, public finance reform, and public administration reform including decentralization & deconcentration.

The Council for Administrative Reform has played a key role in supporting Cambodia's reform movement. Since its inception in 1999, the council has continuously put forth its five-year plan aimed at improving public administration via enhancing the quality of public services and the civil servants.¹ The first National Public Administration Reform plan (NPAR 1999-2003) built upon existed mechanism (i.e. Common Statute Law 1994) focused on strengthening the foundation for public administration reform through the establishment of quintessential mechanisms and a legal framework (i.e. Particular Statute Law 1999, the integration of civil servants from the administrations of different political factions into a unified administration, establishment and implementation of electronic database and a new classification and remuneration system). NPAR II (2004-2008) and NPAR III (2009-2013) both have aimed to widen and deepen public administration reform via their various initiatives (i.e. Policy on Public Service Delivery, compendium on public services, Special Operating Agencies, performance-based pay, improved based salary and Human Resource Policy and practices).² Currently, the council has put renewed emphases on three interlinking components: quality public service, quality human resource and remuneration reform. They are key elements to achieving effective and efficient public administration in Cambodia.

Nevertheless, this paper wishes to highlight specifically on Human Resource Policy in relation to ensuring better governance in Cambodia.

¹ A Reform Committee was created in 1994 to initiate public sector reform. As a result, the Common Statute (otherwise known as Civil Service Law) was passed in that same year though the period was marked with political tension/distrust following the 1993 election.

Context of Human Resource within the Public Administration

Cambodia's political stability was achieved as recently as in 1998 through the 'Win-Win' policy when the different quasi-military political factions each with its own autonomous regional administration were successfully integrated into one unified public administration. North et al. (2007) called such a development a transition from a fragile to a basic 'limited access order' – where an outbreak of violence is evaded. Coincidentally, the integration also saw a significant increase in the number of civil servants in the public administration. O'Dwyer (2004) identified such dramatic administrative growth a 'runaway state building', which essentially affecting the effectiveness of the administration as a whole – though the article fails to take into account the importance of political stability in a post-conflict society. As a consequence, there was little real political space to develop in-depth human resource management and development policy as priorities were divided elsewhere. Though, the human resource situation has improved significantly throughout the period – there have been notable attempts and significant improvements in practices (i.e. The management of cadre and the management of personnel processes). Despite the relative improvements, more is needed and the time is ripe for an introduction of an overarching and comprehensive Human Resource Policy to improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of the public administration.

Proposed Human Resource Policy

The proposed human resource policy is intended to help ministries and other government agencies to strengthen their management and development of human resource to improve work effectiveness and the provision of quality, reliable, responsive and timely public services.

Vision

Civil servants are more competent in providing public services through upholding values of service, loyalty, motivation and professionalism and being employed more efficiently and equitably according to needs.

Objectives

1. Improve the organization of work to clarify roles and responsibilities and to better determine human resource requirements both in terms of quantity and quality according to operational needs;
2. Strengthen the management of civil servants to provide the right staff at the right place at the right time based on principles of merit, equity and transparency;
3. Improve the performance and the sense of responsibility of civil servants;
4. Develop the competencies of civil servants to increase performance today and better prepare for the future;
5. Strengthen ethics and discipline of civil servants.

Scope

The Human Resource Policy applies to all civil servants under the Law on the Common Statute of the Civil Servants of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Strategies

The Human Resource Policy will be implemented along five strategies:

Strategy 1: Improve the operational structure of organizations and the management of workforce

The assessment of the organizational structure within relevant government agencies seeks to avoid unnecessary work duplications and gaps and to allow for clearer assignment of responsibilities. Mechanisms required for the management and control of the workforce need to be aligned with operational needs of each government agency. This entails:

- i) A review and an alignment of organizational structures to the respective missions;
- ii) Position descriptions specifying responsibilities and tasks of civil servants established for each position within the organizational structure;
- iii) Annual work plans prepared for organizational units;
- iv) Reviews based on annual work plans conducted regularly to assess progress;
- v) Further develop human resource planning for short and medium term and strengthening its implementation.

Strategy 2: Enhance the effectiveness of human resource practices and processes

The processes of human resource management and development have to be efficient, merit-based, fair and transparent. This entails:

- i) The review, amendment and development of laws and regulations to support the implementation of this policy;
- ii) Streamlining current human resource practices with this policy;
- iii) Strengthening the implementation of regulations relating to human resource management;
- iv) Strengthen the implementation of standards for ethics and discipline including the establishment of a Code of Conduct.

Strategy 3: Develop and implement a Performance Management System

Human resource management and development enable the Civil Service to become more effective as civil servants are more motivated, loyal, professional and better uphold public service value. This entails the creation of work environment in which civil servants are empowered to perform to the best of their abilities; including:

- i) Development and implementation of individual annual work plans; monitoring indicators; the monitoring of progress, the periodic appraisal of staff; and requisite corrective measures;
- ii) Provision of regular information to civil servants focusing on the functioning of institutions, policies and strategies of the government to help them better understand the context of their work;
- iii) Improving practices and processes used to motivate staff.

Strategy 4: Better use existing competencies and develop new competencies

Better use of existing competencies and developing new competencies require a systematic approach, reliable information on existing competencies and clearly identified present and future needs. Thus, human resource development programs are designed to meet evolving operational needs and are demand-driven. The programs seek to develop core technical, personal and inter-personal skills. This include:

- i) The development and operation of database(s) on competencies;

- ii) The establishment of mechanisms to manage competencies and career planning
- iii) The development of competency profiles starting with specific positions across ministries;
- iv) The development and implementation of programs to facilitate and enhance the use of competencies.

Strategy 5: Enhance the quality and delivery of training

The provision of training is demand-driven and consistent with priority policy and operational needs of government agencies. Training program must be Cambodianized. Quality training includes an efficient and effective use of Cambodian training resources and the use of ICT. This includes:

- i) Cambodianizing the content and delivery of training;
- ii) Developing and implementing relevant training courses;
- iii) Providing mandatory periodic training to all public managers and induction training to new recruits;
- iv) Collaborating with Cambodian training providers, foreign training institutes and learning networks and setting up of training provider networks;
- v) Establishing a national training institute to coordinate all trainings required.

Strategy 6: Develop the capacity to implement the policy

Managers and Human Resource Units need to develop their capacity to implement this policy. Management shall effectively use their qualified human resources to implement this policy with the support of the respective Human Resource Unit. This includes:

- i) Planning, coordinating and conducting training to enhance human resource management and development skills, targeting managers and HR personnel;
- ii) Developing a Human Resource Manual that explicit human resource management and development processes;
- iii) Strengthening the use of ICT in human resource processes;

Implementation

Ministries and other government agencies at the national and sub-national levels have the primary responsibility to manage and develop human resources within their respective jurisdiction and in ensuring consistency with this policy.

Improvements in the human resource management and development are to be introduced gradually in consideration of the actual capacity to implement and to sustain the policy.

Constraints

- Coordination and collaboration between and among Ministries and local authorities need to be enhanced.
- Inadequate financial and human resources. A real lack of resources has retarded many of the reform initiatives in Cambodia and not least human resource management and development. The ability to mobilize the necessary resources poses a difficult hurdle to overcome.
- Resistance to change. Human resource policy breaks away from the entrenched administrative norms existed in the current public administration.

Conclusion

The Human Resource Policy needs to be introduced in conjunction with the public service policy as well as with the remuneration policy. The needed three-pronged approach would create necessary synergy that better further the objectives of the National Public Administration Reform in order to 'serve people better'.

This policy is a logical next step to improve performance in the Civil Service while respecting the core principles of the career system. Seniority remains an important criteria but it is being complemented with other criteria based on competencies and performance.

There is a broad base consensus especially from Ministries on the need and purpose of the proposed Human Resource Policy. In essence, there exists a strong political will for its realization.

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