Lead in: E-governance in Cambodia

Ann-Cathrin Klöckner[1] and Robert Hör[2]

1   Ann-Cathrin Klöckner is currently a researcher at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Cambodia. She studies Politics and Public Administration with a focus on International Relations. Her research centers around conflict studies and the political and social contexts. As part of her education, Ann-Cathrin Klöckner has studied at the University of Konstanz, Germany, and the University of Durham, England.

2   Robert Hör is currently program manager for digitalization at Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia. He is a political scientist by training and is in charge of several research projects and dialog formats between Cambodian, regional and German experts His current research focus lies on the implementation of digitalization projects within SMEs and organizational development. Having always been fascinated by the social-political impact and potential of new technologies and what they mean for enterprise, he started studying the online M.Sc. program digital transformation and management. His major fields of study are digital strategy development, political economy and business informatics.

Introduction

E-government, in its ideal state, aims to solve a variety of governance challenges in developing and developed countries. It would not just be easier and much faster to get new documents, but also improve life in more basic aspects regarding survival and livelihood. For instance, the article by Seanghak Khin and Piseth Kim for this publication is devoted to the topic of "how e-learning can improve water, sanitation and hygiene practices in rural Cambodia" and Riccardo Corrado and Patchanee Tungjan explore the massive relevance of MOOCs for the education system. Both cases clearly show the possibilities e-governance offers in aiding rural citizen's health and education.

The advantages are two-fold, as both the government and the citizens profit from digitized systems, when they are well implemented. Cambodia is still at the very beginning of its way to a well-working e-government system but the potential in the future is enormous and encompasses digital infrastructure and digital government, which includes the digitalization of services and data driven governance.

This is why the Royal Government of Cambodia made this topic a top priority in its rectangular strategy. In fact, the first e-government project was already launched in the early 2000s.[3]

Today, the government's vision for Cambodia is to become a high income country by 2050 with and through a digital and innovative society.[4] For the next 5 years, the focus will be the establishment of digital infrastructure and to develop needed skill sets in order to enable the journey towards this goal in the near future.[5] A step in this direction is, for example, 5G, which is expected to be rolled out by 2020.[6]

So What Exactly is E-government and Which Role Does It Play in Cambodia?

There are a variety of definitions provided by researchers as well as international organizations. The United Nations define e-government as the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in order to improve government services and citizen's access to these.[7] The World Bank defines "Electronic government (e-government) […] broadly […] as the use of ICTs by government to enhance the range and quality of government information and services provide to clients in an efficient, cost-effective and convenient manner, while making government processes more accountable, responsive and transparent".[8] ICTs in this context are digital tools to empower citizens, improve productivity and the skills of a population.[9] Digital tools include

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3   Nguonly, T. (2019). MSMEs in Cambodia Digital Economy. Phnom Penh, 6.

4   Ibid., 9.

5   Ibid., 11.

6   Ibid., 6.

7   United Nations. (2019). publicadministration.un.org. Retrieved from https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/UNeGovDD-Framework

8   Sudan, R. (2005). The Basic Building Blocks of e-Government. In The World Bank Group, e-development from excitement to effectiveness (pp. 79-99). Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 79.

9   Schware, R. (2005). E-Development: From Excitement to Effectiveness. In T. W. Group, e-development from excitement to effectiveness (pp. xiii-xxi). Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank.

data analysis, communication and collaboration as well as transaction systems.

As it has become apparent, an interactive nature of the concept of e-government can be observed: When citizens benefit, so does the government.

Client-government relations are a process which can be represented in a simplified manner:

Source: Heeks 2008

The client - in case of the government for example a citizen or business ⬜ needs a government service and puts in a request. This triggers a process in the government. The quality of the output, namely the fulfillment of the request, is dependent on what happens in the second step and what the government does with it. The more efficient and effective the process in between, the better the output will be most likely. It can be expected that all parties have an interest in the productivity of the process. A simplified process for business registrations could be reached through a single online registration portal. The entrepreneur enters their data into the system (=Input) and the ministries and government agencies working on the case all have access to the data that is relevant for them to fulfill the request (=Process). In order to predict the output better, the entrepreneur will be able to check the status of their application until the registration is issued electronically (=Output).[10]

Different kinds of government - clientele relationships include government services to citizens (G2C), government to businesses (G2B), integration and cooperation between government agencies (G2G) and the information basis of employees (G2E). [11]
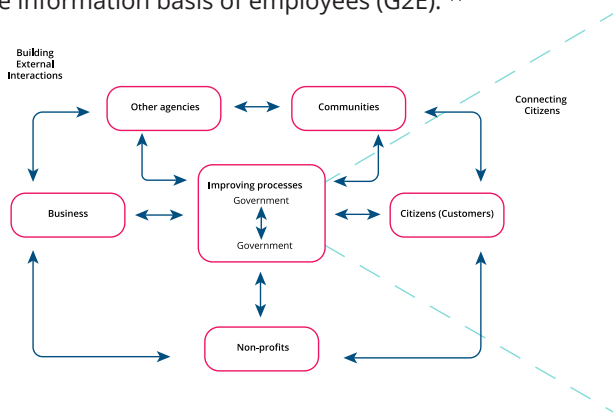
Source: Heeks 2008[12]

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10   Nguonly, T. (2019). MSMEs in Cambodia Digital Economy. Phnom Penh, 36.

11   Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 93

12   Heeks, R. (2008, October 19). Success and Failure in eGovernment Projects. Retrieved from eGovernment for Development: httpwww. egov4dev.orgsuccessdefinitions.shtml#definition

A Digital Government for Digital Cambodians? New Lifestyles Need Citizen Centricity

Digital tools are not new to Cambodians and when the society as a whole is changing, the government has to follow suit. The internet has become a central part in most people's lives. The dominance of Facebook is just one indicator underlying this argument. Currently, there are almost nine million Facebook users in Cambodia.[13] Facebook is used to keep in touch with people but also increasingly to make business and influence the government. At the same time, more and more local fintech companies are entering the market, new delivery services are developed and mobility is changing thanks to Apps like PassApp.

All these are indicators that the Cambodian digital ecosystem is undergoing rapid and fundamental changes, which impact the society as a whole. Makara Vorn and You Y Ly looked at how governance could be promoted through the use of Facebook – the most prominent social network with Cambodians. In the article "Promoting Better Governance Through Facebook: A Pilot Study and Analysis", they underline the importance of Facebook as a means for citizens to get in contact with the government and get involved in the government process. A paradigm shift from government to citizen centricity has to be made in order to address the needs, problems and challenges in the most suitable manner. This includes a change of management styles, objective systems and a turn to economic methods and tools to improve the user experience

of citizens.

Following our word that e-government should be client-centered, the biggest group that will benefit are the citizens. In short, the benefits can be summarized in a few but important keywords: Transparency, user friendliness, accessibility and integration. Simply put, the government is a service provider and caters to a variety of sectors. This implies a mindset shift from top down and a push from traditional government actions to citizen centered government actions. In order to do so, it first needs to be aware of the citizen's needs, problems and behaviors. The citizens thereby become the center and purpose of all government activity and government services are supposed to cater exactly to what clients need and want.[14] This includes feedback on services and progress, complaints about wrong doings and ideas to improve the process.[15]

After all, the government works for the citizens.

E-government is thereby not just a service of the government for their clients, it is also a joint effort of the two parties that reaps benefits for both sides. There is a theory that establishes a 80/20 ratio, claiming that 20% of the information are used by 80% of the clients.[16] The clients themselves know which services and information they need so in order to establish the most relevant aspects, the government needs the clients to express their needs. Therefore, governments need their citizens and businesses in order to reach ideal standards.

13   Ang, C. (2019, July 16). Cambodia's 2019 Social Media & Digital Statistics. Retrieved from geeksincambodia.com: http://geeksincambodia.com/cambodias-2019-social-media-digital-statistics/

14   Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 93.

15   Ibid., 88.

16   Ibid., 103.

Let's elaborate more on the advantages promised by e-government. To make the essence of e-government more understandable, an example will illustrate the characteristics. In Cambodia, registering a business is, currently, expensive and time consuming. The current business registration process is riddled with silos, redundancies and integrity issues. The entrepreneur will have to go to multiple ministries and give the same personal data multiple times. If some data then changes, these changes are not carried into a system but have to be changed by the entrepreneur at each ministry. To register a business, it thus takes 50-70 days and can cost anywhere between 2 and 5 million KHR. By fixing the currently inefficient characteristics, connecting the ministry portals and making workflows transparent, time and cost could be capped significantly.[17] To read more specifically on the relation between e-government and businesses in Cambodia, read "Digital 'Government-to-Business' Services in Cambodia: Overview and Challenges" by Maria Yang and Darapich Sovann, which is included in this publication.

Characteristics of e-government services

Source: Own Graph

Accountability. Accountability describes "the obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent

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17   Nguonly, T. (2019). MSMEs in Cambodia Digital Economy. Phnom Penh, 33.

manner".[18] The World Bank has long declared that accountability and transparency are essential for sustained growth and poverty reduction.[19] Easier access to information fosters information culture and thereby transparency and accountability.[20] Not having full information to answer any requests can seriously impact accountability and therefore hinder the government to respond sufficiently and entirely to entrepreneurs and citizens request.[21]

Cost and Corruption. Government services which are hard to access and expensive, even if just in opportunity costs, foster corruption and bribery. This, in return, decreases government efficiency, trust and effectiveness.[22] Digital tools on the other side enable a complete and transparent tracking of activities and workflows, which reduces the opportunities for corruption and bribery. Furthermore, the limitation and automation of face-to-face contact and touchpoints further limits chances and risks of illegal activities.

Cooperation. E-government ideally enables efficient and large scale cooperation.[23] Access to unified data and information increases the potential for cooperation and innovation. [24]Currently missing unified information systems between ministries, the government agencies do not have access to relevant documents or data. This impacts the quality and possibility of the government to respond to requests.[25] A central information sharing system would dispose of any doubling information that might need to be submitted to a variety of agencies and give government agencies a better overview over the request and how to respond, saving time and effort on both sides of the request and process.[26]

Framework for accountability for public services
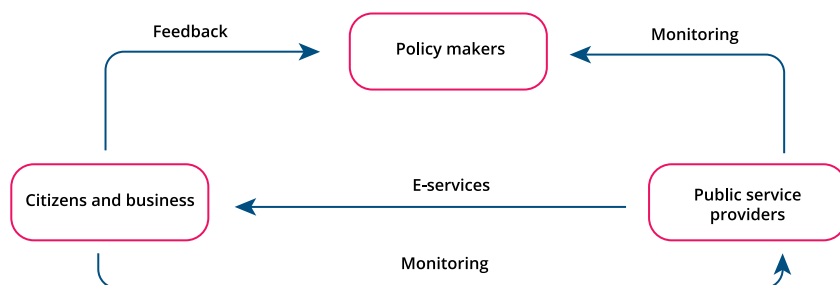
Source: Hannah 2010

18   Business Dictionary. (2019). Business Dictionary. Retrieved from businessdictionary.com: http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/accountability.html

19   World Bank. (2002). Social Funds: Assessing Effectiveness. Washington DC: World Bank.

20   Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 33.

21   Yang, M., & Sovann, D. (2019). Digital "Government to Business Services in Cambodia: Overview and Challenges. Digital Insights, 173.

22   Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 69.

23   Ibid., 12.

24   Ibid., 14.

25   Yang, M., & Sovann, D. (2019). Digital "Government to Business Services in Cambodia: Overview and Challenges. Digital Insights, 171.

26   Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 12.

Development. E-government is a cost-effective way to deliver assistance needed to remote areas in order to assimilate different regions.[27] The goal is to use existing technologies to improve the situation for poor communities.[28] Poor citizens can be provided with easier access to markets and educational opportunities, thereby improving their chances for a better income.[29] If one lives on the country side, there might be long distances and bad roads standing between the client and all the departments required to be visited. Many might not have the financial possibility or time to travel the distances multiple times. The submission of the documents online will approximate rural and urban areas by making the distance to government services equal for everyone: Namely, just the reach to their phone or computer.

Effectiveness and Efficiency. E-government is meant to make the government more effective, meaning that it is doing "the right thing".[30] This can lead to an increase in the size and scope of the economy. But effectiveness can also mean decentralization in order to ensure an improved provision of resources and information.[31] Efficiency, on the other hand, means "doing the thing right", measured on the basis of the consumption of resources in respect to how they could be used for an ideal outcome.[32] Some more important steps are allocating resources more efficiently as well as contin-

ually adjusting programs and policies as necessary.[33] The local level can be made more efficient and more responsive to local needs in the population.[34] Fulfilling these requirements will be especially challenging in light of personalized situations which have no pre-set solutions. The government will have to share information across departments and with the private sector in order to find answers to these individual requests.[35] The ready availability of necessary information and the time saved by not having to use human resources on person-to-person interactions makes it probable that a significant amount of days can be shaved off the total.

Mobile. E-government is compatible with mobile devices, thereby especially suitable for developing countries like Cambodia where desktops were skipped and the mobile phone is widespread.[36] This goes back to the vision that everyone, everywhere in Cambodia has access to government services.

Going Down the Road to E-governance

Taking a successful country as a role model, which already reaps most of the mentioned benefits, the article "E-Government: What Can Cambodia Learn from E-Estonia?" goes further into challenges that Cambodia has faced and is still facing as well as the potential development illustrated on the successful example of Estonia.

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27   Ibid., 47.

28   Ibid., 15.

29   Ibid., 39.

30   Business Dictionary. (2019). Business Dictionary. Retrieved from businessdictionary.com: http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/accountability.html

31   Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 51.

32   Business Dictionary. (2019). Business Dictionary. Retrieved from businessdictionary.com: http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/accountability.html

33   Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 38.

34   Ibid., 42.

35   Ibid., 14.

36   Lallana, E. (2008, October 19). mGovernment. Retrieved from eGovernment for Development: http://www.egov4dev.org/mgovernment/

The United Nations measures their e-government development index, in which Cambodia currently ranks 145th in the world, by the means of three hard necessities: "the provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity and human capacity".[37] This shows, that in the end, even though soft infrastructure enables e-government, hard infrastructure defines it and is key for a viable economy which increases competitiveness and transformation. Though digital development has increased in recent years with good technological and internet coverage, the skipping of computers and laptops and instead reliance on mobile phones continues to pose a problem for the implementation of e-government services in Cambodia because many web services are not fully available in the mobile version.[38]

Cambodia has committed to objectives in regards to digitalization and e-government development multiple times in the past and is aiming to move ahead in the development. ICTs will enable information communication between the government, its departments and the citizens in both directions,[39] laying a foundation that is necessary in order to establish a useful e-government system. In order to foster the development and emergence of a real e-government, more Cambodians need to become literate in ICT related skills.[40]

The government also aims "to build a sizable digital economy to be one of the growth drivers, continuously innovate, and facilitate the transformation of Cambodia into a digital society".[41] The transformation towards a digital society implies the change of values. There needs to be a comprehensive change in leadership, organization structures, processes, culture and innovation management. The government and the society have to adopt new values that allow progress and change. Innovation in this context is made possible by breaking routines and habits, fostering experiment, setting up needed cooperation networks and empowering people to take risks and reducing their fear of failure. Values will have to be based more on the individual in order to allow for change towards a system based on personal user experience of a client.[42] In the future, teamwork, creativity, complex and critical thinking will be of high value for an e-governed society and one that is aiming to get there.[43]

The article "Do Cambodians Trust E-government Services? A Survey" by Sokhan et al. in this publication shows missing trust in Cambodia's general population. Only 34% of the questioned Cambodians feel that the internet is a safe mean for interaction with their government and only 27% of respondents trust e-government services.[44] Maybe most representative of the lack of trust in e-government is that while 39% trust state government agencies, only 13% would feel safe using e-government services for their business.[45] Another

37 United Nations. (2019). E-Government Development Index (EGDI). Retrieved from publicadministration.un.org: https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index

38 Kim, S., & Weiß, R. (2019). E-Government: What Can Cambodia Learn From E-Estonia? Digital Insights, 58.

39 Ibid., 173.

40 Ibid., 175

41 Nguonly, T. (2019). MSMEs in Cambodia Digital Economy. Phnom Penh, 9.

42 Hanna, N. K. (2010). Transforming Government and Building the Information Society. Springer, 13.

43 Ibid., 115.

44 Sokhan, S., Raing, C., & Rin, C. (2019). Do Cambodians Trust E-Government Services? A Survey. Digital Insights, 69.

45 Abdullah, A., Kang, K., & Hawryszkiewycz, I. (2015). The influence of trust and subject norms on citizens intentions to engage in E-participation on E-government Websites. Adelaide, Australasian Conference on Information System, 8

problem in regards to trust is that the government needs the citizen's data to personalize and idealize e-government services.[46] To receive citizen's data, it needs their trust, which prerequisites a culture of trust in the government in general. In order to process the data and keep it secure hard and soft infrastructure is required in highest standards. The publication's article "How Data-Driven Technology Can Upgrade Cambodia's E-Government" explicates the role of data in e-government. In the article "Cambodia vs Hackers: Balancing Security and Liberty in Cybercrime Law", Somaly Ngoun and Sopheak Srun go into depth about the problems associated with digitalization and the collection of data.

Cambodia will have to follow market trends and continuously work on infrastructure in order to ensure success in the future. In line with this, decisions will have to be data- rather than just leader-driven. New ideas and concepts will have to be developed. Silos have to be broken up. An e-government innovation lab, data embassy, research and development centers to push own inventiveness and other organizational reforms would help setting a framework and keeping the standards up according to the contemporary needs. Incentives for staff to engage in the process could trigger innovative ideas and outsourcing services to other providers could bring in new perspectives and solutions as well as external tech assessments and less biased market analysis systems. More cross-department and ministry cooperation should be promoted in order to ensure a comprehensive development of the government as a whole.

E-government can have an impact in many ways, which is demonstrated by all contributors to this publication. In the long run, there are several important aims for e-government which go beyond just convenience. It can be noted that not just technology and systems need to be changed, but so does the way humans think.

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46   Vor, S. (2019). How Data-Driven Technology Can Upgrade Cambodia's E-Government. Digital Insights, 148.