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**Capacity building in Cambodia's rural local governments
for the sanitation market**

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Approximately 72% of Cambodians practice open defecation. The government has implemented strategies and policies to improve access to sanitation and decentralized roles and responsibilities to the local rural district and commune governments so that it can be more effective in supporting rural sanitation marketing (SanMark). Semi-structured informal interviews with local stakeholders were analysed to understand the role of rural local governments (LGs) in SanMark and what capacities they possess – and need. The different roles perceived for LGs to fill include monitoring, regulation, and demand creation, however are not specific as to the details of how these roles can be implemented. The research found that capacity of LGs is very weak and needs to accommodate older personnel with lower levels of education. The capacities identified to support roles given to LGs are often general and unclear, such as “coordination” and “monitoring”, though the key basic capacities in need are effective communication.

Background

Development programs in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), such as “sanitation marketing” (SanMark) programs, need to include local government (LG) to ensure they can benefit the greatest number of people; understanding what LGs must do to improve access to sanitation is not always clear. The skills and knowledge required for LGs to effectively assist the provision of better sanitation to communities are not always available. Many LGs see themselves as catalysts of behaviour change, but do little more than provide sanitation supplies. Other governments struggle with making programs effective because their top-down approaches make implementation difficult. Cambodia's government involvement with SanMark faces both challenges and aims to reform its organizational structure through decentralization to the district and commune levels – the LG – to improve the country's development in areas such as WASH.

Being one of only three countries where less than 20% of the rural population has sanitation coverage and challenged with an open defecation rate of 72% of the population (Rosenboom et al 2011), Cambodia's sanitation situation fosters illness and hinders economic development for its mostly rural population. SanMark programs are working to include LGs to successfully expand markets independently of external support. During the period of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Cambodia's access to sanitation in rural areas improved from 6% to 40% (Joint Monitoring Programme - JMP 2015). While the 20-year period saw a nearly seven-fold improvement, addressing the remaining 60% of the rural population in 10 years (as the Cambodian government has planned) will be challenging, and requires the support of agencies such as the LGs. This research aims to explore the roles of rural LGs in supporting the sanitation market, as well as clarify which skills and knowledge are required for those roles – and which of those skills need additional capacity building for the current LG.

Methods

This paper's research used a conceptual framework that acknowledges that development projects are introduced into a non-neutral settings and that context needs to be emphasized to understand the situation. Data were collected through: (1) desktop literature review; (2) observations noted at sectoral meetings and

daily work within World Bank’s Water & Sanitation Program (WSP); (3) interviews and focus groups with key SanMark actors, including government officials at differed levels and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and, (4) analysis of qualitative data through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows for a flexibility in identifying patterns that are rich in context, particularly between participant groups (Braun & Clarke 2006).

The research was under the auspices of WSP’s decentralization pilot program in Cambodia’s Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), the government arm that supports rural water and sanitation. The researchers selected a balanced pool of stakeholders from different levels of involvement WSP’s program at local, national, and international levels. The researcher collected qualitative research through 16 semi-structured, semi-formal interviews, asking sanitation stakeholders open-ended questions and grouped into different stakeholder groups (coding for participants in Table 1). This qualitative research method is appropriate for analysing and evaluating the context to learn more about how stakeholders within rural sanitation perceive LG’s involvement and capacity (Harris et al 2015, Holma & Kontinen 2011). As some of the stakeholders interviewed were more comfortable speaking in Khmer, translators helped facilitating interviews.

Table 1. Stakeholder group coding			
Group #	Participants’ stakeholder group name	Group coding	# Participants
1	NGO Staff & Consultants	A	5
2	Central Government Staff	B	2
3	District-Level Government Staff	C	5
4	Commune-Level Government Staff	D	4

Findings

The findings from the data are grouped into four main themes. First, we considered the contextual challenges that emerged from the data, followed by examining the roles of local government and mapping the capacity needs for those roles, as understood by the literature and respondents. Finally, we review the recommended methods for effectively building capacity at the local government level.

Contextual challenges for sustaining sanitation markets

Contextual challenges that underscore all sanitation efforts in Cambodia must be addressed because of their relevance to the effectiveness of MRD’s previous work and the LGs’ current efforts. First, persistent perceptions of historical corruptions in Cambodia’s governments has discouraged villagers to engage with government programs (Vimealea et al 2009). This creates challenges for LGs to fill any roles within their rural communities, even if capacity exists at the local level. Second, rural villages still lack an understanding as to why toilets are important and simply “want to continue doing their habits” (Participant C3). Finally, villagers lack funds to purchase toilets (Rosenboom et al 2011). Many villagers delay toilet purchases because they are waiting for harvest revenue or direct subsidies/gifts from NGO projects (WSP 2012), creating a barrier in developing a sanitation market.

Role of local government

Though national governments are important in developing policies, decentralization of control from central to LGs has become more common, particularly for effective implementation of rural programs, as LGs are more accessible to community programs and have more practical experience working on sanitation programs on the ground than higher-level offices. With decentralization, LGs should have more resources in place to support sustainable rural sanitation markets (Rosensweig & Kopitopoulos 2010). However, this is not always true in developing country contexts such as Cambodia, where LGs are still in the process of receiving functional transfers from the national level and await personnel and financial support. LGs also have limited revenue-raising options, constraining financial resources more than other levels of government.

The role of LG in sanitation has remained difficult to pinpoint. There is a dearth of literature on the LG roles in Cambodia, implying that some roles may not be well known. The list of roles for LGs in Cambodia implemented by MRD specifically includes:

- Supporting policies from the ministry (MRD 2012);
- Collecting data for MRD’s monitoring information system (MIS) (MRD 2012; ADB 2012);
- Executing and managing work around awareness building, community-led total sanitation (CLTS), and behaviour change communications (BCC) (ADB 2012; MRD 2013);
- Operating maintenance support for facilities (ADB 2012);
- Enforcing compliance around building of facilities and related infrastructure (ADB 2012);
- Coordinating public services (MRD 2013); and
- Enforcing compliance around products sold by private sector (MRD 2012).

While all interviewees knew about LGs’ roles in awareness building, only some acknowledged other roles. Also, three documented roles – enforcing compliance of toilet products, construction, and supported ministry policies – were not discussed by stakeholders; this implies that LGs are not undertaking these roles, or if they are, LG efforts are not clearly observed.

Coordination and facilitation

Most participants agreed that coordination and facilitation was the most important LG role. Participant A5 said, “In general, I think that their role of coordination is useful...The district can better facilitate NGO consolidation & liaising, for example.” While the literature was vague about this work, participants specified what they expected from LG, although there were differences between groups. Most of Group A wanted LG to coordinate the villagers and private sector. Government groups (B, C, and D), however, stated it should be facilitating and coordinating NGO-related programs to minimize sectoral fragmentation. Government also stated it saw a role in coordinating targets for villages around toilet uptake and operations.

Demand creation and supply connection

All stakeholder groups agreed that one key role of LGs is educating villagers and creating demand for sanitation supplies through awareness building. In fact, many LG respondents felt their roles in sanitation were only with respect to CLTS and BCC, not talking more broadly about demand creation, as NGOs are seen as the wards of demand creation as a whole. Per government policies and guidelines, however, that is not the only role LGs hold (Kov et al 2015, MRD 2012, 2013, ADB 2012). The attention on demand has lessened the dialogue on LG’s other roles, though whether this is out of necessity because of the great need for improved demand or due to a lack of understanding of the other roles remains unclear.

Another important LG role is connecting demand to supply by communicating with suppliers and negotiating lower prices. Some responses indicated that LG should engage the private sector more so they may become more involved with their market by creating more demand themselves.

Monitoring

Some participants in all groups but Group D mentioned monitoring of sanitation uptake and use, primarily data collection (Pedi et al 2011). Participant C2 mentioned, “I collect data for updates on building toilets, and follow up with people who promise to build toilets. So, I find out why people promised [to build] the [toilet].” Monitoring was mostly discussed in terms of data collection and management.

Capacity of local government

Whether LGs can fill their roles in SanMark is dependent on whether there is capacity (Rosensweig & Kopitopoulos 2010). One of the most important aspects of capacity building is determining what types of capacity are needed at the individual level and how to provide contextually-appropriate capacity development methods and content (Perez et al 2012). In countries where decentralization is still new, such as Cambodia, LG capacity is often weak, especially in all government roles within WASH and development (Rosensweig & Kopitopoulos 2010). Most interviewees noted a minimal capacity within LG. Group D unconfidently spoke about their training needs and appeared unclear about what they had already learned. Going forward, capacity building for LG needs to accommodate the lower existing capacity levels; there needs to be a basic platform of skills prior to more technical trainings. To support this finding, Participant A4 stated, “The capacity is still very low, so if we are scaling up the decentralization to allocate a lot of responsibilities to districts and communes, they are not ready to take that responsibility.”

Also, a few Group A, C, and D participants stated that rural personnel were older and grew up during times without a culture of learning and therefore were unable to pick up needed skills. Most LG personnel

are over 50 years, 80% of the commune-level staff being so. In addition, almost all the staff at the commune level have only completed some primary education (Vimealea et al 2009), which is insufficient for their roles and responsibilities under decentralization.

Perez et al (2012) recommend developing capacity building plans with training materials specifically for LGs so they can sustainably facilitate rural sanitation markets. With respect to the specific skills and knowledge required for LGs to facilitate SanMark, however, the literature is limited and inconclusive. LGs in Cambodia find their roles and capacity for CLTS and BCC programs easier to perform than other SanMark support roles (Perez et al 2012), mostly because they are unsure exactly which skills and tasks they need to fulfil these roles. Willetts et al (2008) have identified technical skills and knowledge as the most necessary capacities for WASH practitioners. Implementing agency SNV’s SanMark program in Cambodia has clearly identified the capacity they built in their efforts with LGs. Most other sources were more general about the necessary skills and knowledge, such as “monitoring” (Pedi et al 2011; Willetts et al 2008), “coordination” (Perez et al 2012), or “demand creation & BCC” (SSH4A 2014). The specific capacity recommendations and how they apply directly to LG-specific roles are mapped in Table 2.

Capacity/Skills needed in Cambodia		Roles of Local Government (District & Commune) levels in Cambodia				
		Awareness building	Collect data	Maintenance support	Coordinate services	Compliance
Kov et al 2015	Community mobilization Effective communication Mentoring & supervision	Lit/ A,B,C,D Lit/ A,B,C,D Lit		Lit Lit	Lit/ A,B,C,D	Lit/ A,B,C,D Lit
SNV SSH4A 2014	Supply chain analysis Business modelling Demand creation & BCC Consumer studies	Lit/ A,B,C,D Lit		Lit	Lit Lit Lit Lit	Lit
Pedi et al 2011	Data collection Promotion of local enterprises		Lit/ A,B		Lit	Lit/ A,B Lit
Willetts et al 2008	Community facilitation Planning & strategic thinking Technical - design & construction	Lit/ C,D		Lit/ A Lit Lit	Lit/ A Lit	Lit/ A Lit
Perez et al 2012	Advocacy & promotion Strategy & planning	Lit		Lit		

There is a lack of specificity as to which capacities need development in Cambodia and redundancies amount the literature. For example, what certain skills specifically entail, such as “advocacy and promotion” (Perez et al 2012) remains unclear. The literature is also unclear as to why LG needs capacity in business modelling; one could speculate it could help officials better coordinate public services (SSH4A 2014).

Coordinating and facilitating

Participants across all stakeholder groups stated that LG needs capacity in coordination and facilitation skills, but determining what skills this entails for building capacity remains uncertain. Some said that coordination means knowing how to steer programs and efforts while mobilizing other resources (Group A), while others in LG cited more basic skills such as event, meeting, and training coordination (Group C). Others were more general, such as Participant C3 saying, “I still want more trainings on good facilitation skills.” Facilitating communities also addresses this capacity, pertaining to demand creation and linking it to the local supply chain (Willetts et al 2008), though the actual skills may vary from motivation to conflict management. Per participants, SNV already provides facilitation training for CLTS and BCC-related programs with LGs involved in the WSP pilot areas.

Technical skills for demand creation

The interviews with participants from all four stakeholder groups as well as the literature support the proposition that technical skills are needed for demand creation and behaviour change – namely, CLTS and BCC are required (Kov et al 2015, SSH4A 2014, Perez et al 2012). Though they had trainings in these skills, LGs requested refresher training on managing demand building programs.

Effective communication

Approximately half of the participants felt that LGs need more comprehensive overall communication skills. Group C (and some participants from Groups A and B) spoke about communication in terms of being better equipped to communicate information to rural villagers. Group D discussed the importance of communication skills in persuading villagers to change their habits and negotiating with village leaders to support sanitation efforts. Participant B2 illustrated, “How to make them have good communication with the private sector and the NGO in their local authority... is very weak. How to mobilize resources is very weak.”

Monitoring

Pedi et al (2011) identify that LGs need to gain capacity in data collection for long-term monitoring and evaluation of the sanitation market. Interviewees more clearly specified the need for building technological capacity in individuals than was seen in the literature. Most of Groups A and B mentioned building monitoring skills, but few in LG Groups. This divide in group responses may be because of LG’s low capacity and those groups not being aware of these capacity needs or that they had a role in sanitation monitoring. Those in the LG Groups who did mention monitoring skills said that simple data collection skills would improve the monitoring and planning roles, starting with building basic computer knowledge for data input and management. Participant A5 said that the LG needs to be trained in “...providing data, so data management and being able to maintain a set of data or database. Including IT skills.”

Potential methods for capacity building

Systemic change (e.g., human resource changes in LG) was outside the scope of the study. This research was seeking recommendations for how to build an effective capacity building program for LG staff involved in SanMark programs. As a result, the literature and interview responses detailed recommendations on improving future training methods.

Refresher trainings

Technical guidance programs should be shorter in length and spread out over a longer period so that retention can increase and information can be better applied to daily work (KID 2007). Almost all the LG Groups wanted refresher trainings in subjects they have already learned. Most LG participants indicated that the trainings were day-long, one-off learning events provided by NGOs, which conveyed an overwhelming amount of information.

Knowledge exchange

Trainings should include interaction between different regions of Cambodia so that horizontal learning can occur and workers can share best practices (Willetts et al 2008). LG Groups wanted more local sharing opportunities to improve CLTS and BCC programs; one participant even indicated knowledge exchange (i.e., peer-to-peer exchange, field visits) had already benefited their commune. A training package that fosters knowledge exchange would benefit different areas because they would be able to strengthen their capacity with peers over longer periods of time (Willetts et al 2008, Perez et al 2012).

Incentives

Group A felt that LGs need more incentives to mobilize for capacity building. Their concern was that results are not consistent because capacity building is not valued institutionally in different levels of government. Incentives (improved pay systems for LG staff, for example) would attract more qualified workers and create a better working environment that enables a culture of organizational and individual learning (Vimealea et al 2009). Currently, actors have not defined or consistently implemented incentives or rewards systems in government for sanitation markets, which exacerbates the varying levels of political will and engagement in LGs across Cambodia.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to identify the capacity gaps in Cambodia's rural LGs to facilitate sustainable sanitation markets. The key lessons learned from the research highlight the importance for governments to build a clear understanding on what the roles of LGs are – and related contextual challenges – before identifying appropriate capacities for development. There is only strong agreement on the LG's role in SanMark demand creation, which is still required for success in sustainable sanitation adoption. There was a less unified understanding of LG's role in fostering and supporting private sector engagement in sanitation. There must be more work to determine if the perception of LG's function in creating demand is indeed their most important role. More research is needed to better flesh out other roles LGs need to manage and what additional skills or knowledge would strengthen those functions. Also, the capacity building needed for LG's roles in sanitation markets goes beyond the sanitation sector. Indeed, skills like goal setting and budgeting will help LGs effectively manage their workload as the national government continues decentralization of functions to district and commune levels. The skills indicated – from effective communication and data collection to mobilization of resources – are crucial to improving sanitation efforts in rural Cambodia as well as other development efforts in areas such as employment and education.

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