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Delivering Better Services for Citizens in Battambang

Selected Practices from Partner Districts of the European Union Project for Decentralisation and Administrative Reform (EU DAR)

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GETTING TO KNOW THE EUROPEAN UNION PROJECT FOR DECENTRALISATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM (EU DAR)

For many years, administrative and political power in Cambodia was largely in the hands of the central government. However, the country is currently undergoing a process of change, in which government structures and administrative procedures are being adapted to the requirements of a development-oriented state. The Royal Government of Cambodia is working to promote a service culture and improve the motivation and skills of public bodies and their staff, in order to make public administration effective, efficient, reliable and responsive.

To develop local self-governance, financial and human resources, as well as decision-making powers, are gradually being transferred to the local level. Despite these efforts, the sub-national councils still lack the experience, expertise and personnel required to shape policies in their areas of responsibility. Limited powers and autonomy, as well as insufficient coordination, make it difficult for the councils and administrations to perform their functions and tasks in a transparent and accountable manner and thus provide public service efficiently.

The objective of the European Union Project for Decentralisation and Administrative Reform, which is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-financed by the European Union and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, is the provision of better services for citizens by local governments. In line with this objective, sub-national administrations, councils and line offices in the partner districts and municipalities of Kandal and Battambang are empowered to provide selected public services in a coordinated, responsive and accountable manner.

Friendly staff of One Window Service Office at Battambang municipality serves citizen who has questions.

Citizen raises a concern during Dissemination and Consultative Forum at Banan district.

To implement the decentralisation and administrative reform, the EU DAR Project works with the Secretariat of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD-S), the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) and other sector ministries at the national level in the capital, Phnom Penh. At the sub-national level, EU DAR provides specialist support to all councillors from the twelve partner districts and one municipality in Kandal and Battambang to capacitate them to provide better public services to citizens. The EU DAR Project also strengthens these sub-national governments and administrations so that they can test and implement mechanisms that make responsive and accountable service provision possible. Through this approach, the Project advises partner districts and municipalities in exercising their rights of initiative as part of the general mandate of Cambodian district and municipal councils; this in turn also strengthens the decision-making abilities of sub-national councils.

Furthermore, the extension of the One-Window Service Offices (OWSO) on the district level, which offer numerous services to citizens at a single spot, is supported. The Project also helps sub-national administrations and the line offices of selected sector ministries at the district/municipal level to better cooperate with each other. Local administrations and councils are being strengthened as well, to better manage their service personnel in a coordinated and more performance-driven manner. To achieve this, new tools for human resource (HR) management and development, such as job descriptions and regular performance appraisals, are being created, piloted and put into practice. EU DAR also supports the cooperation between national and sub-national stakeholders in the preparation processes for the transfer of obligatory functions in health and education from deconcentrated sector offices to the decentralised sub-national governments.

Last but not least, the Project pays particular attention to record the lessons learnt from the above-named support processes which are all based on political strategies. These lessons are then widely disseminated in order to promote tried and tested practices and to drive the decentralisation process in Cambodia forward. This supports the Cambodian Government's efforts to make the provision of public services for sub-national governments more responsive, improve the performance of sub-national civil servants and to respond quickly and efficiently to the needs of citizens.

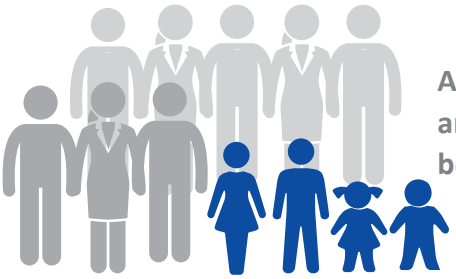
As a result of the EU DAR Project's support, the number of council decisions relating to needs voiced by citizens during council meetings, as well as the provision of selected services, such as solid waste management and those services offered by the One Window Service Offices have increased in both partner provinces: Battambang and Kandal. In this second edition of the Success Stories Booklet, we would like to introduce new accomplishments and further delve into lessons learnt regarding service delivery.

THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION PROJECT FOR DECENTRALISATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM AT THE SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL

The EU DAR Project has two partner provinces in the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia: Kandal and Battambang. Kandal, as an urban province, surrounds the suburbs of the capital Phnom Penh. The mostly rural province of Battambang borders with Thailand and other rural provinces in Cambodia's North-West. In Kandal, EU DAR works with three partner districts and in Battambang with nine districts and one municipality. Overall, the EU DAR project's eleven local governance advisers[1] work directly with their counterparts in partner districts and reach:

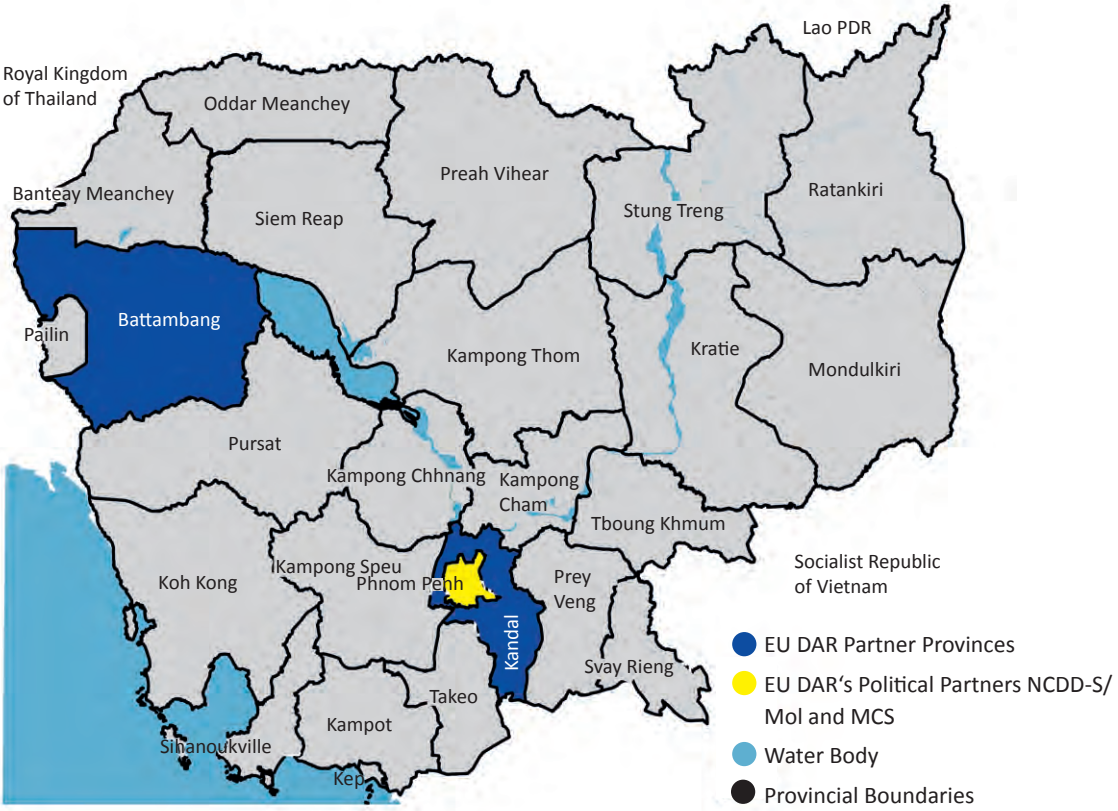
All statistical data on this page and on the following pages is based on these sources: data on poverty comes from the 2013 poverty comparison report by the Ministry of Planning; data on population and occupation comes from the 2016 district data by the Provincial Departments of Planning in Battambang and Kandal; data on councillors comes from the sub-decree on the recognition of members of district/municipal councils for the 2nd mandate of district and municipal councillors.

272 districts/municipal councillors of which **45** are female



Around **1.644.000** citizens of which around **40%** are children and teenagers below 18 years[1]

Provinces of the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia



1. Note that two of the local governance advisers cater to two districts.

BATTAMBANG PROVINCE

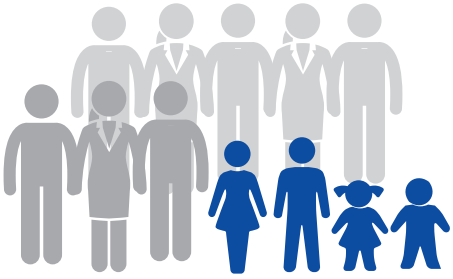
Eight EU DAR local governance advisers are directly located within their respective partner districts or municipalities and advise, coach and train councillors, their administrations and line office staff on a daily basis. The advisers use tailor-made and demand-driven coaching methodologies, in order to capacitate partners to improve public service delivery.

Each of the advisers in Battambang is responsible for both, ensuring smooth cooperation with partners in his district, as well as additional cooperation with those districts in the same province, which do not receive daily technical advice from the EU DAR Project. The latter instead benefit from needs-based training and learning exchanges that are regularly organised between Kandal and Battambang provinces, as well as with the partner institutions NCDD-S and MCS at the national level[2].

Apart from providing coaching, EU DAR advisers also facilitate among different stakeholders and organise specific exchange formats, in order to enhance mutual learning and policy debates that will give its partner sub-national administrations new ideas for improved service delivery. With this approach, the EU DAR Project in Battambang directly and indirectly reaches:

225 districts/municipal councillors of whom **36** are female

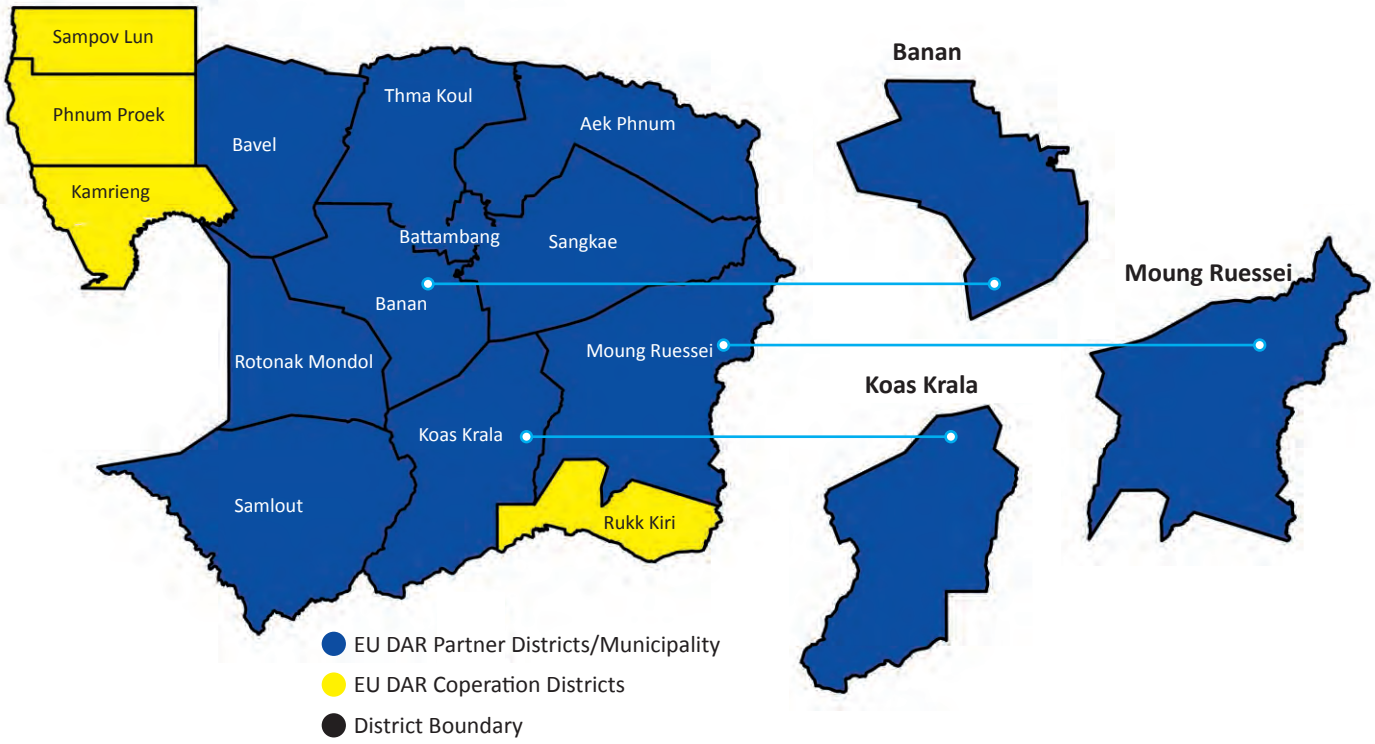
Around **1.243.000** citizens of whom **40%** are children and teenagers



EU DAR complements its technical support with small local subsidies, to provide partner districts and the municipality with funds to deliver social services, which fall under the general mandate of councils. Those services are delivered upon the request by the citizenry and prioritised by councillors in their monthly meetings, in order to discuss potential solutions. In Battambang, the majority of citizens' requests demanding improvement involve three main topics. First, public hygiene problems, particularly those affecting children; second, issues of waste management and maintenance of public spaces; and third, the simplification of administrative procedures and improvement of service delivery at the local administrative offices.

2. Three EU DAR policy advisers are working with and at the partner institutions NCDD-S and MCS at the national level on a daily basis. Advisory services, facilitation and coordination of policy development and dialogue take place between different ministerial stakeholders, as well as between national and sub-national levels and are the core area of their capacity development approach.

Battambang Province



Good Service Delivery Practices in Partner Districts in Battambang

From Battambang province, seven selected examples of the districts' and municipalities' efforts to better serve their citizens will be presented in this booklet. In the first of these examples, taking place in Bavel district, a chaotic market has been successfully regularised by an empowered council. In Rotonak Mondol and Samlout, health standards for food and drinks sold in schools have been successfully established. Battambang municipality and Moung Ruessei district improved the delivery of administrative services and piloted the so-called Performance Management System developed by the MCS to increase civil servants' performance. Banan engaged on the district's serious waste challenge and made significant progress in becoming a clean district. And finally, Thma Koul's council gained the competences to meet the demands of the citizens. In the following pages, these accomplishments will be presented.

Increasing Awareness and Improving Bavel's Market Order

For long, Bavel district's market along the national road was known as a hectic and chaotic place. With the number of competing vendors increasing, vending stands and equipment was encroaching onto the busy road. Passing vehicles, slowed down by having to share the road with the market's stands and customers, made daily traffic jams and the occasional damage to vending stands an inevitable consequence. Furthermore, those vendors established in the inner realms of the market were conflicting with their competitors on the roadside, as the disordered selling near the roadside was deteriorating the area and drawing customers away.

With the complaints of citizens and merchants growing by each day, the councillors of Bavel knew they had to act. In support of this effort, EU DAR has become the capability-builder of essential functions of the council's Urban Beautification Working Group.

BRIEF DISTRICT PROFILE: BAVEL DISTRICT

Location: North West of Battambang Province

Citizens: 118,531 (51% are female; 37.2% of the total are younger than 18 years)

Attributes: Rural; 26.6% of households are identified as poor; 87 % are farmers; 22% of the inhabitants migrated to work abroad

District Council: 17 members (4 are female)

This included the development of surveying, budgeting, monitoring and action-plan-drafting competences in a series of coaching sessions and meetings. After these essentials were trained and established, the council counted with EU DAR's assistance and expertise to draft an action plan, hold meetings with the involved stakeholders, elaborate a directive on market order and implement an awareness raising campaign for the reordering of the public space in and around the market.

The outcome of this process was the successful reinforcement of public market order by the Urban Beautification Working Group of Bavel, the establishment of safe and adequate conditions for vendors, customers and drivers, as well as improved aesthetics in the area. The implemented measures and communication strategy of the council's working group led to 95 of the 100 vendors along the national road to agree to voluntarily remove their stands from the infrastructure and integrate themselves in another location inside the market. In consequence, road accidents and traffic jams have diminished. In addition, waste in and around the market has been greatly reduced by the awareness raising and the creation of a designated waste spot, preventing trash piles to form elsewhere and freeing up space for adequate parking spaces, away from the national road.

In view of these accomplishments, the district council's Chairperson, Mr. Ncheck Peck, proudly stated that the public order improvement of Bavel market will be a good lesson learnt for other districts and municipalities. Meanwhile, Deputy Governor Lout Saly expressed that understanding of the value of continuous coordination and the establishment of communication channels with the market's stakeholders has been gained and that these built channels must be maintained.

1

Surroundings of the national road and inner market before (photo 1 and 2) and after (photo 3 and 4) the council's regulation effort.

2

3

4

Overcoming Food and Drink Hygiene Hazards in Rotonak Mondol

Lacking hygiene of food and beverage vendors in and around the schools of Rotonak Mondol has been a long-standing issue and led to parents repeatedly expressing their concern about their children's health. The problem reached new proportions, when an outbreak of nausea, diarrhoea and typhoid among school children was caused by spoiled food and contaminated beverages. When the report of the district's Women and Children Consultative Committee proved the extent, severity and urgency of the issue, Rotonak Mondol's district council decided to elevate it to a top priority and take action.

BRIEF DISTRICT PROFILE: ROTONAK MONDOL

- **Location: South West of Battambang Province**
- **Citizens: 45,913 (50% are female; 44% are younger than 18 years)**
- **Attributes: Rural; 22.49% identified as poor**
- **District Council: 13 members (2 are female)**

While strong-willed to tackle the deficiency of food and beverage hygiene, the council realised that it did not possess the know-how to properly analyse and effectively approach the problem yet. At the same time, the councillors recalled the results of Banan district, where the council faced similar issues and tackled them successfully with the support of EU DAR. Therefore, it decided to seek the assistance of the EU DAR Project as well. Coaching sessions for councillors and administrative staff were held and focused on the division of the roles and responsibilities in the problem-solving process, the collection of field data, the conducting of data analysis and the development of an action plan and the budget. In addition, EU DAR's technical and financial support contributed to the effectiveness of the district administration, which can now draft and execute a problem-solving measure and serve its citizens appropriately.

Vendor's stand at school campus prior to project.

As a result, a strong collaboration among councillors, administrative staff of several executive offices and school principals was established. Together, the district was able to create and enforce a new guideline for food and beverage vendors and provide the basis for public health officials and school principals to continuously monitor the merchants' abidance to the new standards and ensure food safety. Furthermore, an awareness raising campaign and a dissemination forum taught students on the causes of the illnesses, which they had experienced, and urged them to check the expiry date of products. The positive results from a survey on the involved students', parents' and teachers' opinion on the state of food and drink hygiene, conducted in the aftermath of the efforts, are testimony of an effective endeavour.

Awareness-raising targeted at school children.

Reflecting on the joint effort, Mr. Pov Yany, member of the hygiene working group and Deputy Chief of Administration and Finance, expressed satisfaction about the achievements and mentioned the valuable skills he had gained from this endeavour. Ranging from the ability to prioritise and draft a practical work plan, to recognising and grouping the actors needed for a measure to succeed. Moreover, this successful activity raised the confidence of the councillors, as they witnessed what positive impact they can have on the lives of the citizens they represent.

School children participating as stakeholders in the dissemination forum.

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Working Together for the Sake of Children's Health in Samlout

A story, similar to the experienced in Rotonak Mondol, can be told from Samlout district. There as well, the local Women and Children Consultative Committee (WCCC) acted after noticing multiple cases of diarrhoea and nausea among the students. The WCCC made the concerning revelation, that unhygienic food and drinks were sold in nearly every primary school of the district. Thereafter, the district council began to see the matter as an absolute priority. Willing to regulate the vendors and the food they sell, the technical advice of EU DAR was sought.

BRIEF DISTRICT PROFILE: SAMLOUT

- **Location: South West of Battambang Province**
- **Citizens: 48,907 (49% female; 41% of the total population is younger than 18 years)**
- **Attributes: Rural area; 31.4% of the households are considered poor; 80% of citizens are farmers**
- **District Council: 13 members (4 are female)**

EU DAR contributed with technical support in the form of a coaching session series for councillors and administrative staff on the roles, competences and responsibilities of the district representatives, as well as on data collection, analysis, budget planning, monitoring and evaluation. These support measures built the foundation for councillors and administrative staff to succeed in implementing a permissive function[3] in the area of sanitary regulation and preventive healthcare and strengthened the decision-making abilities of the councillors. In addition, training on the writing of reports and financial help for further capacity building was provided.

In a joint effort, the members of the council, the board of governors, the district administration and education office staff conducted research and developed a regulatory framework, introducing hygiene standards, expiration dates and routinely controls on the merchants. Meanwhile, teachers and children were taught in reading the expiry dates and how to hold the food vendors accountable to sell fresh goods. In this second part, the task force was joined by health inspection officers from the customs agency CAMCONTROL, who demonstrated the recognition of safe and unsafe foods and drinks and gave a series of examples and warnings. These continued efforts resulted in the near disappearance of food-poisoning cases, which could be linked to the vendors in around the schools.

Councillors, with the support of health inspection officers from CAMCONTROL, inspect a stand and teach students and teachers on how to recognise safe und unsafe food and drinks.

3. *Permissive functions refer to governmental executive functions that a sub-national administration may choose to take up. To be eligible, these functions must be either under no mandate of any ministry or agency, or, in case they are being executed by one of these national organisations, come with the consent of the respective institution. Which functions qualify as permissive is determined by law.*

Students in the dissemination forum sharing the lessons learnt on safe and unsafe foods with other students, teachers and parents.

In view of this outcome, Council Chairman Kol Bot expressed his satisfaction. He stated, that the knowledge gained from the implementation of this project really helped in the improvement of the council's project management and decision-making capacity. He added, that the good practices learnt will be guiding further permissive function implementations and serve as an example to other districts. Finally, he encouraged his colleagues from Samlout's council, local administration and line offices to maintain the accomplished productive collaboration environment in this policy domain.

Student reading the guidelines on food safety.

Improving the Performance and Efficiency of Service Delivery in Battambang's One Window Service Office

In the municipality of Battambang, confidence in government services used to be low. Citizens complained about inadequate service delivery at the One Window Service Office (OWSO) and often stated that the staff was poorly trained, unable to provide information, handle a request, or simply absent from the front desk during service hours. Aware of the citizen's dissatisfaction, the municipal council made the improvement of public service delivery a priority task. Willing to understand the root of the issue and execute a well-planned effort to solve it, the council sought the technical advice of EU DAR.

BRIEF DISTRICT PROFILE: BATTAMBANG

Location: At the core of Battambang Province

Citizens: 161,072 (50% are female; 34% of total population is under 18 years)

Attributes: Urban and rural; 22.83% of households are identified as poor; 71.3% of the inhabitants work in the service industry

District Council: 15 members (3 are female)

EU DAR assisted the council in several ways. First, it helped in establishing a working group with citizen's representatives, administrative municipal staff and the board of governors. This group was crucial to fully understand the problem, develop a comprehensive measure and act in a coordinated fashion to service citizens better. Second, EU DAR's local governance adviser coached the involved actors in the drafting of an action plan and follow-up reporting, allowing for a guided approach and future corrections. Third, a training series for administrative staff on "ethical service delivery" was developed and conducted, tackling the citizens' complaints about the staffs' inadequate customer service. Fourth, EU DAR provided financial support for a dissemination campaign – including open debate fora with the community – on government services, the ombudsman[4] and the complaint mechanism, avail-

Representatives of the Ministry of Civil Service, the municipal administration and EU DAR met to discuss the pilot of the Performance Management System (PMS).

4. *The ombudsman is a neutral mechanism in sub-national administrations, responsible for receiving, mediating and resolving administrative complaints from citizens, regarding public service delivery and the conduct of sub-national administration personnel. An ombudsman is an independent and non-partisan officer who has the power to investigate, report upon and make recommendations about complaint cases and administrative procedures. He/she is not a judge or tribunal and has no power to make orders or reverse administrative actions.*

Staff sharing insights on the new performance management systems among each other.

able at the OWSO. In parallel, the OWSO of Battambang municipality was selected to pilot a Performance Management System (PMS), which was developed by the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) with technical assistance of EU DAR's predecessor project. It aims to improve the civil servants' performance through structured human resource management. Containing a work shift schedule, performance and quality verification mechanisms, as well as a feedback structure, the system is well set up. With increased staff performance, issues in the service delivery are intended to be detected and corrected.

OWSO staff verifying and validating citizens' documents.

Subsequently, a significant improvement in the performance quality and efficiency of services was measured. After the awareness on the services' existence and recent improvements were raised, complaints about service quality, coming from the citizenry, diminished as well. In a survey carried out with 132 participants from 20 villages in the municipality on June 14th, 2018, 95% of the respondents perceived an improvement of quality in service delivery and expressed an increased trust in the OWSO and the ombudsman.

Improved Staff Performance Leading to Better Service Delivery in Moung Ruessei

The district of Moung Ruessei faced challenges similar to those in Battambang municipality. In this case, both citizens and employees complained about the poor general situation in the One Window Service Office (OWSO). When the OWSO began operations in Moung Ruessei in early 2017, no proper plan of how this office was meant to deliver services, or what it should achieve in the long-term, accompanied it. There were no clear descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of the staff members either.

BRIEF DISTRICT PROFILE: MOUNG RUESSEI

Location: South East of Battambang Province

Citizens: 130,337 (50% are female; 40% percent of the total population is younger than 18 years)

Attributes: Urban and Rural; 26.55% of households are identified as poor; 2/3 of the adult population dedicates itself to farming

District Council: 19 members (3 female)

Staff overlapped in tasks and the workload was divided unequally. Citizens complained about the service quality and unknowledgeable public servants at the OWSO. Moreover, service request procedures were oftentimes too unclear or complicated to comprehend for citizens. A far bigger share of the citizenry though, did not even know of the OWSO's existence. The district council and the OWSO chief decided to seek the technical advice of the EU DAR Project. As the OWSO in Moung Ruessei has been selected to pilot the newly developed Performance Management System (PMS) by Ministry of Civil Service (MCS) as well, the project supported the efficiency of the new OWSO in a two-fold manner: First, awareness raising campaigns organised by the district administration informed citizens about the offered services and second, a series of trainings were elaborated for the deputy governor in charge of the OWSO, the administration director, the chief and deputy chief of the OWSO, as well as selected back and front OWSO office staff. The training sessions mainly focused on the development of an annual work plan, the elaboration of job descriptions and the establishment of terms of reference based on the recommendations by the MCS. Through these elements, a clear set of objectives, role assignments and a guiding purpose were meant to be established.

Performance review meeting of OWSO management and staff.

OWSO staff processing a service request.

The coaching and training sessions enabled the participating stakeholders to draft an annual work plan on the targets to be achieved, assign clear roles to all staff members and set up a clear structure via the terms of reference. Thereby, with the foundation for a well-functioning system laid, the review and management of staff performance was made possible. On a personal level, the councillors' capability, to independently draft routinely reports on the progress toward set goals and the state of OWSO management, was established.

A crucial success in this effort, is the staff members coming to understand the specifics of their roles, leading to a functional division of work and achieving a timely service delivery to the citizens. Furthermore, staff members expressed an improved relationship between staff and management. As a result of these combined efforts, Moung Ruessei's ombudsman office reports positive feedback on the OWSO's service quality. From a sample of 210 surveyed customers, 97.14% of the respondents categorised the OWSO staff as working efficiently and fast, 77.14% found the service

Driver installing his new license plate, which was provided by the OWSO within 2 hours.

request procedures to be uncomplicated and 99.52% expressed their general satisfaction with the OWSO's customer service experience. The heightened satisfaction was also voiced by the citizenry. One Moung Ruessei resident, Mrs. Ma Ly, summed it up in the following manner. "The staff is welcoming, the forms are easy, and the service is fast, I am happy with it", were her words. Due to the raised awareness, the use of the different service types offered by the OWSO also diversified. In 2017, service requests for legalisation of documents, civil registration and number plate issuing were the absolute majority, with other requests representing only a minimal share. While in 2018, the aforementioned service type requests still were predominant, the number of requests for business licenses, construction permits, and agricultural works doubled and, in some cases, quadrupled. The amount of total services delivered rose from 16,549 in 2017 to 19,076 in 2018.

The OWSO has also managed to become a household name in the constituency. In a random sample baseline and evaluation survey of 60 households in the district, the share of households who have heard of the OWSO rose from 25% to 97%. 82% know what services the OWSO provides and the usage of these services went from 12% to 45%.

Tackling Banan's Waste Issue to Unleash the District's Tourism Potential

BRIEF DISTRICT PROFILE: BANAN

- **Location: Centre of Battambang Province**
- **Citizens: 107,453 (49% are female; 36.8% younger than 18 years)**
- **Attributes: Rural; 14.4% of households identified as poor; 2/3 of adult population dedicates itself to farming**
- **District Council: 17 members (2 female)**

Banan is a district with the potential to develop a strong tourism sector. Yet, waste scattered in key places used to compromise said potential, as it deteriorated the beauty of the district and strained the health of inhabitants and visitors alike. Waste being a topic, often raised by the citizenry in consultative fora, the council of Banan decided to make it a priority issue. The council was aware that in order to get to the root of the problem and make an impact, know-how was needed. Hence, it sought the technical assistance of EU DAR.

In response, EU DAR provided technical support via coaching sessions, to identify the underlying causes and mechanisms leading to the waste mountains. In detail, coaching on information gathering, monitoring and analysis tools was given to empower councillors in their problem assessment and solution process. EU DAR also helped the council to prepare a project proposal and advise on the implementation of the action plan. In addition, EU DAR gave financial support to aid the undertakings of the council. These efforts led to the council being able to assess the challenge ahead, draft an action plan with concrete measures and conduct the appropriate allocation of the funds available to tackle the waste problem.

Citizens participating in information-gathering process.

In consequence, the council decided to primarily engage in the behavioural aspect of the issue and launched a district-wide awareness campaign and a disseminative forum, aimed to raise the awareness of citizens on the negative effects of waste. Furthermore, a clean-up campaign - involving district councillors, board of governors members, council personnel, police officers, students and citizens picking up trash from the streets – was launched.

Councillors, board of governors members, teachers, students, police officers and citizens participating in the district's clean-up campaign.

Moreover, the district's working group, established to face this challenge, also installed billboards along roads and urban areas, with the aim to explain and ensure proper waste disposal. Previously missing waste bins were delivered to selected stakeholders and places, to eliminate the accumulation of waste as well. During a disseminative forum session, a market vendor expressed his gratitude for the attention paid now to the cleanliness around the markets and mentioned the positive impact this had on the market's functioning and customer flow.

Reacting to another root cause, the irregularity and partial non-compliance of the district's contracted waste collector, the district and commune councils have agreed to seek alternative collecting agents. Several communes have already set up provisional and complementary partnerships with small private collecting firms, while a district-wide short-term solution and steps to be taken in the long-term future are currently being drafted. As the district's joint effort to manage public hygiene effectively has made the area more attractive, the potential to attract tourism has already improved.

The working group and GIZ representatives delivered waste bins to selected stakeholders.

Thma Koul's Council Overcomes Internal Challenges and Strengthens the Engagement in its Roles

BRIEF DISTRICT PROFILE: THMA KOUL

- **Location: North of Battambang Province**
- **Citizens: 139,816 (51% are female; 39% of total population is under 18 years)**
- **Attributes: Rural; 25.66% of households identified as poor; 76.9% of inhabitants are farmers**
- **District Council: 21 members (3 are female)**

The council of Thma Koul used to face several challenges: Councillors were uncertain about the competences that their roles entailed, meetings were unfruitful, a debating culture among them absent and communication from and to the board of governors and the administration scarce. In sum, the council was ineffective and hardly fulfilled its mandate. Aware of the state of affairs and willing to turn the tide, the council members decided to seek the external help of its partner, the EU DAR Project.

To face the obstacle at its root, the EU DAR Project conducted a reflection session. Thereby, the most pressing challenges, which were undermining the work of the council, were identified. Together, the dynamics of the council meetings and the roles and responsibilities of both councillors and members of the board of governors – as set by law – were analysed.

Once the main problems were jointly identified, EU DAR's local governance adviser developed a concept to strengthen the capacity of the council members and other involved key stakeholders from other entities of the district. This concept gave way to a training series, focusing on the clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the councillors and the board of governors, the mechanisms of identification and prioritisation of the challenges the community faces, and the know-how of creating an effective working group to develop solutions. Furthermore, the training provided coaching on the drafting of action plans, questionnaires, development proposals and reports.
While strengthening its competences, the training also assisted the council and other participating officials to enact the learned and effectively listen and identify the demands raised by the citizens. After Thma Koul's annual public forum took place, a list of eight key priorities for attention of the

Councillors taking part in the training series on the roles of a councillor.

Working group of the district council engaging in issue identification.

district was produced. Two constraints were chosen to be worked on immediately. These were, first, the ineffectiveness of public service delivery, coupled with the lack of awareness among citizens that a One Window Service Office exists in Thma Koul, and second, problems in the management of solid waste. In these areas, councillors proceeded to draft a clear-cut action plan with milestones and engage into citizens-surveying.

At the end of the coaching sessions, the chief of council highlighted the increased understanding of the council's roles, the improved capability of issue identification and the strengthened effectiveness of the working group, which have been gained during the work on the priorities. He also stated that the lessons learned will remain an important base for future monthly meetings.

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