
OXFAM — CAMBODIA

Strengthening Institutions:
The Management Support Programme
To The Department of Hydrology,
Phnom Penh

Lessons Learned

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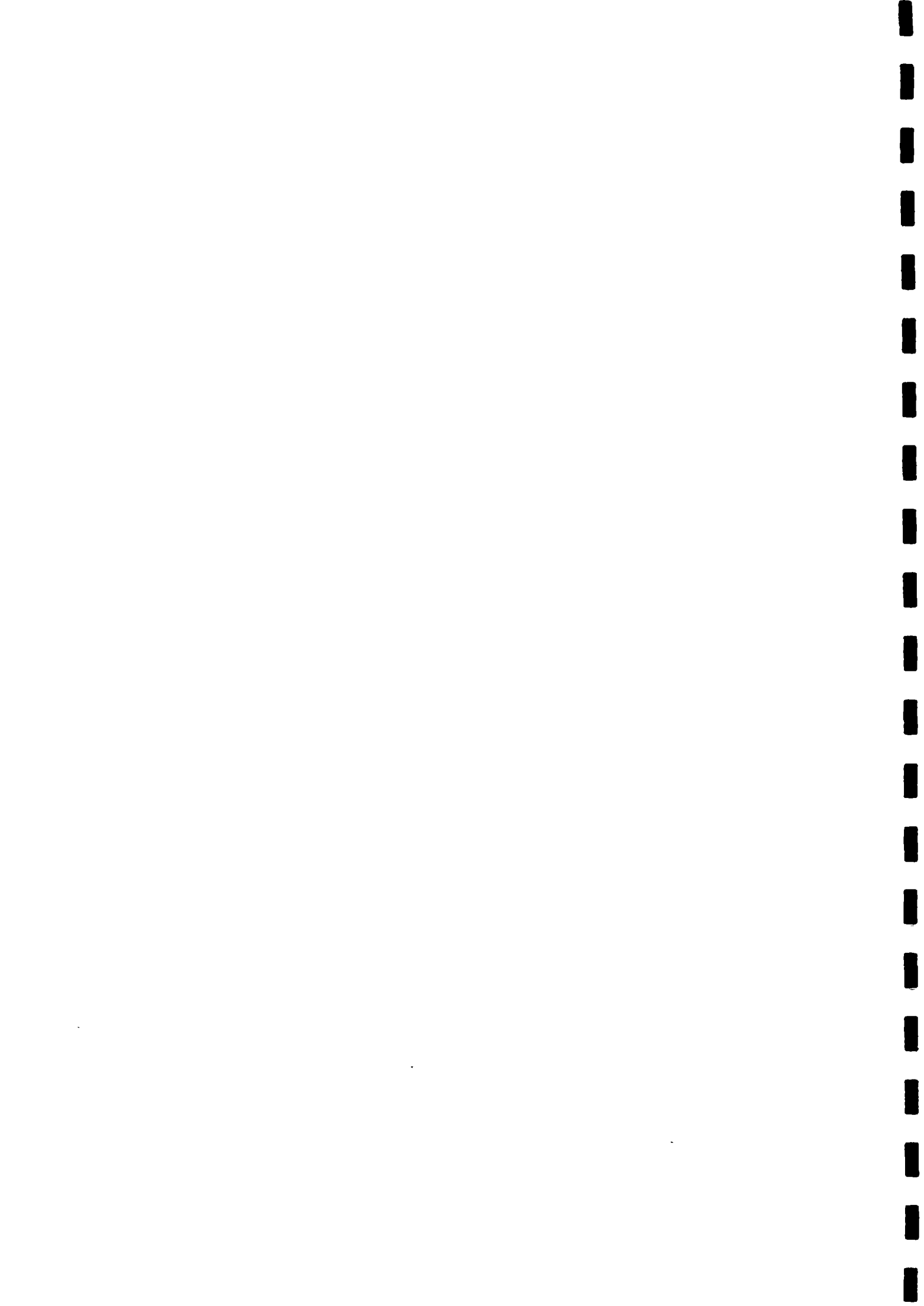


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hydrology Support Programme (HSP) was a programme collaboratively designed by AFFHC (merged with CAA in July 1992), CIDSE, CWS and Oxfam to institutionally strengthen the Department of Hydrology (DoH) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

The programme design envisaged the posting of thirteen advisors with the DoH, two to provide overall programme coordination, and eleven area specialists to support the Hydrometeorology-, Water Management-, Design-, Construction-, and Organization Offices

NGO advisors had been working with the Department of Hydrology since 1991, but the start of the HSP can be taken to be April of 1993, when two senior advisors arrived provided by ODA. The programme collapsed in March of 1994, after a difficult year, marked by disagreement between the NGOs participating in the programme and the ODA senior advisors.

Oxfam decided to support a self-assessment of the programme by its Rural Water Supply Advisor, in an effort to draw lessons from the experience. The report contains an objective description of events, followed by an analysis and recommendations. This summary focuses on the analysis of events, not their description.

Cambodia's Political Climate

When the HSP programme was formulated, in late 1991, the Paris Peace Accords had just been signed, which spelled out the process by which a new government would be formed¹. Before the actual elections in May 1993, government offices became inactive and unable to take decisions because of the political implications of the association of the existing civil service with the Cambodian Peoples' Party (CPP), which had governed Cambodia with Vietnamese assistance from 1979 to 1992. This confusion included the DoH, where officials became less and less active (apart from using equipment as a source of income).

Following the elections there was considerable confusion and disorganisation. During the period of the interim government additional Ministries were set up with responsibilities overlapping with existing Ministries, particularly in water resources development and -management. These were cut back after the new constitution was adopted, but the State Secretariat for Rural Development (which became the Ministry of Rural Development in October of 1994), still claimed some responsibility over rural drinking water. At one stage it looked as if most of DoH's responsibilities would be divided amongst other departments. These problems were only resolved in December of 1994.

¹The process consisted of the following steps: disarming and demobilization of all factions; general elections, the formation of an interim government, the writing of a new constitution; and the formation of a new, permanent government.

Although much of the turmoil could not have been foreseen at the time of programme design, it is surprising that no attempt was made to assess the political situation in which the HSP programme was about to be implemented

DoH's Commitment to Change and Organizational Autonomy

When the HSP was first formulated the DoH and the Ministry of Agriculture appeared to be fully supportive of it. This was indicated by the fact that a Vice-Minister of Agriculture chaired the meetings of the Hydrology Advisory Board, the guiding body for the HSP. Also about half the members of the HAB were from the government side

Gradually, as the HSP took a long time to materialize in the form of a full complement of advisors, the interest declined. The HAB last met in mid-1992, and a meeting planned for February 1993 was cancelled at short notice due to pressures of the election.

Where the HSP was seriously deficient was in the fact that support was never formalized with the DoH in a written and signed Project Agreement. Support was assumed, but project objectives, inputs from NGOs and DoH, and a division of responsibilities were never set out in a document shared by all parties.

Within the DoH, there was never a core group of leaders actively taking the project forward. In 1991, the then Director was supportive of the project design, although not in an active form. By the time programme implementation had started, the Director had been replaced by an Acting Director, in the former's absence. The Acting Director seemed supportive as well, but the senior ODA advisors later admitted that he did not in fact do anything. In August of 1993, a new Director was appointed. He is very much in control of his department and does not seem to appreciate outsiders giving advice. Consequently it was difficult for the senior advisors to establish a relationship with him, although this was not helped by the attitude of the advisors themselves. They very much behaved like external 'experts', arrogantly providing their advice on a 'take it or leave it' basis.

No efforts were made to work with other key people in the DoH, although it can be questioned whether this would have helped at all given the top-down style of management prevalent in the department (and much of Cambodia's civil service). Most counterparts were not in a position to make or implement decisions by themselves either.

Any changes at the DoH have to be approved by the Council of Ministers before they can be implemented. Changes in organizational structure proposed in September of 1993 had not yet been decided upon in January of 1995. This kind of delay is certain to kill off any initiative or attempt at change. Whether a more active involvement of senior staff at the Ministry (through the HAB) would have made any difference is not clear. The lack of organizational autonomy was identified as a possible risk in the programme design, but no efforts were made before implementation to determine the extent of the limitations on delegated authority.

The combined influence of political confusion, lack of support of key staff and limited organizational autonomy leads to the conclusion that the climate was probably not ripe for institutional change

Donor Climate and NGO Commitment

Donors were not attracted or committed to providing funds. UNDP withdrew funds offered to an NGO for one post to spend on another project, and FAO expressed an interest in providing three irrigation advisors but never came up with the money for them, or even a project commitment. Part of the reason for this lack of donor support may have been due to the political context and changes happening during the period.

Another reason may be that donors are reluctant to support institutional development projects because the outputs are difficult to measure. They prefer neat target practice type projects. Between 1990 and 1993, support in Cambodia generally tended to be for 'emergency relief' or quick impact rehabilitation type projects.

The original NGOs were not committed enough to fund and fill the technical advisors posts. Of the thirteen posts identified in the programme design, the three key posts in irrigation were never filled². The NGOs failed to fund these posts, or to encourage others to do so (although funding for one of the posts was provided by one NGO, the organisation that had agreed to fill that post reneged on that promise).

Project Design

The project design stage of the HSP is not very well defined. The original NGO design document (1991) provided the rationale for working with the DoH and set the framework within which the team of advisors was to work. When ODA agreed to become involved (in 1992), they wrote a 'Project Memorandum' setting out the objectives of the programme from their perspective, without however incorporating the original design document. The significance of this was not realized at the time, and working with two different design documents proved next to impossible, even though there were no significant differences between them.

According to the ODA memorandum, the senior advisors were to write an inception report providing an in-depth analysis of the DoH, and outlining a strategy for programme implementation. The inception report that was finally produced by ODA (eleven months after their arrival) provides the analysis, but does not contain a strategy.

There were a number of problems with the project design:

² This has particular significance because the key activity of the DoH has always been irrigation. It is likely that a lot of DoH support was lost when the irrigation advisors posts were not filled.

- The DoH was not equipped to deal with some of the proposed 'strengthening' approaches. For instance, there was no place in the organisational structure for the Human Resource Development Advisor and the Community Organization Advisor.
- DoH staff was not sufficiently involved in the design process.
- The project design does not contain a strategy for implementation, nor does it contain a timeline. In the absence of both, it also fails to outline the process by which a strategy could be reached.
- The ODA inception report lacks a coherent design, and there was no involvement of senior DoH staff in the analysis or design of the proposals it contains (making their implementation very unlikely).

Related to the project design is the disagreement between NGOs and ODA over project objectives. The ODA inception report mentions the original design as a background document with "very different" objectives. A side-by-side reading of the respective objectives does not reveal any differences, raising the question whether the ODA agenda was not, in reality, different from the one stated.

The fact that both ODA advisors spent much time developing a proposal for a State Water Authority (first mentioned in a joint UNICEF/Oxfam water programme evaluation) at the expense of working with the DoH suggests that this was so.

Criticism from NGOs of ODA was more directed at the approach and attitude of the senior advisors, such as lack of leadership, coordination and consultation, than at the substance of their work. The disagreements were not resolved however (in spite of numerous attempts), which does not speak well of either NGOs or ODA. The situation could have been helped if it had been clear who was responsible for the project from the side of ODA. The First Secretary of the Phnom Penh UK Embassy was involved at times, and a number of visits were paid to Phnom Penh by SEADD staff from Bangkok. The same staff from SEADD never visited twice however, contributing to confusion, and the matter was never cleared up.

The Advisory Team

A number of questions can be raised about the background and approach of the ODA advisors. The management experience of the Hydrology Programme Advisor tended to be as leader of science based teams, while the HSP was in essence a *management* support programme. He had no experience of NGOs and apparently little experience in an advisory role. In action he was extremely quiet, was unable to effectively chair coordination meetings, and seemed to lack any sort of leadership skills.

On paper, the Finance and Institutions Advisor seemed suitable. His concept of the role of an advisor however tended to be that of a management consultant commissioned to sort out a commercial organization — assess the organization, make the solutions and present these on a take it or leave it basis. He certainly did not believe in assisting the organization to identify its problems and develop its own solutions. In addition, his attitude to NGOs appeared arrogant and condescending.

Despite his job purpose and description, the HPA made little attempt to coordinate the activities or approach of the technical advisors. In fact, he seemed to dissipate the purpose of the HSP as an institutional support programme by bringing representatives from any organization associated with the DoH into the coordination meetings. The HPA refused to acknowledge the role of the HAB, and in spite of an ODA job description that specified he should play a lead role in ensuring its proper functioning, he ignored its existence.

Both ODA advisors did very little to establish any kind of working relationship with the senior staff of the DoH, especially after the arrival of the new Director. Relationships were not helped by the advisors setting up their own office outside of DoH where they spent most of their time, or by accusing the new Director of being a crook in their draft inception report.

The orientation and abilities of some of the NGO advisors was questionable. The education and experience of the advisors ranged from post-graduate university level to mechanical technicians, and from development and NGO experience to commercial plant workshops. While this is in itself not a problem —on the contrary, it could have made for a very strong team— one or two were rather individualistic and did not have the ability to see the purpose and benefit of teamwork. One or two others did not have the experience to match the job requirements.

The Counterpart Structure

Although the DoH did provide counterparts —taken to indicate support for the HSP— many were not available to work with advisors full time, and a very limited diversity of skills (most staff are engineers) hamper the effective use of counterparts.

Another problem was the fact that some advisors did not have a natural place in the DoH structure; there is for instance no office dealing with staff development, and the DoH is a stranger to social aspects of water supply and irrigation projects, making it difficult for the HRD and Community Organisation advisors to do any work at all, let alone find a suitable counterpart.

Partly because the Hydrology Advisory Board was inactive, these problems were never resolved.

Physical Inputs

The HSP did not have an 'equipment list' attached to it; rather it was assumed that individual advisors relied on their own budgets to provide necessary inputs. Although an annual budget is set for the DoH, in fact it receives very little money from central government, and the prospect of receiving equipment through the advisors must have seemed very attractive. Most advisors however did not have a significant support budget, the participating NGOs seemed reluctant to spend money on making the DoH functional at central level (many NGOs spend significant sums on making Hydrology offices operational at provincial level). This was shortsighted of the NGOs, since providing advice alone is meaningless if the organisation does not have the wherewithal to function properly. The fact that DoH only saw

advisors and not the material resources it was hoping for probably played a role in the diminishing support for the HSP from the DoH

The ODA advisors promised funding for a 'wish-list' of equipment for DoH. After consulting with NGO advisors and the DoH (but ignoring most of the advice) they put together a multi-million dollar list, which subsequently had to be severely pruned back before being cancelled altogether. Neither NGOs nor DoH ever found out what was exactly on the list, and the whole episode was rather badly handled by ODA.

Programme Implementation and Management

By 1993, the stage had been set for major problems to arise. The biggest chance to get the programme off to a good start was missed at the point when the ODA advisors arrived, and the complement of advisors was as complete as it was ever going to get. A team building and problem solving workshop with all advisors, counterparts and senior DoH staff would have been a good way to enter the implementation stage. It could have heightened interest, focused needs, developed and clarified issues, and began to demonstrate some success.

The reality was one of lacklustre leadership, no coordination, unclear methods of communication, and disagreement over management structures.

By far the most serious was the lack of a body responsible for strategic direction and guidance of the HSP; this role was to have been taken on by the HAB, but this was ignored by the HPA. It did not help matters that the monthly coordination meetings were diluted with participants of all manner of agencies involved with DoH, leading to an atmosphere where counterparts did not speak out, and little of HSP significance was discussed.

That building institutions requires teamwork, and is inherently a process of human interaction that brings with it the need to develop and maintain trust was not understood by enough of the participants. An attempt to bring all stakeholders together for a team building and planning retreat failed at the last moment, and the programme finally collapsed three months later, in March of 1994.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: No programme takes place in a vacuum, unaffected by political realities. Before anything else, the question needs to be answered whether institutional change is at all possible, and is politically supported. In a situation where this is unlikely or uncertain, particular care is needed in designing a programme; a staged approach may be necessary, where efforts can be discontinued if they are not supported. Such an approach could strike a balance between doing nothing because there are too many uncertainties, and pressing on regardless in spite of them.

Recommendation 2: Support for an institutional development project needs to be formalised in a written Memorandum of Agreement, covering programme objectives, the responsibilities of all parties participating in the programme, and the process to be followed to monitor progress.

Recommendation 3: The willingness to change of the organization needs to be assessed, and key people need to be identified to start the process and carry it through. If no committed individuals can be identified, it is probably not a good idea to progress to programme implementation. In practice, this means that institution staff needs to be closely involved in the project formulation and design stages, to allow them to 'buy into' the process of change.

Recommendation 4: Changes in key staff should be followed by a re-assessment and re-affirmation of support, to ensure a smooth continuation of the programme.

Recommendation 5: Sufficient efforts need to be undertaken to ascertain that the institution has the delegated authority to implement recommended changes. Where this is not the case, the scope for improvement may be limited, and project design should acknowledge existing possibilities or limitations. This means that the project design document should include a detailed and thorough analysis of institutional (and technical) limitations and risks.

Recommendation 6: In project design for institutional strengthening, it is important to consider all levels of the organisation, up, down and sideways. Internal relationships between departments, and interaction with important external institutions (such as the parent Ministry) need to be well defined. Relationships between individual advisors, and between advisors and institution staff also need to be set out in the project design document.

Recommendation 7: Problems never exist in isolation from each other; they interrelate and are interdependent. For this reason it is also important to consider all problems, and where possible to address them concurrently through in-depth analysis in a well considered project design.

Recommendation 8: It should be ensured that a match exists between the institutional structure and proposed roles of advisors. If this match does not exist, the project design should consider in detail how it could be established at the earliest possible stage.

Recommendation 9: Project participants should be involved in the design process, and 'own' the final product. Such involvement promotes a realistic design and commitment from the beneficiaries. The institution should be involved in drawing up the Terms Of Reference for the project design team, and a draft design document should be offered for review and comments to senior institution staff.

Recommendation 10: The project design should not only set out a clear set of objectives and goals, but identify also the strategy and timeline for implementation. Where this is not possible, a process for reaching a project strategy should be described in detail.

Recommendation 11: A clear set of objectives and project goals should be established, understood and adhered to by all stakeholders in the project.

Recommendation 12: It is essential that a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation is established between advisors and institutional staff, in order to facilitate effective project design. In first instance this entails day to day interaction of all parties, and clear communication.

Recommendation 13: Technical competence alone is not enough for an advisor, and the 'expert approach' has no place in institutional development. Advisors need more generic skills to function well in what will often be a multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural environment.

Recommendation 14: It is advisable to have a steering committee or similar body that is in a position to select appropriate staff, and make changes when necessary. This ensures that proper attention can be given to the formation of a team that works well together, and is accepted by the receiving institution.

Recommendation 15: Counterparts are an essential part to the sustainability of an institutional development programme, and ideally advisors should not start work until counterparts have been identified with the appropriate skills, and the appropriate position in the institution to take learning forward. If the organisational structure does not support the proposed strengthening approaches, efforts should be made in the design stage to define proposals for structural change through a process of mutual consultation, understanding and agreement between institution and design team.

Recommendation 16: Project inputs should be carefully considered. Raising hopes to an unrealistic level may exact a price in lost support and motivation, but funding for equipment necessary for the institution to carry out its tasks is essential. Specification and provision of required inputs needs to take place in close cooperation with the institution, based upon an agreed upon understanding of the tasks of the organisation, and needs to be handled in a transparent manner.

Recommendation 17: Project start-up workshops are suggested as a good way to enter into the implementation stage. They can heighten interest, focus needs, develop and clarify issues, and begin to demonstrate some success.

Recommendation 18: The overall programme management structure needs to include a board responsible for the overall strategic direction of the programme, but not involved in day-to-day issues of implementation.

Recommendation 19: Clear means of communication to enable day-to-day management need to be established, and the programme management structure needs to be clearly outlined and understood by all, fulfil clear, stated objectives, and be empowered to execute its tasks.

Recommendation 20: Team work is essential for success in institution building. Teams should encompass both the external advisors and the institutional counterparts.

Recommendation 21: A common strategy and team workplan needs to be developed based on project aims and objectives, at the start of project implementation.



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| AO | Administrative Officer |
| AFFHC | Australian Freedom From Hunger Campaign |
| CAA | Community Aid Abroad |
| CIDSE | Cooperation Internationale pour le Developpement et la Solidarité |
| CO | Community Organisation |
| COM | Council Of Ministers |
| CWS | Church World Service |
| DoH | Department of Hydrology |
| ESA | External Support Agency |
| FIA | Finance and Institutions Advisor |
| HAB | Hydrology Advisory Board |
| HPA | Hydrology Programme Advisor |
| HRD | Human Resource Development |
| HSP | Hydrology Support Programme |
| LWS | Lutheran World Service |
| MoA | Ministry of Agriculture |
| MSP | Management Support Programme to the Department of Hydrology (commonly called Hydrology Support Programme) |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| ODA | Overseas Development Administration |
| O&M | Operation and Maintenance |

| | |
|-------|---|
| POH | Provincial Office of Hydrology |
| RWSA | Rural Water Supply Advisor |
| SEADD | South East Asia Development Division of the ODA |
| SNC | Supreme National Council |
| SWA | State Water Authority |
| TOR | Terms Of Reference |
| VSO | Voluntary Service Overseas |
| WRB | Water Resources Board |
| WRC | Water Resources Coordinator |

INTRODUCTION

The Hydrology Support Programme (HSP)³ was a programme collaboratively designed by AFFHC⁴, CIDSE, CWS and Oxfam to institutionally strengthen the Department of Hydrology of the Ministry of Agriculture. It was later implemented with participation of these agencies, as well as LWS and ODA. Implementation entailed the posting of a total of thirteen advisors with the DoH, brought together under a common management and coordination structure.

In its current strategic plan, Oxfam UK/I expresses the need to use field experience to much greater effect, and to make radical improvements in its ability to learn from that experience. It also wants to share experience more widely, so it can learn to work more effectively, and replicate best practice. When Oxfam Cambodia decided to support an assessment of the HSP after the collapse of this programme in March 1994, it did so with these wider Oxfam strategies in mind.

This report is not an assessment of the work of individual advisors, but an evaluation of the total programme, encompassing the full structure put in place to support the DoH.

This is not an evaluation in the usual sense, in two ways. Since the programme is finished, there is nothing to be gained from making recommendations for its future. This report is primarily meant to distil learnings from the HSP, that may prove useful for agencies wanting to start up, or participate in, an institutional strengthening project. Secondly, the evaluation was carried out without consultation with other members of the HSP. This is mainly due to the fact that most advisors, and crucially, the ODA programme coordinator, had left Cambodia by the time this report was written. Only Oxfam and LWS left their advisors in place, and the LWS advisor was never involved in the overall implementation of the programme to the same degree that the Oxfam advisor was.

The evaluator was himself involved in the day to day implementation of the programme, and part of all the ups and downs throughout much of 1993, and part of 1994. The disadvantage of that is of course a possible personal bias; the advantage is a familiarity with the programme, and an 'inside view' that could never have been matched by an external evaluator. This resulting report can only be offered with the promise that the author made a serious attempt to stand back from the issues, and in the hope that he was successful.

Much of the information is based on a review of reports, minutes of meetings, discussion papers and memo's, spanning a period of about three-and-a-half years (December 1990-April 1994), occasionally supplemented with personal recall.

³ The programme was originally labelled "The Management Support Programme for the Department of Hydrology", and thus the acronym "MSP" can occasionally be found in documents related to the programme. HSP and MSP are one and the same, and HSP is used throughout this document for reasons of consistency.

⁴ AFFHC merged with CAA in July 1992, and the name of the organisation was changed to CAA. The new organisation continued its involvement in the HSP for 1 post already started, but withdrew support for a second post not yet appointed.

Relying on documents only was limiting in some ways, since much from the early days is undocumented. As mentioned before, no meetings were held with any people that were involved in the programme, both because of a lack of time, and because many of the people originally involved are no longer available. A draft of this report was however reviewed for accuracy by someone familiar with the HSP, and I am grateful to Jeremy Ockelford at Oxfam for his time and efforts. Any remaining errors are of course my own. The views expressed in this report are the author's, and should not be ascribed to, or seen as endorsed by, Oxfam or any other organisation or institution involved in the HSP.

The report is organized along the following lines:

Chapter 1 is a review of the events that led to the formulation of the HSP, and the 'picture of the world' the HSP Programme Design Document was based on. This period ends in early '93, when the senior programme advisors arrived, and the project can be said to have entered its implementation phase.

Chapter 2 is a review of the year the programme was fully implemented, picking up where chapter 1 left off, and ending in April of 1994. Points of importance are pointed out along the way, but not looked at further until the final chapter.

Chapter 3 is the analysis of events, and general learnings that can be drawn from the programme about designing and implementing an institutional development project are listed here.

1. BACKGROUND AND GENESIS OF THE HYDROLOGY SUPPORT PROGRAMME; 1990 - 1992

"Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end then stop"

"The time has come " the Walrus said, "to talk of many things "

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

1.1 Cambodia: A Brief Political Context

An understanding of the political context and timing of events through the years since the signing of the Paris Peace Accords is important for a full appreciation of the situation in which the Hydrology Support Programme (HSP) was implemented, and some of that background follows.

On October 23, 1991, following four years of negotiations, diplomats from eighteen countries, including the five permanent member countries of the UN Security Council, met with representatives of Cambodia's four contending factions in Paris, and adopted the Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict designed to bring about Cambodia's recovery after two decades of war and social disruption. The agreement established a peacekeeping organization, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), investing it with unparalleled powers over the government installed by Vietnam in 1979, its affiliated Cambodian People's Party (CPP), and the three other competing factions: the Khmer Rouge's Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK), FUNCINPEC formed by Prince Sihanouk and headed by his son Prince Norodom Rannaridh, and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) led by former Prime Minister Son Sann. UNTAC's mandate (endorsed by the four factions) covered a wide spectrum of activities that authorized it to exercise considerable oversight of civil administration and military matters.

The Paris agreement stipulated that Cambodian sovereignty would rest in a Supreme National Council, composed of representatives of all the factions, under the chairmanship of Prince Sihanouk. The SNC, in turn, delegated extensive powers to UNTAC (including lawmaking authority). The two phases of the peace plan consisted of demobilization of the warring factions and withdrawal of Vietnamese troops, followed by elections for a constituent assembly, the drafting of a new constitution (after which the constituent assembly would be formed into a legislative body), and the creation of a new Cambodian government.

Before the elections, government offices became inactive and unable to take decisions because of the political implications of the association of the existing civil service with the CPP. This included the Ministry of Agriculture and its Department of Hydrology, where fewer and fewer activities took place. Ministry staff were more interested in electioneering than in ensuring the functioning of their Departments.

On June 10, 1993, following the UN-supervised elections, the royalist opposition party, the United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), received 45.5 percent of the vote. The governing Cambodian People's Party (CPP) received 38.2 percent (and immediately brought charges of massive voting irregularities). The two major parties agreed to share power in an interim government, with Prince Sihanouk retaining his position as head of state until the popularly elected National Assembly drafted a constitution.

On September 24, the new constitution was finalized, re-establishing Cambodia as a constitutional monarchy with King Sihanouk as head of state. Five weeks later the new cabinet had been established, and it took several months more to appoint provincial governors.

It is very difficult for contending Cambodian parties to conceive of their survival within the context of genuine power sharing, and coalition politics have been rocky. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that FUNCINPEC and CPP are ideologically very different, and that the main partners had been actively at war with each other for the past thirteen years. Sharing of power in many cases took the form of duplication; Cambodia is probably the only country in the world with two prime ministers (one from each party), two ministers of national defense (ditto), and two ministers of home affairs.

The new government 'inherited' a civil service that was essentially dominated by the CPP, which had been in power since 1979. Rather than opting for extensive reforms, new ministries were formed by the interim government, staffed by FUNCINPEC; namely the Ministries of Rural Development, Environment, and Women's Affairs. After the permanent government had been formed these ministries changed to State Secretariats, but in November of 1994 they re-gained their status as ministries once more.

These new ministries had to define their portfolio's, and did so by attempting to transfer responsibilities that had hitherto belonged to existing ministries. For example, the Ministry of Rural Development announced that it would be responsible for rural water supply, a responsibility that had rested with the Department of Hydrology. The DoH however, did not agree to shedding this responsibility, and considerable confusion ensued (particularly among donor agencies) exacerbated by political differences and a limited understanding on the side of the MRD about the precise role of the DoH (essentially the two parties in this dispute refused to talk to each other at senior levels). The confusion was not resolved until eighteen months later, when a new minister for Agriculture was appointed (from FUNCINPEC), and a newly established Council for Rehabilitation and Development of Rural Agriculture announced a (hopefully) definite division of responsibilities⁵.

⁵ As of December 1994, the DoH will be responsible for water supply related to agriculture (irrigation) and national hydrogeological data collection, and the MRD will be responsible for rural domestic water supplies.

1.2 The Department of Hydrology⁶

The Department of Hydrology (DoH) is one of the eight technical departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MoA) in Cambodia. The Department is made up of a total of eight technical and administrative offices, viz. Administration, Organization, Planning and Statistics, Accounting and Finance, Design, Construction, Water Management, and Hydro-meteorology. Each office has a 'chief' at its head (from the French *chef*). The Department is managed by a Director, assisted by a Vice-Director (admin) and a Vice-Director (technical). It has been in existence in its present form since 1979.

Speaking in the broadest terms, the overall goal of the DoH can be defined as: Managing the water resources of Cambodia in line with the development programme of the government. In theory, this means that the department is responsible for the design and construction of irrigation structures, rural drinking water supply (which it interprets as drilling wells, under the responsibility of the drilling section in the Water Management Office), flood control, and the collection and elaboration of climatological, hydro-meteorological, hydro-geological and geological data. In practice, due to severe monetary constraints and the absence of trained and experienced staff, the Department relies heavily on project implementation by External Support Agencies (ESAs), such as NGOs, UN organisations and bilateral donors.

Central policy of the Ministry of Agriculture is driven by the imperative to produce rice; as a result, it is the intention of the DoH to establish as soon as possible, as many hectares as possible under irrigation. The overall outlook of the DoH is thus agriculturally focused, which is reflected in staff activities, budget allocations, and the lack of interest in those activities that do not deal directly or indirectly with irrigation⁷.

Most agencies working in either irrigation or rural water supply implement their programmes with the DoH as counterpart organisation (e.g. CIDSE, AFFHC, ACR, Oxfam from 1990). Until 1989, severe travel restrictions made it impossible to work directly in the provinces, and most agencies supported the Central Department of Hydrology in its implementation of projects. From the end of the 1980's until the last travel restrictions were lifted in 1991, a shift took place from support for central government institutions to direct provincial support. From 1990 however, a number of organisations raised questions about the ability of Central DoH to manage and support the provincial offices of hydrology⁸. Some nine months later, these questions would lead to the formulation of the Hydrology Support Programme (HSP).

⁶ A much more detailed description of the history and responsibilities of the DoH can be found in the original HSP project document (ref. [5]), and the ODA Inception Report (ref. [7]).

⁷ The fact that the DoH is primarily focused on irrigation is important: this probably influenced its support for the HSP when the irrigation advisors' posts were not filled.

⁸ Although called Provincial Offices of Hydrology, formal organisational structures did not allow the Central DoH to "manage" these offices, a situation that remained in existence until late 1994. The Provincial Offices were responsible to the Provincial Governor, who in turn was answerable to the Council of Ministers. Thus, formally there was no link between the Phnom Penh parent ministry and the provincial offices.

1.3 1990: Early Indications

In December of this year, AFFHC and CIDSE carried out a joint appraisal of management systems and resources of the DoH [1]. The objective of this appraisal was to develop appropriate institutional strengthening strategies for the Department. Detailed recommendations, however, were not made, the report of the appraisal should be seen as a preliminary mapping of the strengths and weaknesses of the DoH.

Although the existing structure of the DoH was seen as a firm basis for future development, a number of weaknesses were identified:—

- a long command line and difficult coordination,
- technical and administrative activities necessary for project planning were insufficiently addressed;
- problems with maintenance (of equipment and structures) and spare parts availability were widespread;
- monitoring of projects and budgets was impossible; and
- there was a clear need to develop a Human Resources Development (HRD) plan, to identify priorities and coordinate training plans⁹.

The report concluded that the DoH did not seem to be able to effectively support provincial activities, and raised the question whether support to the central level would be a sound investment. A stronger DoH would make for more efficient project implementation in the long run, thus benefiting Cambodia's farmers.

Although in 1990 the number of NGOs active in Cambodia was still relatively small (the aid embargo would not be lifted until the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in October 1991), the CIDSE/AFFHC assessment already concluded that: *Increased co-ordination between NGOs would also improve effectiveness of support programmes.*

It was suggested at this time that NGO assistance to DoH institutional capacity could be focused on the following seven areas¹⁰:—

1. DoH decentralisation plans;
2. project planning and development procedures;
3. farmer involvement, including the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of irrigation schemes;
4. the integration of planning and budgetary procedures;
5. staff training, including the development of a HRD plan;
6. operation, rehabilitation and replacement of equipment; and
7. coordination of donor support.

⁹ The lack of a HRD plan was a recurrent theme in assessments of the DoH; a HRD advisor was later hired as part of the HSP.

¹⁰ The HSP programme design later covered all seven areas, although not all proposed advisors would actually be posted.

1.4 1991: Making a Plan

Although the seeds for the HSP were sown in late 1990, it would take almost till the end of 1991 before they took root. Two further reports were published by AFFHC in this year, both informing and influencing the final shape of the HSP project document.

One of these was a Review and Strategy Report of the Cambodia AFFHC programme, produced in February [2], and the other was a Program Design Document for AFFHC, based on the programme review, and produced by the same authors in September [3].

The programme review document argued consistently that a more integrated approach, along with more deliberate NGO donor coordination of assistance to the sector would increase the effectiveness of assistance. The observation that water resource management capacity needs to be developed can be found in most NGO reviews of the sector, and this report is no exception:—

Given the shortage of experienced personnel in Cambodia, there is a need to address the technical and organisational capacity of government staff and farmers to effectively operate, maintain [and] control new technology. With regard to technical training a need was identified that 'hands on' in-country training is provided at all levels. There is also a concern regarding the capacity of staff to integrate basic water resource, agro-economic and financial information in planning and management of the technology provided.

The fact that the DoH was under tight budgetary constraints was noted in the report¹¹, but the implications of this fact for a central DoH support programme were not reviewed¹².

Some careful steps were proposed at this time to support the institutional capacity of the DoH. AFFHC had identified water resources planning at the provincial level as one activity for further development, and CIDSE would provide assistance to the irrigation planning and design sections of the Department.

¹¹ The following budget figures for the 1990 financial year were quoted (all figures in millions of Riels):

| | requested | approved | received June 30 | spent June 30 |
|---------------|-----------|----------|---------------------|------------------|
| Projects (20) | 97.5 | 92.5 | 18.8 | 31.8 |
| Admin | 144.0 | 46.5 | 16.5 | 40.8 |
| Total | 241.5 | 139.0 | 35.3 | 72.6 |

These figures suggest a deficit of almost 40 million Riels halfway through the year, but details were not available

¹² The financial squeeze on the Department is important; the subject is further looked at in chapters 2 and 3.

By the time the project design document was written, some of this had come to pass. CIDSE had technical advisors working with the DoH, as, incidentally, did Church World Service (CWS), who had an advisor working at the DoH heavy equipment workshop in Phnom Penh.

Except for working out in more detail the proposals made in the strategic review report, the project design report made two very important observations:—

More recently [the financial incapacity of the government has] been exacerbated by the increased number of donor agencies establishing rural development projects with little regard to the recurrent costs implications of capital investment, nor to the effects of the concentration of government personnel around such projects has on the execution of ongoing government responsibilities throughout the area concerned.

The issue of government personnel working on projects was later raised in some more detail, with great foresight. It would surface a number of times in the WatSan and Irrigation sectors, and the HSP, but to date no action has been taken. The basic problem is well stated in the AFFHC project planning document:—

The shortage of proficient English speaking Cambodians, combined with the rapid increase in expatriate numbers in Cambodia is placing a severe strain on government agencies. English speaking Khmers tend also to be the most qualified technically. The demands for English speaking Khmer counterparts is therefore distorting government staff deployment toward the needs of externally assisted development projects.

Even before the completion of the project design work, AFFHC committed itself to supporting the DoH at central level, and it invited other agencies to combine efforts in supporting the Department as well.

CIDSE, CWS and Oxfam responded, and in June of 1991 AFFHC and these three agencies agreed to prepare a common programme strategy document outlining the assistance they would provide to the Department of Hydrology over a period of three years. This would range from assistance to the design and planning, finance and administration sections, through operation and maintenance of pumps, heavy equipment and well-drilling, hydrometeorology, water resource management and farmer participation.

1.4.1 The Project Design: An Overview

In November of 1991, José Galvez (consultant), Joop Schaap (CIDSE) and Seng Lo (AFFHC) prepared the project document for the Department of Hydrology Management Support Programme [4].

It recognised that the existing support to Hydrology in the form of technical advice and/or material resources, channelled directly to either the provincial or central level, left a gap in strengthening the overall capability of DoH in managing Cambodia's water resources.

Based on the need felt by NGOs to pool individual assistance to further enhance DoH capability to support development, and the role the DoH has in giving overall direction to the water resources sector, nine areas for improvement were identified —

1. *project development*, covering identification, feasibility, selection and design,
2. *project implementation and construction*, including planning, methods, quality control and monitoring and evaluation,
3. *operation and maintenance of irrigation and rural water supply systems*, focusing on delineating the roles of the various levels (central, provincial, district), and developing policies and procedures for implementation and farmers' participation;
4. *involvement of beneficiaries*, emphasizing participatory approaches in all points mentioned under 1-3 above;
5. *data bases in water resources*, to improve collection, compilation, preservation and dissemination of data;
6. *workshop management*, improving procedures in preventive maintenance, workshop operation and spares management;
7. *administration, finance and organisation*, focusing on improving systems and procedures, including accounting, stock control, HRD and personnel management;
8. *water resources development*, aimed at formulating an overall water resources development plan; and
9. *training and field exposure of DoH staff*, to strengthen confidence and competence.

The objectives of the programme were stated as follows:—

The objective of the program is to strengthen the technical and administrative capability of the Central DoH as the main government agency responsible for water resources development in Cambodia. The program is expected to provide a coordinating mechanism to the present individual support of NGOs, to assist DoH to develop and install policies, strategies and procedural improvements in various areas...

In effect it is expected that the DoH improved capacity would enable it to handle higher investments in water resources development including O&M of completed projects through its increased technical assistance and improved communication links to provincial and district levels.

It is also the aim of the program to install a mechanism by which the individual support of the NGOs could be consolidated to achieve a concerted [sic] effort in improving the central DoH to make it more responsive to the delivery of support services to Provincial + district levels and farmers

The three key elements of the programme were the Department of Hydrology, the individual assistance from NGOs, and the coordinating mechanism to be introduced by the programme. In fact, the programme design was premised on the presence of individual advisors at DoH, deployed by NGOs through their regular assistance programmes, complemented by additional new advisors for posts identified.

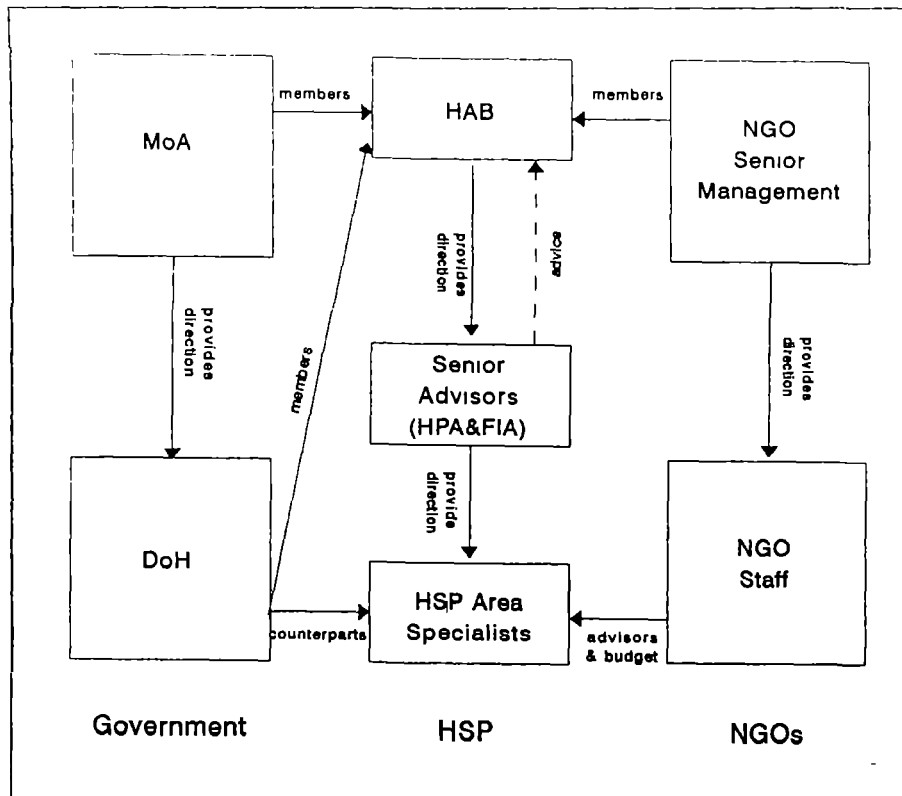
To provide support to the DoH in the areas identified in the report, it was recommended that a total of 13 advisors would be posted with the Department by participating NGOs:—

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|---|
| Coordination | 1. | Hydrology Programme Advisor |
| | 2. | Administrative Officer |
| Hydrometeorology Office | 3. | Hydrologist |
| | 4. | Meteorologist |
| Water Management Office | 5. | Irrigation O&M Engineer |
| | 6. | Community Organizer |
| | 7. | Rural Water Supply Specialist |
| | 8. | Workshop Management and Organization |
| Design Office | 9. | Irrigation Engineer (Planning & Design) |
| | 10. | Laboratory Specialist |
| Construction Office | 11. | Construction Engineer |
| | 12. | Heavy Equipment Workshop Advisor |
| Organization Office | 13. | Organization and HRD Advisor |

A coordination mechanism would be provided through the Hydrology Advisory Board (HAB), composed of senior representatives from cooperating NGOs (such as country representatives or programme managers), the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Department of Hydrology. The Hydrology Program Adviser (HPA) would assist the HAB in the formulation of policy advice and recommendations for improvement of management structures and procedures. The mechanism to assist DoH in installing recommended systems and procedures would be provided through the Administrative Officer (AO). Figure 1.1. schematically shows the management structure and major lines of responsibility.

Other components of the programme were a support operating fund, transport and office equipment for the programme coordinators, and a training fund for counterpart staff.

These major components were estimated to cost about US\$ 590,000 in three years, including 68% for HPA and AO salaries. Costs for the advisors were expected to be borne by the NGOs employing them, and the DoH would provide office space and counterparts.



1.1 Management structure of the HSP

Over the three years of implementation, the Management Support Programme for Hydrology was expected to have the following outputs:

- maximized use of NGO assistance to the Department, particularly of the experts deployed;
- manuals of procedures in technical and administrative matters;
- training of DoH staff at central, provincial and district levels;
- more effective use of human, material and equipment resources;
- stronger links between central, provincial and district offices of Hydrology;

- establishment of a reliable data base to support water resources planning and development.
- policy and strategy for O&M and beneficiary participation,
- a defined O&M programme at all levels, and
- national direction in water resources development, particularly in irrigation and rural water supply

A number of programme risks were identified in the design stage, all of which proved to be significant¹³.—

- a) delays in implementation resulting in delayed benefits;
- b) slow and inadequate reactions from the DoH to implement recommended improvements in procedures;
- c) the inability of the DoH to institute organisational changes due to limitations on delegated authority;
- d) inadequate responses from experts to align workplans to programme objectives; and
- e) inability of funding agencies to respond quickly to requirements to carry out additional activities on concerns identified during programme implementation.

1.4.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The programme document specified in some detail the roles and responsibilities of the Hydrology Advisory Board, the Department of Hydrology, the Hydrology Programme Advisor and the Administration unit. In addition, job descriptions for all newly identified advisors' positions were included in an appendix, so as to avoid duplication of effort, or omission of certain areas of attention. For existing advisors' positions only supplementary responsibilities were given to enable them to fit the HSP. The roles envisaged for HAB, DoH and HPA are briefly discussed below.

The Hydrology Advisory Board

The HAB was envisaged as the body that would give strategic direction to the Management Support Programme. It would be made up of representatives from the MoA, DoH, and Country Representatives from the participating NGOs. The HPA would have observer status at HAB meetings.

Initially, the HAB would discuss and agree on the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the HPA and the individual advisors, and it would be responsible for recruiting the HPA.

¹³ Some programme risks and constraints will be reviewed in chapter 3: Analysis and Recommendations

Once programme implementation started, the HAB would assess whether its general direction was in accordance with the original objectives. Furthermore, it would advise on policy issues with regard to water resources management, organisational matters and areas of concern in the DoH not covered under the present programme. And last, it would review progress and constraints in the different areas and monitor and evaluate the activities of the HPA.

The Department of Hydrology

The DoH would actively participate in the Hydrology Advisory Board, and in addition would have the following responsibilities:—

- a. to provide full time competent staff to function as counterparts to the Hydrology Programme Advisor, the Administration Officer and other experts;
- b. to provide office space for all advisors at its headquarters in Phnom Penh;
- c. to provide administrative support staff (secretary, drivers, translators); and
- d. to provide access to documents and data required for the work.

Although it was recognised that the DoH budget was tight, these inputs could be provided to the programme at no additional cost to the Department.

The Hydrology Programme Advisor

The HPA was to play a number of different roles; he would function as an advisor to the HAB, the DoH and the administrative section. At the same time, he would manage and coordinate the work of the technical advisors, while he in turn would be 'managed' by the HAB.

In these roles, he would be responsible for identifying areas of concern in the DoH, and developing proposals to address these with the HAB and DoH. He should discuss with the DoH, and advise on organisational, procedural, institutional and administrative issues to improve the structure of the DoH, and formulate and discuss policy advice for discussions with HAB, MoA and DoH.

Also, he should discuss and advise the DoH on establishing relations with the provincial and district departmental offices, and monitor and review the work of the experts in the field.

The HAB should be informed regularly of progress and constraints, and regular updates on the general direction of support in the water resources development sector should be provided.

1.4.3 Organisational Structure of the DoH

Besides defining the institutional strengthening project, it was also recognised that the current structure of the DoH needed to be looked at. Since this was not part of the TOR of the original three people working on the project design, a separate contract was drawn up with Jose Galvez, to look at organisational aspects. In one week's time, Jose Galvez prepared a report *Alternative Organisation for the Department of Hydrology (DoH)* [5], based on interviews with DoH officials and some staff.

He identified a number of weaknesses, ranging from a lack of coordination between offices, ill defined tasks and procedures to poor international contacts and networking. Major attention was given to the fact that there was no formal link between provincial offices of hydrology, and the central office in Phnom Penh. Recognising that big changes might happen in the near future, he developed two alternatives for a re-organisation plan. One was based on the current situation perpetuating itself, the other on the assumption that sooner or later formal links between POH and DoH would be established.

Main recommendations from the report were the following:—

1. start a programme of management training at senior levels;
2. review -currently excessive- manpower levels in the Department, and recruit based on workload only. Concentrate on developing capability and efficiency of current staff;
3. institute management innovations in motivating employees (a.o. start regular monitoring and evaluation of staff);
4. set up a section responsible for O&M of irrigation systems;
5. delegate responsibilities;
6. ensure participation of beneficiaries in O&M.

Although the report had (and still has) a lot of value to it —particularly the proposed organograms were useful— it was mostly ignored, and silently faded into the background. It is not clear whether the results were even discussed with the DoH, and their opinion sought. One advisor tried to re-issue the report in 1993, but too much had changed by then to consider it without reviewing it first.

So now a project had been designed, and weaknesses in the DoH structure had been identified. There is no evidence on file that the project design was discussed with the DoH, or that a formal agreement was reached to implement the project. Neither is it clear what would happen at the end of the three years the project was proposed to run for. It can be assumed however that some agreement with the DoH was reached, since the HAB —including quite senior government officials— started meeting in 1992. As for the future of the project, it was expected that at the end of three years bilateral and multilateral assistance would have arrived in Cambodia, enabling its continuation¹⁴.

¹⁴ Personal communication Jeremy Ockelford

1.5 1992: Countdown

Although initial action on implementation was extremely swift, it would take more than a year before the majority of the advisors were in place

CIDSE started recruiting for the Community Organiser, who arrived in May. The Rural Water Supply Advisor recruited by Oxfam arrived in March, and VSO posted a laboratory specialist in February. Furthermore, Oxfam offered funding to AFFHC for an irrigation O&M engineer, which offer was originally accepted. However, after AFFHC merged with CAA in July 1992, a change in organisational objectives precluded participation in projects supporting central government, and the funding was returned. Oxfam subsequently offered the funding to other NGOs, provided that they would recruit the advisor, but this offer was not taken up. CAA did fund the pump workshop advisor though, who arrived in Phnom Penh in November. At this point, all advisors were on two year contracts.

Church World Service was preparing to support the position of Irrigation Planning and Design Engineer, with funding promised by UNDP. In November it had a suitable candidate selected and waiting, but it was still waiting for a final decision from UNDP. CWS had to withdraw its plan in the end, because the UNDP funds were diverted to its irrigation rehabilitation study (see chapter three for an analysis of the donor climate).

In January, ODA/SEADD representatives visited Phnom Penh from Bangkok, and had discussions with the CIDSE representative, Brian Veal. During this visit ODA funding was offered for the Hydrology Programme Advisor, and the Finance and Institutions Advisor. SEADD looked forward to collaborating on the HSP¹⁵. In June, ODA/SEADD issued a draft memorandum of understanding for comments, outlining their proposed participation in the HSP. They had to do this, because they had to define projects in their own way. The significance of this was apparently not realized at the time, but because of ODA/SEADD's memorandum, there were now essentially two project documents. They did not seem to differ greatly, but conflicts would arise later as to which document should be followed in the implementation.

Hydrology Advisory Board meetings, with representatives from the participating NGOs, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the DoH started early in the year. Because of delays in recruitment however, these meetings lapsed in the second half of the year.

In November, Oxfam proposed and started meetings of Country Representatives and those advisors in post, to prepare for an HAB meeting and take on coordination before the arrival of the senior ODA advisors. These meetings acquired a special significance later, because the Hydrology Programme Advisor considered them to be meetings *instead of* the HAB meetings, and they were the only meetings fully supported by both of ODA's advisors.

¹⁵ Memo to project members by Brian Veal, Jan. 1992.



2. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION, 1993-1994

*"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.*

*The players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarrelling
all the while.. and in a very short time the Queen was in a furious
passion, and went stamping about, and shouting, "Off with his head!"*

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

2.1 1993: Lift Off

i January

ODA had finalised its support for the HPA and FIA positions by this time, and the arrival of these two key advisors was eagerly awaited. In a Project Memorandum written by ODA to cover their involvement (see previous chapter), the objectives of the HSP were stated as follows¹:

to enhance the capability of the DoH to manage the development of the irrigation, flood control, and rural water supply sectors, and in particular to raise its ability to manage the process of change and the absorption of the expected increase in external assistance for water resource development;

to maximize the benefit to the DoH from the current technical co-operation assistance being provided by a range of NGOs, primarily active in the technical offices of the DoH.

In the same document, the role of the HPA was described as follows: "... this will be a coordinating function to ensure that the benefits to DoH from the NGO assistance are maximized. The main outputs [of the HPA position] are likely to be: policy guidelines, improved planning procedures and appropriate technical manuals which meet the needs of the DoH."

The document goes on to describe the HAB as a coordinating body for ODA, NGO and other assistance; "The HAB will provide the forum for determining the direction and detail of the ODA/NGO external assistance to the DoH. The HPA will provide a coordinating role and the FIA will provide a secretariat function for the HAB."²

The ODA project was structured such that the first six months of the project would be taken up with the research and writing of an inception report reviewing the DoH from all angles.

¹ *Project Memorandum, Cambodia - Department of Hydrology Management Support Programme, ODA*

² These details are included here because they will later lead to disagreement; details are covered in chapter 3.

This inception report should contain a detailed workplan for months 7-18 of the project. Besides working on the inception report, specific duties for the HPA were outlined as follows:—

1. support to the Department of Hydrology

Assist in establishing and defining provincial-central relationships with the DoH, and with assistance from the FIA determine plans for the improved management and organisation of the DoH. Assist the DoH to improve its capacity to formulate long and short term water resource development plans, etc.

2. support to the NGO funded area specialists

Work with specialists to ensure work objectives and programmes are in accordance with objectives of HSP. Assist in drawing up work plans; monitor, evaluate and advise on activities of specialists. Assist specialists in organizing sectoral meetings to facilitate the exchange of experience with experts working outside the central DoH.

3. support to functioning of Hydrology Advisory Board

Play a lead role to ensure effective functioning of the HAB. Utilise the HAB as a forum for the interchange of views between MoA, DoH, NGOs participating in the programme, and HPA/FIA.

4. reporting to SEADD/ODA

The original NGO-prepared project document lists much the same job description for the HPA, except that of course point four in the list is not included. At least on paper, ODA and the NGOs involved in the HSP agreed on the roles and responsibilities of the Hydrology Programme Advisor.

The actual activities of the HPA will be looked at a little bit in the next chapter, but it is important to note that no support was provided to the Hydrology Advisory Board throughout the programme. There were no meetings after the HPA's arrival, and as a matter of fact he opposed the concept of the HAB as a management body for the entire programme. The role of the HAB, and the implications of its non-functioning are important things to understand for a full grasp of further developments.

A HAB meeting was called by the Ministry of Agriculture for the 2nd of February. It was cancelled at short notice however because the Vice-Minister, Chea Song, was called to another meeting. Occurrences like this were not unusual around this time. It should be remembered that the HSP implementation phase started during the run-up to the general elections, and many a government official spent his time preparing for these. This resulted in a difficult climate in which few decisions were taken.

In a meeting of agency representatives and three of the four advisors currently in place, called to prepare for the HAB meeting that was later cancelled, the reps decided to continue the meetings started in November 1992 (see chapter 2) on a monthly basis, to coordinate ongoing activities at least until the ODA advisors arrived³. Three other significant points came up in the course of this meeting:—

- UNDP decided to fund the Irrigation Rehabilitation Study, so no money would be available from them for CWS to fund the Irrigation Planning and Design Advisor;
- Oxfam cancelled the funding for the Irrigation Operation and Maintenance Advisor because no NGO took up the offer of funds;
- FAO was mentioned for the first time as a potential funder for the irrigation advisors; subsequently so much faith was put in this possibility that nobody continued looking for alternatives.

A representative from SEADD, Mark Lewis, visited Phnom Penh. This was the first of a number of visits by ODA/SEADD from Bangkok, although the individuals involved were never the same. This gave rise to confusion later on, as it was difficult to know who was actually in charge of ODA's project.

Also in this month, the Heavy Equipment Workshop Advisor —sponsored by CWS— took up his post.

The Rural Water Supply Advisor was also responsible for the Oxfam rural drinking water programme, and to lighten his workload Oxfam started recruitment for a second person to take over the advisory post.

ii February

In this month the CIDSE sponsored Organisation and Human Resource Development Advisor arrived in post, bringing the total number of advisors to seven (HRD, laboratory, heavy equipment, pump workshop, rural water supply, community organisation and meteorology).

The ODA's HSP Project Memorandum was passed by the UNTAC office responsible for screening aid proposals, with only a few informal comments regarding the budget⁴.

³ Minutes of meeting, January 8, 1993.

⁴ The ODA budget called for £844,300 over three years, of which £590,000 was for salaries and living allowances, £40,000 for cars, and £132,000 for contingencies leaving £82,300 for training and equipment. This was more than twice the budget prepared by the NGOs, for the same programme.

iii March

The pump workshop advisor issued a draft report on the status of the workshop. The report abused DoH officials, and contained a number of unrealistic proposals, linking the ultimate survival of Cambodia's farmers to the functioning of the pump workshop. The report was not re-issued in final form, but it was the starting point of a deteriorating relationship between CAA and the advisor.

iv April

Both ODA advisors arrived in country, and set up office at the DoH complex in Phnom Penh. The first of henceforth monthly HSP meetings was held, with all advisors present, as well as representatives of participating NGOs. During the meeting it became clear that besides funding the two senior advisors, ODA apparently agreed to finance a 'shopping list' for DoH, to be prepared by the HPA and FIA after their arrival. This shopping list was not part of the ODA Project Memorandum, neither was it made explicit in any other way. Much work was subsequently invested in preparing this 'shopping list', although ODA never revealed its contents. Much later it was announced that there was actually no money available any longer, and the list was cancelled.

v May

Oxfam posted a new Rural Water Supply Advisor in May, and LWS a new Meteorologist. This meant that at this point almost all advisors' positions were filled, with the exception of the Hydrologist and the three Irrigation Specialists (Planning & Design, Construction, Operation & Maintenance).

A FAO mission that visited from Rome in late '92 or early '93 had indicated serious support for these three positions, but nothing happened. Since no report of that mission was ever prepared, no approval could be given to proceed with the recruitment of advisors. At the time the programme was suspended in March of 1994, there were still no Irrigation Advisors. No other organisations offered funding for the posts, and in any case, the issue was hardly pursued by others because of FAO's initial encouragement, and during the monthly HSP meetings, the FAO representative frequently announced that a breakthrough was imminent. That these advisors were never posted is unfortunate to put it mildly, given DoH's emphasis on supporting agricultural activities.

vi June

On the third day of this month, a HSP meeting was held, again with advisors and NGO representatives. From the minutes of this meeting: *Discussions also focused on the key role of the senior advisors in bringing together the HSP through coordination of the individual advisors. Peter [the FIA] feels that a different body to the original Hydrology Advisory*

Board (HAB) needs to be set up, which would address the issue of effective policy making across the water sector as a whole and not just within the DoH. He and Nick [the HPA] are currently working on such a proposal of which a first draft may be ready to be submitted to the next HSP meeting. This was the first time that the establishment of a 'Water Resources Board' or 'State Water Authority' surfaced, an issue that would lead to heated debate later on, since ideas for a SWA were developed to the detriment of attention to the DoH or HSP as a whole, while developing such plans was not part of the initial brief of the ODA as it was known by the NGOs. At this point, few people realised the implications, and later nobody seemed to remember the fact that this was even mentioned so early on. The draft was indeed produced later in the month (see below).

In a reaction to the discussions taking place at this meeting, the Water Resources Coordinator for Oxfam wrote a paper for the July meeting⁵. He expressed his concern about project direction, and noted that: *It is now relevant and important to re-examine and reaffirm the original intention and methods of the HSP, and to modify them if necessary to fit the changed circumstances of Cambodia and the HSP. It is also necessary to check the differences between the NGOs' Programme Document of November 1991 and ODA's Project Memorandum of January 1993 and reconcile these to achieve a common way forward.*

The document went on to restate the original objectives, and to raise some questions about the role of advisors (which could be interpreted as being rather pro-active from the 1991 Project Document). It also noted that relationships between advisors had not been defined, and that there was no mention of a team approach. The version of ODA's Project Memorandum of January circulated by the HPA and FIA left out their job descriptions and the budget, since these were 'confidential', according to an accompanying memo. It also referred to the November 1991 Project Document as 'background data'. This while it was considered the working document for the five NGOs involved, a fact that ODA did not seem to grasp. A final point was that of the HAB, which was implied not to exist in the June 3 meeting.

Another paper was written by the Rural Water Supply Advisor, dealing with the relationship between advisors⁶. It observed a number of areas where advisors were asked to perform similar jobs (e.g. data collection and training), and went on to say that: "The current schedule of monthly meetings does not achieve the kind of planning that would enable fruitful co-operation." The paper ended with the suggestion that a five day retreat of advisors and counterparts would be a good way to address current deficiencies in planning and co-ordination.

Meeting and papers were the first time the issues that would lead to the demise of the programme surfaced — quite early on. The paper from Oxfam's WRC, and the objectives for the HSP retreat (developed later) were the *only* times that the suggestion was made that the

⁵ Jeremy Ockelford, *Notes for and arising from discussion at HSP meeting - 3rd June 1993 June 9, 1993.*

⁶ Jan-Willem Rosenboom, *Co-ordination Between Advisors, June 1993.*

different outlook by ODA and NGOs needed to be examined and reconciled for a common way forward.

Towards the end of the month, the ODA advisors produced a draft paper discussing present and future water resources management structures in Cambodia⁷. It discussed the National Mekong Committee, the HAB and a possible Water Resources Board (WRB). The proposal combined legislation, coordination of sector activities, screening of proposals, licensing and national planning into one body, the WRB. The current role of the DoH in these activities was not mentioned. Later revisions of the paper started making a distinction between legislation and implementation.

The NGOs involved in the HSP wrote a letter to the ODA advisors on the 15th of June requesting a meeting. On the 18th, this meeting took place, mainly discussing the ODA-NGO working relationship and the (non-)functioning of the HAB. Nothing was resolved, but it was agreed that such meetings would continue on an 'as-needed' basis.

In a meeting between the Rural Water Supply Advisor (RWSA) and the Vice-Chief of the Water Management Office, Veng Sakhon, the situation around counterparts came to the foreground. Veng Sakhon was upset about the behaviour of NGOs; they did not understand enough of the working conditions (little income, little working experience of staff), and staff at central level were frustrated because POH personnel were paid salary supplements by NGOs, but personnel in Phnom Penh was not. As a result, they were forced to look for supplementary work in the private sector.

vii July

The RWSA produced a paper for discussion at the HSP meeting, outlining the problems created by NGOs for the DoH when they request counterparts. Two forms of involvement in project work by government staff are distinguished: *Seconded staff*, who work on NGO projects and are usually paid a salary top-up. They are not supported in a particular recognised position in the DoH, but they gain experience (and often training) by working with NGOs this way. On the other hand, true *Counterpart staff* are supported in their existing position by NGOs through advice, training, etc, and they are most often not paid a salary supplement. It is the NGO trying to support the staff member in his work, rather than the other way around.

NGOs want to work with staff who have English skills and a sound education, plus preferably some experience. Since most staff work as seconded staff, and not as counterparts, that means that all the best people from DoH are no longer available for DoH work. This in turn has the effect that NGOs with their activities weaken the DoH rather than strengthen it.

⁷ Nick Mandeville and Peter Hesham, *Some initial ideas concerning Water Resources Board*, 29 June 1993

The intention of the HSP was that each advisor would work with a true *counterpart*, provided by the DoH. The reality was slightly different however. Some advisors worked with a number of staff, without recognising one single person as their counterpart; rather they considered all staff they work with as counterparts. This was a situation found mainly in the pump workshop and the heavy equipment workshop.

A counterpart to the HRD advisor only became available in early 1994, mainly because there was no staff within Hydrology responsible for HRD, and no person with the skills or experience to usefully function as a counterpart. In addition, Human Resource Development is not a function that exists within the DoH structure, so it was difficult for the DoH to accommodate an advisor in that field. The Community Organisation advisor faced the same problem; there was no DoH staff with CO experience, and the DoH as an organisation was not set up to accommodate an advisor in that field. Consequently, he was working with an engineer as a counterpart.

The HPA and FIA were supposed to work with the Director and Vice-Director (admin) respectively, but no true working relationships were ever formed. The Director of the department, Suos Kong, was away in Thailand from the end of 1992 to pursue a Master's degree, and the Vice-Director (technical), The Lim Tong, became Acting Director. The HPA could identify more easily with the Acting Director than with the new Director who was appointed in August, and later believed that his counterpart was the Vice-Director (technical).

The counterpart situation was discussed in the July HSP meeting, and the HPA offered to set up a meeting with the counterparts. The HRD advisor offered to chair a small working group to produce recommendations for improvements in the situation.

During the same meeting the proposal for a retreat was discussed, and the idea to prepare objectives and an initial programme was accepted. This proposal was produced later in the same month, and mentioned as objectives for the retreat:

- developing a common approach to the HSP;
- further definition and coordination of the role and individual tasks of the advisors;
- developing a further awareness and understanding of the Cambodian culture (as related to the work); and
- experiencing working together as a team.

Halfway through the month, the FIA wrote two memo's to the Acting Director of hydrology, one dealing with the control of income generated through private work carried out in the pump workshop, the other with counterparts. They were both basically 'top down' instructions to the Director with little regard for his position. The tone and contents of the memo's gave an indication of how the ODA advisors saw themselves; i.e. as outside consultants telling the DoH how to change, not as advisors working within the structures to effect change.

viii August

The month started with the usual HSP meeting, this time attended by a British consultancy firm and UNDP, in addition to the regular members. Counterparts were again on the agenda, and it was observed that there was no control on the identification and management of counterparts. The situation that was referred to with this remark was that of the Vice-Chief of the water management office, who was counterpart to at least four people. Two of these were HSP advisors (RWSA and CO), and two worked for other organisations. This was clearly an unsatisfactory situation, both for the Vice-Chief, and for the other people involved. No immediate solution or course of action was identified however; as a matter of fact, this was the last time the issue of counterparts was raised in the HSP meetings

Several NGO representatives present at the meeting commented on the FIA's memo's to the Director of Hydrology (see above), and strongly disapproved of his approach to the issues.

The initial programme for a three day HSP retreat was approved, and scheduled for the end of September.

The ODA advisors also announced that the 'shopping list' for DoH had been cancelled, since the funds were allocated elsewhere.

Lim Kean Hor replaced the Acting Director as the new Director of the DoH. He worked with the Department in the past, and now returned after a number of years in the Land Titles Department. It is not known to what extent Lim Kean Hor was briefed on the HSP, nor how supportive he was of the programme. Later decisions suggested that he was indifferent at best, although his behaviour was almost certainly affected by the somewhat adversarial relationship between him and the ODA advisors

The ODA advisors issued their draft inception report on the twentieth of the month, and invited comments from the other participants in the programme, preferably to be given before senior ODA staff would visit at the end of the month. The other NGOs felt unfairly pressured by this deadline, and wondered whether the ODA was really interested in serious comments. This impression was much strengthened by the fact that the inception report was written with very little input from, or consultation with, the other programme members. All in all, at this stage the participating agencies were not very happy with the approach of the ODA advisors. Everyone was looking forward to the review mission scheduled by SEADD in Bangkok, as an opportunity to sort out differences.

The commitment of ODA to truly working with the DoH was further drawn into question by the fact that both advisors stopped working at the DoH offices, and moved to a private office in town. The reason given for this move was that the environment at the DoH is not conducive to serious work, because of dust, lack of airconditioning and unreliable power. So a separate office in town was outfitted with 12 airconditioning units and a 90 KVA generating set, at an expense that could presumably have ensured a very comfortable working environment at the DoH offices. Other organisations working with the DoH rehabilitated existing DoH offices (Halcrow, UNDP, LWS), and it was not clear why ODA decided not to do the same.

From August 24-27, a three man ODA review mission was in Phnom Penh. William Baker (institutional advisor, London based), David Robson (engineering advisor, Bangkok) and Shantanu Mitra (economic advisor, Bangkok) reviewed the overall programme, and future directions were agreed upon. The HPA and FIA were told to make more of an effort in building relationships with the NGOs and the DoH. The review mission also felt that the draft inception report did not adequately reflect the views of participating NGOs, or 'ownership' by the DoH. A revised version should be prepared by the authors after receiving feedback from the NGOs and the DoH. Uncertainty about the future responsibilities of the DoH meant that the inception period was extended to beyond the adoption of the new constitution—due to be published in September—and that the revised inception report would investigate two different directions. One exploring the consequences of a split of responsibilities in water resources management between DoH and SRD, and one assuming that nothing would change. [The final inception report however assumed a continuation of the status quo, and did not investigate implications if things were to be different.]

The feeling was that the SEADD visit had really made a difference, and there was renewed hope for fruitful cooperation between NGOs and ODA. The HPA agreed to regular meetings with the NGO reps to discuss programme direction, but the role of the HAB was still not resolved.

ix September

Membership of the HSP meetings seemed to grow by the month, since on 9 September not only were the advisors present, but also representatives from BCEOM/ADB, ILO, Halcrow and FAO. Only one counterpart attended this month. Participation in the meetings was developing into somewhat of an issue. The ODA advisors saw the meetings as an open forum for every organisation implementing large projects that fell under the mandate of the DoH, while most NGOs saw the meetings as one where HSP business was discussed, and where an atmosphere was created in which DoH counterparts could comfortably and confidently express themselves. They felt that any other business should be conducted as part of the regular Water and Sanitation- or Irrigation Sector Group meetings (the HPA's job description after all specified that he should assist the advisors in organizing such meetings). This made it clear that there were different views on the purpose of the meeting, and the FIA agreed to put some ideas in writing for further discussion. No progress reported on the recruitment of irrigation engineers.

The NGOs in the HSP sent a coordinated response to the ODA with comments on the draft inception report. The comments allowed for the fact that the report reflected ODA's standpoint, not that of the programme as a whole, but also reiterated that a split in approach existed that had been discussed, but not resolved. Main comments on the report pointed to five areas of concern:

- The dysfunction in the ODA-NGO partnership, with ODA calling the HSP an ODA programme, and dismissing the crucial role of the HAB;
- The lack of a strategy for the HSP in the report, although it was understood that the inception report would outline a way forward for the next eighteen months. It was odd

that although an overall strategy was missing, detailed plans for a State Water Authority were included, which was never part of the brief to begin with:

- Insensitivity towards Cambodian culture displayed in the report.
 - No understanding for the Provincial Offices of Hydrology was apparent (neither one of the senior advisors travelled outside of Phnom Penh), and
 - The lack of involvement from DoH in assessing needs and developing strategies
- Basically, the ODA advisors placed themselves in an isolated position from both the DoH and the NGOs, and wrote a report as if they were outside consultants, asked to diagnose an ailing institution and to propose treatment. That the patient itself may have had an opinion about what was best was completely ignored. The NGOs expressed the hope that further work on the report would be done with more input from DoH and NGOs.

Towards the end of the month, a further revision of the document outlining a possible State Water Authority was distributed by the senior advisors. The idea for a SWA was broadly supported by the participating NGOs, although there was concern that the DoH should have been consulted in the process of designing a proposed structure. Generally, ideas that are developed from the outside —no matter how good they are— may never get the political support they require to be implemented. In a meeting between the ODA advisors, the rural water supply advisor and Oxfam's water resources coordinator in early October, the support and criticisms were shared.

x **October**

CAA terminated the contract of the pump workshop advisor due to irreconcilable differences between them. These had mainly to do with the advisor's efforts in privatising the workshop, creating a benefit system covering salaries, sickness, and death parallel to that of DoH. The decision to go this way was never made, and the DoH was certainly not officially involved. It was unclear how to 'undo' such a situation once the DoH developed its legitimate role, and the questions of overheads and effects on other DoH staff were never addressed (e.g. jealousy within other offices of DoH). Interestingly, the ODA advisors considered the privatisation as one of the successes in working with DoH, mentioning it as such in their draft inception report. This was another area of disagreement between NGOs and ODA; the NGOs considered that the role of an advisor is to offer advice, and that the political decisions should then be left to the DoH. Privatisation also played a role in the soils and water laboratory, and the heavy equipment workshop. Details differed however.

Given the dissatisfaction with the results of the HSP so far, CAA decided not to recruit a new advisor, but to look at alternative ways of using the funding to support pump maintenance at provincial level.

xi **November**

LWS wrote a letter to the HPA questioning the composition of HSP meetings, suggesting that monthly meetings "...should be restricted to those persons directly associated with the HSP,

namely the Advisors and their DoH counterparts, on the technical level " I do not feel it is appropriate that representatives from other international organizations attend " It went on to discuss the NGO representatives meeting, which should be limited to those directly involved in the program, and it should be understood that this meeting was merely a 'stop gap' for the HAB to keep the NGOs and ODA briefed on the present situation CAA and Oxfam wrote similar letters around the same time.

Also, a meeting took place between the NGO representatives, and Valerie Thorpe and Philip Rose of SEADD, in which it was announced that a decision on commitment to the HSP by ODA should be made by January.

In a HSP NGO Reps meeting concern was expressed about ODA's isolation from DoH, and the direction of the programme.

On the same day this meeting took place, the Rural Water Supply Advisor had a telephone conversation with the FIA. The FIA said he would not be attending the HSP retreat, ostensibly because ODA BKK did not support his participation, and did not allow him to take the required US\$150.- for expenses from his programme budget. The initial date in September had been postponed until the second half of November, and at this stage the general feeling among NGO representatives was that the whole programme stood to gain immensely from a dedicated three-day planning, problem solving and team building workshop. After having been offered his expenses from the Oxfam budget, the FIA came up with another excuse why he could not participate. The telephone conversation dragged on with one excuse after another being held up as the reason for not being able to attend. The unspoken message was that the FIA was not willing to attend. This episode may not have been very important in itself, but was is an indication of the extent of non-cooperation and contrariness that had developed between NGOs on one side and ODA on the other. Oxfam sent a transcript of the telephone conversation to SEADD in Bangkok and ODA in Phnom Penh, with a covering letter questioning ODA's imminent decision on continuation of involvement given this advisor's lack of commitment.

The NGOs sent a letter to the Department of Hydrology, indicating a need to work more closely again with the Cambodian members of the HAB or a similar committee. A situation report was enclosed, stating that NGOs would like to review their support to the HSP with the HAB, because of the uncertainty over the position of government support for the HSP, possible changes in DoH resulting in possible relocations to the State Secretariat for Rural Development, advisor contracts ending, and a change in focus of NGO programs. There was no reply to this letter, and no meeting took place.

At the November HSP meeting, held on the 18th, the retreat —due to start the next day in Kompong Som— was cancelled because of lack of interest. In an odd twist, the need for a retreat was endorsed, and the organiser was asked to re-schedule the event at another date! The organiser, having gone through months of preparation, and having overcome many obstacles, politely refused this request.

xii December

Two meetings took place with the NGO representatives this month. In the first one, between reps and ODA advisors, the executive summary of the revised inception report was presented for instant comment at the meeting. The second one was between the reps and Christopher Raleigh, head of ODA/SEADD in Bangkok. He said that ODA's decision whether to stay in the sector was pending, depending on the attitude of the government. The NGOs in their turn made it clear that they were unhappy with the senior advisors. The NGOs suggested a short assessment mission to review the programme and suggest a way forward, but the meeting was cut short by Christopher Raleigh because of a meeting scheduled with the UK Ambassador.

The main conclusion in the summary inception report was that: "Analysis of the Central DoH has revealed that it is too unwieldy to be developed into a coherent entity to manage efficiently the planning, utilisation, development and conservation of the water resources of Cambodia." It then recommended that the DoH go back to its basic activity, which has been the design and construction of irrigation schemes. Water supply activities should go to the State Secretariat for Rural Development (SRD)⁸.

Following from this basic recommendation were a large number of further recommendations, the main ones being:—

- drastically reduce staffing levels, from 753 to a core of 73;
- dispose of construction equipment;
- urge FAO to supply three irrigation advisors, and ask other advisors -with the exception of HRD and CO- to transfer to other ministries;
- recruit a fourth engineering advisor in water management;
- re-establish provincial and district offices under direct central control, but only have Provincial Hydrology offices in those provinces where irrigation is practised;
- review policy on releasing staff on secondment to NGOs; and
- draft preliminary training programmes for each grade and type of employee.

Two further points were that the DoH should be empowered to monitor the activities of agencies active in irrigation, to enforce conformity of national plans, and that a State Water Authority should be established independent of any ministerial influence, with powers to formulate water policies and enforce water legislation.

Later in the month, the NGO reps issued letters to DoH and SEADD stating their view on the inception report executive summary (the full report would only be distributed months later) —agreeing with some of the recommendations, but disapproving of the method of reaching them. Two things played a role here. In the first place, ODA developed the inception report in complete isolation from the DoH. Not only did the advisors not have an office at DoH, the Department's input did not go beyond ODA's interpretation of interviews with DoH. The

⁸ SRD indicated in a statement issued in July of 1993 that it wanted to take over the responsibility for rural water supply. This was supported by most agencies in the sector, but little happened, and confusion over roles and responsibilities lasted till December 1994, when the transfer of responsibilities (for new projects only) was officially decided.

approach was very much one of an outside expert consultant diagnosing the department Plans for treatment then surfaced that were not 'owned' and not (politically) supported by DoH, and ODA's attitude was one of take it or leave it (we don't really care). In the second place, there was never a real chance for the NGOs to provide input or comments. The fact that the first inception report had to be rewritten could have been avoided by closer cooperation of ODA's advisors with both DoH and NGOs. Sadly, the process of writing the second report was not significantly different from that followed in writing the first draft. So although some of the ideas had improved, there was still no support from the DoH, basically making it into a document with very little value (but a very high cost). The process of writing the report was also challenged by the Vice Director (technical) of the DoH at the December Irrigation Sector meeting.

Indicative of the feelings of NGOs at this stage was the fact that the HRD Advisor was unofficially informed that CIDSE would withdraw from the HSP programme, and that his contract would be terminated because of that.

2.2 1994: Flame-Out

i January

CWS officially withdrew the heavy equipment workshop advisor from the HSP, due to a change in policy, difficulties of working in the workshop (ADB placed an advisor there with a multi-million dollar budget), and personal reasons.

The HSP meeting was held with attendance and input by ADB, UNDP, Halcrow, and JICA. Little of relevance to the HSP programme was discussed. The meeting had become more like a project information exchange (without DoH involvement), halfway there to becoming a Sectoral Meeting. In an atmosphere where coordination was not happening in the first place, the dilution of monthly meetings with anyone and everyone working with DoH had a negative effect. Counterparts felt uncomfortable speaking out, and many HSP issues could not be decided. In the draft inception report it was stated that both policy and practical matters were discussed in the monthly meetings. This may have been true in the beginning, but was certainly not the case later on. Apart from that, the monthly meeting was not the proper forum for policy making. The meetings evolved this way due to the absence of HAB meetings. Non-HSP agencies should have been referred to the monthly WatSan- and Irrigation Sector meetings (a fact that was brought up various times, but ignored by the chairman, the HPA).

In an agency representatives meeting, ODA announced it had put an ultimatum to the government: if the concept of a national State Water Authority was not accepted, it would withdraw. It was further announced that there was still no sign of funding for the irrigation posts from FAO. The question of "what is the HSP now?" remained unanswered. A paper by DoH (unsigned and undated) titled *Opinion of the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries on the Inception Report (Executive Summary) Which Organize by ODA* was distributed. In it, the Inception Report was called not realistic or reasonable given the

situation in Cambodia. Basically, the letter stated that nothing should change (no functions to SRD, no SWA, no equipment transfers, no disposal of heavy equipment, no staff reductions). Although the letter may have been indicative of the feelings about the HSP at senior DoH levels, the fact that it was not signed meant that little could be done with it.

ii February

Five months after the draft inception report was finished, and two months after the executive summary had been circulated, the final version of the inception report was distributed. This was a full eleven months after the arrival of the senior advisors in country, and, as it happened, one month before the final collapse of the HSP. Its issue was reportedly delayed because ODA's advisors were waiting for binding combs to be cleared through Customs.

A number of points emerged from the inception report that were significant in the context of the functioning of the HSP:—

- the perceived differences in objectives between the NGO HSP document and the ODA Project Memorandum;
- the difficulties in coordinating the NGOs advisors' activities experienced by the ODA advisors;
- the reason for the non-functioning of the HAB; and
- the overall management structure of the HSP.

These issues will be looked at in more depth in the following chapter. The basic conclusions and recommendations were mentioned already, and these will not be repeated.

Also in February, a CIDSE team visited Phnom Penh from Ireland, and informed the DoH that it was withdrawing the CO and HRD advisors from the programme. The other participating NGOs were not informed of this decision however until a week later. This decision did not come as much of a surprise, since some participating NGOs had been told informally that this was about to happen in early December of 1993. At that time the CIDSE head office —when questioned— denied however that any decision had been taken. Although the advisors' positions were no longer supported, in the second half of 1994 CIDSE agreed to renovate a number of rooms at the DoH offices, and outfit them as library, study rooms and lecture hall. Any future HRD Advisor to the DoH will benefit tremendously from this improved working environment.

Two further advisors were lost to the programme in this month. ODA's FIA ended his contract by mutual agreement, and took up a post in Minsk... The VSO soils laboratory advisor came to the end of his contract. He may be replaced by VSO, but at the time of writing no new candidate had been identified yet.

The soils lab advisor was highly critical of the HSP in his final report, stating that "it existed on paper only", and that "in practice, HSP never worked as a coordinated programme." He cited elections, political uncertainty, tensions between NGOs and ODA as playing major parts in the failure. But according to him, NGOs were certainly not blameless, as they never

seriously tried to resolve the issue surrounding the irrigation advisors, when irrigation is after all one of the core functions of the DoH

iii March/April

At the end of March the HPA issued a letter to the Director of the DoH, suspending the HSP. This despite objections by LWS that he did not have the right to do so on behalf of the NGO partners. The letter suggested that the programme could be restarted when the three irrigation advisors are in place.

In the absence of a reply to this letter, the HPA telephoned the DoH Director on the first of April, and the director informed him that he would like the programme to be suspended. Although the timing would suggest it, this was not taken as a joke. The HPA left the country at the end of April.

At the end of almost one year of programme implementation, the HSP fizzled out. No big bang, no big surprises; the participants had seen it coming for a long time.

The situation was back where it was before the HSP. There were two individual advisors working with the Department, the Oxfam RWSA, and the LWS meteorologist. The main difference was that the relationship between DoH and NGOs had cooled somewhat as a result of the HSP experience. So in a sense the situation now was worse than it was before the HSP started, and it would take some time to repair the damage done.



3. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"If there's no meaning in it," said the King, "that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn't try to find any "

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

3.1 Introduction

The analysis of events is split-up into a number of sections, none of which fit into a very strictly defined time period. After all, original programme design and the posting of the first advisors was followed by a second programme design (by ODA) and the arrival of additional advisors. Programme design and implementation were thus mixed rather than strictly sequenced.

Each section aims at examining a particular situation, or sequence of events and their conditions for successful completion. General recommendations are made throughout each section; these are not specifically aimed at the HSP, since the programme no longer exists, and there would be no benefit in making specific suggestions for improvement. Rather, an attempt was made to stand back from the details and make recommendations that are felt to be generally valid for institutional strengthening and support programmes. Although some may seem too obvious for words, the HSP experience shows otherwise.

A very useful publication dealing with the management of institutional development projects is WASH Technical Report No. 49¹, and frequent reference is made to this document.

3.2 Institutional Change in Cambodia's Political Context

Before project design can be considered, a number of questions have to be answered about the environment in which the programme will be implemented.

One of the first questions that announces itself when looking at the HSP, is whether institutional reform was desired, or even possible. The question needs to be answered whether the government would support the kind of changes that were needed, and was in a position to sustain the costs of improvements.

Whether institutional reform of the Department of Hydrology was possible to start with is a question which does not have a simple answer.

When the HSP programme was formulated, in late 1991, the Paris Peace Accords had just been signed, and certainly on the donor front a 'wait and see' attitude was displayed. This is easy to understand, since the signing of the peace agreement was a first step, to be followed by:

¹ *Managing Institutional Development Projects - Water and Sanitation Sector*, Water and Sanitation for Health Project, USA (ref. [8])

- disarming and demobilization of all factions;
- general elections;
- the formation of an interim government,
- the writing of a new constitution, and finally
- the formation of the new, permanent government

In other words, this was a time of change and uncertainty, in which it was difficult to see very far beyond the present situation. It is hard to reconstruct what happened at the DoH around that time, since all the senior staff have changed since

Before the elections in 1993 —after implementation had already started— government offices became inactive and unable to take decisions because of the political implications of the association of the existing civil service with the CPP. This included DoH, where fewer and fewer activities took place. At this point in time, staff at the Department and at the Ministry were more interested in electioneering than actively participating in a programme with a long term focus.

Considerable confusion and disorganisation followed the actual elections. During the time the interim government was in place, new ministries were set up —e.g. the ministries of Environment, and Rural Development— to give some FUNCINPEC counterweight to the existing CPP civil service (see chapter 1). Responsibilities of these new ministries overlapped or duplicated those of existing ministries. After the new constitution was adopted, and the permanent government was formed, some of the new ministries disappeared altogether, others were changed into 'State Secretariats'. This happened for instance with Environment and Rural Development. At some point it looked as if most responsibilities of the DoH would be divided up between different ministries or secretariats. As mentioned in chapter one, the question of responsibility for rural water supply was only resolved in early December 1994. The level of confusion, and the duration for which it lasted could not have been foreseen, and has much to do with the continuing mistrust between the main coalition partners, FUNCINPEC and CPP.

With hindsight, it is easy to say that the climate was probably not ripe for institutional change, but this is an argument that works two ways. Taking a chance at a time like this, when confusion reigns, and making it work could have made for a very strong programme.

In 1991, more than a year before the elections, much of the turmoil and indecision could not have been foreseen. Nobody could have predicted that Cambodia would end up with a coalition that functions with difficulty because of the historical animosity between the partners. The HSP advisors were certainly not the only ones who were taken by surprise, and who ended up being impatient with the pace of change. It was known however that elections would be held, and it was likely that changes would take place as a result. Furthermore, the process of change (from CPP rule to new government) was known, and it would not have taken much to see the period between elections and installation of the new government for what it was: one of waiting and indecision. Given this foreknowledge of impending change (in whatever form it would come), it is surprising to see that no effort was made to assess the political context in which the programme was about to be implemented. Part of the inflated expectations for the HSP could have been prevented by a rational review of Cambodia's political history, and some educated guesses as to the situation that history might give rise to in the future. In this respect

ODA's decision to follow a 'process approach', whereby the decision to proceed with the programme would only be taken after the research and writing of an inception report, was the right one.

Recommendation 1: No programme takes place in a vacuum, unaffected by political realities. Before anything else, the question needs to be answered whether institutional change is at all possible, and is politically supported. In a situation where this is unlikely or uncertain, particular care is needed in designing a programme; a staged approach may be necessary, where efforts can be discontinued if they are not supported. Such an approach could strike a balance between doing nothing because there are too many uncertainties, and pressing on regardless in spite of them.

3.3 The DoH: Organizational Autonomy and Commitment to Change

Besides the larger political context, the commitment of the Department of Hydrology and its parent Ministry (MoA) to implementing necessary changes needs to be assessed. What is important is formal support from within the organization, the commitment of key people in the organization and the autonomy of the organisation to implement proposed improvements. There were serious problems in the HSP programme on all counts.

3.3.1 Support of the DoH for the HSP

That the Vice-Minister of Agriculture at the time chaired the Hydrology Advisory Board meetings at the start of the HSP implementation can be taken to mean that there was implicit support for the programme. This interest declined however as the HSP took a long time to materialize in the form of a full complement of advisors, although the pressure of the upcoming elections also played a role in this. Further support from the DoH was indicated by the fact that most advisors had a DoH counterpart to work with (more about that later), and office space was provided by the Department. These are all *ex-post-facto* observations however, the DoH support was never formalised in a written agreement. A document should have been prepared covering at least the following points²:—

1. the overall objectives of the programme;
2. a description of the responsibilities taken on by each of the parties (DoH and NGOs in first instance);
3. the input provided by the participating agencies, including advisors' budgets, provision of equipment and the like;
4. the input provided by the Department of Hydrology, including counterpart structure and assignments; and

² The fact that these points were covered in the project design document does not in any way invalidate the observation that there should have been a formal agreement; once the institution is committed to the agreement there is a certain level of protection against whims of individuals within it, a fact that would have been important within the HSP given the major changes of personnel at the DoH over the course of its implementation.

- 5 the project monitoring process to be followed (including possible steps in case one of the partners does not meet his obligations)

Such an agreement provides a transparent description of the responsibilities of each of the parties, and as such promotes clarity and better understanding, and can help to avoid conflict at a later date

In addition, certain milestones could have been described in this project agreement, serving as checkpoints on progress. Such milestones could include particular decisions to be implemented by the DoH (e.g. a restructuring of the organisation), or actions to be completed by the project partners. Objective evaluation criteria would thus have been provided that would have helped in reaching decisions about programme continuation, changes of direction, etc. However, given the fact that the original programme design did not outline a strategy for reaching the programme objectives, it would have been difficult to decide on programme milestones.

As it was, the support for the HSP was assumed, rather than formally agreed upon in writing. This situation negated any possibilities to objectively review progress with the DoH at a later date. To make matters worse, no formal approach was made to the DoH after the formation of the permanent government, and the attendant staff changes at the Department. Not only should the programme have been explained to the new Director in detail, his formal support and approval should also have been obtained. Whether he would have supported the project in the first place, and how much his support would have meant is difficult to gauge at this point. There are indications that he never really understood what the programme was attempting to do, and later events certainly did much to erode whatever goodwill he felt towards the HSP.

Whatever the case may be, the fact that no formal project agreement was drawn up either at the start of the programme, or after the formation of the new government, was a serious shortcoming.

Recommendation 2: Support for an institutional development project needs to be formalised in a written Memorandum of Agreement, covering programme objectives, the responsibilities of all parties participating in the programme, and the process to be followed to monitor progress.

3.3.2 Individual Support Within the Department

From the donor perspective, the willingness of the institution to undertake a system-wide development project needs to be assessed. Key people need to be identified who will support the project. What is needed is a commitment and an understanding on the part of those most affected by the changes and outcomes of the project to a process which, if successful, will require them to change the way they conduct their business. The WASH report observes:—

A core group of leaders is needed to start. If there is no willingness to change, an institutional development project is probably not a good idea.

Support from people at the top of the management hierarchy is especially important in Cambodia, because of the way decisions are made. Management is not only bureaucratic, but also extremely autocratic at all levels. In an abstract sense, the King is the patron of all Cambodians, and as such he is expected to look after their well-being. If he does this well, Cambodians (the 'clients') will follow the wishes of the King. This patron-client relationship can be found in many manifestations at many different levels. Within the Ministry of Agriculture, it is the Minister who is in the role of 'patron', demanding loyalty and support from all staff through his position. Little initiative will be taken by Directors of Departments if decisions are not expressly supported by the Minister. At the Department of Hydrology, staff will not act unless so instructed by their 'patron', the Director. Decisions thus need to be approved and supported at the highest level before they can be implemented. Where this is not the case, little will get done. This system does not encourage individual initiative, and the processes of communication and decision making are long and slow. Recognising the way in which decisions are made, and accepting the fact that little can be done about it are important first steps in starting work with the Cambodian bureaucracy.

In 1991, the then Director of the DoH, Suos Kong, was supportive of the proposal for the HSP, although that support did not take on any practical significance. Suos Kong subsequently took a leave of absence to take up studies in Thailand, and was temporarily replaced by the Vice-Director (technical), The Lim Thong, as Acting Director. He seemed very supportive of the HSP programme (as observed by the ODA advisors in their inception report) and was very forthcoming with information about Departmental issues. The ODA advisors acknowledged in January 1994 however that The Lim Thong 'made all the right noises' but did not in effect do anything. The fact that he was at odds with the MoA probably explains much of his inaction (he later left to start work with the National Mekong Secretariat). Support for the HSP at senior level took a nosedive in August of 1993, when The Lim Thong was replaced by a new Director, Lim Kean Hor. He does not seem to appreciate being given advice by outsiders, and consequently it was difficult for the ODA advisors to establish a relationship with him.

As observed earlier, after the appointment of the new Director, no effort was made to formalize support for the HSP with him; a serious error given the top-down management style that is prevalent throughout the civil service (no support from the Director means no support from anyone below him). This error was made all the more glaring because it appeared that Lim Kean Hor did not quite grasp the meaning of the phrase 'Hydrology Support Programme'. It seems that he considered 'support' to mean equipment for the DoH, and when faced with the fact that only a number of advisors were working with the Department, he quickly lost interest. This situation could have been rectified at an early date, but all chances for support from the Director were lost after the first ODA inception report spelled out his shortcomings in some detail, and recommended the establishment of a State Water Authority to take over most of the DoH's responsibilities. From that point on he became openly hostile to the HSP.

No effort was made either to secure support from other key people in the MoA or the DoH. The HAB did not function, and most counterparts were not in a position to make or influence policy. Veng Sakhon, Vice-Chief of the Water Management Office at the start of the programme was the one person openly supportive of the HSP throughout, and when he was promoted to Vice-Director (technical), this was fortunate for everyone involved.

In all honesty however, it should be observed that identifying a group of committed leaders in a department that is run in such an autocratic way along such strictly hierarchical lines as the DoH might not have been more than a cosmetic exercise, especially given the dis-interest of the Director

In some ways, the key was the Director, and he was not on board. Whether or not he would have expressed support for the HSP had he been asked, and whether it would have made much difference is speculation at this point. The fact remains however that the HPA should have made a formal approach to Lim Kean Hor, in an effort to secure his support.

Recommendation 3: The willingness to change of the organization needs to be assessed, and key people need to be identified to start the process and carry it through. If no committed individuals can be identified, it is probably not a good idea to progress to programme implementation. In practice, this means that institution staff needs to be closely involved in the project formulation and design stages, to allow them to 'buy into' the process of change.

Recommendation 4: Changes in key staff should be followed by a re-assessment and re-affirmation of support, to ensure a smooth continuation of the programme.

3.3.3 Organisational Autonomy of the DoH

If an organisation is to change, it should have the delegated authority to implement improvements. Looking at the DoH, the situation was again far from ideal. The same top-down decision making found in most institutions in Cambodia also stifled progress in the Department of Hydrology. Proposed changes in the DoH apparently have to be approved by the Council of Ministers (COM) before they can be implemented. In late September of 1993 the then Vice-Chief of the Water Management office pushed for a reorganisation of the Department very much along the lines of what was proposed by Galvez in 1991. The proposed new structure was approved by the Director, and forwarded to the COM. At the time of writing, a decision had still not been made. This kind of delay is almost certain to kill off any initiative or attempt at change. The situation might have been different if senior officials of the Ministry had been involved in the HSP on a more regular basis, through the HAB, but this is by no means certain.

A further major problem in (re-)organising the Department's work at provincial level was the very tenuous link between the Central DoH in Phnom Penh, and the provincial offices. A formal link between central DoH and provinces was only established in late 1994, well after the HSP had come to an end. During the implementation, the lack of formal control and mechanisms—including for example regular reporting by Hydrology personnel to Phnom Penh—meant that planning and management of resources could not be effected according to any overall plan. Formulating and implementing a national rural water supply development plan for instance (a task the RWSA was supposed to assist the DoH with), would have

depended on a formal relationship existing between provinces and Phnom Penh. However, the DoH had to wait for the government to create this formal relationship.

In other words, even in an ideal situation, with full support for change at all levels in the organization, the DoH would still have been powerless to implement any structural changes, a situation that was not examined in any depth in the programme design.

The original design document states under 'Program Risks' the *inability of DOH to institute organizational changes due to limitation on delegated authorities*, but no attempt was made to determine what those limitations were.

Recommendation 5: Sufficient efforts need to be undertaken to ascertain that the institution has the delegated authority to implement recommended changes. Where this is not the case, the scope for improvement may be limited, and project design should acknowledge existing possibilities or limitations. This means that the project design document should include a detailed and thorough analysis of institutional (and technical) limitations and risks.

3.3.4 Conclusion

The preceding sections sketched a complicated situation, possibly made even more confusing by the fact that this is only the beginning of the story; many more factors influenced—or even determined—the eventual collapse of the HSP. It is impossible, and not very helpful, to speculate about what might have been, but one thing is clear. Whatever support there was for the HSP in the early days, the DoH's attitude changed under the influence of the following factors (some of which will be mentioned in more detail later):—

- the change in directorship;
- the fact that no irrigation advisors were ever posted;
- the withdrawal of ODA's 'shopping-list'; and
- the dysfunctional relationship between the ODA advisors and the new Director of Hydrology.

There were some aspects in the HSP that were not sufficiently considered before the project design was taken up, such as the upcoming elections, while others were not acted upon as the situation changed (e.g. the change in directorship). Some of these could not have been foreseen, others should not have been left out. It is worth remembering the situation at the time though. A number of advisors *were* already working with the DoH, and there were glaring shortcomings in the way Central DoH operated; in many ways it was a non-functional institution. In such a situation, trying to expand and coordinate support in a coherent programme, aimed at improving the basic functioning of the DoH is indeed a logical thing to do. And although some aspects that should have been considered more rigorously were pointed out in the preceding sections, these are in my mind not the determining factors in the

collapse of the HSP. They may have been important contributors, but we will have to look further for the real causes

3.4 The External Environment: Donor Climate and NGO Commitment

That a number of NGOs combined efforts to support the Department of Hydrology was unusual, in the sense that most NGOs prefer to work with communities at grassroots level. Projects at this level tend to be of the 'target practice' type, where outputs are easy to measure. That they agreed to fund a centrally based institutional support project was a direct consequence of the international political climate at the time. Cambodia's isolation and the aid embargo, preventing multi- and bilateral donors from becoming involved in the country, led to the involvement of NGOs in projects that would normally have been considered the province of these larger donors. Recognising that these donors would not arrive in country for some time, NGOs simply continued existing relationships.

Multilateral and bilateral donors were not attracted to providing or committing funds to Cambodia after the signing of the Paris peace agreements (almost at the same time when the HSP was formulated). They adopted a 'wait and see' attitude; it seems that they were not prepared to risk investment until they saw how the peace process turned out. One of the assumptions behind the HSP project design was that at the end of three years of implementation multilateral assistance would have arrived in Cambodia, and that funds would be available for institutional support³.

This donor hesitance was one of the reasons that the full advisory team was never fielded. In November of 1992, CWS had an Irrigation Planning and Design Engineer selected and waiting, but funding from UNDP for this post was diverted to the Irrigation Rehabilitation Study in January of 1993, leaving the post empty. FAO expressed an interest in the irrigation posts, but never came up with the money for the advisors, or even a project commitment. It seemed that even the larger donors were more interested in providing infrastructure without supporting institutions⁴.

NGOs too, seemed half-hearted about their support for the DoH. Oxfam made funds available for an Irrigation Operation and Maintenance Advisor, which were accepted in first instance by AFFHC, but later returned after the merger with CAA. The offer was not taken up by others, and neither did Oxfam decide to recruit an advisor using its own funds. Little action was taken by the NGOs when no money for advisors was forthcoming from the UN. The fact that not all of the advisors that were fielded by NGOs had an adequate budget to carry out their jobs will be looked at in a later section (3.8).

³ As it was, this was an optimistic assumption. Multilateral aid is arriving at the time of writing (Jan. '95), but even that is earmarked for infrastructure provision and rehabilitation. IFAD and EEC have concluded that institutions are too weak to handle money..

⁴ Rural infrastructure without institutional support was exactly what NGOs had been providing for a long time. Emphasis was on 'emergency relief' or rehabilitation type projects, failing to recognize the shortage of organisation and management skills (and consequently with too much emphasis on technology alone)

The upshot of all this was that not one of the three originally envisaged irrigation engineers was ever fielded. This while the primary activity of the DoH is focused on irrigation, and at some point indications were that this was the *only* task the Department would retain. No agencies involved—including ODA's HSP Coordinator—recognised the early warning sign of the withdrawal of UNDP funding, and they allowed themselves to be lulled to sleep by FAO's continuous assurances that it was interested (when six months after the first expression of interest there was still no other action, they should have woken up). One of the programme risks identified in the original HSP document is the inability of funding agencies to respond quickly to requirements. The question of the irrigation advisors is an issue where the programme participants should have realised the importance of the posts to DoH, and have taken action to fill the gap. It is likely that a lot of DoH support was lost when these posts were not filled.

3.5 The Project Design

A well-designed project sets the stage for successful implementation, although many projects still fail in the implementation stage, in spite of a good design.

One of the reasons the WASH report gives for this is the difference between institutional development projects, and the more common, output-oriented development projects. The fact that the primary target of an institution building project is the institution itself makes it different, and more complicated, since it focuses on people and organisational systems:

In the institutional learning process, individual learning cannot be separated from the products procedures or policies which the participants are learning how to improve. The project results are the results of individual and corporate learning and the people in the system working together, not of outside consultants or a special group set up or hired to do a development task.

Some of the more important considerations in designing an institutional support programme are the following:—

- the problems need to be defined and described correctly (you don't want to treat symptoms);
- all essential problem elements need to be integrated into a coherent design that addresses the whole institutional system;
- project goals and strategy need to relate to institutional issues, not be symptomatic or peripheral issues only;
- project participants need to become involved in designing the project and 'buying in' to the proposed changes; and
- inputs need to be sequenced properly.

The project design stage of the HSP is not well defined. First came the original HSP Project Design document, which provided the rationale for working with the DoH, and set the framework within which the team of advisors was to work. This was followed by ODA's

Project Memorandum, which did much the same as the HSP document, but then from ODA's perspective.

The original design did not outline a strategy for implementation though, and this is where ODA's inception report came in. This would provide an in-depth analysis of the DoH, and propose a strategy for further implementation. In other words, this was where the actual support to the institution was to be defined

There were a number of serious problems in the project design.

The original rationale for working with the DoH was sound, and the proposed framework, of advisors coordinated by the HPA, with access to a support fund and directed by the HAB, was well considered. All institutional systems were addressed concurrently, and it involved people at all levels of the organisation. The framework allowed for strengthening of individual units, and improving coordination among them. The external relationships with the (political) institutions that support and influence the life of the DoH were well defined. Risks and constraints to the programme were correctly identified.

Recommendation 6: In project design for institutional strengthening, it is important to consider all levels of the organisation, up, down and sideways. Internal relationships between departments, and interaction with important external institutions (such as the parent Ministry) need to be well defined. Relationships between individual advisors, and between advisors and institution staff also need to be set out in the project design document.

Recommendation 7: Problems never exist in isolation from each other; they interrelate and are interdependent. For this reason it is also important to consider all problems, and where possible to address them concurrently through in-depth analysis in a well considered project design.

The fact that the DoH was organisationally not equipped to deal with some of the proposed 'strengthening' approaches was not addressed however. The idea was that through the HSP, the DoH would be enabled to respond better to farmers' needs, and involve them in O&M. This was one of the main tasks for the Community Organisation Advisor. The DoH however, has always approached irrigation and drinking water supply as technical problems, to be solved by engineers. It is a stranger to social approaches to development and community involvement. This bias is reflected in the organisational structure, and consequently, there is no natural 'fit' for the CO advisor in any of the departments. Neither is there staff with the appropriate background to function as a counterpart. Likewise, the HRD Advisor was to develop in-house training capacity at the DoH, whereas hitherto this did not exist, and again, appropriate staff was not available. These factors severely hampered the work of those advisors. More account should have been taken of the organisational limitations of the DoH, and more effort should have been made to look at alternative structures, and to obtain a commitment from DoH to change. The crucial question of how to change a technical department to take a social approach was not considered in depth. Too much faith may have been placed in the belief that

the DoH would change its structure (which would have created a place for the CO and HRD advisors) without analysing the constraints from the perspective of the DoH

Recommendation 8: It should be ensured that a match exists between the institutional structure and proposed roles of advisors. If this match does not exist, the project design should consider in detail how it could be established at the earliest possible stage.

This could possibly have been facilitated by involving the DoH more in the original design process. The design was drawn up by three consultants (one Khmer and two expatriates), and while 'information and suggestions from the DoH' are acknowledged, the design remains a piece of work by outsiders, drawn up with insufficient involvement of DoH staff.

Recommendation 9: Project participants should be involved in the design process, and 'own' the final product. Such involvement promotes a realistic design and commitment from the beneficiaries. The institution should be involved in drawing up the Terms Of Reference for the project design team, and a draft design document should be offered for review and comments to senior institution staff.

A further weakness in the project design is that it does not outline a timeline or strategy for implementation. It is acknowledged that it would have been difficult to do this given the changes and uncertainties, but the least the programme design should have attempted is to describe the process by which a strategy could be reached.

Recommendation 10: The project design should not only set out a clear set of objectives and goals, but identify also the strategy and timeline for implementation. Where this is not possible, a process for reaching a project strategy should be described in detail.

Then, there is the Inception Report. This did only half its job (and did that well). Where the draft contained many factual mistakes, the final version is a well researched and well documented analysis of the DoH, presenting a picture of the real world. But that is as far as it goes. It contains numerous proposals for change, but it lacks a coherent design, with goals and strategy set out for the support to DoH. Furthermore, there was no involvement of senior DoH staff in designing proposals, in fact ensuring that they would never get off the ground in the first place.

If we consider for a moment that even though a large number of advisors had been in place for some time, the Inception Report was to set out programme strategy and direction, we immediately spot another problem: timing.

Although the initial four months specified by ODA for the production of the Inception Report may have been overly optimistic (not to say unrealistic), it took a full eleven months from the arrival of the ODA advisors to the circulation of the final Inception Report. As if time was no longer important, the issuing of the report was delayed for two or three months because the

combs for binding it were held up in Customs. By then the programme was in tatters, and in many ways the report is a monument to a failure (and an expensive one at that, at US\$ 1600 - per page). Closer cooperation with the NGOs and the DoH could have produced a workable document in maybe half the time.

In the absence of the Inception Report, the question of an interim programme strategy should have been addressed, but it was not. Since this is more related to the programme implementation stage, it will be considered later.

Also related to programme design is the question of perceived difference in programme objectives between the original HSP document of the NGOs and ODA Project Memorandum. There was the assumption of a common understanding based on these documents, although the reality was different. The final ODA Inception Report states:

The [HSP programme] report was submitted to ODA who had targeted the water sector for technical assistance. On the basis of this report the latter prepared a Project Memorandum (but significantly different to the report) for a Management Support Programme (MSP) which received the approval of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia in February, 1993. In April, 1993 two senior Advisors were fielded: an Hydrology Programme Advisor, as Co-ordinator of the NGO Advisors and Technical Advisor to the Director of the Department, and a Financial & Institutions Advisor.

It is interesting to note that although the approach to the programme was the source of much debate and disagreement between NGOs and ODA, and the Project Memorandum prepared by ODA is called "significantly different" from the original project document, little cause for misunderstanding is apparent when reading both documents together. Furthermore, as programme coordinators it would have been the senior advisors' task to resolve this perceived difference, but they did not do so. The objectives for the programme are stated as follows in the respective design documents:

From the HSP Project Design document:

The objective of the program is to strengthen the technical and administrative capability of the Central DoH as the main government agency responsible for water resources development in Cambodia. The program is expected to provide a coordinating mechanism to the present individual support of NGOs, to assist DoH to develop and install policies, strategies and procedural improvements in various areas...

In effect it is expected that the DoH improved capacity would enable it to handle higher investments in water resources development including O & M of completed projects through its increased technical assistance and improved communication links to provincial and district levels.

It is also the aim of the program to install a mechanism by which the individual support of the NGOs could be consolidated to achieve a concerted [sic] effort in improving the central DoH to make it more responsive to the delivery of support services to Provincial / district levels and farmers.

From the ODA Project Memorandum:

to enhance the capability of the DoH to manage the development of the irrigation, flood control, and rural water supply sectors, and in particular to raise its ability to manage the process of change and the absorption of the expected increase in external assistance for water resource development;

to maximize the benefit to the DoH from the current technical co-operation assistance being provided by a range of NGOs, primarily active in the technical offices of the DoH.

Order and wording of both objectives are slightly different, and the objectives stated in the HSP document are more detailed. There is little to explain ODAs insistence that its Project Memorandum presented a project design that was significantly different from that of the NGOs.

Truly disagreeing objectives for a programme should never be allowed to live side by side. It is obvious that this would be a recipe for disaster. As it was, even though the differences were only perceived, the disagreement may have been the symptom of deeper rooted dissatisfaction of the various parties with each other, and the cause should have been addressed. What was probably at issue was the *style* of working of the HPA and FIA on the one side, and the NGOs on the other, not the substance of the work. DoH and NGOs were largely ignored by ODA, and so was the HAB, leaving few avenues for discussion.

Recommendation 11: A clear set of objectives and project goals should be established, understood and adhered to by all stakeholders in the project.

Another important question this disagreement raises is whether the ODA agenda was not in reality different from the one stated. The emphasis placed on establishing a State Water Authority, or Water Resources Board by the senior advisors right from the start is an indication that this indeed may have been the case. The concept of a Water Management Authority is not new. It was proposed in the report of the joint UNICEF/Oxfam evaluation carried out in 1992⁵ and issued to NGOs and embassies in January of 1993. Although the concept was supported by other agencies, it was developed and continuously refined without any involvement from DoH whatsoever. Both ODA advisors did however consult extensively with other institutions,

⁵ Joint UNICEF/Oxfam Evaluation Rural Water Supply Projects Cambodia, The Hague 1992

such as the National Mekong Secretariat and the State Secretariat for the Environment. Both the HPA and the FIA indulged in substantial political lobbying in developing the proposal, and it is likely that the politicising of the concept caused it to hang up in the end. Whether the participating NGOs should have gone along in their support of the proposals given the way they were developed, is questionable.

Recommendation 12: It is essential that a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation is established between advisors and institutional staff, in order to facilitate effective project design. In first instance this entails day to day interaction of all parties, and clear communication.

That ODA developed and promoted the idea for a SWA is no problem in itself. However, this should have been done in addition to its work within the HSP, not at the expense of it. In other words, ODA should have fulfilled their stated purpose of support for the DoH. The impression that they were more interested in having an overall hold on the water supply sector in Cambodia than in DoH support *per se* was strengthened by an off-the-cuff remark to that effect made by the First Secretary of the UK Embassy during one of the meetings between ODA and NGO reps. A motive for this attitude could be that ODA was interested in obtaining consultancy services for British engineering firms.

It is possible that some of the issues around project objectives would have come out at the retreat, but preferable would have been a 'problem solving workshop' between ODA advisors, NGO representatives and DoH senior staff at the moment it became clear that there were major differences to be resolved. Although some meetings were held between agency reps and ODA advisors, they discussed practical manifestations of underlying problems only. The problems of lack of strategy, and differences in approach between ODA and NGOs were mentioned in various meetings and documents⁶, but the root causes of the disagreements were never addressed. The fact that it was never clear who was in charge of the programme from ODA's side contributed to the difficulties in addressing and resolving these problems. It was not clear whether formal responsibility for the HSP -from ODA's side- rested with the UK Embassy in Phnom Penh, or with SEADD in Bangkok. If SEADD was responsible, it was never clear whom in Bangkok should have been the primary contact; responsibility seemed to change from month to month. With all the visits that SEADD representatives paid to Phnom Penh, the same person never appeared twice. Had the responsibility been clearly defined, a more serious effort to identify and resolve the root-causes of the problems could have been made. As it was, it was clearly unhelpful that issues were allowed to simmer all through the programme.

3.6 The Advisory Team

Given the fact that institution building is inherently a process of human interaction, and brings with it the need to develop and maintain trust, much rests on the composition of the advisory

⁶ For example minutes of the meeting between NGO reps and ODA on August 24 1993, and *The ODA Draft Inception Report of Aug '93 - Comments from NGO Members of the HSP, September 1993*

team. It is evident that insofar one could speak of a 'team' in the HSP, it did not function very well, and this section explores some of the issues

Once the required skills for the team members have been determined, the appropriate people need to be found to fill the posts. The WASH reports makes a number of important observations on the nature of an advisor ('change agent').—

There is extensive literature on the 'change agent.' Very little of this literature... indicates that the consultant is required to take over and tell people what to do... Yet, this is the most common approach practised by most consultants. There is a prevalent misguided notion that the way to help someone learn is to show them that they don't know what they are doing and demonstrate the right way to do it. In consulting terminology this is called the 'expert approach.'

...most institutional problems which consultants can affect are solved by helping the client gain the skills to remove or work through the constraints in the system. Often the issue is not that the client does not know what is right (or even how to do it right) but that he/she is constrained or prevented from doing it. Institutional problems usually require, therefore, a 'working along with' approach —a flexible approach of moving into a problem, then moving aside.

This suggests that people are required who are not just experts in their field, but have a number of more generic skills, such as the ability to communicate cross-culturally, patience, listening skills, sufficient maturity to take a back seat, a non-confrontational style, etc.

Recommendation 13: Technical competence alone is not enough for an advisor, and the 'expert approach' has no place in institutional development. Advisors need more generic skills to function well in what will often be a multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural environment.

The ODA Advisors

The appropriateness of the qualifications and experience of the Hydrology Program Advisor recruited by ODA are difficult to assess from his C.V. His management experience for what is essentially a *management* support programme has tended to be as leader of science based teams. He had no experience of NGOs and apparently little experience in an advisory role. In action he was extremely quiet, was unable to effectively chair coordination meetings, and seemed to lack any sort of leadership skills. From his actions it became clear that he did not see it as his task to give strategic direction to the programme as a whole; he was happy to ask advisors for their individual workplans for forwarding to ODA⁷, but did not make any attempts to coordinate activities as part of a larger framework. This while his job description gives him a large coordinating role, and is actually weak on his strategic role within the programme. In

⁷ Letter to advisors, August 17, 1993.

fact, he seemed to dissipate the purpose of the HSP as an institutional programme by bringing representatives from any project associated with DoH into the coordination meetings. This meant that any agency carrying out a construction project or study or mission was included, instead of those whose only objective was to develop the institution itself. The retreat, an initiative to improve coordination was barely supported by him (possibly because he saw it as infringing on his role). An area of his job description he completely ignored was that related to the HAB. The ODA Programme Memorandum stated that he should play a lead role in ensuring the proper functioning of the HAB, but as mentioned before, the HAB never met once after ODA's arrival to the great detriment of the programme.

On paper, the Finance and Institutions Advisor appears to be suitable. However, his concept of the role of advisor tended to be that of a management consultant commissioned to sort out a commercial organisation — assess the organisation, propose solutions to problems and present these on a take it or leave it basis. He certainly did not believe in assisting the organisation to identify its problems and develop its own solutions. In addition, his attitude to NGOs appeared arrogant and condescending.

Neither of the ODA advisors did very much to establish a working relationship with the senior staff of DoH. They enjoyed working with the Acting Director, and the Vice-Director (admin), but the relationship with DoH broke down after the arrival of the new Director. Matters were not helped by the fact that ODA's advisors set up their own office outside of DoH where they spent most of their time.

It is admittedly not easy to establish a working relationship with the Director of the DoH, for he gives the impression of being more interested in personal gain and establishing a strong position politically, than in a functioning Department. The frustration felt by the ODA advisors in having to work with him is well understood. All this however, does not change the single fundamental fact that he is the Director, and nothing happens in the DoH without his approval. Working in isolation from him, or calling him a 'crook' — as he is called in the Draft Inception Report — is not the solution, and neither is it very wise. That the senior advisors apparently did not have the understanding, insight and patience to develop a relationship that was so crucial to the support of the DoH is indeed baffling. After all, the commitment of the HSP was to the DoH as an institution, irrespective of individuals within it. Ignoring the Director should not have been the solution of choice when this proved to be an untenable position.

The NGO Advisors

The team of advisors fielded in the HSP programme was very diverse in education and experience, ranging from postgraduate university level to mechanical technicians, and from development and NGO experience to commercial plant workshops. In itself this should not have been a problem, on the contrary, it could have been a very stimulating group. However, one or two were rather individualistic and did not have the ability to see the purpose and benefits of working together to address common problems. One or two others did not have the

experience to match the job requirements, and some were rather too pro-active in their approach, considering themselves indispensable to their section at the DoH⁸

That approaches and personalities clashed was perhaps inevitable given this mix of teamworkers and individualists, arrogant experts and consultants. It would have required strong and respected leadership to pull the team together, and this was missing. The lack of a common direction is likely to have made matters worse. Quite late in the programme, serious questions were raised about the suitability of the HPA and FIA for their tasks. Although these concerns were shared by the NGOs with SEADD and ODA, no action was taken.

In a situation where much depends on the make-up of a team, it is advisable to have a Steering Committee, or management group which is in a position to select the appropriate staff, and make changes when necessary. This may not be easy, and it takes time and funds. However, if the alternative is to 'work with what you've got' and that is not good enough, it is not too difficult to justify this with a view towards the longer term benefit to the programme and the supported organisation. Within the HSP, the task of selecting advisors was given to the HAB, but in the end it was never involved in reviewing or recommending candidates for appointment. It would have been the right body though to carry out this task, and to be given a relatively free hand in selecting and changing staff.

Recommendation 14: It is advisable to have a steering committee or similar body that is in a position to select appropriate staff, and make changes when necessary. This ensures that proper attention can be given to the formation of a team that works well together, and is accepted by the receiving institution.

3.7 The Counterpart Structure

As the primary tools of institutional development are training and skills transfer (along with systems and procedures development), the DoH should have presented a counterpart structure that would have carried institutional learning to the rest of the Department. Since the DoH has over 700 employees in Phnom Penh alone, the advisors could not hope to work with everyone, thus the team would need to work with key individuals, who in turn would work with others.

Ideally, the counterparts should have been identified before the arrival of the advisor, to prevent time being wasted on identifying a suitable person. Also, the position the counterpart holds should be relevant to the work the advisor is asked to do. It is possible for an advisor to work with more than one counterpart, but for reasons of continuity and sustainability, a primary counterpart should be identified.

Although DoH did provide counterparts—taken to indicate support for the HSP—many were not available to work with advisors full time, and there were other problems on all accounts.

⁸ Two advisors gave this as reason why they could not attend the retreat.

Some advisors did not have a natural place in the DoH structure, and thus no counterpart, such as the HRD and CO Advisors. This made for a situation where much of the work done by an advisor was essentially useless, since no transfer of knowledge or skills took place, and no institutional learning either. This problem was to have been addressed by the HPA through the Hydrology Advisory Board. Since the HAB was inactive, this never happened.

Other advisors did not work with one primary counterpart, but with everyone, for instance in the pump workshop and the heavy equipment workshop. This leads to the advisor being seen as the leader/manager of the workshops, not as someone to support their actual management systems.

The HPA and FIA did not work with their counterparts at all, a fact that has been mentioned sufficiently before. The RWSA didn't only share his initial counterpart with four other people, he also went through a change in counterpart three times in as many months, because of promotion, resignation and internal restructuring, which is most unhelpful from the standpoint of continuity.

Although the DoH is very willing to provide counterparts (even eager, given the excess staff), a very limited diversity of skills (most senior staff are engineers), and possibly a limited understanding of the counterpart concept hamper the effective use of counterparts. More work could have been done in defining the counterpart concept with DoH, and working through job-descriptions and responsibilities (this was actually an initial task for the HRD advisor, since none of the staff at DoH even have job-descriptions).

Recommendation 15: Counterparts are an essential part to the sustainability of an institutional development programme, and ideally advisors should not start work until counterparts have been identified with the appropriate skills, and the appropriate position in the institution to take learning forward. If the organisational structure does not support the proposed strengthening approaches, efforts should be made in the design stage to define proposals for structural change through a process of mutual consultation, understanding and agreement between institution and design team.

3.8 Physical Inputs

Physical equipment (computers, vehicles, laboratory equipment) needs to be provided to enable new systems to function, and it must be available when it is needed. There are always trade-offs in this area; physical inputs are attractive and seem more permanent than technical assistance and training. Institutions may be more willing to undertake structural change if the pot is sweetened with needed equipment in a project package.

The HSP programme did not have an 'equipment list' attached to the original design, it was assumed that individual advisors relied on their organisations' budgets to provide necessary inputs. It is very clear that the DoH was in no position to provide any inputs, given the tremendous financial strain it is under. Although an annual budget is set, it actually receives very little money from central government, and staff are only paid their very low salaries.

intermittently. The prospect of receiving equipment through the advisors must have seemed very attractive. The fact of the matter was however, that most advisors did not have significant support budgets, the participating NGOs seemed reluctant to spend money on making the DoH functional at a central level⁹. In many ways this was a very short-sighted attitude to take, since providing 'support' to an organisation is meaningless if that does not include the inputs required to allow it to function (although it is likely that requirements would exceed budgets, no attempt was ever made to draw up a list of needed equipment, except by ODA, see below). Of course to be able to draw up a list of requirements there needs to be an agreed upon definition of what the tasks of the DoH are. This is a fundamental issue that was never really addressed; senior staff of the DoH see an operational role for the Department, a view that was questioned by a number of the NGOs involved in the HSP. The discussion of this issue could have been led by the HPA, but it was not. But whatever the reason, the DoH only saw an advisor, not the material resources it was hoping for, which probably also played a role in the diminishing support for the HSP from the DoH.

With the arrival of the ODA advisors the situation seemed to change for the better, as the FIA proceeded to draw up a list of needed equipment, indicating that a large amount of money was available for drilling rigs, vehicles, computers, etc. The process of drawing up the list was not very transparent, and it was never announced what was on it. Advice was asked from some NGO representatives, and subsequently mostly ignored¹⁰.

Compiling a list like this must have raised high hopes within the DoH, and was a nice way for ODA to establish credibility with the Department. Later, the list had to be severely cut back, and after this was completely cancelled.

The cancellation of the list may have seriously eroded DoH support for the HSP, since at this point the only visible input was a number of advisors, and not even the most important ones at that. The whole episode was rather badly handled.

Recommendation 16: Project inputs should be carefully considered. Raising hopes to an unrealistic level may exact a price in lost support and motivation, but funding for equipment necessary for the institution to carry out its tasks is essential. Specification and provision of required inputs needs to take place in close cooperation with the institution, based upon an agreed upon understanding of the tasks of the organisation, and needs to be handled in a transparent manner.

⁹ NGOs spend significant amounts of money on providing equipment such as vehicles and drilling rigs to provincial offices of Hydrology, but did not seem to be willing to extend the same level of support to Central DoH. The withdrawal of the CWS Heavy Equipment Workshop Advisor was at least partly due to the fact that ADB posted an advisor at that workshop with a one million dollar budget. Facing this fact, CWS concluded that it could more usefully support provincial activities.

¹⁰ The Oxfam Water Resources Coordinator for instance indicated that one low technology drilling rig could usefully be included on the list. The FIA changed that to two high technology rigs without further explanation. Minutes of an HSP meeting also mention 14 computers on the list that were not sufficiently justified according to SEADD in Bangkok.

3.9 Programme Implementation and Management

It is difficult to actually talk about the Implementation Phase of the HSP. After all, advisors had been working with the DoH since 1992, and in many ways, the posting of further advisors was nothing more than a continuation and broadening of these existing efforts. However, a coherent, coordinated support programme was to have been implemented after the arrival of the senior advisors, and what follows will confine itself to the period from early 1993.

The inception report has the following to say on the difficulties experienced during the year of programme implementation:—

Co-ordinating a group of Advisors drawn from different NGOs and working in different fields raises problems. Firstly, the NGOs each have their own ethos and guidelines to which they must adhere; these may differ both from government policy and the guidelines of other NGOs. Secondly, some of the Advisors prefer to examine verbally every issue in detail to try to reach a consensus amongst all parties on the best way forward; this may not be the best way of taking decisions in the fast changing scenario found in Cambodia. Lastly, people working for NGOs are individualistic in outlook and prefer to resolve a problem according to their personal beliefs, which does not always provide the most practical or pragmatic solution; a common approach to a problem is not something that comes easily to them.

That the second and third point in this paragraph contradict each other is probably not as important as the fact that a fundamental weakness in the HSP management system is overlooked. The fact that the advisors were all assigned to the HSP by their individual agencies meant that—especially in times of disagreement with the programme coordinators—these advisors could fall back on their NGO managers (they were supposed to be managed by the HPA). Had there been one lead agency, nominally in charge on the NGO side, this management ambiguity could have been avoided.

On the HAB, the report notes that meetings lapsed due to nonattendance and difficulties with recruiting advisors. Subsequently, the NGO representatives initiated their own meetings, and regular HSP meetings developed into a forum wherein both technical and policy matters were being discussed and acted upon.

This expansion of the activities of the HSP committee, the recent creation of a further discussion group (comprising the five NGO representatives and the ODA Advisors to discuss wider-ranging issues on an 'as needed' basis), but particularly the deep involvement of the government personnel in electioneering, and the many rumours of changes in portfolios and policy, have more or less caused the temporary suspension of the HAB to continue. After ratification of the new Constitution and the establishment of the final versions of ministerial portfolios, the composition and definition of purpose of the HAB can be reviewed.

As stated [before], the NGOs fielding the Advisors have their own ethos and objectives which influence their views and decisions, which can be at variance with those of the ODA Advisors who are working to achieve the objectives of the ODA Project. Hence, the management structure of the Project, whereby the HAB (populated with NGO Representatives), sitting above the ODA Advisors, (burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that the individual NGO-Advisors' workplans and activities are directed to the achievement of the ODA-stated objectives), is unworkable, since the ODA Advisors have to make pragmatic decisions to respond to actual situations, which decisions have proved contrary to the opinions/policies of the NGO Representatives. If the Project does continue in its original format it is essential that a workable Project management structure is devised.

What the ODA advisors ignore to mention in the second paragraph is that ODA also had the right to representation on the HAB. Representation could have been through the First Secretary of the UK Embassy, or through SEADD in Bangkok (it never was clear who was responsible). A difference between the original project document and the ODA Project Memorandum is that in the former the ODA advisors are resource persons to the HAB, while in the latter they are perceived as full members.

This last section creates a picture of ODA advisors pulling the other advisors in one direction (the ODA objectives), while the NGO reps on the HAB pulled in another (their own objectives). This would be a real problem if there were big differences in the objectives. This was not the case however, and criticism from the NGOs was much more focused on the approach of the ODA than on the overall direction. This was not a problem that would be resolved by changing the management structure, but by working closely with all parties involved on a mutually agreeable direction. What seems to be stated here in not so many words, is that the ODA advisors were not willing to accept a situation where they might lose their perceived complete autonomy.

It should be remembered that the inception report was issued at a time when indications were strong that the ODA would pull out of the programme, and the HSP would be cancelled or suspended. It is therefore that a statement like "composition and definition of purpose of the HAB can be reviewed" is read with some scepticism; it is likely that the authors suspected that issuing the report would be their last task in Cambodia.

Pessimists may conclude that by 1993, the stage had already been set for major problems to arise, and they may be partly right. But everybody —NGOs, ODA and DoH— missed a major chance to get things off to a good start right at the beginning of full programme implementation, in early 1993. Some points of decision are time-bound. Miss the point, and you lose the chance of making the right decision. The early days of the programme presented such a point, and it was missed. Let us look at this a little bit more.

One element that was not understood was that building institutions requires teamwork. There must be commitment and leadership from the beginning. The methodology of change is, in part, team building for institutional learning. A team building and problem solving workshop at the beginning of the programme, with the advisors, counterparts, DoH officials and NGO

representatives participating could have heightened interest, focused the needs, developed and clarified issues and demonstrated some success

This would have been the time to:—

- pull together support from the DoH,
- iron out differences in view or objectives;
- establish management structures for the programme as a whole (HAB, HSP meetings, role of other agencies, etc.);
- solve outstanding issues or problems together,
- look at horizontal and vertical relationships, coordination and planning;
- reach agreement on counterparts;
- develop mechanisms for communicating and working together; and
- develop an interim strategy and action plan.

Recommendation 17: Project start-up workshops are suggested as a good way to enter into the implementation stage. They can heighten interest, focus needs, develop and clarify issues, and begin to demonstrate some success.

The reality however was one of lacklustre leadership, no coordination, unclear methods of communication, and disagreement over management structures.

Let us examine project management in some more detail. On one level, there was the Hydrology Advisory Board, meant to provide strategic direction to the programme, but ignored and resisted by the HPA. When he wrote in the inception report that the HAB is unworkable, since *the ODA Advisors have to make pragmatic decisions to respond to actual situations* he ignored a basic principle of management. Freely translated, it runs like this: 'When you are up to your arse in crocodiles, it is hard to remember that your primary objective was to drain the swamp'. Nobody will prevent the ODA advisors—or any advisor for that matter—from making pragmatic decisions based on actual situations. The fact remains that someone is needed who can take a step back from the day to day situation, and provide strategic direction based on a reflection on the larger context, and by definition that cannot be someone caught up in the daily running of the programme. The HAB was foreseen as the group to fulfil this function of the outsider, and rightly so. That it, or a similar structure was not brought to life at the beginning of the programme meant that strategic direction and review were lacking, with disastrous results.

Recommendation 18: The overall programme management structure needs to include a board responsible for the overall strategic direction of the programme, but not involved in day-to-day issues of implementation.

On another level, there was the monthly HSP meeting. A common purpose was assumed, and only later did it become clear that different people assumed different objectives for the meeting. It is not worth having a meeting if you don't know why you are meeting. In the

absence of the HAB, NGO reps attended the monthly meetings early on to discuss policy. Later this was done in reps meetings with ODA. The HPA apparently saw the meeting as a forum for everyone involved with the DoH in one way or the other. Other advisors would have liked to see discussion focusing on coordinating activities and solving common problems. One advisor wanted to discuss very practical matters, such as painting the ceiling of the pump workshop¹¹, but refused to discuss more serious issues such as privatisation of the workshop. In other words, this was another situation where there was disagreement that remained unresolved despite requests by NGO representatives for clarification and a statement of common purpose. In any programme it is important to have a regular means of communication, and the HSP is no exception. The fact that some advisors went on field trips regularly, and almost none of them worked from the same office made this even more important. There also should have been a way to stay on top of the activities of other donors, and if the regular irrigation sector- and water and sanitation sector meetings were found wanting in this respect, they should have been separate from the HSP meetings. Without going into too much detail, it is important to note that the purpose of the monthly HSP meeting should have been clarified, and this difficulty should have been resolved one way or the other.

Recommendation 19: Clear means of communication to enable day-to-day management need to be established, and the programme management structure needs to be clearly outlined and understood by all, fulfil clear, stated objectives, and be empowered to execute its tasks.

Having a *team* of advisors indicates a group of people working to a common purpose. What was actually in place was a *group* of advisors, all convinced that in one way or the other they worked to support Hydrology, but there was no real cooperation or common approach.

Overall management was non-existent, and the HPA focused on developing the Inception Report and a proposal for a State Water Authority, leaving the other advisors to their own devices. What was needed was an overall strategy and work plan, even if only until the Inception Report was finalised. The fact that this was missing was brought up by the Oxfam Water Resources Coordinator, and later by the Rural Water Supply Advisor. The issue could have been addressed at the HSP meetings, and would have been at the retreat, had it not been cancelled. So rather than the overall coordinated programme envisaged, there was a group of individual advisors working in the various offices of the DoH, and two senior advisors undertaking an analysis that was never really accepted. In this climate it could happen that every advisor followed the course that seemed most appropriate to his part of the universe. Operations in the pump workshop for example were privatised to a large degree, and to a somewhat lesser degree at the heavy equipment workshop. Private work was also being undertaken by the soils and water laboratories, but on a much more *ad-hoc* basis. Much of this went on with informal consent from the DoH, but without a formal strategy and with the disapproval of other participating agencies. There was however, no functioning structure to question and resolve these fundamental differences in approach. In other words, there was no coherence to the programme whatsoever.

¹¹ memo to FIA re agenda items for meeting 3 June 1993

Recommendation 20: Team work is essential for success in institution building. Teams should encompass both the external advisors and the institutional counterparts.

Recommendation 21: A common strategy and team workplan needs to be developed based on project aims and objectives, at the start of project implementation.

The question one could ask, given the difficulties and disagreements over project management is whether multi-party funding of a common programme and management structure with government as one of the partners is possible. On the one side, there is the question of inter-NGO co-operation. It has already been observed that having one agency responsible for staff management, hiring, etc. would have provided a clearer situation in case of difficulty. On the other side there is the question of co-operation between NGOs and a government organisation (ODA). The HSP experience seems to show that if not impossible, this is certainly very difficult, although differences in personal approach played a large role as well. The ODA advisors ignored the government, marginalized the role of the NGOs and seemed intent on forging ahead with their priorities, based on the institutional needs and relationships perceived by them. In the circumstance, the NGOs should have instigated discussions with ODA and demanded executive action. In terms of management structures, besides the relationship of the area specialists with both their 'parent NGO' and the HPA, there is an issue with the fact that the HPA was told to ensure proper functioning of the HAB. The HAB managed both senior advisors, according to the original project design. Given this, it is odd that the job description of the HPA specified that he should play a lead role in its functioning. This made it very easy for him to sideline the very body that should have been providing him with direction. In the event, it would have been better to charge a few key members of the HAB with this task.

The three main lessons to be learned from the difficulties in co-operation between the various partners are that there need to be common objectives and strategy, that serious attention needs to be paid to team composition and compatibility, and that well thought through and sensible management structures need to be put into place (all three of which have been mentioned in recommendations before).

3.10 Conclusion

Many programmes fail, or come to an end prematurely. Some have had their time or run out of steam, others miss their chance entirely. None of this is inherently bad, as long as it is recognised in time that stopping would be better than stumbling on. Fortunately, that is one thing that went right with the HSP; it was stopped. There is no one single cause for the failure of the HSP; many different factors interacted to bring that about, ranging from the political climate, to project design, to project implementation and management. On a positive note, much has been learned from it. What makes the HSP experience such a frustrating one, and what throws up the question whether things could not have been different is the fact that many mistakes were obvious at the time, yet they were allowed to remain unsolved.

Of all the mistakes, omissions and oversights, the lack of a coherent strategy, and the difference in approach between ODA and NGOs certainly rank as the two most important ones, underlying much else that went wrong. Trying to 'strengthen' an institution by standing at a distance and beating it over the head with a stick just does not work, no matter how big the stick. That kind of 'expert approach' was discredited a long time ago, and never sat well with NGOs in the first place. In this particular instance, the ODA-NGO combination was thus a very unsuitable one, although that could not have been known in the beginning. That the differences could not be resolved does not speak well of either the NGOs, or the ODA. Although the DoH is far from blameless in the HSP saga, it certainly was the one party that lost most because of its collapse.

There are no startling new insights in this report that explain the failure of the HSP. Everyone involved was familiar with the causes. Everyone involved shares responsibility for many of the mistakes and problems, and maybe for not trying hard enough to solve them.



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