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Governance and Decentralisation Unit**

Project Design Document

**STRENGTHENING PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE IN
CAMBODIA'S DECENTRALISATION AND
DECONCENTRATION REFORMS: ACCOUNTABILITY IN
THE NEW MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

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1. BACKGROUND

It is almost a decade since Cambodia first started its decentralisation reform journey in 1996 with the introduction of the Seila programme, which supports local development based on participatory approaches to local planning and project funding. With the intention to improve democracy, people participation and service delivery at local level, local elections in 2002 introduced Cambodia's *political* decentralisation, creating the Commune/Sangkat Councils (CC), which Seila funds would support. Since then, decentralisation in Cambodia has referred primarily to commune level processes. Deconcentration issues, concerning the delegation of tasks and transfer of authority to provincial/municipal and district/khan levels remained difficult to resolve (Rusten, Kim, Eng and Pak, 2004). More recently, a Decentralisation and Deconcentration (D&D) reform process has been instigated. This phase of the reform will pay particular attention to the issues related to deconcentration which was commented as lagging behind decentralisation (Rudengren et al., 2005). Deconcentration reform will be the main focus of this study. It will limit its scope to only provincial/municipal level given the amount of attention placed at this level in this emerging reform.

1.1. Current management system at provincial/municipal level

The current management system at provincial/municipal level has been weak and fragmented. The Organic Laws required by the Constitution for the sub-national levels of governments i.e. province/municipality, district/khan and commune/sangkat is still in the making.¹ The governors, although given the authority to coordinate the activities of various line departments, have in practices limited powers on a majority of development issues except for those of security and social order. In many ways, the governor acts more like the head of provincial line department of the Ministry of Interior (MoI), managing a small part of provincial financial and human resources. A majority of the resources are planned, budgeted and implemented in a highly centralised and fragmented manner by various line departments. Horizontal coordination among the governor offices, line departments, various NGOs, and civil society has been weak, leading to the issue of lacking of coherence in planning, budget and personnel management.²

These above issues significantly undermine accountability at provincial/ municipal level. First, with poor coordination and participation from non-government stakeholders, local people or even their representatives (commune/sangkat councils, in particular) are less likely to effectively interact with and be aware of the performance of the provincial authority. The absence of mechanisms through which feedback or complaints from local people, civil society and/or even the councils can be channelled makes the upward information flows almost non-existent. Moreover, it has been generally recognised that the interaction between people and government has been very little (Turner, 2002); in some instance, people view government as something they should avoid, rather as the servers or guardians.

Second, given the lack of clear and commensurate assignment of roles, responsibilities and resources among various actors, and the generally poor management and control system, there seems to be no mechanisms by which the central government can hold their line departments accountable for their performance and even compliance. The governor, in particular, is left in an awkward situation in terms of what he should and can do to serve the people in his territory. This also implies the uncertainty as to what extent the governor should be held accountable for

¹ With support from UNDP, MoI has started the drafting of these Organic Laws. The first draft is expected to be finalized sometimes in 2006.

² This information is based on our initial field observations and interviews.

whatever happens in his province. All these structural management issues lead to a number of operation and performance related issues including a non-transparent budgeting and implementation process, overlapping and uncoordinated development projects initiated by different line departments and the absence of a traceable linkage between project inputs to outputs and outcomes (Batholomew and Betley, 2004). It has also been found that the supports the current provincial/municipality has given to the elected commune/sangkat councils is still limited (WB, 2004)

Intending to overcome various deficiency in service delivery as described above, certain line ministries and institutions have attempted to establish some experiment-like reform initiatives including both on-budget such as the Accelerated District Development (ADD), the Priority Activity Program (PAP), and off-budget such as the Provincial Investment Fund (PIF) activities implemented through the Provincial Rural Development Committee (PRDC) and the Agricultural Development Support to Seila (ADESS). However, as noted by Prime Minister Hun Sen in May 2002, these examples of deconcentration are still few and young, and generally left to the initiatives of individual ministries (Turner, 2002). A part of the challenges is still the issues of coordination and putting these different pieces, both new and old practices, together in order to gain a better harmonization (ibid). Yet, these reform initiatives are seen as rich sources of experience from which the emerging D&D reform can learn, especially those relating to accountability issues.

1.2. The emerging reform

Responding to the above issues, in June 2005, a significant progress in the decentralisation and deconcentration reforms has been made with the approval by the Council of Ministers of the Strategic Framework for Decentralisation and Deconcentration Reforms, hereafter referred to as the Framework. The D&D Framework sets out objectives, visions, basic principles, scope, and strategies to develop management structures for governance reforms and guide all reforms affecting the management system at the sub-national levels which include provinces/municipalities, districts/khans and communes/sangkats. It is also a main document to divide the powers and the duties between the levels of the state administration. The framework envisages “a sub-national governance system that is based on democratic participation, operating with transparency and accountability in order to promote local development and delivery of public services to meet the needs of citizens and contribute to poverty reduction within respective territories.” The reforms will base on a number of important principles including democratic representation, participation of the people, public sector accountability, effectiveness and poverty reduction (RGC 2005, p. 3-4).

It is implied from the Framework that the focus of the emerging D&D reforms is more on the provincial/municipal level. First, at these levels, except for Phnom Penh municipalities, a unified administration will be established at provincial/municipal and ditrict/khan levels. At the provincial level, a number of bodies will be created including (i) a provincial/municipal council, (ii) a governing board, (iii) a secretary general and (iv) a cabinet to assist the work of the administration. The following are the essential changes of the reform.

- (i) The administration, with five-year term, is accountable to both the Royal Government and the citizens within its territories. The administration will have the secretary general and a cabinet to assist with its work. It will have duties to manage development activities and deliver services and infrastructures in accordance with the Organic Laws and overall national policy. It will have a unified budget and local staff management system in the province/municipality. It will be entitled to receive part or whole of the budget collected in

province/municipality and also transfers from the national government based on a specific and transparent formula. The size of the budget will correspond to the responsibilities of the province/ municipality.

- (ii) Financial management systems and other procedures will be reformed aiming at strengthening the process of planning, programming, budgeting, procuring, managing state assets, accounting, financial reporting, evaluating, and internal and external auditing. All these, together with better incentives and monitoring system in place, will be of priority to improve effectiveness of financial management and strengthen the vertical and horizontal systems of accountability.
- (iii) The council will be established by indirect elections, the procedures of which will be determined by the Organic Law. The council represents interests of the local citizens, and will have duties to discuss and approve the provincial/municipal budgets, plan and evaluate the activities of the governors and of the unified administration. The governing board will be composed of the governor, deputy governors and a number of members as necessary. Chaired by the governor and has the mandate of five years, the board will be responsible for job performance within the province/ municipality.
- (iv) The governor will be appointed by the Royal Government and will have a number of deputy governors as assistants to be also appointed by the Royal Government. They will have also five-year term. The governor will undertake the daily affairs of the province/ municipality. S/he is the representative of the Royal Government, ministers and head of institutions and the provincial/municipal council, and will be accountable for all affairs of the administration to the Royal Government, the governing board and council.
- (v) To support the administration at the sub-national levels, attention will also be paid to strengthening the responsibilities of central ministries and institutions and, if necessary, their roles, duties, and organisational structures will be appropriately revised.

The Framework lays out three seemingly consecutive outputs to push the reform forward. First are the policy and regulation outputs which include the organic laws and various regulations for the implementation of the laws, and sectoral policies on division of responsibility for delivering public services that needs to be transferred to each level. Second are the institutional outputs including the revision of the management systems at provinces/municipalities and district/khan levels and the revision of the roles and duties of the central ministries and institutions to reflect the above proposed structural changes. Third are sectoral outputs which refer to the provision of public services and infrastructures by sub-national administration.

The Framework provides a good starting point for the D&D reforms. However, a lot more thinking needs to be done and stipulated, especially in the upcoming Organic Laws. A part of remaining issues to be addressed is the structures of accountability that need to be designed and incorporated in the new unified administration. The following are some accountability concerns relating to certain actors.

- (i) *Governors' and secretary general's roles* will be extended influence over policy and processes, as will senior officials around governors, especially those in key roles in provincial general secretariats. These strengthened roles will present a number of important possibilities for leadership, in areas of coordination of line department activities around provincial needs and goals. But the new arrangements will also face the potential risks of any system highly focussed on particular individuals. Creating good opportunities

for wider policy debates, for local voice to be heard, avoiding bottlenecks, elite capture, gate keeping, influence pedaling, and further patronising and politicising of provincial governance are all important challenges in the new context.

- (ii) *Provincial line departments' roles* will face a new policy and operations environment, where they will be delegated execution and implementation responsibilities set by central policy makers, but will also potentially engage with province level governance priorities and cross-programme activities. We see one major challenge here as involving the creation of shared policymaking, planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring that lead to shared accountability. Also important are the issues of financial and human resources made available to the provincial administration. Ensuring enough participation and voices from commune authority and civil society is equally important in this respect.
- (iii) *New roles for Seila, Excom and PLG*, now handled by the Executive Committee (ExCom) of the Provincial Rural Development Committee, and extensively supported by the Partnership for Local Government, will likely form an important part of day to day accountability structures, for areas including financial transfers, contract management, process facilitation and technical support. At present, these exist alongside other, less well developed (and accountable) systems, with which they will need to be harmonized. Maintaining and expanding these accountability structures in the new environment will be an important challenge for the reforms. Changes to existing human resource arrangements, training and capacity building and other supports at province level will have important implications for the emergence of a strong, professional workforce in new provincial settings.
- (iv) *New indirectly elected councils* will provide the main avenue through which local and commune level voice can be heard at higher levels. The new system needs to be democratically accountable, and to ensure some checks and balances on what would otherwise be a high level of power concentration at province level, where the design so far suggests direct democratic accountability will not be strong. Effective representation and strengthened voice mechanisms are also necessary to ensure that the new province administration provides support and does not undermine the authority and mandates of the existing popularly elected commune councils.
- (v) *Donor and civil society groups* will now be dealing more intensively with provincial level partners, engaging in policy dialogue and planning, capacity building, support for line departments and staff and a range of other implementation issues. Participation of these stakeholders could increase the number of channels of expressing and representing ideas and interest, avoiding an executive dominated or narrowly politicized reform outcome. As an important driving force of decentralisation, donors' roles in the new reform is crucial for ensuring effectiveness of grants, evaluating impacts and maintaining a range of accountabilities.

1.3. Political and social context affecting decentralisation and deconcentration

The above description of the background of the decentralisation and deconcentration is more on the formal institutional arrangement. However, political and social factors, which create the informal parts of the reforms, are also shaping the design of the reform. Political consensus, power brokering and widespread rent-seeking behaviour heavily depending on political affiliation and personal relation set out a contextual environment in which decentralisation and deconcentration reforms operate (Rusten, et al., 2004). In policy implementation, the

effectiveness and efficiency are placed a lower priority than the loyalty; and the prospects for generating rents and the cultures of impunity is high (Hughes and Conway, 2004). Very often, formal status of a high-ranking official is not as important as his informal influence derived from his position in a political party. For instance, the real influence of a governor depends very much on the influence he has as a party member especially the ruling party³. All these create a political atmosphere which is not particularly conducive for pro-poor policy formulation and implementation (Hughes and Conway, 2004).

Such political contexts are well reflected at the sub-national levels. With the absence of the election, the members of parliament (MP) and district governors and deputy governors are appointed based on political party quotas. So far, the appointments are made as part of political reconciliation amongst the CPP and Funcinpec, without much consideration to administrative efficiency or effectiveness. In this third term of the Government, for instance, there are up to ten deputy governors in some provinces/ municipalities and districts/khans.⁴ Such overwhelmingly dominating effects of the political factors at the provincial/municipal level make the issues of deficiencies and coordination even worse partly because there are too many players and yet there is unclear stipulation as to who should do and be responsible for what, and partly because it sends stronger and stronger message to public officials that the incentives that they should pursue do not exist in the formal administrative systems but in political parties and spheres.

2. THIS STUDY: BACKGROUND AND MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is a part of a longer research programme, the Policy Oriented Research Programme on Decentralisation (PORDEC), enacted by the Cambodian Development Resource Institute (CDRI), and funded by UK's DFID and Sweden's SIDA, as part of their wider commitments to decentralisation in Cambodia. Since its inception in November 2002, PORDEC has completed a series of studies including (i) "The Challenges of Decentralisation Design in Cambodia, 2004" (Rusten et al. 2004) (ii) "Fiscal Decentralisation: Existing Taxation and Potential Tax Candidates for Reassignment and Sharing between the Province and the Communes, 2005" (Eng and Rusten *forthcoming*) and is involved with an ongoing study about (iii) "Democracy in Action: Decentralisation Process in Post-Conflict Cambodia" (Kim *forthcoming*). Besides the core studies listed above, PORDEC researchers have also produced consultancy studies including (i) "Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) on Education Sector in Cambodia, 2005" (PETS *forthcoming*) focusing mainly at provincial level, and (ii) "Local Public Service Delivery, 2005" (Eng et al. 2005) documenting the legal basic and current roles of all actors in the provision of local services, and analysing the roles of commune councils in such provision.

2.1. Main research questions

Most studies conducted so far by various institutions whose work covers decentralisation (partly or entirely) focus more on commune council levels (e.g. Seila, CDRI, CAS, CCSP, CCDP, PACT). However, given the new development in the D&D reform, together with our intention to stay policy relevant, this new phase of our research program will focus more on the reform at provincial/municipal level (*Phnom Penh Capital is excluded*). As the reform is still at its early stage, this new research will be carried out in a difficult environment with changing emphases emerging. At the same time, the project is designed to be sufficiently flexible so that it can capture important issues, should they arise, making it possible to observe the reforms closely, and to provide timely and strategic policy advice to the reform process.

³ Field interviews with PLG's senior provincial officers.

⁴ Field interviews with PLG's senior provincial officers.

We believe that an independent research can provide important perspectives going forward. One way to do a study that remains relevant and contributing to the reform is to provide *a better understanding about accountability in the current system, especially at the provincial/municipal level* and its relationship with other stakeholders. The following are therefore our two main research questions, followed by an explanation and rationale as to why they are important to study.

- (i) **What important accountability issues and processes can be identified in the existing administrative and political structures and relations at provincial levels?**
- (ii) **How can the design of the D&D reforms be strengthened to promote better accountability at the province level in the future?**

In addition to the main research questions, three points of clarification and rationales need also be made to answer three key questions: (1) why it is useful to study the current provincial governance system in terms of policy relevance; (2) what accountability means in this study; and (3) why it is important to study it as the central theme?

2.2. Why is it important to study the current provincial governance system?

Despite the general recognition of the deficiency in various areas of the current sub-national governance system, there remains an obvious need to deepen and broaden our understanding of what is happening – what works or does not work and where accountability is strong or not strong – in the current provincial system, which will shed light on where it should be improved. From this understanding, and in the light of probable changes, a set of useful policy and structural design issues can be identified, and introduced to policy discussions around the new reforms especially as the preparation of the Organic Laws.

As earlier stated, Cambodia’s governance reforms operate in a very unique political and social environment. The D&D reforms upon which the government embark are also undertaken within this particularly unique context. Apart from contributing to the maintenance of peace and stability, D&D reforms have produced little impact on social outcomes. Development practitioners and scholars reason that it is the reforms’ lack of fit with Cambodia’s socio-cultural and institutional context that prohibits the reforms from achieving their full potential (Blunt and Turner, 2005; Ojendal, 2005; Ojenda and Kim, 2005). They argue that the context of society, history, culture and institutions, to a great extent, influences the results of the D&D reforms. In Cambodia, the social, cultural, historical and institutional contexts all are unreceptive to and unsupportive of the three pre-conditions required for decentralisation success: devolution of adequate power to lower-level, allocation of adequate resources, and reliable mechanisms for downward accountability (Blunt and Turner, 2005).

We believe that the Framework’s suggested rearrangement of provincial governance system is intended to improve the receptivity of the contexts to be more supportive of the three elements. However, the current bodies of research on Cambodia’s governance reforms provide little insight into the socio-cultural and institutional context within which the provincial government operates.⁵ This makes the need to explore and understand in-depth the workings and dynamics of the current provincial governance obvious and urgent because the ‘character’ and ‘pace’ of governance reform should be guided by “pragmatic, thorough and realistic assessment of context, rather than

⁵ Previous research on provincial governance has centered mostly on financial aspects.

ideology [driven by the western values]" (ibid.). Therefore, it is hoped that practical policy interventions can be designed to improve the receptivity of the contexts once the contexts themselves are better understood.

2.3. Application of the concept of accountability in the study

Both in general literatures and Cambodia, accountability is still a contested and multifaceted concept whose meaning is evasive and sometimes confusing. Therefore, it is important that this document make it clear from the beginning what the concept of 'accountability' means. This study will employ a combination of two prominent definitions identified from selected literatures. First is by Schedler (1999) which defines accountability as ***a process composed of two components: answerability and enforcement***. Answerability means that public officials have the obligation to provide *information* and *justification* on their actions. *Information* dimension of answerability is about making available "reliable facts," whereas *justification* focuses on explaining such actions happened. Enforcement refers to rewarding the good and punishing the bad behaviour. Accountability needs to have both answerability and enforcement. Answerability without sanctions is generally considered weak or inconsequential accountability. Also, it seems that answerability comes first and followed by appropriate enforcement.

The second definition is from the 2004 World Development Report (WDR) which sees accountability as ***a relationship among actors that has five features: delegation, finance, performance, information about the performance and enforcement***. The WDR defines accountability from principal-agent relationship perspectives. It argues that in the relationship, in order for the principal to effectively hold the agent accountable, it needs more than just information and enforcement in respects to his/her performance; clear delegation together with precise objectives to be achieved followed by adequate financing need to be provided to the agent. After that, there should also be mechanisms by which the performances of the agent can be accurately measured.

These two definitions, although quite different, are related and both can be useful analytical tools for this study. The first definition, this document would argue, provides us the general notion about accountability whereas the second focuses on the process through which answerability and enforcement can be achieved.

In Cambodia, accountability is translated as "ka nak neypheap" which can be easily confused with the term *accounting*. The Khmer word with the closest meaning to accountability and that is simple enough to be understood by everyday Khmers is "*totul khos trov*," literally meaning "responsibility." However, according to Keohane 2001, responsibility is different from accountability: responsibility is ***as if*** accountability. If a person is responsible, he *by himself* fulfils his duties and serves people properly. But this implies no mechanisms to ensure that he needs to behave in such ways. Thus, given the linguistic limitations, for interview purposes, the study plans to prepare questions to capture the degree of answerability and enforcement rather than choosing one single Khmer term to represent the concept of accountability. Alternatively, the study might use the second definition by selectively look at some from the five features of accountability relationship. Also, in terms of expected outcomes, this study defines an accountable governance system as the one ***which serves Cambodian people, especially the poor, in an honest, fair, efficient and effective way***. This 'outcomes' dimension of accountability implies two things: better service delivery and empowerment for the poor.

It should also be noted that rather than studying the issues of accountability just in respects to specific principal-agent relationships like who is accountable to whom and for what, which

according to Keohane (2002) can be misleading, this study focuses more on the system which defines the relationship of accountability among different actors. This is because all accountability relationships are embedded in a broader institutional arrangement and context, both formal and informal, all of which constitutes accountability system.

2.4. Why is it useful to study accountability?

There are a number of answers to this question. First accountability is currently an overarching concern in Cambodia. The Royal Government of Cambodia's Rectangular Strategy (RGC 2004) stresses the importance of good governance as a pre-condition to sustainable development, with equity and social justice. The World Bank's 2004 submission to the Cambodian Consultative Group, Cambodia at the Crossroads (World Bank 2004) suggests that in order to reduce poverty, serious effort will have to be paid to improving accountability in several areas. These include strengthening checks and balance in judicial reforms, improving financial accountability, enhancing transparency in natural resource management, decentralisation, and removing obstacles to private sector growth. Without improvement in these areas, poverty reduction and development will be difficult to realise. The need for social and financial accountability is also stressed in the recent Seila mid-term review (Rudengren et al. 2005).

For the D&D reform, accountability is even more important. As indicated by Cohen and Peterson (1999), designing an administrative decentralisation for public sector requires special attention to three different levels of components: principles, purposes and property of the design. Principles of the design include accountability which in turn breeds efficiency and effectiveness. Purpose of the administrative design, on the other hand, includes stabilisation, distribution and allocation. For administrative decentralisation in particular, it has been widely argued that allocation should be its purpose, leaving the former two to the centralisation. Lastly, property of designs focuses on roles and sequences of roles that need to be divided to different players in and outside the state and to fit with a context and dynamics of each country's institutions. In this regard, it is clear that the first thing a design needs to address is the accountability or it will be less likely to achieve its objective and sustain. The authors indicate in addition that decentralization is about delegation and accountability is a very necessary component for an effective delegation.

By focusing on accountability at this early stage of the reform, the study therefore expects to contribute to the policy dialogue process by pointing out (1) the working systems that should be kept and strengthened and (2) the potential obstacles preventing the reform from sustaining itself and not focusing too much on just getting the reform rolling fast. And, as indicating earlier, the study expects that understanding accountability issues in the current system is a starting point to point out potential issues in the future. Because accountability is an overarching issue, studying it in-depth is expected to illuminate the dynamics of the reforms in a more complete picture. However, to make its scope feasible, the study identifies the following sub-research areas to be carried out in sequences as follows.

3. SPECIFIC RESEARCH AREAS

Our research will have two overall concerns and developing focal points.

- (i) Initially, the focus will be on gaining an overall understanding of existing and anticipated province level structures and relationships relevant to accountability, and
- (ii) Secondly, focusing in on particular sub-areas where accountability issues are likely to be important.

3.1. Overview: understanding existing and proposed province-level governance structures and relationships

We need to understand the existing province governance arrangements much more closely, if we are to get a realistic sense of what will be important going forward. In particular, the following aspects and relationships which are important for province level accountability are currently not well understood.

- Formal power sharing arrangements and their impact: party quota arrangements for official positions including governor and deputy governors at province and district levels, and senior departmental positions.
- Existing complex parallel funds transfer arrangements; Seila, IFAD-funded projects, and other governmental arrangements, and how these can be reconciled in the new system.
- Existing arrangements with major donors working either through ExCom systems (for example, the Ministry of Agriculture/ Seila/ IFAD agricultural development loan) or in parallel: which aspects of these will be retained and expanded for the new system?
- Processes of consensus-building and contest between political parties, and how these affect the governance environment.
- Political party structures, their internal governance and accountability arrangements, and the effect of these on wider aspects of provincial governance.
- Overlap and interaction between political and administrative processes at province level.

3.2. Sub-areas for more specific researches

Considering progress in designing the reforms so far, it is also possible to foresee (but not prejudge) a number of important accountability sub-areas and issues – some new, some a continuation and intensification of existing issues. In this study, three more specific areas are of interest:

3.2.1. Voice, information and policy dialogue

Voice, information and policy dialogues are widely considered as basic elements of accountability. With decentralisation, it is expected that government will be brought ‘closer to the people’, where locally aware and responsive officials and political leaders are better able to hear and be accountable to the voices of local people, civil society, and communes. If this happens, participation will be promoted to prevent undermining the mandates of the CS in particular. However, in practice voice based accountability is often weak, even where decentralisation programmes have tried to strengthen them (see ADB et al. 2004, Craig and Porter 2006). Cambodia’s proposed reforms need to be considered for their impact on local voice and its current and potential accountability aspects.

- This study seeks to understand how the voice and influences of (i) locally elected CS presumably representing the local people and (ii) and civil society groups can be heard in the policy dialogue and innovation in the current and emerging provincial level. The focus here is on vertical inclusion of voices and information sharing.
- Also related, the study will focus on the problem of horizontal information sharing necessary for policy dialogue especially between the governor and various line departments.

3.2.2. *Planning, budgeting, and financial management and execution*

From our discussion with provincial level officers and senior Seila provincial advisors, there is currently considerable variable in the development of planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring and control mechanisms. These systems now mainly involve vertical transfers and accountabilities, from central to provincial and lower levels. As noted above, the PRDC/Excom already has a considerably developed system, especially in relation to, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture/ Seila IFAD program. Most provincial line departments too have developed their own protocols and arrangements. However, these new reforms will see much development and more coordination. For this study, the following areas are considered to be weak with high potential for improvement, and therefore maybe considered as sub-areas for the research:

- *Planning and budgeting.* Although given a mandate to ensure the welfare of the people within his territory, the governor in practice is not very involved in development planning and budgeting process involving line departments and many donor arrangements. Basically, each line department prepares work only with their respective central line ministry doing their planning and budgeting. The level of coordination among line departments at this stage, on the other hand, is minimal. This process is highly fragmented, and as a consequence of this, a blurring of accountability is inevitable.

This study seeks to understand issues of province level planning and budgeting, and to recommend improvements for the next reforms.

- *Financial management and execution.* Besides a number of new reform initiatives such as Seila, PAP and ADD, provincial governor and line departments have little authority as to how financial resources should be managed. This issue is compounded by the weaknesses in the overall financial management system of Cambodia which is considered to be highly centralized, poorly controlled internally and externally, vulnerable to fiduciary risks, and inputs- rather than output/results-oriented.

This study will examine in particular the current roles of the governor, line departments versus the national government, and the consequences of such arrangements on the financial management system and service deliveries. From there, suggestions shall be made on issues of delegating more financial control authorities to the governors.

3.2.3. *Professional, motivated and well monitored civil servants*

Most civil servants at province level receive meagre salary and incentives. However, a small group receives support from donor and salary supplement programmes. The human resources system in general is poor: recruitment processes are sometimes questionable, capacity is currently low with no clear capacity development schemes, too many staff are kept on the payroll, and performance evaluation systems are seldom effective. This situation affects the outcomes of civil services and leaves room for some individuals to exploit their roles through patronage and political connection for financial benefits. At province level, the role of the governors versus the central ministries in managing the line department staff is not well balanced.

- This study sets out to understand existing province level capacity and human resource management system, and from there, tries to point out issues to be addressed when the reform comes into places.
- In particular, issues of *salary supplementation, recruitment, performance, patronage* and the potential roles of the governor versus the line ministries in managing human resources at province level will be considered.

4. CONCEPTUAL/ANALYTIC FRAMEWORKS

The study aims to generate a close empirical understanding of province level governance in Cambodia, in both its executive/ technical/ administrative aspects, and in its political structures and relationships. In both of these areas, both formal and informal aspects of these relationships will also be considered.

This study's approach to theory and modelling will be 'eclectic': that is, it will identify and use appropriate theory and models as issues present and require theoretical framing. Some of these theories and models are already obvious: others will emerge in field and literature review processes. This should result in an adaptable set of working analyses well grounded in Cambodian situations.

Some initial basic analytic themes, then, have already been identified.

4.1. The Political and the Executive

This simple and pragmatic analytic division of aspects of governance will be applied to our analysis of accountability in province governance. In particular here we are interested in understanding both aspects in overview:

- Executive structures, actors and relationships, and how these function within particular institutions including the governorship, the salaket, Excom and Seila, line departments, and at commune and other local levels of governance.
- Political structures, actors and relationships, and how these function at provincial level.

This study is especially interested in the ways these two aspects overlap: how, for example, political power and executive power are effectively combined in the office of the governor, but also at a range of lower levels. Here, two different systems of relationships, power, resource mobilisation and accountability come into interaction with each other with a range of effects. Describing and analyzing these interactions and effects will be an important task for this study.

4.2. The Formal and Informal

Formal executive and political structures at provincial level relevant to accountability include elected and party quota- appointed officials, positions within party structures, as well as formal bureaucratic procedural and contracting arrangements within government and with outside agencies. Key structures include the Salaket, Excom, line department organization

Informal executive and political structures relevant to accountability include a range of relationships, including networking and non-formalised information sharing, competition and some collaboration and partnership in service delivery arrangements, voluntary contributions to

service delivery or political activities, personal and political loyalty, extension of patronage and some other personalized parts of political leadership, and relationships based in personal friendship and family.

This study considers both of these aspects to be important, and understands that again there is considerable overlap between these aspects in everyday governance situations. It wants to understand how these processes work and overlap to produce different kinds of accountability within Cambodian provincial governance settings.

4.3. Specific theoretical literatures

At the same time, the study will begin especially in its literature review processes by considering Cambodian sub-national government against a number of obvious theoretical and analytic traditions.

These will include:

- Analyses of Cambodian political culture especially in the context of wider South East Asian government, elite networks and authoritarianism: see for example Chandler 1999; Alagappa 1995; Peang Meath 1997; Vickery 1994; Vatikiotis 1996; Roberts 2001, Gottesman 2003, Hughes and Conway 2003, Rusten, Kim, Eng and Pak 2005.¹; Ledgerwood 1996a; 1996b; 1998; Ledgerwood and Vijghen 2002; Ledgerwood and Un 2003; Hughes and Kim 2004.
- Analyses of neopatrimonialism in developing countries: see for example Chabal and Daloz 1999; Braathen 2002; Bratton and van de Walle 1994 and 1997; Gerdmann and Simutanyi 2003; Migdal, Joel. 1988; Migdal, Kohli and Shue, eds, 1994; van de Walle and Smiddy Butler, 1999, and Van de Walle 2001; Young 1995.
- Analyses of accountability issues in current decentralised governance contexts: see for example World Bank 2004; Agrawal and Ribot 1999, Rusten, Kim, Eng and Pak 2005; Crook and Manor 1998, Crook 2003; Blair 2000; Ebrahim 2003; Keohane 2002; Kaufman et al. 2002; Craig and Courtney 2004, Craig 2003; 2004; Craig and Porter 2003; 2006; Schedler 1999
- Conceptualisations and reports covering key aspects of Cambodian decentralised governance and accountability: see for example Biddulph et al 1997; 1998; 1999; Biddulph 2004; Calavan, Briquets and O'Brien 2004; Cooperation Committee for Cambodia 2004; Hasselskog 2000; Nissen 2005; Rudengren, Andersen and Durant 2005; Rusten, Kim, Eng and Pak 2005; World Bank 2004. See Kim and Pak 2004 for a review of previous literature

5. METHODOLOGIES, ETHICS, AND RISKS

Studying political/informal aspects of accountability at provincial level poses significant methodological and ethical challenges, and some potential risks, especially given the level of sensitivity of some issues. Yet this study's authors hold the convictions that (1) these areas are important, and need to be understood if the actual topic of accountability is to be understood, and (2) that they are not so sensitive that researchers should always avoid them. Moreover, it is also the conviction of this study that (3) political aspects of governance have a basic legitimacy as a

widely accepted domain of society, and therefore should not always be considered in negative (or normative) terms. Likewise, discussion or studies relating to it should not be seen as intimidating or politically biased. And finally (4) in this study it will be made clear that the objective of including the political part in the study is not to provoke political agenda on its own; but to capture a more complete picture of the dynamics of the accountability and good governance at the provincial level.

Nonetheless a number of important ethical and risk issues remain. Researchers have a number of options when approaching such areas. They can use 'overt' or open research approaches, in which objectives of the researchers are made clear to all, and where all research subjects are clear that the material they offer may be published and thus exposed to the wider public domain. The advantages of such an approach are that the research is able to proceed on a sanctioned, open basis, with the overt or tacit approval of various local and other authorities. People are clear on what they are involved in, what the material will be used for, and can make their own informed choices about participation. The disadvantages are that given the sensitivity of the information, respondents will not be able to respond in as full and forthright a manner as is necessary to generate an accurate picture of actual situations.

Another option is the employment of 'covert' (covered or secret) research approaches. With covert research methodologies, by hiding the real agenda of the researchers, researchers seek to extract information indirectly from respondents who are unaware of the researchers' real identities and purposes.

In either case, a number of ethical issues are important.

- First, risks of harm to research subjects and researchers. Researchers addressing sensitive issues create risks for themselves and for their subjects. Suspicion around unclear and especially covert research agendas here raises especially grave risks.
- Second, informed consent: By proceeding in an overt manner, researchers can ensure that their respondents are participating fully informed of their rights in relation to the study: rights to participate or not, rights in regard to confidentiality, and in relation to dissemination of research materials. They are free to decide whether or not to trust and accept the verbal and written undertakings the researchers have made to them.
- Third, confidentiality: Except in cases where the respondent has expressly agreed to have their identity exposed (written evidence will be obtained here in such cases), all research subjects should be guaranteed protection of identity.
- Security of information and respondents' identity. Even for a considerable period after the research, it is necessary to continue security of information and respondent identity even beyond the end of the research process. In this case, all notebooks, interview tapes, any identifiable, non-public domain material will be kept at CDRI under secure conditions.

5.1. This study: 'overt' methods

Because of the above ethical implications, 'overt' or open approaches will be used in this study. Professionalism, objectivity and confidentiality shall be strictly followed. Informed consent will be assured via research protocol involving both verbal and written research project information.

This will be conveyed in two ways: first via a simple language fact sheet introducing the research, detailing its purpose, use of materials, reinforcing the subjects rights to withdrawal (including withdrawal of materials during a period after the interview), and offering a telephone number where subsequent requests for information or withdrawal can be made. Secondly, via a standard researchers introduction to be read to each participant, subjects will be made fully aware of the purposes of the study, how it will proceed, and how its findings will be used. This should ensure a level of ethical transparency and allow subjects to make informed choices about their participation. Given wider undertakings of confidentiality it should not, however, rule out the possibility of respondents giving as full and frank an account of the realities of situations as they want to give.

5.2. Methods

Broadly speaking, the study will use (i) formal interviews, (ii) informal discussion with different stakeholders, and (iii) participant and other observation techniques in certain meetings and events.

The methodology of the study will involve 3 stages starting a formative and followed by two iterative research phases. In the first stage, the intention was to get preliminary understanding about the current situations which would lead the study to identification of important and relevant issues. From there, the two other stages will involve revisits to the respondents and sites to learn more about the issues.

5.1.1. Formative period: familiarization with systems and people at province level

- Initial overview, and identification of suitable key informants and potential cases
- Inventory overview of management arrangements at the province level.
- Collection of basic descriptive materials and information about the Governor's office and departmental activities at the province level.
- Very basic introductory semi-structured interviews with key figures: Governor, PDRD, PLG, ExCom, other province line departments: regarding aspects of existing structure and of anticipated impacts of D&D reforms
- Researchers' individual notebook and memo reflection
- Group reflection on findings
- Prioritization of next phase issues and approaches

5.1.2. Second iterative research phase

- Working more closely with key informants: formal and informal
- Second round of interviews with
- Taking opportunities to engage in participant and other observation of actual processes.
- Notebook and memo writing in the field
- Group reflection on findings and reconsideration of research priority sites, subjects and issues

5.1.3. Third iterative research phase

- Working more closely with key informants: formal and informal
- Second round of interviews with
- Taking opportunities to engage in participant and other observation of actual processes.
- Notebook and memo writing in the field
- Group reflection on findings and reconsideration of research priority sites, subjects and issues

5.3. Work plan

Work Plan for Accountability Issues in the Emerging Decentralisation and Deconcentration Reform

Year	2005												2006											
Activity/Month	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
Step I Research design and piloting																								
1.1 Conceptual and Cambodian case workshop																								
1.2 Consultation process																								
1.3 Project design document writing																								
1.4 Identification of case provinces																								
1.5 Developing semi-structured interviews for first field work																								
Step II Literature review formative field visits																								
2.1 Literature reviews and synthesis																								
2.2 Linking of network peer learning groups																								
2.3 Preparing questionnaires and first phase fieldwork																								
2.4 Write initial first draft of the first chapters																								
Step III Iterative field visits																								
3.1 Second phase of field visits																								
3.2 Write draft of the chapter on the last three research sub areas																								
3.3 Third phase of field visits																								
3.4 Write final draft of the report																								
3.5 Report peer reviews and comments																								

6. WIDER POLICY ENGAGEMENTS

From the outset, the PORDEC research has set out to be policy relevant, and responsive to issues emerging now in a fast changing Cambodian and international decentralisation and governance context. In this phase too, we will be seeking to directly engage in policy debates through a number of channels, including project advisory people, participation in decentralisation forums and where possible processes.

In particular, we have identified a number of potential key advisors who will be consulted on the current draft document, and then be formally asked to act as ongoing advisors.

While it would be premature to name these people formally now, these include

- Royal Government of Cambodia officials
- Provincial government officials and advisors
- Seila programme officials
- Donor representatives

- Independent researchers

In addition, PORDEC researchers will participate where possible in a number of research-relevant forums, including

- The Technical working group for Decentralisation
- The Decentralisation Forum working group

7. CONTACT DETAILS

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ⁱ For wider South East Asian politics, see Rodan et al 2000; 2001; 2000. Kingsbury 2001 Lim 2001; McCargo 2002; Means 1996 Case 2001