



ວາລະສານການສຶກສາສາລາວແບບຍືນຍົງ

ວິທະຍາໄລຄູສາລະວັນ

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ດຳເນີນການວາລະສານໂດຍ ວິທະຍາໄລຄູສາລະວັນ

ຄວາມສຳຄັນຂອງນະໂຍບາຍຄຳສັ່ງສາມສ້າງກ່ຽວກັບການແບ່ງຂັ້ນຄຸ້ມ ຄອງປະສິດທິພາບຂອງອົງການປົກຄອງເມືອງສັງທອງ: ຄວາມເຂົ້າໃຈ ໃໝ່ໆຂອງ ລາວ

Impact of the Three-Build Directive Policy on Decentralization Performance of Sang Thong District's Administration: Fresh insight from Lao PDR

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ບົດຄັດຫຍໍ້

ການສຶກສາຄົ້ນຄວ້າສະບັບນີ້ໄດ້ວິເຄາະວ່າ ນະໂຍບາຍການກະຈາຍອຳນາດ (decentralization) ໄດ້ລົງຜົນ
ກະທົບຕໍ່ການບໍລິການສາທາລະນະ ແລະ ການຮັບຮູ້ຂອງປະຊາຊົນໃນເມືອງສັງທອງ ແຫ່ງ ສປປ ລາວ ແນວໃດ.
ຜົນການວິໄຈຊີ້ໃຫ້ເຫັນເຖິງການເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນຂອງ ຄວາມເພິ່ງພໍໃຈຕໍ່ການບໍລິການສາທາລະນະ, ປະສິດທິພາບ, ແລະ
ຄວາມເປັນມືອາຊີບຂອງອົງການປົກຄອງເມືອງ.

- ຄວາມໝັ້ນໃຈຂອງປະຊາຊົນ: 43.33% ຂອງຜູ້ຕອບແບບສອບຖາມກ່າວວ່າ ພວກເຂົາເຊື່ອໝັ້ນໃນ
ການບໍລິການຂອງອົງການປົກຄອງທ້ອງຖິ່ນຫຼາຍຂຶ້ນ.
- ຄວາມເປັນມືອາຊີບ: ອັດຕາສ່ວນຂອງຜູ້ຕອບແບບສອບຖາມທີ່ເຫັນວ່າ ເຈົ້າໜ້າທີ່ທ້ອງຖິ່ນມີຄວາມ
ເປັນມືອາຊີບໄດ້ເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນຈາກ 21% ໃນປີ 2012 ເປັນ 27.33% ໃນປີ 2020.
- ການເຫັນຄຸນຄ່າຂອງຄຳຄິດເຫັນ: 33% ຂອງຜູ້ຕອບແບບສອບຖາມກ່າວວ່າ ຄຳຄິດເຫັນຂອງພວກເຂົາ
ຖືກເຫັນຄຸນຄ່າ, ເຊິ່ງເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນຈາກ 20% ໃນປີ 2012.

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- **ປະສິດທິພາບ:** 47.67% ຄິດວ່າເຈົ້າໜ້າທີ່ທ້ອງຖິ່ນມີປະສິດທິພາບ.

ດ້ານຄວາມເພິ່ງພໍໃຈຕໍ່ການບໍລິການສາທາລະນະໄດ້ມີການປັບປຸງໃນທຸກດ້ານ ເຊັ່ນ: ໂຄງສ້າງພື້ນຖານທາງຄົມມະນາຄົມ, ສາທາລະນະສຸກ, ການສຶກສາ, ການເກັບຂີ້ເຫຍື້ອ, ແລະ ນໍ້າດື່ມສະອາດ. ໂດຍສະເພາະ, ການສະໜອງນໍ້າດື່ມສະອາດ ໄດ້ຮັບຄະແນນເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນ 20.33 ເປີເຊັນ. ເຖິງແມ່ນວ່າຈະມີການປັບປຸງເຫຼົ່ານີ້, ບັນຫາຕ່າງໆ ເຊັ່ນ: ການຈ່າຍສິນບິນເພື່ອໃຫ້ໄດ້ຮັບການບໍລິການໄວຂຶ້ນ ແລະ ຄວາມບໍ່ພໍໃຈຢ່າງຕໍ່ເນື່ອງຕໍ່ການບໍລິການບາງປະເພດກໍຍັງຄົງມີຢູ່. ສິ່ງຄົມອອນລາຍໄດ້ກາຍເປັນເວທີສໍາຄັນສໍາລັບການສະແດງຄວາມຄິດເຫັນຂອງປະຊາຊົນ. **ສະຫຼຸບໂດຍລວມ:** ເຖິງແມ່ນວ່າການກະຈາຍອໍານາດໄດ້ປັບປຸງການຄຸ້ມຄອງ ແລະ ການບໍລິການສາທາລະນະແລ້ວກໍຕາມ, ແຕ່ກໍຍັງມີວຽກງານອີກຫຼາຍຢ່າງທີ່ຕ້ອງໄດ້ເຮັດເພື່ອແກ້ໄຂບັນຫາຄວາມບໍ່ມີປະສິດທິພາບທີ່ຍັງຄົງຄ້າງ ແລະ ຮັບປະກັນໃຫ້ເກີດຄວາມຍືນຍົງໃນຄວາມເຊື່ອໝັ້ນ ແລະ ຄວາມເພິ່ງພໍໃຈຂອງປະຊາຊົນ.

ຄໍາສັບຫຼັກ: ການກະຈາຍອໍານາດ, ການບໍລິການສາທາລະນະ, ວຽກງານ 3 ສ້າງ, ອົງການປົກຄອງທ້ອງຖິ່ນ.

Abstract

This study analyzes how decentralization policies have affected service delivery and public perceptions in Laos' Sang Thong district. The results demonstrate increases in public service satisfaction, efficiency, and professionalism in municipal government. While 43.33% of respondents said they were more confident in local government services, the percentage of respondents who saw local officials as professionals rose from 21% in 2012 to 27.33% in 2020. In addition, 33% of respondents said their ideas were valued, up from 20% in 2012, and 47.67% thought local officials were efficient. Road infrastructure, healthcare, education, waste collection, and drinking water all saw improvements in public service satisfaction, with clean drinking water receiving a 20.33 percentage point boost. Even with these improvements, problems like bribery for quicker service and persistent discontent with some services still exist. Social media has emerged as a crucial forum for public opinion. In summary, even though decentralization has improved governance and service delivery, more work is required to resolve lingering inefficiencies and guarantee sustained gains in public trust and satisfaction.

KEY WORDS: decentralization, local government, service delivery, three build directive.

Introduction

Decentralization is regarded as the most important technique for overhauling the public sector by bringing public service delivery closer to the people. In the Lao PDR, decentralization is a key strategy used to restructure the public sector, with the introduction of a new economic system in 1986 marking its beginning. However, over ten years after the pilot projects of the "Three-Build Directives" (TBD) or Sam-sang policy were initiated, the program has not been thoroughly evaluated, despite the Ministry of Home Affairs frequently gathering data from the affected areas. There is a critical need to assess the effectiveness and public benefit of the Sam-sang policy to recommend necessary changes to the national decentralization plan.

According to some scholars, decentralization means that the private sector, local governments, and subordinate or quasi-independent government entities receive authority from the central government (Rees & Hossain, 2010). This process has become a global priority and a necessity to enhance public administration. By granting local governments a certain degree

of responsibility, the decentralization reform aims to improve local government performance, which can be measured by residents' satisfaction with district administration and public services, as well as evaluations made by local authorities.

In response to public demand, the Lao government established two primary legal acts to facilitate the Sam-sang policy: Prime Minister's Instruction No. 01/2000, which emphasizes the "formulation of the province as the strategic units, district as comprehensively strong units, and the villages as the implementation units," and Party Resolution No. 03/CPP in 2012, which focuses on building districts to be more active and villages to become development units (Government of Laos, 2000; Lao People's Revolutionary Party, 2012). Since these laws were passed, experimental projects have been implemented in approximately 100 pilot communities nationwide, where villages and districts now hold increasingly significant responsibilities.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the TBD with a focus on Sang Thong district, an area that historically had less capital, a budget deficit, and slower development than other districts. Because the district has an abundance of natural resources to support socio-economic development, the Lao government included it in the TBD experimental project. Using a survey of locals and in-depth interviews with both local and central government representatives, this research investigates the policy's implementation status and its impact on the provision of local services. Determining if the Sam-sang implementation has improved the district and the lives of its citizens is vital for the future of governance in the region.

Research Purposes:

1. To investigate and analyze residents' perceptions regarding the efficiency and quality of public services following the implementation of the Three-Build Directive policy in Sang Thong District.
2. To explore and evaluate changes in the district government's approach to its responsibilities from the viewpoint of district administrators as a result of the Three-Build Directive policy.

Methodology

Framework of Study:

This study examines the effects of decentralization under the "Three Builds Directive" in Laos by gauging the effectiveness of local administration through the perceptions of the district's citizens.

Data Collection

Quantitative Survey: A survey was conducted with 300 residents in three representative villages: Banna Chalern, Banna Thiem, and Banna Lath.

Qualitative Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with two representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs and one from the Sang Thong district administration.

Sampling Technique: Judgment sampling was used to achieve a demographic mix representative of the population.

Results and Discussion

Results

The study's conclusions are shown in this section. The findings are shown in four sections based on the survey questions that were answered: People's views on the professionalism of local government representatives will be presented in section one. Their views on the effectiveness of local government will be presented in section two. Their views on the provision of public services will be presented in section three. Finally, their experiences with local government will be presented in section four.

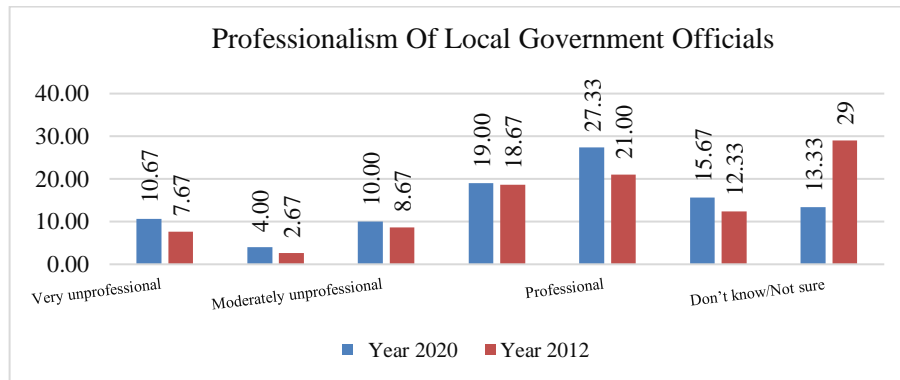


Figure 1: Perceived Level of Professionalism of Local Government

The perceived level of professionalism of local government representatives in 2012 and 2020 is shown in Figure 1. We saw a rise in the proportion of respondents who chose "professional" or "very professional." In 2012, for instance, 21% of respondents said local government officials were "professional"; by 2020, that number had risen by more than 6% to 27.33%. Furthermore, when asked about the circumstances in 2012, 29% of respondents said they were unaware of the professionalism of government officials. However, when questioned about today (2020), the number dropped to 15.67%. Thus, we might conclude that locals now view the local administration as being more professional.

Table 1 : Satisfaction on Level Capacity of Local Government in Delivery of Service

| No . | Items | Percentages |
|------|----------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Not confident at all | 1.33 |
| 2 | Slightly confident | 11.67 |
| 3 | Somewhat confident | 32 |
| 4 | Confident | 43.33 |
| 5 | Very confident | 9.67 |
| 6 | Not sure | 2 |

The respondents' confidence in the local government's ability to provide services in the modern era is seen in Table 1. The respondent provides a positive assessment overall. Of the respondents, 43.33 percent chose "confident," whereas 32% and 9.67 percent chose "somewhat confident" and "very confident," respectively. This outcome indicates that the district's local administration enjoys a comparatively high degree of trust from the populace regarding its ability to provide services.

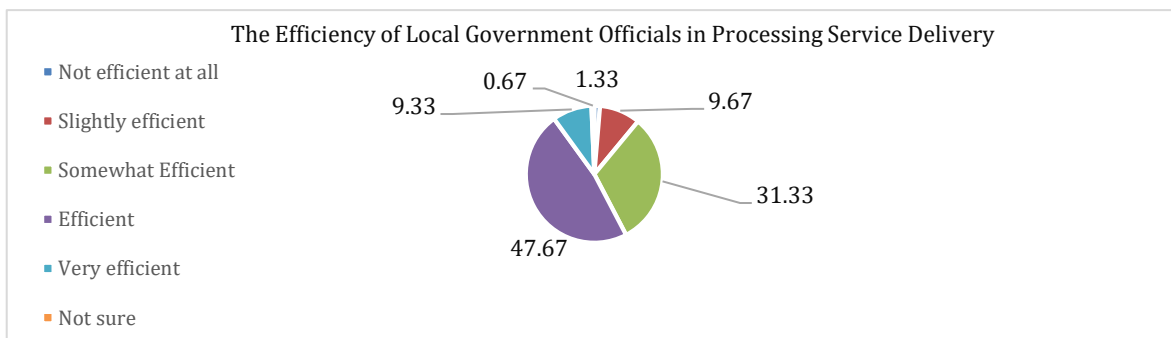


Figure 2: Perceived Level of Efficiency of Local Government Officials in Processing Service Delivery

Respondents' trust in the effectiveness of local government representatives in handling service delivery demands now is seen in Figure 2. The respondent provides a positive assessment overall. Out of the respondents, 47.67% chose "efficient," whereas 31.33% and 9.33% chose "somewhat efficient" and "very efficient," respectively. This outcome shows that, in terms of service delivery in 2020, the district's local government representatives are viewed by the locals as being comparatively efficient.

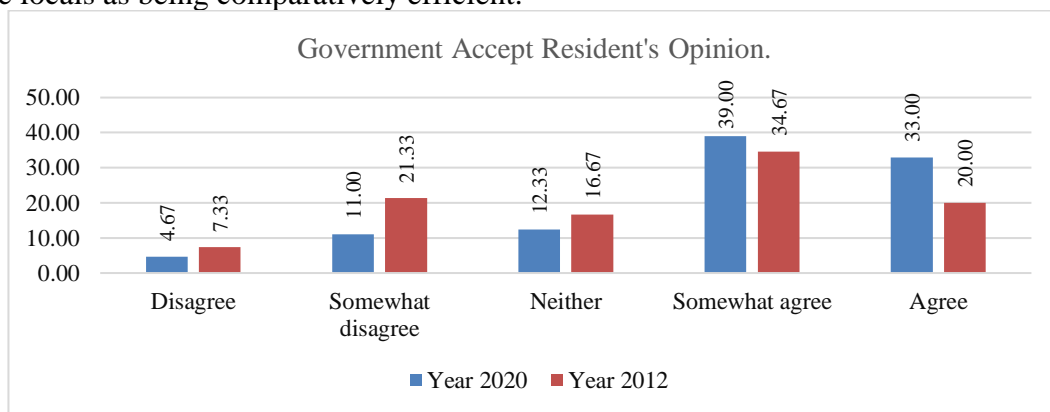


Figure 3: Does Local Government Accept Resident’s Opinion?

Opinions on local government in 2012 and 2020 are reported in this section. The respondents' perception of the local government's acceptance of residents' viewpoints is shown in Figure 3. Residents' perceptions of how much their opinions are respected are generally more positive in 2020. For instance, when questioned about 2020, 33% of respondents agree with the assertion, up 13% from 2012 (20%). Additionally, more respondents (to a greater extent) concur that the local administration respects their viewpoint. The percentage rose from 34.7% in 2012 to 39% in 2020, following the same pattern.

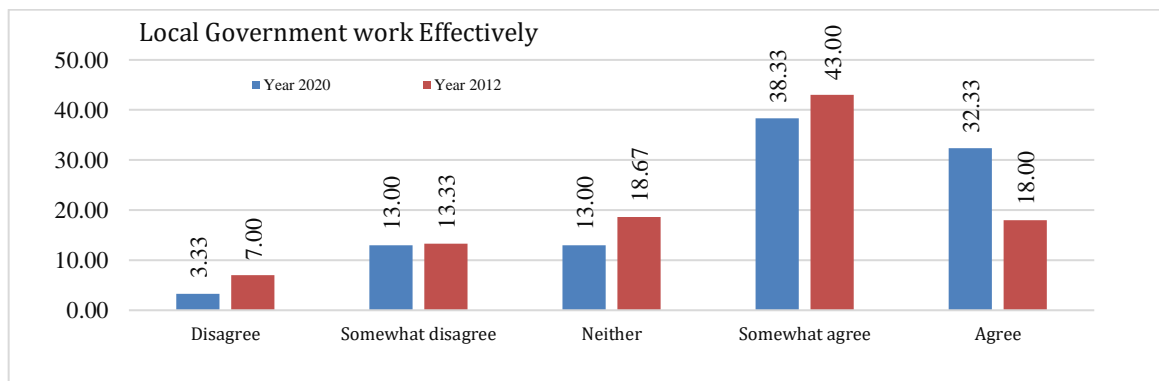


Figure 4: Does Local Government Work Effectively?

Information regarding how people see the efficacy of government activity is shown in Figure 4. There is a roughly five percentage point drop in the proportion of those who agree slightly. Nonetheless, the proportion of respondents who concurred rose significantly, rising from 18% to 32.33%. As a result, we may conclude that public opinion of the efficacy of municipal government has improved.

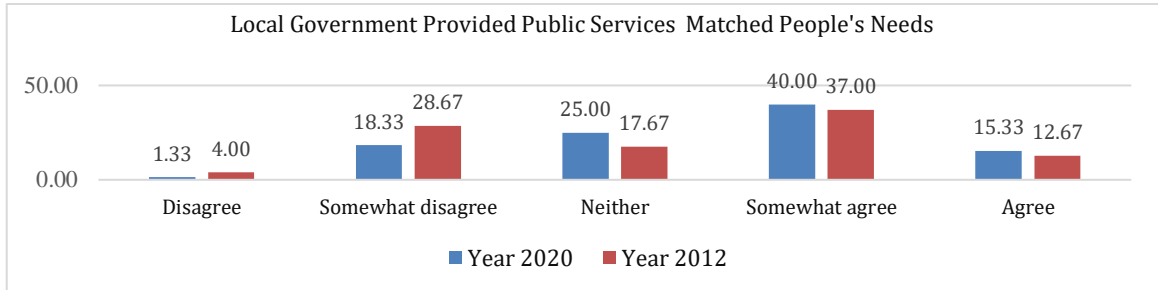


Figure 5: Does Local Government Provide Public Services That Match People's needs?

Respondents' agreement with the claim that local government offers public services that are tailored to individuals' needs is seen in Figure 5. 40% of respondents said they somewhat agreed with this statement, compared to 15.33% in 2020. When questioned about the circumstances in 2012, the numbers were a little lower (37% and 12.67%, respectively). Furthermore, the proportions of respondents who disagreed and disagreed somewhat decreased between 2012 and 2020 (2.7% and 10.34%, respectively), from 4% and 28.67%, respectively. This suggests that more individuals now than in the past believe that the local government provides public services that meet people's needs.

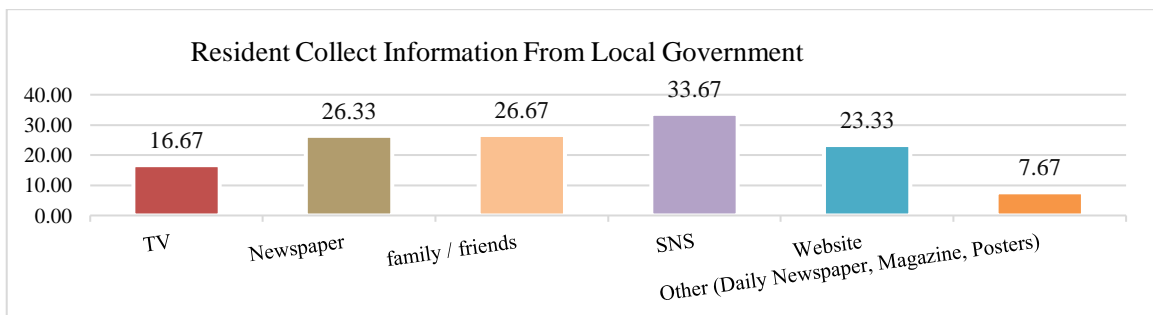


Figure 6: How Do You Collect Information from The Local Government?

The inhabitants' sources of information regarding the local government are displayed in Figure 6 (they were permitted to choose as many response options as appropriate). It reveals that a large number of people get their information from social networking sites (33.67%), followed by friends and family (26.67%), newspapers (23.33%), websites (23.33%), and so forth.

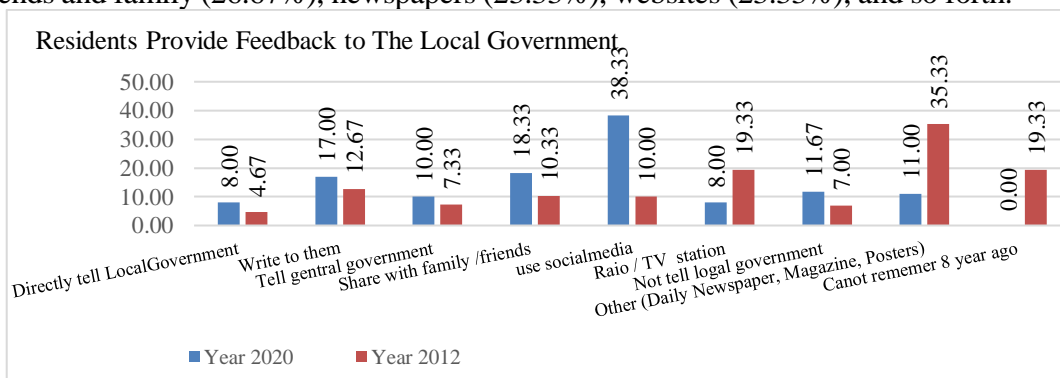


Figure 7: How Do You Provide Feedback to The Local Government?

In order to get input, we lastly asked the respondents how they interact with the local administration. In particular, we requested that they list every communication method they utilized to give input to the local administration both in 2012 and currently. The results are shown in Figure 9. It shows that 38.33% of respondents in 2020 provide feedback to the government via social media, a significant rise from 10% in 2012. In 2020, giving feedback to family members or friends who are employed by the government ranks second (18.33%), followed by writing to them (local government) (17%). In 2012, the corresponding responses for these two categories were 10.33% and 12.67%. The results indicate that the use of three sources has increased. According to the data, people are using social media, writing to local governments to voice their opinions or grievances, and discussing their opinions with family members or friends who are employed by the government.

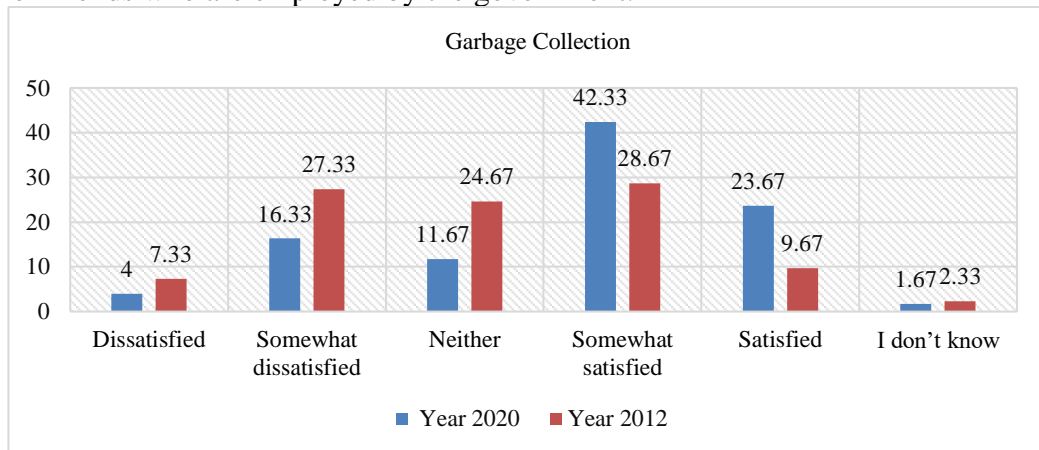


Figure 8: Satisfaction Level on Garbage Collection Service

The satisfaction of respondents with the rubbish pickup service is shown in Figure 8. In 2020, 23.67% of respondents were satisfied, while 42.33% are just moderately satisfied. When questioned about the circumstances in 2012, the percentages were lower (28.67% and 9.67%, respectively). The graph above makes it evident that, compared to 2012, more people are content in 2020. Nonetheless, in 2020, 4.3% and 16.33% of respondents, respectively, expressed dissatisfaction and slight dissatisfaction. This suggests that there is still potential for improvement in this service.

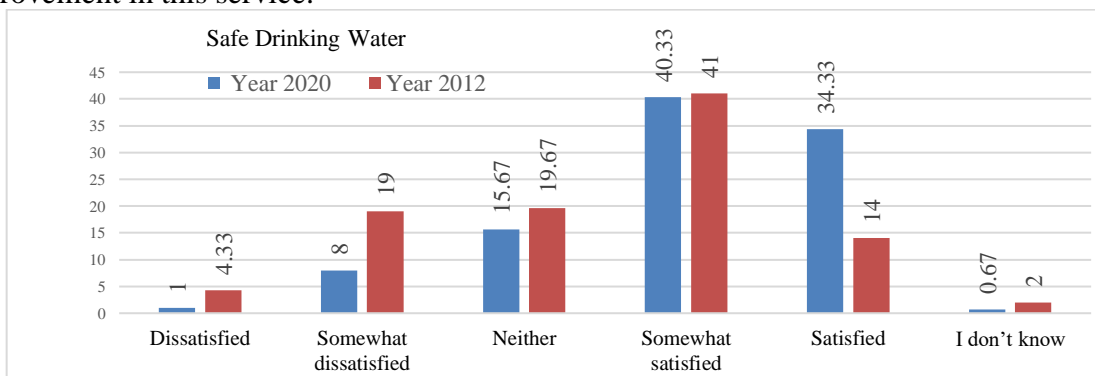


Figure 9: Satisfaction Level on Safe Drinking Water

The respondents' satisfaction with the safe drinking water supply is shown in Figure 9. In 2020, 34.33 percent of the respondents expressed satisfaction, while 40.33 percent expressed some degree of satisfaction. When questioned about the circumstances in 2012, the percentages were lower. The graph above makes it evident that, compared to 2012; more people are content in 2020. Furthermore, from 2012 and 2020, the respondent's satisfaction level improved by 20.33 percent (34.33% and 14%). However, in 2020, 1% and 8% of respondents, respectively, still expressed dissatisfaction and mild dissatisfaction.

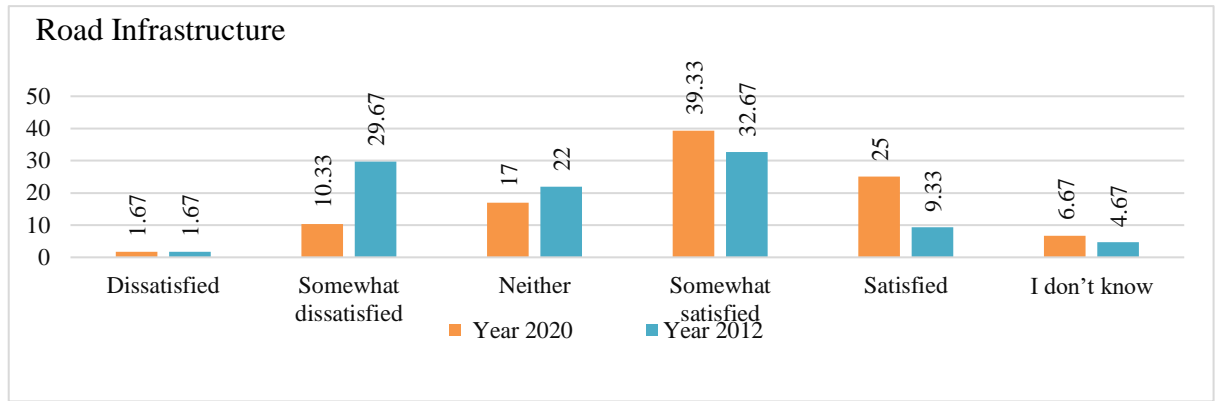


Figure 10: Satisfaction Level on Road Infrastructure

The satisfaction of respondents with road infrastructure service is shown in Figure 10. In 2020, 25% of respondents are satisfied, while 39.33% are only moderately satisfied. When asked about the circumstances in 2012, the percentages were lower (32.67% and 9.33%). Additionally, the graph indicates that the proportion of respondents who chose "somewhat dissatisfied" decreased by 19.34% between 2012 and 2020 (29.67% and 10.33%). In comparison to 2012, it made sure that more individuals were satisfied in 2020.

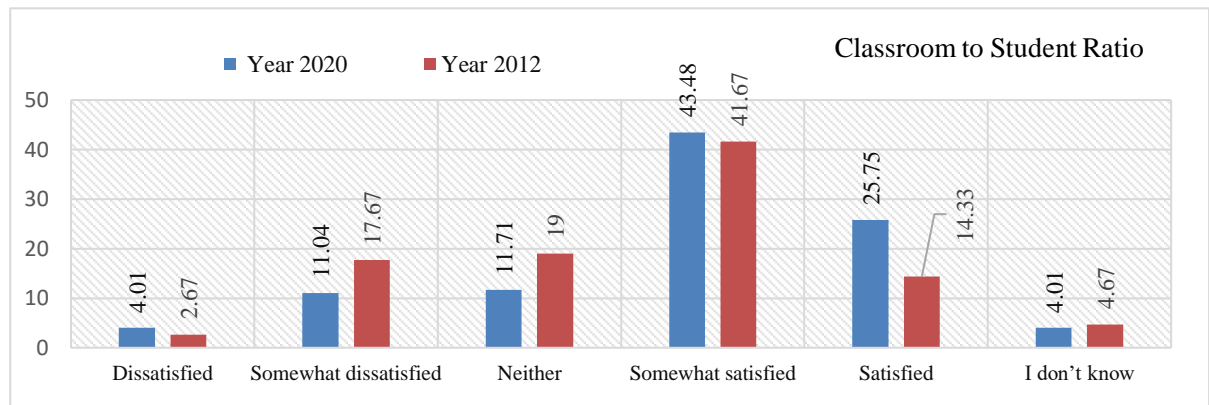


Figure 11: Satisfaction Level of Classroom to Student Ratio

Respondents' satisfaction with the classroom-to-student ratio service is seen in Figure 11. In 2020, 25.75 percent of respondents were satisfied, compared to 43.48 percent who are moderately satisfied. When questioned about the circumstances in 2012, the numbers were lower (41.67% and 14.33%, respectively). Despite a slight increase in the number of dissatisfied respondents, the percentage of respondents who chose "somewhat dissatisfied" decreased by 6.29 percentage points between 2012 and 2020 (from 17.67% to 11.04%).

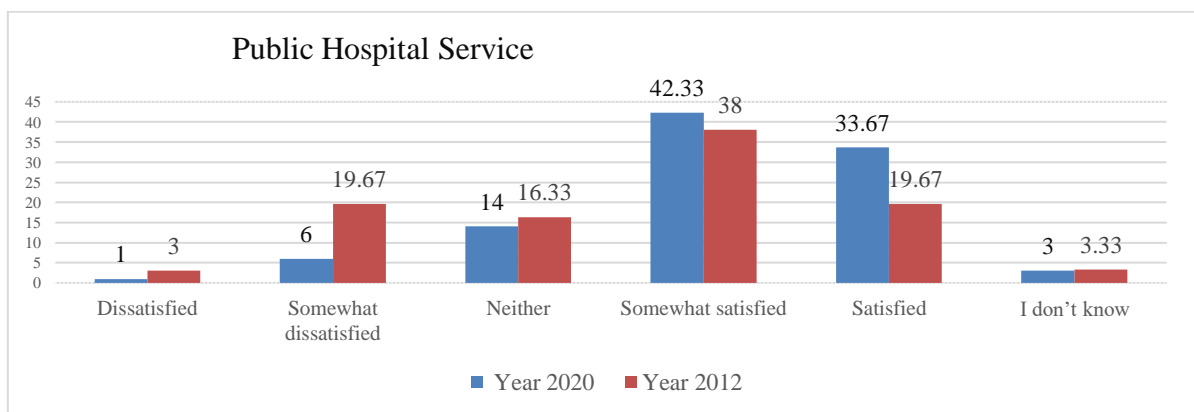


Figure 12 : Reports That Respondents' Satisfaction with Public Hospital Service

Respondents' satisfaction with public hospital services is seen in Figure 12. 33.67% of respondents are satisfied, while 42.33 percent are just moderately satisfied. Additionally, the proportion of those who chose "somewhat dissatisfied" or "dissatisfied" dropped significantly. Residents are therefore more satisfied with the public hospital service provided by the local government, according to this conclusion.

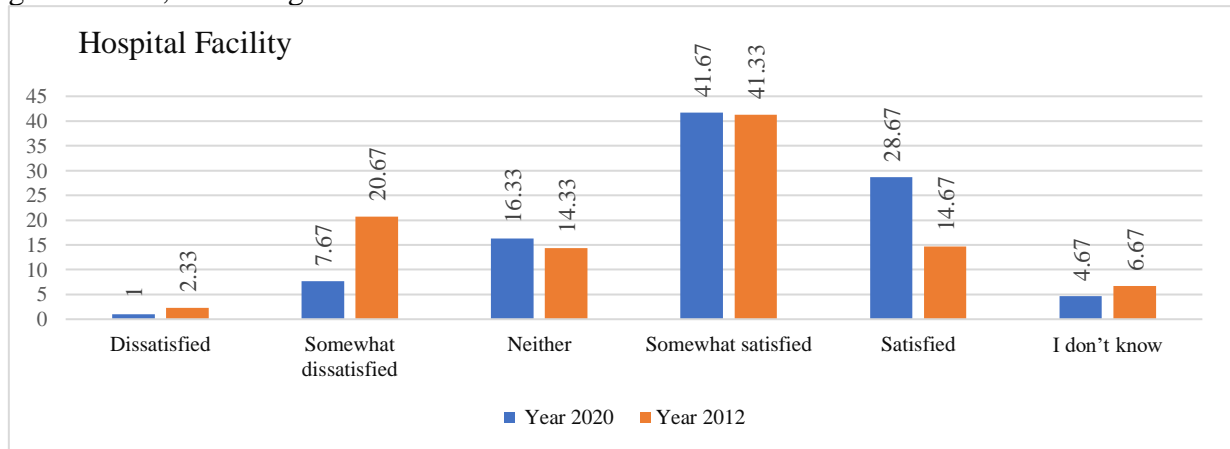


Figure 13: Satisfaction Level on Hospital Facilities

The satisfaction of respondents with hospital amenities is seen in Figure 13. In 2020, 28.67% of respondents were satisfied, while 41.67% are just moderately satisfied. When questioned about the circumstances in 2012, the numbers were lower (41.3% and 14.64 percent, respectively). Additionally, in 2012, 2.33% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, while 20.67% expressed some degree of dissatisfaction. As a result, citizens are happier with the public hospital services provided by the local government now than they were in the past.

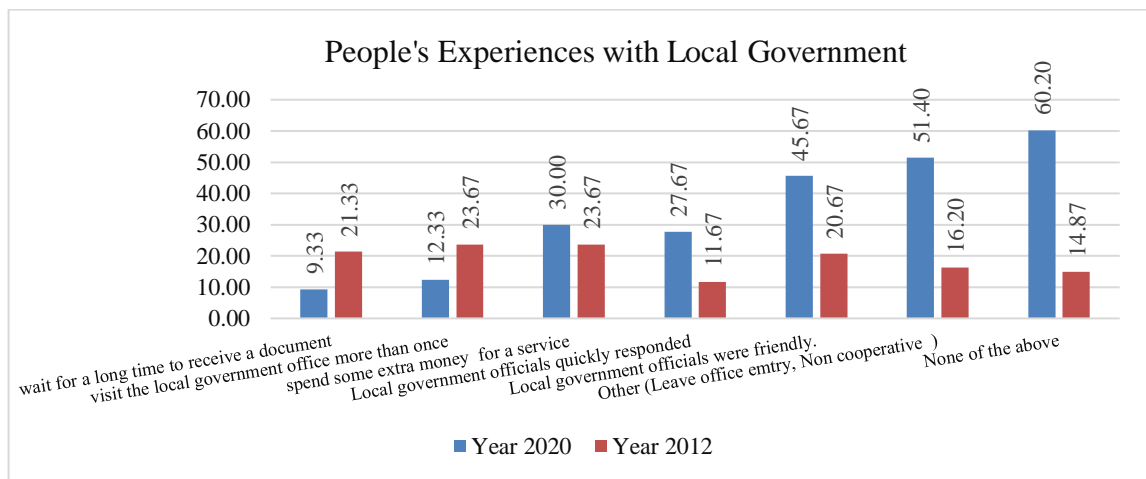


Figure 14: People's Experiences with Local Government

The respondent's experience receiving services from the local government from 2012 to 2020 is shown in Figure 14. We saw a rise in the proportion of respondents who chose "spent some extra money to get quick service from local government," "local government officials were friendly," and "local government officials were responding to people quickly." In 2020, for example, 45.67 percent of respondents said local government representatives were courteous, whereas 30% said they had to pay more for the service, and 27.67 percent said they received prompt service. When asked about the circumstances in 2012, the percentages were low (20.67%, 23.67%, and 11.67%, respectively).

In 2020, there were more respondents (12.33% and 9.33%, respectively) who thought they had to visit the local government more than once and were waiting for an officer to provide

them with a document than in 2012 (23.67 and 21.33%, respectively). According to the graphic, respondents must bribe in order to receive timely governmental services. Therefore, local governments must address people's negative experiences in order to improve the quality of their services.

Discussion

This study provides empirical insights into how the Sam-sang policy in Sang Thong district has shifted public attitudes and service quality. The rise in perceived professionalism among local representatives confirms the claim by Bovaird and Löffler (2003) that decentralization promotes professionalism through greater accountability. Furthermore, the decrease in public unawareness regarding governance indicates increased participation, aligning with the participatory governance model highlighted by Ostrom et al. (1993).

Residents' greater satisfaction with the government's attention to their opinions reflects enhanced responsiveness, consistent with classical economic views by Hayek (1945) and Musgrave (1959) regarding local requirements. Increased satisfaction in sectors like safe water, infrastructure, and waste collection aligns with findings by Aslam and Yilmaz (2011) and Faguet (1997) regarding local government adaptability.

These findings address domestic research gaps noted by Luangrath (2019) and Vongxay (2017), confirming that policy implementation translates into tangible public satisfaction. However, disparities in satisfaction levels underline the significance of ongoing capacity building and fair resource distribution, as seen in the Sri Lankan experience (Niros, 2014). The expanding role of digital platforms, echoing PACSA (2006), further demonstrates increased accountability through social media feedback.

Despite these advancements, persistent challenges like bribery and bureaucratic inefficiency point to enduring governance flaws. These negative outcomes are consistent with Maro's (1990) conclusions regarding decentralization difficulties in developing nations, including institutional gaps and elite interference.

Conclusion

The study shows that after decentralization reforms in Sang Thong district, the people's perceptions of local government professionalism, efficacy, and public service delivery have improved. This shift indicates a positive public response to the Sam-sang policy's implementation over the eight-year period examined. Key data confirms a significant increase in the perception of local officials as professional, rising from 21% in 2012 to 27.33% in 2020. Similarly, public confidence in local government service delivery increased notably, with 43.33% of respondents expressing confidence in 2020. The perceived efficiency of local government officials also improved, with 47.67% of respondents rating them as efficient, reflecting a positive shift in their ability to meet service demands. Moreover, resident engagement has improved, with 33% of residents agreeing that their ideas were valued, up from 20% in 2012. There were notable gains in the level of satisfaction with core public services, including safe drinking water, road infrastructure, healthcare, education, and waste collection. The supply of safe drinking water saw the most significant improvement, with a 20.33 percentage point rise in satisfaction between 2012 and 2020. Likewise, reduced discontent with road infrastructure suggests improved service delivery in this critical sector.

Positive changes were also observed in the residents' interactions with the local administration. Feedback channels have become more varied, with social media emerging as a major platform for public interaction, which promotes greater accountability. Although the use of polite and timely service delivery increased, a critical challenge remains: the requirement for

bribing for quicker service persists as a serious concern, highlighting fundamental governance flaws that threaten the integrity of the reforms.

Overall, the study concludes that decentralization reforms have successfully fostered tangible improvements in governance and public service delivery in Sang Thong district. However, to solidify these gains and ensure long-term sustainability, urgent steps must be taken to resolve the persistent inefficiencies and eliminate corrupt practices, thereby guaranteeing sustained public trust and equitable service provision.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations Based on Research Findings

To build on the positive shifts in Sang Thong district while addressing persistent challenges like bribery and service gaps, the following actions are proposed:

- **Professionalism and Accountability:** Implement ongoing professional development focusing on ethics and responsiveness, alongside transparent performance appraisal mechanisms for local officials.
- **Service Delivery and Infrastructure:** Increase funding and maintenance for essential services—specifically water, roads, and waste collection—prioritizing underserved areas through a specialized task force and impartial quality assurance oversight.
- **Anti-Corruption and Transparency:** Combat bribery by digitizing administrative services, establishing clear delivery protocols, and providing protected whistleblower channels for citizens.
- **Citizen Engagement:** Leverage social media, mobile apps, and community forums to create inclusive feedback loops and involve the public in decision-making and budgeting processes.
- **Local Autonomy and Equity:** Promote local decision-making autonomy regarding resource allocation while ensuring inclusive development plans address regional disparities and underserved communities.
- **Educational Sustainability:** Allocate decentralized budgets for continuous professional development of teachers and grant local authorities autonomy over educational infrastructure maintenance.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the limitations and findings of this study, future research should consider the following:

- **Longitudinal Analysis:** Conduct follow-up studies to determine if the improvements in professionalism and service satisfaction in Sang Thong are sustained over a longer period.
- **Comparative Studies:** Expand research to other districts under the Sam-sang policy to identify if these insights are unique to Sang Thong or representative of national trends.
- **Impact of Digitalization:** Investigate the specific effectiveness of digital feedback platforms and E-government tools in reducing bribery and increasing administrative transparency in rural Lao contexts.

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