

Government Structure in Cambodia: *Back to Orthodoxy?*

Like other developing countries, Cambodia mainly relies on an extensive government to initiate sustainable development. However, a smaller, more centralized cabinet may be more efficient in achieving this task.

Administrative reforms usually include reforming the government, along with the civil service, the public management and the territorial administration. Reforming the government implies the reshuffle of the cabinet, the reallocation of functions between ministries, the creation or abolition of non-ministerial institutions, etc. In this article, the government structure mainly refers to ministries and their personnel, especially members of government.

The administrative reform, led by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), is mainly devoted to the reform of the civil service, the development of local democracy and to internal ministerial reforms. Currently, a reshuffle and cutting back of ministerial portfolios have not yet been considered. Developing countries tend to rely on an extensive government intervention - thus often too numerous ministries - to initiate and sustain development. This tendency is challenged by scholars and development advocates with some countries having successfully reduced the size of their government, which Cambodia may consider to emulate to its own benefit.

Historical Perspectives

The common evolution of a government's structure worldwide is from centralization to decentralization. During the Angkorian period the King was simultaneously public works architect, military commander, navy captain, judicial arbitrator and religious chief. But the reins of the administration was in the hands of a small aristocracy and few members of the royal family.

The French administration of Indochina withdrew government and

administrative powers from Cambodians. Major offices were held by French officials and more trivial functions were entrusted to Vietnamese individuals.

During the Sangkum Reastr Niyum in the 1960's and the Khmer Republic in the 1970's, the cabinet size usually ranged from 12 to 18 ministries and its structure was limited to the major functions of the State, such as Defense, Foreign Affairs, Public Health, Commerce, etc. However, at times, the government could exceed 20 ministries when the socio-economic and political situation of the country required it.

During those regimes, the government management team was centralized through the "packaging" of ministries into common fields of action. For instance, the ministries of education, health, social action were managed by secretaries of state and grouped into a "social issues" package, headed and coordinated by one minister, responsible for the government's social policies. This sometimes allowed for the appointment of only six ministers, each ministry being headed by a secretary of state.

After the liberation from the Khmer Rouges, the People's Republic of Kampuchea, inspired by communist ideology, kept its structure to a minimum: national defense, national security, planning, etc.

Government Structure Since 1993

On the eve of 1993, the Cambodian government consisted of ministries and portfolio that illustrated the core functions of the State, the socialist inheritance from the previous regime, the political will to manage the country's economy and the government's consideration for

social concerns.

After the 1993 general elections, the first RGC initiated several reforms to rebuild the country's economy, society and political institutions, which required new ministerial portfolios to manage education, infrastructure, and public health among other national issues. While the numerous challenges and reforms called for a legitimate expanded government, the increased number of portfolios mostly served as a compromise between the three coalition parties to distribute cabinet posts and political offices to their members.

In 1998, the RGC created two ministries and reallocated social affairs' responsibilities. After the 2003 deadlock for the formation of the new RGC, its composition remained about the same: 26 ministries and two secretariats of state.

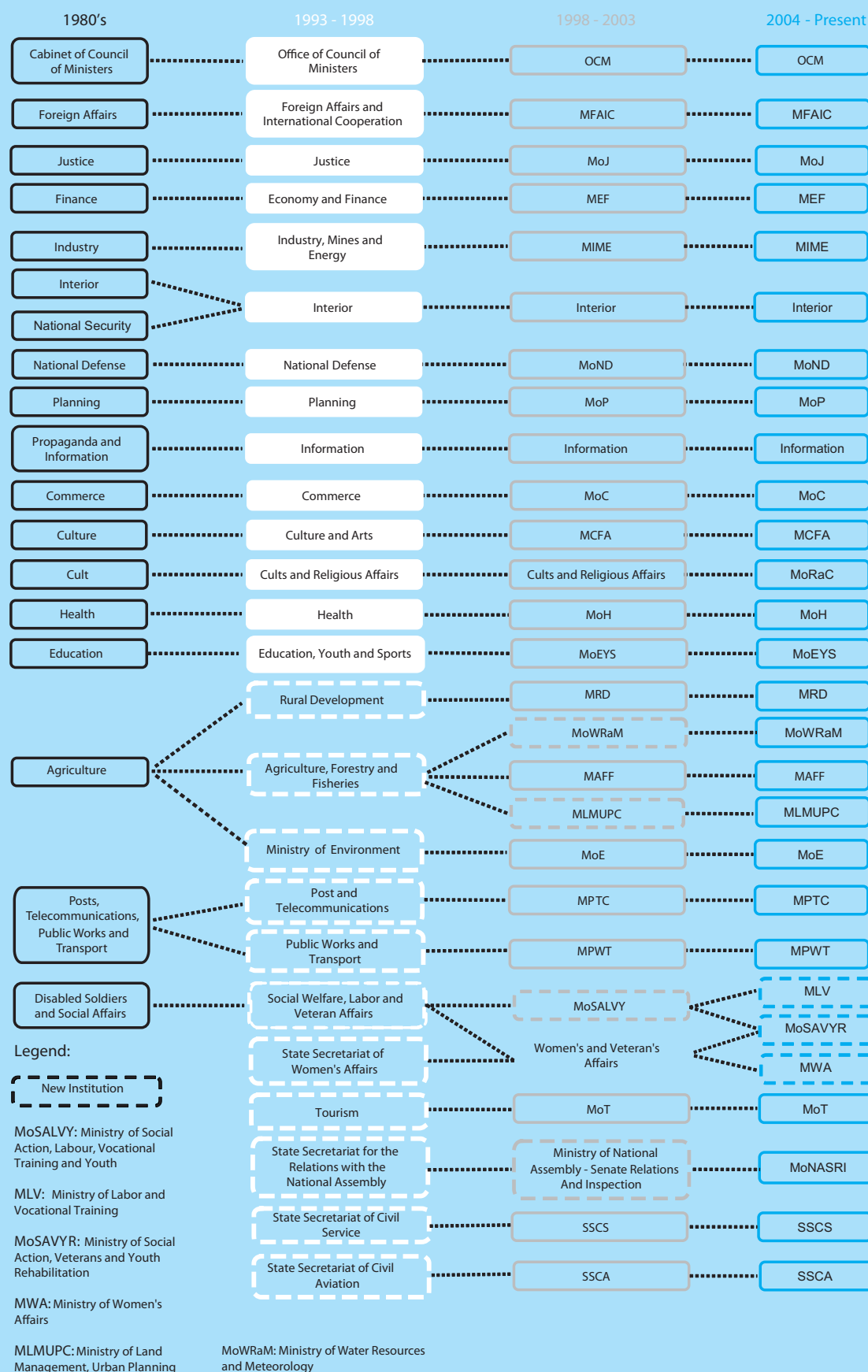
The 1994 Law on the Organization and Functioning of the Council of Ministers provides that the RGC consists of one Prime Minister, Deputy-Prime Ministers, Senior Ministers, Ministers and Secretaries of State. However, Under Secretaries of State, while receiving their salaries from the National Budget, are neither

Table 1: Evolution of the Number of Government Members

	1993	1998	2004
Prime Minister	2	1	1
Deputy Prime Minister	2	2	7
Senior Minister & Minister	21	26	28
Secretary of State	26	53	135

Source: Royal Decrees on the Appointment of the Royal Government of Cambodia

Figure 1: Evolution of Government Composition in Cambodia Since the 1980's



Source: Compiled by the Author from Royal Decrees on Appointment of the Royal Government of Cambodia and Laws on the Establishment of Ministries

members of the RGC nor permanent agents of the Administration.

In 1996, the laws on the establishment of the ministries of the second RGC provided that each ministry is headed by one Minister and one Secretary of State, assisted by as many as needed Under Secretaries of State. In addition, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of National Defense were co-headed by two ministers, one from each coalition party.

In 2006, in a move which seemed to centralize some of the power to the ruling party, the co-leadership was abolished and Funcinpec co-ministers of National Defense and Interior were dismissed. Now every ministry is headed by just one minister, assisted by Secretaries and Under Secretaries of State, bringing the number of Government members to 163 and the number of Under Secretaries to 142.

Why Reforming the Government Structure?

Administrative reform is an important step to reach good governance, which some developing countries have also included government reform.

Regional Comparison

In Southeast Asia, the size of government varies from 12 to 26 ministries or departments, without including various government agencies, and secretariats. Essential ministries usually include defense, finance, interior, foreign affairs, commerce, justice, education, and health. In developing countries such as Cambodia, agriculture and tourism are also portfolios of importance due to the structure of the population and the economy. Common-place areas of government action also include industry, culture, social action, labor, environment and natural resources, energy, transport, communications, public works. More specific ministries such as ministries

of religious affairs, women's affairs, and water resources illustrate particular issues a government wishes to handle. Ministries of information, planning, and war veterans' affairs are found mostly in former and current socialist countries.

High income ASEAN countries usually have a small-sized government (Brunei and Singapore respectively have 12 and 15 ministries). Other ASEAN members generally have a larger government, except for Laos which displays only 13 ministries, after the fundamental restructuring of its government. The Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam have undergone a reorganization of their respective government to reduce its size. China, which had an inordinately large public administration even for the size of its population, also successfully reduced the number of government departments, agencies, ministries and institutions.

The Good Governance Rule of Thumb: Keep-it-Small-and-Simple

Government composition is purely a political matter. Its ministerial structure and managerial leadership depends on the Prime Minister's will and his or her party's political platform. From one government to another, the priority issues may change, and thus ministries may be abolished or created in accordance with those priorities. There is no standard or perfect structure of government.

However, principles of consistency, efficiency, and public interests instead of individual interests, political partisanship and patronage should govern the composition of the government to first serve the State and the citizens. To foster an environment for good governance, requirements should be met by the government: transparent, accountable, efficient and effective, participatory, consensual, responsive to the needs of the citizens and public service users. Small and simple structure of government is easier to understand and interact with.

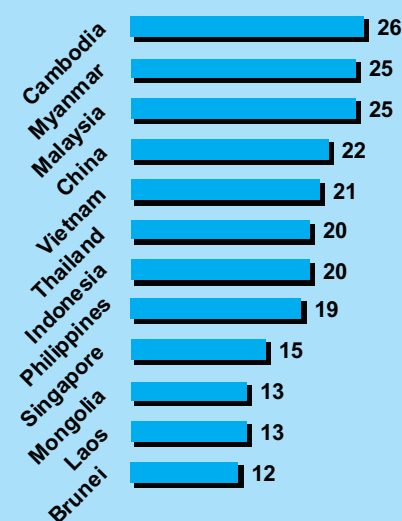
Conclusion: Back to Orthodoxy?

Because the state of their economies and private sectors do not allow it, several developing countries, with reason, rely on an extensive government to initiate an economic take-off. Government does play a fundamental role in regulating society and economy but too much public intervention has proven to generate a negative impact on economic growth in the long term. The current trend among developing countries is to reduce the size of government, both in terms of structure and intervention, as did China, Mongolia, Thailand and Vietnam.

It has yet to be assessed whether Cambodia should return to orthodoxy: cabinet centralism and economy of ministerial offices. Measuring the impact of the current government structure on budget revenues and incomes and evaluating the potential benefits from restructuring and reorganizing the cabinet are studies which would help the Government to carry out the restructuring of its cabinet.

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Figure 2: Number of Ministries in Selected Asian Countries



Source: Compiled by the Author from Government Portals