



Decentralization in Cambodia: Evaluating Impacts, Challenges, and Governance Dynamics

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamic decentralization process in Cambodia, particularly its impact on local governance and public service delivery. Following the post-Khmer Rouge era, the Royal Government of Cambodia has implemented institutional reforms, particularly in the 2001 Law on Administrative Management of Commune/Sangkat and the 2008 Organic Law, to enhance local accountability. This study employs a qualitative research paradigm, utilizing purposive sampling to select key participants, including local government officials, community leaders, and civil society groups who have first-hand knowledge of the decentralization process. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are employed as primary data sources, complemented by secondary analysis of legislative documents, constitutional provisions, and policy instruments. Thematic analysis is employed to organize and interpret this non-numerical data, employing qualitative software to track the emergence of recurring themes on institutional performance. The research evaluates challenges like the dominance of central politics and financial limitations that might hamper the success of reforms. The results show that, despite the existence of a legal framework for local empowerment through decentralization, its effectiveness is limited by a lack of fiscal autonomy and overlapping administrative authorities between deconcentration and decentralization. Moreover, the dominance of central politics in the approval of budgets still leads to inefficiencies in the delivery of services. The research concludes that, to ensure balanced service delivery, there is a need for more institutional guidance and local autonomy to go beyond top-down approaches.

Keywords: Decentralization, Local Governance, Financial Constraints, Political Dominance, Cambodia

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Introduction

Bureaucratic Digitization of public administration has been an important transition for the Royal Government of Cambodia during the last two decades. Since the post-Khmer Rouge period, which really left the country disunited, Cambodia adopted a unitary form of governance with control over local autonomy and less citizen participation, thus becoming, under Pol Pot, a virtual autocracy (Frolov, 2025). Recognizing the need for reform for accountability and responsiveness, the Royal Government began the implementation of decentralization reforms at the beginning of the 2000s. A milestone of legislation in this regard was the **Law on the Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans**

issued in 2001 (Royal Kram No. NS/RKM/0508/017) (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2008a). This provided a lawful structure through which enhancing the delivery of public services could be better performed at the grassroots level, along with the expansion of the mandate of local governments. The intention here was the devolution of power from the center to the locality so that citizens can actively participate in social life, while enhancing basic public services and pursuing local development.

In June 2005, the Royal Government introduced the **Strategic Framework for Decentralization and Deconcentration Reform**, which presented its vision for better local governance at both the province and municipality levels. The provinces are further divided into communes (khum), districts (srok), and communities/villages (phum), while municipalities are further divided into sections (khan) and quarters (sangkat) (Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning, and Construction, 2016). Through this framework, the interactions between the local councils and the various national government departments are supposed to be transformed in such a way that there is increased enhancement of governance within the sub-national levels. Decentralization policies are vital in Cambodia to address many of the ongoing problems that the country still faces: poverty, inequality, and lack of infrastructure. Grassroots problem-solving necessitates effective governance at the sub-national levels since local governments can respond to community needs more effectively through the processes of decentralization (Youvan, 2024).

The objective of this study is to identify the change in service delivery performance between district and commune levels of administration as a consequence of decentralization reform. In providing an analysis of the relative benefits and challenges from decentralization, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of local governance dynamics in Cambodia. This will help policymakers, practitioners, and scholars develop far better public service outcomes. This study portrays a connection between effective service delivery and decentralization, thus contributing theoretically and practically to the discussion on governance and public administration in Cambodia.

This study is poised to address a few critical research questions on decentralization and how it influences the governance of local governments: To what extent does decentralization redefine the role and responsibilities of local governments in Cambodia? Through what ways has access and quality of public services been improved since these reforms were effected? In what way does community participation influence the decision-making process on service delivery? Which challenges have come up and are perceived as a hindrance to successful decentralization at local levels? The answers to the above questions shall emanate, through practical recommendations, for ways to enhance the effectiveness of public service delivery, hence informing how best to achieve the millennium development goals in Cambodia. Such implications derived will inform strategies on the improvement of local governance and engendering community engagement in decision-making processes.

Theoretical Review and Research Focus

Constitutional and Legal Framework for Subnational Administration in Cambodia

Decentralization in Cambodia has undergone rapid development and can be regarded as a transition between violent conflict and a relatively stable governance structure. The Royal Government of Cambodia took an initial focus on infrastructure rural development and the improvement of refugees' and internally displaced persons' lives, until the UN and other development partners came to help substantially (Szatkowski, 2017). Nevertheless, during this period, local government systems had problems due to inadequate budgetary allocations and weak legal frameworks. Subnational governance was captured once the government initially strengthened its authority at the national level. A legal framework for subnational governance started with the promulgation of the **Law on the Administrative Management of Communes/Sangkats** in 2001 (Royal Kram No. NS/RKM/0301/05) (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2001). Ever since, different forms of decentralization modalities have been practiced in Cambodia, such as shifting from the **Decentralization & Deconcentration (D&D)** approach towards the **Sub-National Democratic Development (SNDD)** approach (Rohdewohld, 2022).

The **Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia**, adopted in 1993, was not initially based on principles of local self-government or a decentralized model of public administration. It was based on centralization, represented in two organic laws: the **2008 Law on Administrative Management of Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts, and Khans** and the **2008 Law on the Election of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts, and Khans** (Royal Decree No. NS/RKM/0508/017; Royal Kram No. NS/RKM/0508/018). These have set up the strategic framework necessary for the functioning of the appointed councils since the integration across line ministries is realized (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2008a, 2008b). However, the **Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF)** remains in control with greater centralization in the fiscal system of subnational governments when it comes to budgetary approvals. Centralist control has resulted in confusion concerning the role and responsibilities of the subnational administrations, contributing to several inefficiencies in the delivery of services (Yeth et al., 2023).

Recent sub-decrees have sought to enhance institutional mechanisms at district and municipal levels, completing functional allocations. They can represent government interests and manage local autonomy at the commune and quarter levels while having the potential for broader legislative and executive roles at the district and municipal council levels. New legislation might clearly define responsibilities and powers, thereby increasing the capacity of these governments to enhance service delivery (Bhatti & McDonald, 2020).

Conceptual Confusion: Deconcentration and Decentralization as Separate Concepts

The existing decentralization policies in Cambodia face implementation challenges because their practical execution remains undefined and unstructured. The overlapping concepts of decentralization and deconcentration create a confusing management scheme for local governance (Rohdewohld, 2022). Deconcentration enables central ministries to transfer decision-making authority to provincial and district departments yet actual implementation shows different results according to ministry requirements. Local council officials serve as civil servants who lack power to make decisions because they must follow their ministry's orders. The ministries fail to provide proper authority to local areas which creates this restriction (Eng, 2016). Decentralization efforts face administrative difficulties because inadequate integration of these efforts reduces their advantages.

While the **2001 Law on Commune/Sangkat Administrative Management** provided for both deconcentration and decentralization, the former has left deeper ripples within power dynamics at the level of local governance than the latter (Royal Decree NS/RKM/0301/05) (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2001). By law, local councils must represent both national interests and the needs of their respective communities, a dynamic that complicates processes often overlooked by the central government to ensure the representation of its interests at every level of governance. Local self-government councils have limited powers due to numerous controls imposed by the center; most decisions must pass through the **Ministry of Interior (MOI)** via formal letters and are subjected to needs assessments (Rohdewohld, 2022). Consequently, decentralization is crippled in practice due to limited powers and rather fuzzy understandings of limitations and responsibilities expected of local governments. In the absence of any clear guidelines, such reforms may well remain on paper and not amount to much in real life as change in the pattern of governance (Schröder & Young, 2019).

Methods

The research investigates the missing elements which it evaluates through studying how decentralization characteristics match actual decentralization policies used in Cambodia. The research uses decentralization theories together with community development and public policy and policy implementation theories to develop a complete understanding of the complex nature of decentralization.

The research uses qualitative design methods which enable researchers to study how participants perceive and experience decentralization policies. The research sample consists of key stakeholders involved in the decentralization process, including local government officials, community leaders, and civil society representatives. The study selects participants through

purposive sampling to include individuals who possess the necessary knowledge and experience required for research.

Data collection requires primary sources and secondary sources for its process. Primary sources include qualitative data obtained from interviews, focus group discussions, reports, memos, letters, and officially published documents, including constitutional texts. Secondary sources consist of books and reference materials together with newspapers and journals and unpublished theses and dissertations. The researchers created operational definitions which define the main decentralization variables through their definitions of "local autonomy," "service delivery effectiveness," and "community participation." The definitions establish operational definitions which guide the analysis while delivering clear results for researchers to interpret.

The analysis of non-numerical data needs systematic organization and interpretation work that helps researchers discover patterns and themes together with underlying meanings. The process starts with researchers learning about the data then they begin coding which helps them classify data while discovering commonalities and differences together with connections between different data elements. The researchers use qualitative data analysis software to manage and analyze qualitative data because it enables them to handle their research more effectively. The study wants to discover and analyze themes that show how effective Cambodia's decentralization policies work but it does not use traditional quantitative hypothesis testing. The research results will help people understand how decentralization impacts real-world situations while providing them with new insights to improve local governance systems.

Results and Discussion

Ideas for Reform: Why Decentralize in the First Place?

Some of the most important reasons include that local governance has increasingly become more accountable and responsive to the community needs, whereas, on the other hand, the government came up with a three-tier administrative framework with the leadership of the international aid organizations as a means of making governance accessible to the citizens of Cambodia (Eng et al., 2015; Ministry of Land Management, Urban Management, and Construction, 2016). Among them, pilot programs, such as the Seila program, have performed very well and got good remarks from the local government authorities along with common local community members (Kim, 2017).

During the last three decades, the local governance system has evolved with many different regime changes. However, at subnational levels, the three tiers of local governments, which include provincial/municipality, district (srok/khan), and communal (khum/sangkat), have remained intact (Ministry of Land Management, Urban Management, and Construction, 2016). In this regard, the structure of the legal system in Cambodia concerning the existence of the central government at every level of administration and social and economic matters at each provincial and local government, under the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, has been clearly defined appropriately since the 1990s.

Later on, the adoption of the Law on Khum/Sangkat Administration in 2001 brought about the transition in the early 2000s. Accompanied by increased participation of the population in governance, it was supposed to translate changes to make public service delivery more effective through the transferring of decision-making powers and fiscal budgets from the central government to the sub-national councils. This process has included all the big contributors, starting from various government departments at various levels, civil society organizations, and even international partners in developments (Prum, 2020).

Take, for instance, while the Ministry of Interior (MOI) informs decentralization policies, their implementations and financial management at the local levels are under the authority of the local municipalities (Rohdewohld, 2022). The international development partners, including the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the World Bank, have also been involved in one way or another in either providing the necessary technical and financial capacities to improve the competencies at the sub-national levels in Cambodia, but civil society organizations do, however call for increased accountability and transparency of the local institutions of governance (Bandyopadhyay & Khus, 2016). Decentralization reforms have

boosted these through community meetings and participatory budgeting as a means of participatory citizens. It's a way of ensuring that the government ensures accountability and is more open; as such, there is increased trust among citizens in the local areas who take responsibility to participate in the development programs at the community level (Eng, 2016).

Fragmented Service Delivery: The Impact of Fiscal Decentralization in Cambodia

Decentralization in Cambodia in the early 2000s has been defined as the process in which the independence of the so-called sub-national governments was rapidly increasing from the center through deconcentration of responsibilities and resources downwards. Such a process has undergone several difficulties and still is confronted by many challenges, such as political instability, regions with very low revenues, and lack of budget support—factors all contributing to poor service delivery (Eng, 2016). So far, foreign aid has influenced the process of decentralization. However, too many parallel programs meant lesser ability to function properly for the government and less incentive for full reform; hence, service delivery occurs in fragmented manners that often fail to adequately meet local needs.

Economic opportunities and social services remain unequally divided throughout the nation, and there is still a need to balance national policies at the center with local development efforts (Eng et al., 2015). Fiscal decentralization has drastically altered the landscape on how jobs and financial responsibilities are spread throughout Cambodia, while the local elections have also provided stability and cooperation at the commune council levels within the government system. It's just the little money that goes down to the sub-national level, whereas big amounts are hardly seen compared to the national budget (Kim, 2017).

But even with these good benefits from fiscal decentralization, there is still a big question over the way local services are provided in Cambodia. Without good policies for local development, there are scattered and unconnected ways of responding to the local needs and priorities. In such a situation, the administration becomes less politically committed. Besides, the fact that Cambodia adopts a two-tier budgeting system, which includes the National Level Administration and the Sub-National Level Administration, further complicates coordination in the planning and implementation of the development programs at the local level by the different tiers of government (Asian Development Bank, 2024).

Power Dynamics at the District and Commune Level: The Influences of Central Control in Cambodia

The Organic Law provided that the decentralization and deconcentration of district councils in Cambodia was implemented in the year 2008 and was considered landmark legislation that brought reform within the system of local governance in the direction of effective decentralization (Rohdewohld, 2022). Indeed, there has been increased clarity on the political economy that underlines these decentralization reforms since the early 2000s. In its turn, commune council members indirectly elect the district councils by the party-list voting, and the biggest share of voices comes from the Cambodian People's Party, or CPP (Kim, 2017). This, in turn, has questioned this specific form of an electoral system about who the real representatives are, since it often leads the council to bow down to the interests of the ruling party rather than the interests voiced out by the people, since the latter has huge powers over the administration. While these stated objectives are worded as "the councils strive for increased local service delivery and accountability to citizens," the fact is that they are seriously constrained by control from the central authority through the Ministry of Interior (Eng et al., 2015; Morgenbesser, 2019; Rohdewohld, 2022).

Decentralization policies are most fully put into practice in municipalities or districts at the administrative level (Rohdewohld, 2022). The chief governors, appointed by the Ministry of Interior, have quite a good extent of power and carry quite important responsibilities concerning not only local legislation but also law and order at the district level (Kim, 2017). Too often the governors, however, have ended up carrying out these tasks for the good of the CPP—not for the benefit of the people they represent (Loughlin, 2020). All this would place the governor under a dual mandate, likely to lead to greater engagement with superiors than with the councils and population they serve. It is the latter that underlines, among other things, a number of key issues so far as real decentralization—or rather, deconcentration—in Cambodia is concerned; more

specifically, unequal power relations present at the district to commune levels (Bhatti & McDonald, 2020).

As Eng (2016) observes, although local councils have powers provided for by the Organic Law for enacting and executing legislation, in theory at least, even such powers, in fact, are severely restrained by broad inadequacies of financial autonomy and general independence. This situation arises because district and commune councils are dependent upon the national government to devolve powers and resources down to them—a fact that rarely, if ever, occurs. The problem is that accountability often goes beyond what is legally and politically given to the councils. To make this problem worse still, during the major meetings of the councils, such as the monthly meetings, the governors remain in control of the agenda and the deliberations. This, in effect, has made it impossible for opposition members to demand accountability from the administrations (Hughes, 2015).

Relationships that are accounted for by this include, for instance, that between commune councils and district councils, whereby, even though the former are directly elected, they often cannot control the latter, which may appear superior given that the district councils are more resourceful and administratively stronger than commune councils. This has naturally resulted in an acute misrepresentation of the interests of the constituents, wherein the district and commune councils, lacking direct representation and cooperation, had not been able to bring about any significant changes in the region's decision-making process (Eng, 2016). The establishment of the National Committee for Implementation of Public Administrative Reform was announced in the year 2023, whereby the committee played an active role in ensuring the functions of various ministries and their institutions were working effectively (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 2022). Regarding the issue of the elimination of unsuitable civil servants or reduction in benefits, it is done gradually and through continuous dialogue.

Empowering Local Governance: The Struggles of Commune/Sangkat Councils in Delivering Services

These reforms taken in the early 2000s gave very wide-ranging powers to the local governments so that public services at the local level are well-managed and the working mechanism of the local jurisdictions is accomplished with efficiency. Therefore, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) had recognized that commune councils had the potential to make the services effective through the better use of inputs, management of their activities and hence adding value to the local communities in allowing them to voice their needs concerning the services (Eng, 2016).

The NPRS believed that commune councils make a critical difference in poverty reduction; they provide for training opportunities, active community involvement in decision-making, and budget allocation in an effort to reduce development gaps at both the commune and village levels by participating in basic service delivery like roads, health, and education. Apart from the public expenditure, the councils would involve the private sector as well as other agencies at the community level to stimulate local development (Eng et al., 2015). However, the NPRS failed to explain the specific level and how the various levels of government would render these services at the commune councils, and this raises the question of how all those efforts would indeed work to reduce the suffering of poor families at village levels.

Following the 2002 elections, commune councils started implementing development activities through donor and NGO funds, which helped generate new momentum for local planning. Community development programs, as funded through donors, NGOs, and the provincial government, created an impulse for the councils to initiate their own version of community development programs (Eng, 2016; Wong & Guggenheim, 2018). One of them was the Commune/Sangkat Fund (CSF), which granted direct distribution of funds to communes for development activities at the local level in sectors such as education, health, transport, and irrigation (Rohdewohld, 2022). The first impression of service delivery at the commune level raised a number of ambiguous questions on resource sharing amongst the communes and beyond the local governance approach. The gaps in population and size differences of various communes are, no doubt, highly critical, particularly to the Cambodian commune councils (Eng, 2016). As a fact, the complicating factors have greatly served as barriers to the effective working of the councils.

This system evokes a number of questions concerning the competence of local administrators. In smaller communes, inadequate administrative powers and a lack of resources would often deprive administrators of their legally assigned roles and would thus reassert centralized powers over local governance (Loughlin, 2020; Morgenbesser, 2019). Accordingly, in 2001, the National Committee for Support to Communes/Sangkat (NCSCS) was established to facilitate this process. Comprised of several government ministries, this committee was formed principally to spearhead these changes in local governance through support to the Commune/Sangkat councils. While significant partnerships with agencies like the Seila program have considerably enhanced community governance, the National Committee for Support to the Communes/Sangkat (NCSCS)—by the time being established—still does not clearly identify policies on how cooperation among communes should be addressed (Eng, 2016).

As such, different communes often allow specific issues to be settled by themselves in their own concerns. However, decentralization reform in legal terms has focused on clearly establishing the role and competence of the commune councils. This, within the fiscal system of the commune, has meant granting competency in asset management and resource budgeting, a most characteristic expression of which would be the actual existence of the Commune/Sangkat Fund (CSF), which allows communes to manage their finances and allocate resources according to their specific needs (Khoun, 2018).

Other responsibilities of the councils will be to formulate and operationalize the five-year plan for development at the commune level—a strategic document guiding local development—wherein priorities for resource allocation would also be determined in so far as realization of projects (Rohdewohld, 2022). How the actual functioning of the Commune Procurement and Project Implementation System, which is supposed to take care of the procurement of goods and services at the level of the communes, along with the implementation of development projects, really functions becomes a very complexly interrelated question. Most councils are given responsibility with very minimal or otherwise constrained staff and may have no more than the one centrally appointed clerk to perform basic administrative work (Eng et al., 2015; Kim, 2017).

The result has been that their role in community development has remained confined to purchasing small-scale infrastructural provisions from outside. This limited potential allows them to build up their capabilities at a snail's pace; however, it might make them unable to undertake big projects in subsequent stages, but it is the small-scale projects being initiated that will give councils experience and confidence to work on more considerable tasks progressively through the coming decades (Schröder & Young, 2019; Wong & Guggenheim, 2018).

Impact, Challenges, and Dynamics of Decentralization Reforms in Cambodia (Political, Administrative, and Financial Perspectives)

Indeed, political decentralization in Cambodia has been carried out through the devolution of powers and responsibilities from the center to the subnational tiers through the establishment of the electoral establishment of commune councils (Ministry of Land Management, Urban Management, 2016). This is a move in the right direction, given the history of commune elections that first took place in 2002; however, excessive dominance by the ruling party still calls into question the efficiency and effectiveness of representation within these councils. From this perspective, for instance, one finds absolute political representation; 100 percent of the commune chiefs come from the ruling CPP and contribute to the distortion of democracy (Right, 2025). Meanwhile, decentralization has been implemented along these lines as a political tool by the ruling party with a view to solidifying its regime, given the fact that, through its members, it holds a monopoly on the process of delegates' being included in voter lists for local elections (Peou, 2019).

Administrative decentralization has thus emerged from the dire need for efficiency in the delivery of essential services at the community level by the local councils. But the ambiguity that has always surrounded the definition of their roles and functions has always brought many questions to light. Presently, the majority of the local government representatives are appointed and not elected; this has negatively affected accountability and responsiveness to the citizens' needs (Bandyopadhyay & Khus, 2016). No incremental output has been achieved so far through the institutional processes meant to achieve the overall objectives of the decentralization

program. Also, the level of fiscal decentralization has usually been one of the key pre-determinants of the extent of the ability of local authorities to finance the responsibilities of their mandates. In reality, the current regime is under-resourced, and its revenues have made it misleading, hence making it incapable for the councils to mobilize and manage their expenditure effectively (Khoun, 2018; Yeth et al., 2023).

The table below summarizes the various aspects of decentralization in Cambodia that were discussed in this study.

Table I. Overview of Decentralization Reform in Cambodia: Impacts, Challenges, and Dynamics (2024)

| <i>Aspect</i> | <i>Impact</i> | <i>Challenges</i> | <i>Dynamics</i> |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Political | Improved responsiveness and accountability in local governance. | Dominance of the ruling party at the expense of real representation; low political diversity. | Decentralization as a strategy of maintaining control. |
| Administrative | Improved delivery of core services at the community level. | Unclear role definitions block effective functioning and accountability based on accountability mechanisms. | Need for clear guidelines and definitions for local councils' roles and responsibilities. |
| Financial | Improved financial mechanisms because of fiscal decentralization. | Insufficient financial resources and ambiguous revenue sources restrict the capacities of local councils. | Increased demand for capacity-building in financial management and resource mobilization. |

Implication

The research results of this study create major contributions to the current discussion about Cambodian decentralization operations while maintaining connections to research studies conducted in other parts of the world. The study shows that Cambodia can improve its local governance and service delivery systems through decentralization but must first resolve three main challenges which include political control and funding shortages and undefined responsibilities. The research demonstrates that Indonesian and Philippine studies have found local governments to be under control of central authorities which creates problems for those countries who try to execute their decentralization policies (Bhatti & McDonald, 2020; Rohdewohld, 2022). The research demonstrates that decentralization difficulties in Cambodia function as a common problem which affects developing countries throughout the world.

In light of these findings, the authors propose creating a new middle-range theory that needs to incorporate three components which are local governance systems and political power and financial independence. The theory aims to demonstrate how different levels of decentralization affect both service delivery and community participation in various political environments. The framework helps users understand how local organizations work with central authorities which enables them to develop better strategies for implementing decentralized government systems.

Practical Implications

The study results demonstrate practical value in multiple ways. The research findings indicate that Cambodian policymakers need to establish role definitions for local councils which will improve their operational effectiveness and public service delivery. The establishment of explicit rules and operational structures for local governance will enable commune councils to handle community needs through their decision-making processes. Local governments require additional financial resources combined with operational support to execute their official responsibilities. The budget allocation process requires revision to guarantee that financial

resources will be distributed fairly and accessible at local government offices throughout the region. The process of decision-making needs to include more citizen input through community meetings and participatory budgeting because this approach builds trust between local governments and their citizens. The involvement of civil society organizations in local governance monitoring activities will enhance accountability systems through their transparency advocacy work.

Theoretical Implications

The study demonstrates that decentralization requires multiple historical and political and economic factors to be fully understood. The study results prove that decentralization does not automatically result in better governance outcomes. The study demonstrates that researchers must study local contexts to better understand how decentralization programs achieve their goals. The study shows that implementing decentralization reforms for governance and public administration requires a complex understanding of the process. The research results from this study establish broader implications which benefit nations facing identical decentralization difficulties as Cambodia. The research combines practical recommendations with theoretical insights to develop an effective and fair local governance system which meets community needs throughout time.

Conclusion

The local governance system and service delivery system in Cambodia show signs of improvement which have become visible after two decades of decentralization reforms. The current situation shows progress yet it exists within a framework that combines strong political power with deficiencies in both financial assets and governmental operational capabilities. The local councils show their potential through their actual achievements yet the decentralization reforms require additional resources plus operational freedom to succeed. The research results demonstrate that decentralization improves local government operations yet the different outcomes found in various regions show the need to study local situations plus the elements which promote or obstruct changes. The organization faces major obstacles which consist of insufficient operational abilities plus monetary limitations and the absence of open information. Rural residents now have better access to fundamental services which include health and education and sanitation yet they still experience major deficiencies in transportation systems and worker development programs. The current situation demonstrates an urgent requirement for a dedicated solution which will help resolve the existing problems that stem from decentralization reforms in Cambodia.

The research results demonstrate the need to improve local governance through better resource distribution and increased autonomy for local governments. Local councils need essential tools and decision-making power. Local councils need essential tools and decision-making power to fulfill their role of serving community needs. The establishment of transparent governance systems together with responsible decision-making processes will help local governments to build public confidence while delivering better service results. The research study contains several limitations which affect its findings. The research study focused on specific regional areas which prevented it from showing the complete range of Cambodian experiences. The research relies on qualitative data which introduces potential biases according to how stakeholders perceive the situation. The ongoing political and administrative shifts cause research results to change which requires continuous assessment of the findings.

Future research should investigate how decentralization reforms affect local governance through their effects on citizen participation and service delivery standards. Countries that have implemented decentralization should conduct comparative studies to identify effective methods for overcoming common challenges. The sustainability of decentralization implementation will become clearer through longitudinal studies which track social equity and development outcomes. This research helps to advance the discussion between scholars and practitioners about establishing effective local self-government systems in Cambodia. Social equity will

improve and governance standards will rise through the solution of current problems and the development of sustainable solutions.

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