

Sanitation Development in Cambodia and India: Political Economy and Civil Society

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is a comparative analysis of India and Cambodia's sanitation development and the relationship between that development and the evolving political narrative and political economy of the respective states. Despite the differences in size and scale of the two countries, both have had among the lowest levels of sanitation development in the world and both have great disparities in terms of sanitation access, particularly in rural-urban terms. Sanitation development became a major issue in India during the 2014 election that saw the BJP under Narendra Modi, sweep to power. In Cambodia, sanitation development has not seen such explicit public political focus and yet, Cambodia's levels of sanitation access have improved relatively rapidly over recent years. However, in the early 1990s, direct UN intervention in Cambodia's troubled political economy provided a fertile environment for civil society to flourish.

KEYWORDS

BJP, CPP, GDP, Hun Sen, Modi, Mr Poo, NGO, Rural, Toilets, UN, UNESCAP, UNICEF, Urban, WHO, World Bank

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is a comparative analysis of India and Cambodia's development of sanitation access for their citizens and the parallels that can be drawn between the two countries. Both have had among the lowest levels of sanitation development in the world and both have great disparities in terms of sanitation access, particularly in rural-urban terms. India's topographic diversity and sheer physical size sees great disparity in sanitation access between its Provinces. Cambodia though also has great Provincial level sanitation disparity. Despite these parallels and similarities that may be observed between Cambodia and India's sanitation development, India has begun to develop what is akin to a form of government driven 'sanitation nationalism', something that has not yet developed in Cambodia. Despite this distinction though, recent UNICEF/WHO data shows Cambodia having made significant progress in recent years with exponential growth in sanitation access. In comparison, India's progress has been more linear and now lags Cambodia's levels of sanitation access, the opposite situation to that which existed twenty years ago.

India's nascent national obsession with sanitation and hygiene has been driven by both the government and NGO sectors. The BJP, under Narendra Modi, swept to power in 2014 after an electioneering process that saw engagement with the youth of the country assure a landslide victory. Modi had tapped into the youth vote through social media by connecting with younger Indians on issues that they felt strongly about. One issue that received a degree of prominence in the campaign was that of the urgent need to tackle India's poor sanitation coverage. Ironically, Cambodia's 2013

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national elections had also seen the main party opposition, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) win a great percentage of the youth vote with social media utilised more effectively by the CNRP than by the incumbent CPP under Hun Sen.

In contrast to the Indian election, sanitation was not a major election issue in the general elections in Cambodia in 2013. One fundamental difference in the two cases was that of genuine electoral contestation. Quite simply, in the case of India, the BJP could drive the agenda particularly amongst the young who saw a real opportunity for national socio-political change. Given the result of Cambodia's 2013 elections though, the opposition CNRP is now seriously contending the CPP's power base and the youth vote and social media used to court it will be prime territory for future electoral contestation. The time is right for Cambodia to adopt a national political response to the country's poor sanitation performance via genuine electoral contestation. International and local NGOs in India are active in the new national sanitation fervour. Whilst NGOs may take actions to tackle low levels of sanitation development, these are constrained by resources and the relative competency and enthusiasm of the political response. The national government must direct the national efforts and ensure that there is integration between all actors.

Both India and Cambodia still have comparatively low levels of sanitation access, both in global terms and within their respective regions. Over the last two decades, both countries have seen increases in their levels of access to improved sanitation. Cambodia's progress has gathered pace in recent years, something that is largely the result of focus by international bodies and NGOs at all levels. India on the other hand has seen an explicit political push to address sanitation, largely as a result of the 2014 general elections that saw the BJP under Modi build the sanitation mantra as part of its ultimately successful campaign to take government. Cambodia's general election in 2013 saw a tighter contest but there was still not the widespread belief that there was a genuine electoral contest that could see a power shift from the entrenched Hun Sen led CPP.

This distinction between India and Cambodia in terms of the electoral contest has been a major factor behind the variance in national political focus on sanitation, something that could potentially change with an evolving political landscape. The input of civil society and international organisations though has arguably played well for Cambodia's recent progress. In some respects, it may be argued that NGOs and international organisations may provide more direct and effective contact within the local context. For example, education within local communities is vital to ensure that any sanitation infrastructure is properly utilised. At the same, time investment into the required infrastructure may also be facilitated by large international organisations and local NGOs.

2. POLITICAL ECONOMY

In their broad analysis of 'The Governance and Political Economy of Water and Sanitation Service Delivery', Harris, Kooy and Jones, (2011, 25-6) assert that 'there is a need to ensure that any analytical framework gives recognition not only to the local and national context, but also to the forces and political pressures associated with international players /actors.' This need to consider all political levels from the local to supranational and the relationship between them also raises a question about the relative importance of the global and the local in developing sanitation in a given polity. Understanding the prevailing political economy and socio-political context is essential to any attempt to address low levels of sanitation access in a given local area or country.

For example, in the late 1990s in India, Chaplin (1999) observed that India's middle class were relatively small and yet as a group, the middle class wielded such electoral power in that period that development resources of the state were utilised to 'appease' them as a group. Further, Chaplin (1999:157) asserted that change may only come from the middle class creating pressure and that it would seem that the only way they will be forced to develop an "awareness of the independency and a sense of responsibility for the plight of others" is when the poor become truly included in the political process. In terms of the developing role of NGOs and IOs at that time, Chaplin (1999:158)

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