

Chapter 9 | Public Administration: Digitalization and Talent

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Vireak is a public servant representing the Tonle Bassac Sangkat in Phnom Penh. He was recruited from the Royal University of Law and Economics following graduation and spent his first two years as an intern in the department of e-citizenry. During this time, he was trained in effective digital response through the ministry's e-administration platform. Today, he begins the next stage of his career as a supervisor in the services department. It will be Vireak's role to analyse domestic and national trends that have the potential to affect the menu of citizen requirements in relation to public administration. This data forms a key component of the Sangkat's "town-hall" meetings, where local residents and public administration representatives provide updates and undertake discussion on potential reforms.

I. Future Public Administration: The Ideal Scenario

In 2040, the public sector requirements of the Cambodian citizenry continue to be shaped by enhanced economic performance, globalization, and domestic advancements in digital information and technology systems. Guided by the strategic goals of governance reform - modernizing public institutions and ensuring the stable roles and functions of public administration (hereafter PA) - the Cambodian government has continued to build progressively on its 2019-2030 National Public Administrative Reform Program (NPAR). The reforms have continued to build incrementally towards delivering a suitable public

administration service for the needs of Cambodia 4.0. The primary goals of PA reform policy by 2040 will be to deliver responsive, effective, efficient, and accountable public service. The system will be rooted in the requirements of a nation with a growing middle-income and increasingly industrialized manufacturing sector. Several features shape the ideal scenario of PA infrastructure by 2040.

Firstly, the motivations behind public administration reform policy will come to be driven by public demand, set within a system of feedback and response. The government PA system will have developed its role towards being a responsive civil society infrastructure, rooted in the constitution. Whilst in 2020, PA is primarily influenced by political party agenda and politicians (Eng & Ear, 2018), by 2040 it will be seen as a responsive platform of service rooted in the needs of the citizenry. Serving the public will be undertaken with cross-party impartiality and underwritten by the guarantees of the Cambodian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Government agencies (see Figures 1 & 2) will remain mechanisms through which the government channels and administers its programs; although the modern development of PA will require a certain degree of civil service delivery through public and private partnership (PPP) to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

Public accountability denotes public servants acting in the public interest with transparency and openness (Bovens, Schillemans & Goodin, 2014) and a driving principle of PA development by 2040 is captured by this sentiment of 'virtues of service'. The accountability virtue is a desirable quality in public actors (state agencies, politicians, and civil servants) where there are requisite standards of behaviour for good governance (Bovens, 2010; Bovens et al., 2014; Dubnick, 2007). In order to establish the accountability virtue Cambodia will ensure the presence of five key components—transparency, liability, controllability, responsibility, and responsiveness. Additionally, accountability mechanisms will be introduced that ensure institutional arrangements by which a public actor may be held accountable by another actor (Bovens, 2010; Bovens et al., 2014). The establishment of a forum by which public actors can be held accountable, such as parliament, will be key. To this end, in 2040, Cambodia will have

developed the requisite 'check and performance control' procedures to deliver an effective and accountable public administration body.

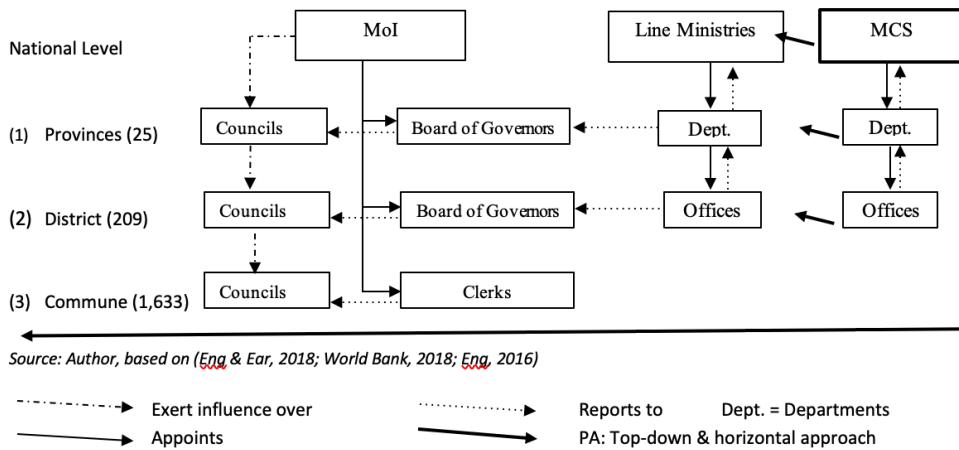
In this era of a 'globalised Cambodia',³⁷ PA in Cambodia has shifted from sectoral approaches to a 'new public governance' model. This is represented by a moving away from stated-directed interventions and personal/group interests (Robinson, 2015; Saxena, 2013; OECE, 2009). Embracing such shifts will have enabled Cambodia to move towards a responsive management style of PA where performance standards, outputs and outcomes, competition, and contestability are key to ensuring quality. It will also allow Cambodia to build an effective and accountable PA system to not only provide better public services, but also to be robust enough to tackle unforeseen local and global exogenous and endogenous influences.

II. Scenario Space and Key Factors for Future Public Administration

Contemporary Cambodia first commenced PA reforms in 1993, when the Kingdom entered the current period of relative national stability and peace (MCS, 2015). The following three decades saw reforms undertaken by committees operating incrementally. The first departure from this approach came in 2013, where an intensification of the reform track occurred; manifested by the establishment of the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS), which employed a vertical (Eng & Ear, 2018; World Bank, 2018; Eng, 2016) and horizontal approach to current PA reform (see Figure 1). Subsequently, MCS has strategically looked at enhancing the quality of public services, human resources management and development, and pay and remuneration over the past five years (MCS, 2015; MCS, 2018). However, PA reforms remain fragmented.

³⁷ Characterised as having a greater degree of economic integration in the global supply chain principally due to the kingdom's industrialized manufacturing sector (see Cambodia 2040 Volume 1 for more details).

Figure 1: Vertical and horizontal approaches to PA reforms at national and sub-national levels



Source: Author, based on (Eng & Ear, 2018; World Bank, 2018; Eng, 2016)

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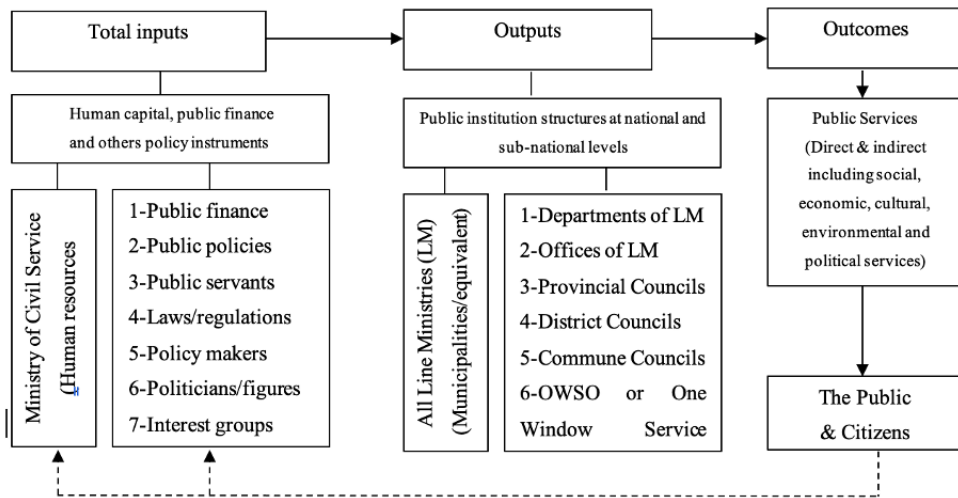
The improvements have been largely seen in legal and strategic frameworks (World Bank, 2018; MCS, 2018). There has been some training conducted for key officials (MCS, 2018), yet its effectiveness remains unknown due to an absence of quantifiable and systematic assessments. A significant development has been seen in the area of payment and remuneration, with MCS embracing technology. For example, officials can receive payment and remunerations, and check transactions through Bank Mode (MCS, 2015; 2018; World Bank, 2018). The current reforms have demonstrated moves in an optimistic direction, with the government showing a certain degree of political will towards reform in the PA space. However, a number of structural and non-structural constraints should be recognized and systematically tackled.

Firstly, the capabilities of public institutions remain inefficient, with management structures, mandates, and services, largely undefined and overlapping (ADB, 2018; MCS, 2015; 2018). For instance, the management structures of only 11 ministries and eight provincial departments had been outlined as of 2018 (World Bank, 2018). Turner (2013) notes that PA suffers from capacity deficits and dysfunctions and is still characterized as being highly centralized.

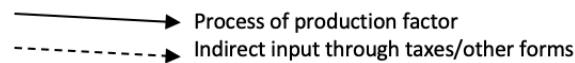
Secondly, reforms have not been satisfactorily financed, with those involved having insufficient technical and professional skills (Turner, 2013; World Bank, 2018; MCS, 2018; 2018a). They have received merely piecemeal support from donors, as they tend to support sectoral and situational approaches, rather than to build the institutional capacity (UNDP, 2015). The reforms also encountered complex and sluggish processes when requesting financial authorization (MCS, 2018).

Given the production factor of public services (see Figure 2), PA in 2040 should be rooted in successful reforms and development across the key factors of public sector institutions, civil servants, services, and systems.

Figure 2: Cambodian production factor for public services



Source: Author



Source: Author

Key Factor 1: Institution: Several components of PA reform have already been introduced, such as defining management structures, roles, responsibilities, mandates, and services for each agency (MCS, 2018; World Bank, 2018). However, compatibility between budget and a feasible workload is key to quality. Moving forward, the PA institution needs to have acquired anticipative

and innovative capabilities in order to tackle complex and unforeseen issues. Institutional strategic and operational plans need to be put in place with comprehensive performance and personnel management frameworks, with budgets audited. The performance of service delivery needs to be regularly, quantifiably, and quantitatively measured by responsive, efficient, effective, and accountable evaluation indicators. Performance-focused service delivery and principles-based management should be part of the rules-based institutional management of PA by 2040. If the PA institutions put in place are robust, users will be able to access social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental services that enhance their well-being and save them time and money. They could also strengthen the relationship between the government and the people, as public trust is fostered, with citizens partners with the government, engaging in policy-making, tapping into new sources of ideas, and making decisions regarding public needs (Josephine, 2019).

Key Factor 2: Civil Servants: By 2040 civil servants will be represented as “e-servants”. An “e-servant” more usually refers to intelligent, programmable systems that support assisted-living technologies; however, in this context it refers to public servants with the ability to deliver e-services. They will be able to electronically use, manage, and transfer data, having acquired a professional understanding of e-service delivery and be client-focused. Flexibility and an anticipative ability to respond to rapid changes and complexities will be expected. In any PA ecosystem, public servants are the key players. They can either facilitate or impede development as they are service providers and coordinate public goods via the internet and information and communications technology ICT (Chou, Chen, & Pu, 2008). In the short term, internal and external arrangements to intensively train government officials in the management and transfer of data, and e-services delivery will be needed. In the long-run, training in ICT and a formal education will be required for prospective government officials for them to acquire the e-capacities needed for the position. The Cambodian ICT Master Plan 2020, referred to as a vision of an “ICTopia Cambodia”, will help empower citizens as progress is made toward the desired future of PA (KOICA, 2014).

Key Factor 3: Services and Systems: In 20 years, those born in the 2000s will be at the fore of society, and they will be more technologically exposed and capable than any previous generation. One prerequisite is to solve the utility function of e-services, which is the sum of providers (institutions and servants), users, and technology subject to an availability of other resources (β). To put it in the form of an equation: e-services = $[(i + s) + (u + t)]\beta$, where i is for institutions, s for public servants, u for users and t for technology. Owing to the above two ideal factors and a utility function, what can be expected is the digitization of all public services and methods of payment. Digitalizing all services in one-stop services/one-window service offices (OWSO) is one approach. The incorporation of e-applications and e-interactions, and e-machines for giving feedback will need to be available. Establishing e-systems requires transforming the processes and interactions between citizens and the government from conventional approaches (manually done and walk-in) in parallel with current developmental moves. Interactions between government and citizens are expected to shift from walk-in proceedings to those done via email, websites, e-applications and e-initiatives. Those in the private sector and involved in foreign direct investment (FDI), among others, will be able to maximize financial efficiency through the resultant reductions in transportation, administrative, legal, and other costs. E-governance and e-systems will be available to citizens and investors as the government modernizes such processes.

Key Factor 4: Citizens: E-citizens will be those using electronic methods to interact with the government and public e-servants through e-systems to access e-services in the exercising of their rights and duties. People will be able to use e-services across multiple sectors, from public transportation, electricity and water, health care, education, social security, and the legal system, as well as accessing socio-economic services. Citizens will have the ability to participate in national e-polls and elections online, and be able to search for their names in e-polling systems, locate polling stations on online maps, and print voter and information slips, as well as apply for enrolment, modifications, and deletion.

Figure 3: Key Factors for PA 2040

Types of Factors	Key features/characteristics
Institutional factor	Management structures, roles, responsibilities, mandates and services, institutional developmental, strategic, and operational plans with comprehensive performance and personnel management frameworks. Performances timely, quantifiably and qualitatively measured by accountable, responsive, efficient, and effective evaluation indicators.
Servants factor	E-servants, if not AI-servants with e-capacities and professional knowledge of e-services delivery with client-focused mannerism. Flexibility and anticipative ability, accountability, integrity, free-corruption mentality, not politically biased and under the influence of patronage.
Services factor	Digitization of all public services and methods of payment in one-stop-services/ OWSO incorporation of e-applications and e-interactions and e-machines for giving feedback (become e-services with accessibility at <u>any time</u> and anywhere).
Systems factor	Interactions and processes with e-systems, visual and e-communications, interactive digital screens or AI, e-government and e-governance.
Citizens factor	Use electronic methods to interact with the government and public e-servants through e-systems to access e-services and exercise their rights and duties.

Source: Author

III. Policy Initiatives to Achieve the Ideal Scenario

A change in governance and the approach to public services can be attributed to dramatically increasing domestic and global endogenous and exogenous influences (Haque, 2013). Yet, the focus of such shifts and reform efforts should remain on the needs and interests of the citizen (Robinson, 2015). Though approaches to PA will have shifted from the conventional model to the New Public Management (NPM) method, Cambodia will likely remain incremental in its approach without targeted intervention. To achieve the ideal PA scenario for 2040, certain policy initiatives are required. These are considered in detail below.

Policy Initiative 1: Develop a Quantifiable Performance and Management System.

Given the complicated structural and non-structural issues facing PA reform, and its current incremental approach; it is likely that Cambodia will continue working on defining roles, responsibilities, and mandates, while restructuring management structures for national and sub-national administrations and training. These need to be aligned with institutional strategic, developmental,

and operational plans, otherwise they will be inefficient to meet the needs of a 2040 citizenry. Yet, these, with budget, plans, structures, and the capacity of officials, show only half the picture. Policy Initiative 1, by showing ongoing operations and the outcome of public service delivery, will provide the other half. Institutional theory suggests that the development of a performance and management system will increase the capacity of national and sub-national administrations, reveal flaws, show levels of public satisfaction, and strengthen the performance of officials (Vandenabeele, 2007). The rational choice theory of NPM indicates that results of assessments will enable the government to cut or direct resources toward areas of concern, and dissolve and/or suspend roles and institutions that are not needed (Robinson, 2015). NPM theory emphasizes the management of quantifiable output measures and performance targets, rather than policy body (Rose et al., 2015). Overall, Policy Initiative 1 would add value and create possible key solutions to future policies in addressing wider societal needs. It can be considered a micro-tool of the accountability mechanism for holding civil servants answerable to their responsibilities, and of services provision within respective public institutions. These micro-institutional arrangements cure public management ills and help build the value desired within the PA system.

Policy Initiative 2: Digitize All Public Services and Methods of Payment.

In 2040, in line with the increased digitalisation of practices and processes, it is likely that citizens will prefer to use public services in a streamlined, technological, and efficient manner. NPM theory suggests that service providers (the government) need to understand the choices of customers (citizens) (Rose et al., 2015; Robinson, 2015); bringing about a need within the kingdom to digitize public services and methods of payment³⁸. To achieve this, the Cambodian government will look to take advantage of e-governance (the systematization of processes) and e-systems (the systematization of interactions

³⁸ An additional benefit of digitizing public services concerns the ability to ensure public inclusivity. This theme is explored explicitly in Cambodia 2040 Volume 2.

between citizens and government agencies). In addition to the outlined “need-to-do” list, Cambodia needs a “must-do” list of immediate priorities. The Kingdom must first increase the capacity of institutions and officials in parallel with digitizing all public services, while addressing at least the institutional and other factors outlined above. Second, Cambodia must build ICT infrastructure nationwide, and provide full internet coverage to ensure universal access. KOICA (2014) shows that adding to the existing advancement of the telecommunications industry, Cambodia needs to secure national satellite, submarine cable and backbone networks run by a state-owned agency. Research and development in ICT is a must-do item. Third, increasing ITC/digital literacy among officials and the public (see more Policy Initiatives 3 and 5) is another must-do agenda to fulfill these triangular priorities—institutional and official capacity, universal ITC coverage and access, and ITC/digital literacy. It is worthwhile noting that MCS annual reports have consistently shown government employees have low ICT skills (MCS, 2016, 2018, 2018a) and Cambodians’ e-awareness is reported as ‘very low ICT usage’ (KOICA, 2014). Groot & Budding (2008) suggest that Policy Initiative 2 would contribute to decentralization, competitiveness, by increasing efficiency and effectiveness, and accountability in officials’ performance. In addition, e-systems/e-government bring about efficient services and engagement ideals because of increased specialization and reduced complexity and interference, while resources and resistance would be minimized, and engagement per se in accordance with liberal democratic principles (Rose et al., 2015).

Policy Initiative 3: Public E-Servants Approach While Attracting and Keeping Talent.

Almost 30 years since PA reforms began, Cambodia is still facing dysfunctionalities and capacity deficits (Turner, 2013). Despite merit-based appointments having increased recently in PA at the national level, there is less evidence to support the same approach at the subnational level. The increase in merit-based appointments has been ascribed to newly developed HR guidelines and related mechanisms (MCS, 2018). In NPM, a merit-based system is crucial in increasing the effectiveness of public services (Robinson, 2015). Given changing

socio-economic conditions and technological advancements, Cambodia needs to employ a market-driven, incentives- and e-servants-oriented approach in addition to the increasing merit-based appointments. The market-driven incentives approach to the public sector is a modern policy direction where public benefits are aligned (both monetary and non-monetary) with market-driven or private ones. It aims to appeal to the younger generation and attract the necessary talent to support public services. The e-servants-oriented approach is designed to equip public servants with e-capacities to serve the public in a changing technological world. Utilizing the market-driven incentives approach will need to directly address an increase in pay, for which the burden will fall onto citizens through various tax increases. Yet, the government will need to seriously take into account institutional factor, (see more in Scenario Space and Key Factors) whereby Cambodia will need to align workforce, workload, and finances, while eliminating unnecessary ministries and institutions, and political roles, such as advisors and secretaries and under-secretaries of state.

Policy Initiative 4: Increase Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are defined as institutional agreements between government and the private sector. The major aim of PPPs is to improve public sector management, which has increased considerably in recent years in various sectors, mostly transportation, water and sewage, energy, environmental protection, health care and education, and infrastructure (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Wang et al., 2018). The nature of partnerships, Bayliss and Waeyenberge (2018) argue, is to shift management responsibility, and to some extent risk, to the private sector through output specifications. The increasing trend toward PPPs has also been seen in Cambodia, but mostly in just a few areas, notably education, healthcare, and physical and financial infrastructure, with it largely limited in other sectors. While the overall environment for partnerships is positive, especially in the financial sector, the situation in the legal system, corruption, political instability, issues regarding governance and coordination, poor public services, and limited civil servants are constraints (Spoann et al., 2019; ADB, 2012). To realize the ideal scenario for

2040, these barriers need to be removed and the relationship of partnerships normalized. Given the dynamism of Policy Initiatives 1, 2 and 3 (especially with regards the digitalization of methods of payment), increasing PPPs in the financial and investment sectors is a must. ADB (2018) argues that PPPs can improve efficiency in the delivery of public services, gain access to new expertise and technology, and reduce spending on infrastructure (ADB, 2012). Joint agreements need to be made for collective goals, shared accountability, and non-hierarchical and horizontal structures and processes (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). In this case, citizens will get public services from the contracted agencies which believe the business-style delivery of public services is responsive and efficient. The government can act as a forum (see more accountability mechanisms in Ideal Scenario 2040) holding all contracted agencies accountable. This would promote effectiveness, governance, efficiency, and innovation (Bayliss & Waeyenberge, 2018).

Policy Initiative 5: Empowering Citizens with E-Services

In early 2000, Cambodia began building institutional infrastructure (e.g. NiDA) and introducing policies to support various e-government projects. The Cambodian ICT Master Plan 2020 was introduced in 2014 to enhance capacities and connectivities, enrich e-services, and empower people (KOICA, 2014). Some efforts brought rewards, while many proved ineffective. In realizing the ideal scenario, both short and long term approaches should be considered. In the short run, Cambodia needs to educate its citizens on access to e-services, and provide training on the processes and interactions provided by the government to increase e-usage, e-participation, and e-consultation through mass media and all other available channels. Engaging with relevant shareholders should be a catalyst for accelerating the realization of the short-term goals. In the long-run, Cambodia needs to invest in digital literacy, which includes the insertion of comprehensive ICT lessons into primary and secondary education. The New Generation Schools (NGS) model educational reform program can be viewed as a success to be rolled out across the country. Cambodia needs to recognize that the economy will be driven by the technological capacities (e-commerce and AI

commerce) of not only the government, but also citizens in using the PA e-services and the global market.

IV. Future Public Administration Under the Baseline Scenario: Business as Usual in 2040

Cambodia resumed PA functions after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979; however, operations were limited as full peace, security, and national integration had yet to be achieved. It wasn't until a coalition government was formed in 1993 that Cambodia embarked on a period of national reconciliation and unification (1993-1998). The Executive Commission of Inter-ministerial Technical Committee (COMEX) was then established to implement reform agendas (MCS, 2015) and adopted the Law on Common Statute of Civil Servants (1994) to regulate PA (UNDP, 2011, p.9). Between 1999 and 2003—a period of strengthening the foundations of civil service management—the Council for Administration Reform (CAR) was set up to improve civil service management and streamline government structures.

In the latter mandates (2004-2008; 2008-2012), albeit facing emerging complex public issues, reforms were still incremental and aimed to realize the major objectives of 'Serving people better' and 'Serving people better for the wellbeing of the citizens and the prosperity of the nation' (MCS, 2015). PA reform schemes, since 2013, have been centered on improving the quality of public services, human resources and management, and pay and remuneration.

It is worthwhile to note that PA reform is complicated by the way Cambodian administrations are structured nationally and sub-nationally (see Figure 1). Provincial, district, and commune levels constitute the three tiers of sub-national administrations (SNA) that are administered directly by the Ministry of Interior (MoI). The provincial (1) and district (2) levels are headed by MoI-appointed boards of governors (Eng & Ear, 2018; World Bank, 2018; MoI, 2008). Not only SNA, but also the vertical structures of SNA line ministries have been centralized under MoI (See Figure 1), which means a unified relationship of accountability and authority is required, as broadly rests in the respective central ministries (Eng and Ear, 2018). MCS has employed top-down and horizontal approaches

across all sectors and line ministries. The development of PA (see figure 4) is progressive, but it is incremental in approach.

Figure 4: PA reform development and period

Period	Theme/goals of reform	Reform committee/Unit	Characterization/Features
1993-1998	National reconciliation and unification	Executive Commission of the Inter-ministerial Technical Committee (COMEX)	Redesigning state structures of public administration
1999-2003	Strengthening the foundation of civil services	Council for Administration Reform (CAR)	Streamlining structures and rationalization of the public management
2004-2008	Deepening reform: National program for Administrative Reform (NPAR)	Council for Administration Reform (CAR)	Developing capacities-HR, ICT and delivery and the compensation
2008-2012	Further deepening reform	Council for Administration Reform (CAR)	A vision to transform from administrators to providers
2013-2018	Continuance of further deepening reform for effectiveness	Ministry of Civil Service (MCS)	HR functions- improving the equality of public services and HR development/management
2019-2030	Citizens-centered, clean, smart and strong PA?	Ministry of Civil Service (MCS)	?
2031-2040	?	Ministry of Civil Service (MCS)	?

Source: Author's compilation

In envisioning the PA system in 2040 to be effective, efficient, responsive, and accountable (EERA-PAS), it requires strong institutions, civil servants, services, systems, and citizens factors, with six key policy initiatives in support.

The results of the recent reform (2013-2018) have not yet met the needs of citizens or policy expectation (MCS, 2018; 2018a). Progress has been seen more on paper, with the reality challenged by institutions that are extractive and/or poor (undefined management structures, mandates, and services, as well as overlapping roles and responsibilities) and under-resourced (under-financed and under-skilled officials), institutional resistance, conventional practices of performance management (absence of rigorous assessments). Given these challenges, by 2040 without the comprehensive interventions of the suggested policy initiatives, citizens will still experience poor public services.

The new MCS action plan 2019-2030 suggests PA reform will continue to incrementally strengthen performance, roll out monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and performance management systems (PMS) between 2023 and 2027,

and work on performance accountability in 2027 and 2030 (MCS, 2019). These may mean public institutions are relatively strong by 2040. M&E and PSM may become internal tools in the accountability mechanism holding civil servants answerable in the absence of broad institutional arrangements for other public actors or forums to do so. However, bloated and unnecessary political institutions will unlikely build public trust and draw in participation.

PA systems may not have become e-systems (e-government and e-governance), while civil servants may also not have become e-servants or have developed the accountability virtue. With civil servants without the e-capacities necessary to provide e-services, citizens will not be able to optimize their time and money, still needing to access manual public services in 2040. For the benefit of citizens, it is desired that this normative and probabilistic prediction is inaccurate. The PA systems therefore need to become robust to deliver the 2040 ideal scenario.

In conclusion, borderlessness global exogenous and endogenous influences could weaken Cambodian PA by causing large, unexpected problems, generating different public needs and expectations. In 2040, the delivery of public services is expected to be responsive, effective, efficient, and accountable through public institutions ready for e-servants, e-services, e-systems, and e-citizens. To prepare these key factors for the ideal 2040 scenario, it is recommended that the following policy initiatives are incorporated:

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