

The Effectiveness of the Commune Officials: A Case Study of Commune in Chamkarmorn District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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Abstract

While nearly all countries in South East Asia region were being experimenting with decentralization process, Cambodia, apparently under external pressure from aid agencies, had to follow the international trend of public administrative reform. Therefore, Cambodia started to reform its public administration in 2002 in order to deliver better services and to reduce poverty to the local citizen. The study of effective of commune officials in Chamkarmorn District was conducted in order to investigate whether there is an effective working performance of the commune officials after the two mandates of practicing public administrative reform. The findings in general emphasize the effectiveness of the commune officials in Chamkarmorn District in delivering services to the local citizens while the local citizen in response claimed for performance satisfaction of the commune officials. However, it was not a big success yet since there were still some problems regarding the security and environmental management.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Public Administrative Reform, Service Delivery, Balanced Scorecard

1. Introduction

After the UN-led elections in 1993, decentralization was not a priority in Cambodia (Devas, 1996). Even until 2000, there was “no local civil administration directly representing the people” (Kato *et al.*, 2000). With nearly all countries in region being experimenting with decentralization process (Manor, 1999), Royal Government of Cambodia, apparently under external pressure from aid agencies, had to follow this international trend. Therefore, in February 2002, Cambodia took its major step forward towards the public administrative reform in order to foster the concept of decentralization to the local government to develop a sense of democracy, to deliver services, and also to reduce poverty to the local residents (Mainsfield & Macleod, 2004). However, the local residents experienced little or no improvement in their standard of living as well as were not aware of the commune officials’ work (Mainsfield & Macleod, 2004).

Due to problems found after the reform of public administration in Cambodia, the researcher was inspired to conduct such a research to investigate whether there is an improvement in working performance of the commune officials after the two mandates of practicing the reform. The researcher conduct the study related to the effectiveness of the commune officials by choosing the twelve

communes in Chamkarmorn District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia as a case study.

2. The Model Used

A study conducted by Marr and Schiuma (2003) showed that the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) developed by Kaplan and Norton was the most popular methodology in effectiveness measurement (EM). It was adopted by thousands of private, public, and nonprofit enterprises around the world (Kaplan, 2010). Furthermore, the Balanced Scorecard is unique because it adds three perspectives to the traditional financial perspective. A typical Balanced Scorecard uses four perspectives including financial, customer, internal business process, and learning and growth derived from an organization’s vision and strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). The four perspectives are understood as typical relationships between means and ends in organizational activities, and it is called a “vertical” cause-effect relationship (Kaplan and Norton, 2001).

However, with public institutions, key financial figures are not in any way meaningful enough to provide a basis for measuring and controlling the performance of the organization. Therefore, the public institutions cannot use the standard architecture of Balanced Scorecard where financial perspectives are the ultimate, high-level to be achieved (Kaplan, 2010). Kaplan also recommended that the new framework of

Balanced Scorecard for public sector, purposefully for the local citizen since the important outcome of the public institution is

customers' satisfaction. Hence, the researcher has come up with the conceptual framework of the research study as following:

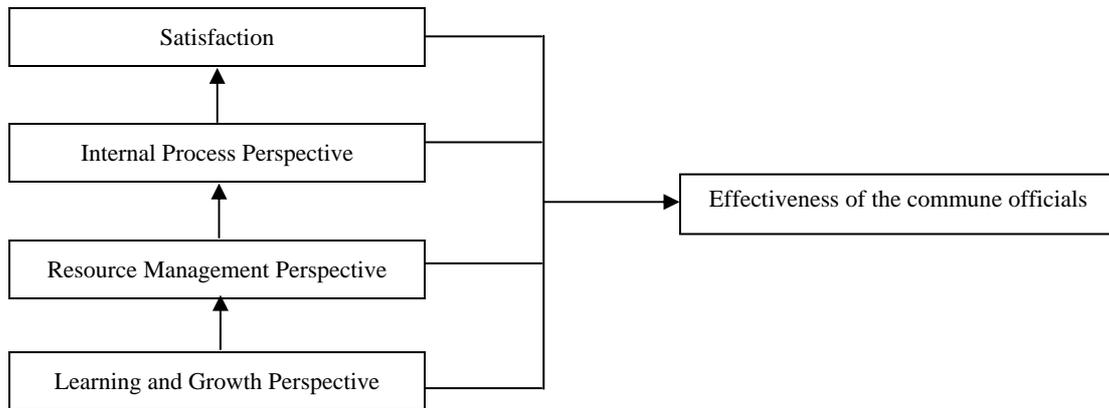


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3. Research Methodology

This research study is designed based on a mixed method approach. Thus, this study can be categorized into two crucial parts. Both quantitative and qualitative research will be adopted to conduct this study.

3.1 Quantitative Approach

In this phase, two set of questionnaire were sent to the sample of the research. Questionnaire set A focused on “Local Citizen’s Satisfaction over the service delivered of the commune development plan”. It was distributed to 399 sampled local citizens who were the breadwinners of the family. On the other hand, questionnaires set B, which focused on the first three perspective of Balanced Scorecard, were delivered to the whole population of 100 commune officials who were currently working in communes in Chamkarmorn District in order for them to evaluate their own performance towards the service delivery to the local citizen.

3.2 Qualitative Approach

In this stage of data collection, semi-structure interview is going to be conducted. The researcher designed two sets of semi-structured interviews checklists for individual respondent. One set of semi-structured interview checklist is used to interview with 10 randomly selected citizens who are heads of group of citizen from the five selected communes in Chamkarmorn

District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Its main purposes are to understand deeply about the local residents’ perspective towards the performance of the commune’s officials in their region, and also to comprehend whether there are some suggestions requested from the citizen for the betterment of the performance of the commune officials.

On the other hand, another sets of semi-structured interview checklist is used to interview with 5 chiefs of communes in order to understand intensely about how the commune officials perform, problems during performing their duties, and any suggested solutions to the problems.

4. Findings

4.1 Quantitative Findings

4.1.1 Commune Officials’ Perception

According the data received from the questionnaire set B filled by the commune officials currently working in communes in Chamkarmorn District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia in order for them to determine the level of agreement over the effective practices of the first 3 perspectives of Balanced Scorecards, including Learning and Growth Perspective, Resource Management Perspective, and Internal Process Perspective, the researcher have analyzed the data as its results are revealed as below:

Effectiveness of the Commune Officials	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	Level of Agreement
Learning and Growth	3.31	0.40	Strongly Agree
Resource Management	3.43	0.39	Strongly Agree
Internal Process	3.20	0.42	Agree
Total	3.31	0.31	Strongly Agree

Table 1 Level of Agreement over the Effectiveness of the Commune Officials

The commune officials viewed the internal evaluation over their performance to serve the services to the local citizens. In overall, the commune officials stated strongly agree to their performance effectiveness to deliver the services to the local citizens since they believed that they had such an effective learning and growth perspective which believed to be the path for them to perform a very good resource management perspective. Last but not least, the commune officials also agreed that they had a good internal process perspective which enabled them to deliver services to the local citizen very well.

4.1.2 Local Citizens' Perception

Base on the data received from Questionnaire set A, which was designed for the local citizens who are the breadwinners of the families residing in communes in Chamkarmorn District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the result data focused on the fourth perspective of Balanced Scorecard-Local Citizen Perspective. 399 questionnaires was delivered in order for the local citizens to evaluate their satisfaction over the four factors of commune development plan including Economic Factor, Social Factor, Land, Natural Resource and Environmental Factor, and Security and Administrative Factor. Below are the results that the researcher got from the data analysis:

Performance of the Commune Officials	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	Level of Satisfaction
Economic Factor	3.09	0.51	Satisfied
Social Factor	3.33	0.47	Very satisfied
Land, Natural Resource, and Environmental Factor	3.01	0.51	Satisfied
Security Factor	3.24	0.51	Satisfied
Total	3.17	0.42	Satisfied

Table 2 Level of Satisfaction of the Performance of the Commune Officials

The local citizen views overall satisfied over the performance of the commune officials to deliver services through the practice of commune development plan.

In summary, the results of quantitative data analysis emphasized that the commune officials believed that they had done a good job in building their knowledge input as well as to put that knowledge into practice. For example, while the trainings were provided to the commune officials in order for them to perform the task better and more effective, the commune officials agreed that they were able to manage the commune resource properly, which could lead to the clear work flow within the commune. Furthermore, according to questionnaire set A done by the local citizen residing in communes in Chamkarmorn District over the performance of the commune official to practice the four factor of commune development plan which are Economic Factor, Social Factor, Land, Natural Resource and Environmental Factor, Security and Administrative Factor, in general, the local

citizens view satisfied with the performance of commune officials.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

4.2.1 Local Citizens

Base on the interview with the respondents from the territory of communes in Chamkarmorn District, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the communes provided such a wide range of services to the local citizen such as to construct and repair road, take care of the road light bulb, train about health knowledge and hygiene, educate about knowledge of gender equivalence, provide the local administrative services, manage rubbish and sewage, maintain the local security, and eliminate the drug-trafficking and gambling. Furthermore, the local citizen claimed with satisfaction to the services that are being provided by the commune officials within their territory.

"I am very satisfied with the services delivered by my commune officials. I would like to express my sincere to the chief of

commune and all of the commune officials for their great efforts to serve everyone in the commune." (P2, November 8, 2010).

However, there were some problems being existed in the commune under the authority of the commune officials. Those issues were mostly related to security and environmental of the communes. The first and most concerned issue of the commune is all about the security reason within the communes since the communes have groups of gangster and also some robbery.

"There are a number of drug-addicted gangsters who usually groups with one another within the commune." (P3, November 8, 2012)

With such this problem, the local citizen seems to get afraid of their security especially when they or their family members were away from home at night. Therefore, the respondents generally suggested the commune official to take action as to eliminate the gang groups as well as the robbers and so on.

Furthermore, not only the local citizen concerns about their security, but some of them were also unhappy with the services provided by the commune official about the environmental factor. As P1 mentioned that

"There is a lot of domestic waste all along the road in my area, especial when there is a holiday. The waste collection vans don't come to collect the domestic waste regularly". (P1, November 8, 2012)

The respondents also further explained that these problems can affect to the health problems of their family members and also the hygiene of their community. As a result, they suggested the commune official to pay much attention and take control of the waste management.

4.2.2 Commune Officials

Throughout the interview with the commune officials, the communes had both strengths and obstacles to deliver services to the local citizens. On the plus side, the commune had a good commune development which it was designed based on what the local citizen really want the commune to do. Therefore, *"the local citizen will be pleased with and well-cooperated with the commune whenever the project has been established"* (P12, November 15, 2012). Another positive point of the communes is the qualified staffs. Since it is the third mandate of the new reformation of Cambodian local governance since 2002, most of the staff, around 80%, is left from the first mandate. Therefore, the human resource of the commune is high experienced, skillful with tasks, and knowledgeable with their duties. Also, the staffs are required to sit in for training

whenever there is new service released, or whenever there is a reformation in task performance or duties.

On the other hand, there were also some difficulties existing during delivering the services to the local citizens. The first obstacle is limited resources both operational and financial resources. The central government played a very important role to provide supports to the communes. Therefore, the commune fund relied on the support from the central government especially the Ministry of Economic and Finance. However, the fund provided by the central government did not response to all the needs of the commune, for instance, to solve the security or environmental problem since the fund were mostly provided to work on infrastructure and the communes were not encouraged to spare some funds for dealing with other issues. Last but not least, lack of local citizen cooperation was also the obstacle to operate the commune development plan. Most commune projects serve the majority of the local citizens. However, for a project related to the infrastructure, for example, to widen the road. This project will affect to the road light bulbs, electric wire, running water tube, and the local citizens' house which built forward to the walking path that all of these problems are required to solve beforehand.

4.3 Two-Side Analysis

According to both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, in over all, the commune officials could be view as performing their task effectively which could lead to the local citizens' satisfaction. However, to study in detail, the performance of the commune officials did not consider as a big success yet since most of the local citizen claimed for dissatisfied over the security and environmental management of the commune officials. Also, these findings could lead to some implication as following:

4.3.1 Citizen Centered Services

Base on the concept of local public service by Duggan and Green (2008), citizen-centered service refers to basing services on citizen needs rather than on organizational requirement. It is in reflection similarly to the activities being practiced by the commune officials working in Chamkarmorn District since the commune development plan was designed and established base on the needs of the local citizen. However, it is such a tough job particularly for the commune officials to get the approval and satisfactions from everyone in the commune, but the majority of the local citizens instead. As mentioned by

Proper and Wison (2003) that the public institution have increasingly come under pressure in recent years to become more customer-oriented. Therefore, in order to be effective in performance, the commune officials are expected to have a great ability to recognize, interpret, and satisfied the majority of citizens' need and demand for public service (Montero and Samuels 2004). Consequently, if individuals are satisfied with their local officials' performance, they may express greater support for the authority. However, if the commune officials are unable to fulfill and satisfy their demands, they will not only express their discontents with the commune officials, but they can also be increasingly dissatisfied with the ways democracy work in the entire nation (Weitz, 2008).

4.3.2 Lack of Problem Solving Competency

According to the initial findings, the local citizens seem to feel discontent with the domestic waste management of their commune. In respond to this problem, the local government claimed for some reasons which lead to the problem of waste management within their territory. Those reasons deal with the limited understanding of the local citizens over domestic waste management, and especially the lack of fund to cope with such a problem. The commune officials seem to rely too much on supporting funds for equipping more waste bins in the populated areas of their commune as well as to train people about how to pack and manage their domestic waste properly. Hence, it can be emphasized the lack of problem solving competency. The commune officials did not find any other ways to cope with such a problem besides excusing on the lack of resources. As suggested by Wilson (2005), the local authorities need to be innovative to create the public sector value from their resources by delivering improved outcome and more cost effectiveness. Therefore, the commune officials should seek for some creative activities to cope with the problem of waste disposal at the reduced cost such as to deliver leaflets or to ask for the head of commune official to educate their people about domestic waste management and so on which these proposed practices are low-costing techniques.

4.3.3 Incomplete Decentralization

In Cambodia, decentralization is central to local service delivery (Kimchoeun, 2011). However, the communes receive limited resources from the government, but the central government agencies have more resources and play a very important role in this respect. The

resource provided by the government agencies are clearly categorized the groups of project to work on. As claimed by Romeo and Spycerelle (2003), almost 80% of the commune resources were used to finance for economic infrastructures, while a minor share of the commune resources has gone to improve social and environmental factors of the commune which were also considered important. It can cause task-performing problems for the commune officials because the commune officials have no ability to share the budget from other developing projects to work on another project while the central government does not encourage them to do so. This problem of incomplete decentralization enables misunderstanding between the commune officials and the local citizens.

5. Recommendation

Throughout the data analysis and the discussion above, the researcher has come up with some recommendations for the stakeholders to take into consideration in order to better the situation as following:

1) The commune officials should make the information sharing and suggestion from the local citizens a priority.

2) The commune officials should seek for alternative solutions to deal the facing problems.

3) The commune officials as the service provider should be trained vigorously in order to assist with competencies and performance of teams, problem solving, and also the need to prepare for and response to the future changes in organization or job duties.

4) The royal government of Cambodia should take part in fostering the practices of decentralization within the local level by encouraging the local government the right to make decision, taking the suggested project into consideration, providing quick response to the suggestions, and giving supports in accordance with the proper needs of the local government.

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