



WORLD BANK GROUP
Water



Policy Learning Note: Recommendations for Decentralised Rural Sanitation Service Delivery

Key Messages

Decentralisation of rural sanitation functions provides an avenue to accelerate progress towards the Royal Government of Cambodia's (RGC) national sanitation targets. To facilitate the effective implementation and roll-out of decentralised rural sanitation service delivery, the government should prioritise:

- Preparing for nation-wide scaling up of rural sanitation through clearly obligated functions to sub-national authorities (SNAs);
- Addressing key elements to improve implementation effectiveness including a supportive enabling environment, building local capacity, providing adequate financing, and establishing governance systems;
- Enhancing coordination mechanisms nationally including between ministries, development partners, civil society and private sector actors, and sub-nationally through relevant working groups to foster alignment of government and donor funding; and
- Maintaining political commitment at the national level to build and systematically sustain local government capacity.

Introduction

Cambodia has been pursuing a decentralisation and deconcentration agenda for over a decade to address local needs by transferring financial resources and decision-making powers to local levels where needs are best understood. Following the success of the Seila programme, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) established the National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Decentralisation (NCDD) in 2008 as the lead implementer of the Organic Law 2008 (Law on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans). The executive and ministries have been gradually delegating financial and administrative authorities to local governments, following the 10 Year National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development. Its implementation is now in the third phase (IP3–3: 2018 - 2020) with service accountability mechanisms, including the One Window service provision modality and development of the Implementing Social Accountability Framework.

In support of the government's decentralisation agenda, the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) conducted a review of functions in 2013 which identified rural sanitation as one of three functions that should be transferred to District Administrations¹. Under decentralisation, MRD retains its roles in setting policy and strategy, monitoring and evaluation and technical guidance. It is also responsible for providing technical support and guidance to sub-national authorities via its provincial departments. MRD issued a *Prakas* which temporarily delegated the responsibility for rural sanitation and hygiene promotion to 10 participating districts for the purpose of piloting functions (2015 – 2019), adding an additional 5 districts in 2019 (i.e. a total of 15 pilot districts). The pilots have tested how rural sanitation and hygiene promotion can be decentralised to SNAs, built capacity at sub-national levels, collected and shared lessons, and developed processes for further scale-up.

Under the National Strategy for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (2011-2025) MRD sets a target to reach 100% sanitation coverage nationwide by 2025. There has been a rapid increase in sanitation coverage over

¹ MRD (2013), *Functional Mapping Report*, Ministry of Rural Development. This report identified rural roads, sanitation and water supply as functions to be decentralised.

the last decade, with an increase in rural sanitation coverage from 20% in 2007 to 70.9% in 2017². The Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6) sets a high bar of providing safe and equitable sanitation to all. The RGC is working towards SDG6 but faces numerous challenges, particularly in achieving safely managed sanitation. The Department of Rural Health Care (DHRC) of MRD, responsible for sanitation and hygiene promotion, has limited human and financial resources and relies on coordinated NGO and donor activity.

Policy Options to Support Decentralised Rural Sanitation Service Delivery in Cambodia

The key policy elements for the effective decentralisation of rural sanitation service delivery should include:

- **Enforcing policy and legislation on functional transfer with technical and financial support** from central and provincial levels to district administrations. Strengthening the office in charge of rural sanitation functions would stimulate more commitment from local government to take on ownership and prioritise sanitation and pursue sector targets.
- **Establishing coordination mechanisms** with clear mandates operating at each level: the inter-ministerial Functional Transfer Coordination Group (FTCG) at the national level, and Provincial and District Working Groups (PWGs and DWGs). The roles of each coordination mechanism to support the implementation of rural sanitation function transfer should be highlighted.
- **Creating incentive mechanisms** to recognise good performance through public recognition of local achievements and show local implementers that their efforts are valued. The scope for encouraging competition between districts, communes and villages could also be explored.
- **Formulating a framework for the alignment of government and donor funding** to ensure sector efforts are heading in the same direction to strengthen local governments' efforts with adequate resources.
- **Adopting roadmaps for** decentralised rural sanitation service delivery with consideration to available financial resources and capacity.

Implementation

There are a range of steps that assist preparation and effective implementation of decentralised functions. The following stages and lessons from piloting rural sanitation service delivery could be usefully replicated and applied to decentralised functions by other departments and ministries.

Functional review and delegation of functions. Assessing the existing roles and responsibilities of MRD, its provincial and district offices and of communes enabled a clear identification of the roles that could be delegated. For rural sanitation, local implementation including sanitation promotion, planning and coordination were functions delegated to district administrations. Through the MRD *Prakas* districts were obligated to perform these functions. Districts then formally designated a District Sanitation Officer as focal point (which was sometimes the Chief of the Office) and established DWGs. Representation of various district offices as well as each commune in the DWG was essential for ensuring good local outreach and feedback. PWGs are responsible for province-wide water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) coordination and monitoring and evaluation, and link to DWGs.

Pilot stage to establish roles and responsibilities. Piloting decentralised rural sanitation service delivery allowed time to communicate, test and adjust roles and responsibilities of the government from the national to commune levels. The FTCG membership included MRD, Mol and Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) and provided oversight and helped solve bottlenecks as they arose. Multiple government stakeholders were required for effective functional decentralisation including Provincial Administration, Treasury and District Administration, Department of Finance and District Office of Rural Development with regular interactions via the PWG and DWG quarterly meetings (see Figure 1). Leadership at district levels with provincial involvement was essential, particularly for coordination with the private sector and development partners (DPs). After four years of

² 2007 figure from WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program; 2017 figure from CSES (2017) Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey

decentralised piloting efforts all parties were clear on their and others' roles in decentralised rural sanitation service delivery, enough so that they were comfortable holding others to account and requesting help where they required it. District and commune staffing levels are not a major constraint as multiple actors can play a useful role in sanitation and hygiene promotion.

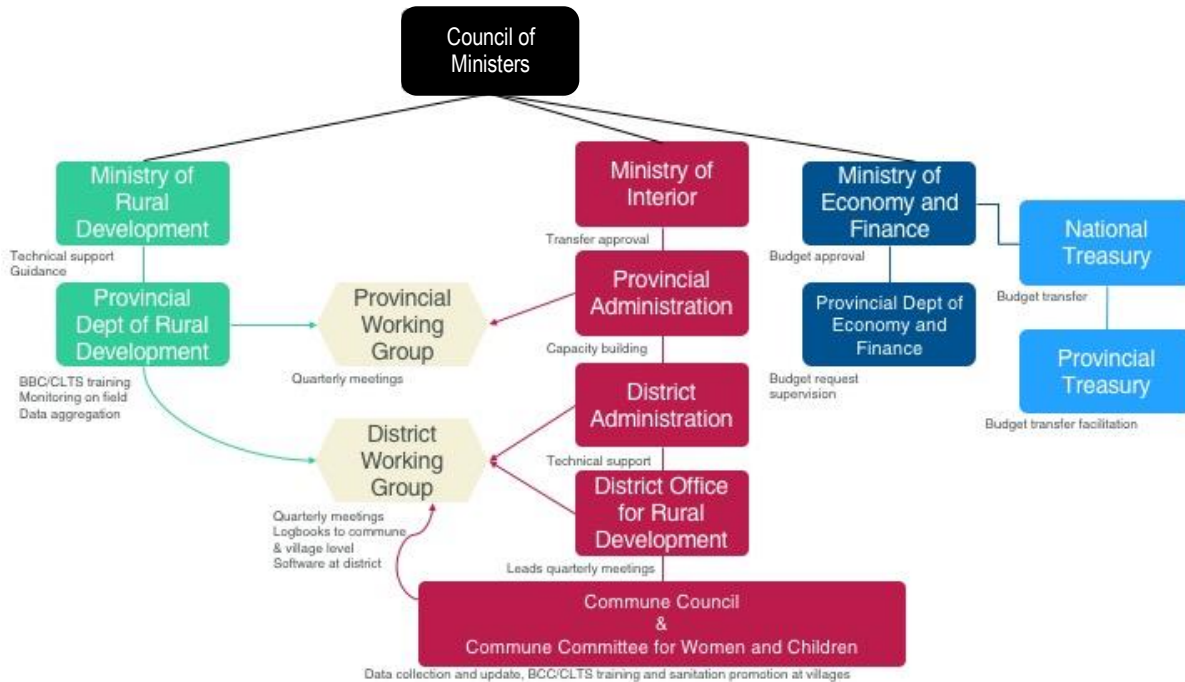


Figure 1. Various levels of government and agencies involved in decentralised rural sanitation, their relationships and simplified roles and responsibilities.

Establish and test financial transfer mechanisms, addressing bottlenecks and providing training support.

Providing timely and sufficient allocation of financial resources is critical to effective decentralisation efforts. There is a need for clear and written guidance and understanding of fund flow processes shared with all parties. For rural sanitation the processes are captured in Figure 2. Clear communication between relevant national line agencies via the FTCTG helped increase efficiency and timeliness in decentralised budget transfer processes. Even with training supported by MEF and National Treasury, only nine out of the 15 districts were able to expend and acquit the functional transfer budget during the four-year pilot period. This indicates the complexity of processes and the need for good communication and further capacity building.

The total decentralised budget funds allocated by MRD were insufficient to implement District Sanitation Plans (providing between 5-12% of funds needed). In most instances the District Sanitation Plans were only implemented because of the volunteer work of the Commune Committee for Children and Women (CCWC) members, communes allocating Social Fund budget and technical assistance supported activities. This highlights how increasing local ownership can result in the dedication of matching resources from a wider pool of resources, without sole reliance on decentralised functional budget.

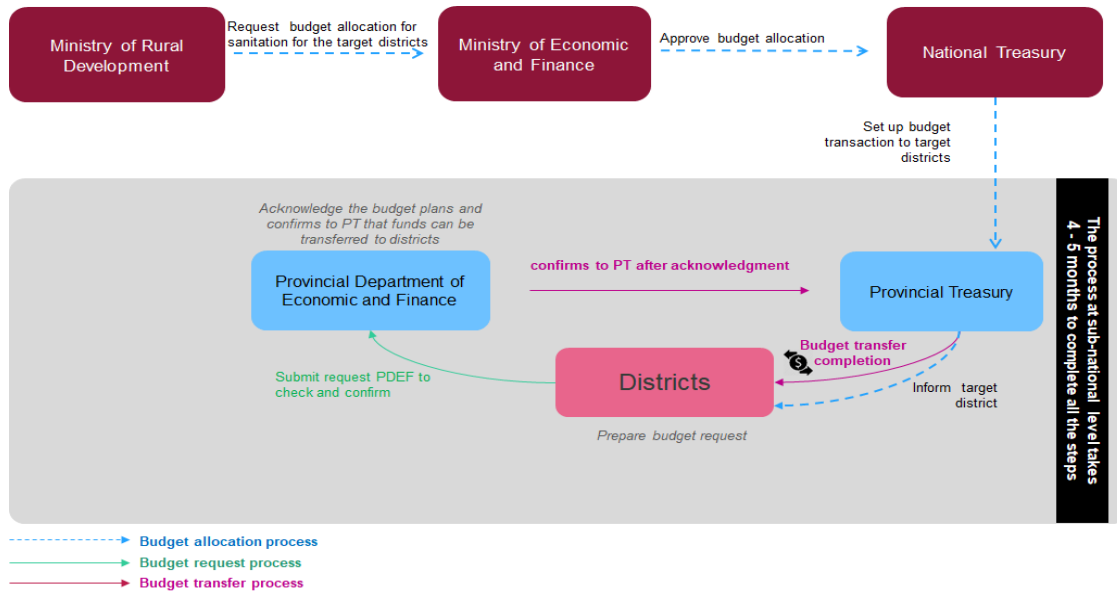


Figure 2. Financial process for rural sanitation budget transfer within RGC

Recommendations for nation-wide roll-out. In order to accelerate nation-wide roll-out of decentralised sanitation functions the RGC could consider a range of short to long-term options as described in Table 1.

Objectives	Short-term options 2020-2021	Medium-term options 2022-2023	Long-term options 2024-2025
Transfer rural sanitation functions nationwide to 162 districts	Rural sanitation functions are transferred in the form of fully assigned mandate to the districts across the country Legal framework and Operational Manual are adopted by district administrations		
Align efforts towards the implementation of a decentralisation programme	Provide intensive supports to at least 54 amongst 162 districts to implement rural sanitation functions	Rural sanitation functions are transferred in the form of fully assigned mandates to additional 54 districts. Provide intensive supports to these 54 districts	Rural sanitation functions are transferred in the form of fully assigned mandates to additional 54 districts. Provide intensive supports to these 54 districts
Continue to strengthen roles of Provincial and District Working Groups (PWGs and DWGs) to provide hands-on supports to districts	Establish coordination mechanisms with clear mandates operating at each level: the Functional Transfer Coordination Group (FTCG) at the national level, and PWGs and DWGs	Ensure coordination mechanisms available with clear mandates operating at each level: the FTCG at the national level, and PWGs and DWGs	Ensure coordination mechanisms available with clear mandates operating at each level: the FTCG at the national level, and PWGs and DWGs

Table 1: Roadmap for scaling up decentralised rural sanitation service delivery

Sustaining Decentralisation Efforts

Balancing obligation with incentives. District and communes participating in the pilots have achieved significant results, but their efforts were to a large extent voluntary. At present, sanitation is not necessarily viewed by the District Administrations as a high priority: on average it ranks twelfth out of 22 sectors in the district budgets. The RGC needs to determine how it will ensure that District Administrations prioritise rural sanitation having received devolved powers. Aside from technical and financial support, this will require attention to:

- *Obligations:* Duties can be imposed via policy and legislation, but unless there is real accountability for making progress in this area, local governments may not prioritise sanitation and pursue sector targets.
- *Incentives:* These could take the form of rewards (in addition to increased funding allocations) for good performance or simply public recognition of local achievements, to show local actors that their efforts are valued. The scope for encouraging competition between districts, communes and villages could also be explored.
- *Benchmarking:* Benchmarking SNAs could encourage improved service provision performance at the sub-national level. Coupled with an incentive programme, performance monitoring that is well-communicated and developed in conjunction with district authorities would reinforce local ownership. The FTGC members could consider a holistic benchmarking framework that incorporates not only sanitation but a whole range of service delivery.

Financial analysis of resources required to go to scale. To rapidly expand beyond the pilot districts, financial resources will need to be mobilised to build SNA capacity and support implementation plans. Resources can be mobilised through coordinated efforts with MEF via MRD, province, district and commune budget planning processes. Donor and DP efforts should be coordinated to bolster and complement the government's agenda. A financial analysis has shown that decentralisation is more a cost-effective way of achieving national sanitation targets.

Operational Manual agreed by multiple line ministries. Documenting the roles and responsibilities of agencies and coordinating bodies (e.g. DWG), planning, monitoring and evaluation and financial transfer processes ensures these lessons are captured for future reference. In the case of rural sanitation an Operational Manual was developed and a draft agreed upon by line agencies.

Comprehensive capacity building package required. Training, peer-to-peer learning and knowledge transfer increased the capacity of districts to a good level of competency during the pilots. However, high personnel turnover, especially at the commune level, resulted in a loss of trained and knowledgeable personnel. A comprehensive training package including regular refresher trainings, monitoring and support by the MRD and PDRDs is needed to ensure transferred functions are sustained.

Recommendations

- There is potential to accelerate progress towards national sanitation targets through decentralisation. However, district administrations will need further support and encouragement if the momentum generated in the pilot projects is to be sustained.
- MRD should ensure timely financial transfers to the districts with increased funding so that mechanisms are established for larger transfers in future, but also to demonstrate that the government is committed to the decentralisation process.
- Effective leadership and co-ordination at district levels is essential to maximise benefits arising from the inputs from multiple stakeholders working on sanitation. Up to now, a contracted support agency has played the role of the facilitator, but in future this role needs to be established within district and commune structures.

- To support decentralisation at-scale in the longer-term, an option for developing capacity in the districts would be to establish technical support unit(s) at the national and/or provincial levels. Through existing mechanisms such as the FTCCG, PWG and DWG, technical support could be mobilised at the national and sub-national levels.
- Transfer rural sanitation functions in the form of fully assigned mandate to all 162 districts by 2025. In tandem with the obligations of assigned function, implement doable incentive programmes to recognise good performance.