

The Role and Participation of Japanese NGOs in Environmental Conservation in Cambodia

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Abstract

Japan demonstrates the importance of environmental issues as evidenced by the active role it plays concerning international environmental protection. For example, at the G8 conference in 2008, Japan raised the issue of the environment and proposed the idea of the “Cool Earth” to the conference. Japan conducts environmental work that meets the requirements of targeted countries through the government sector, NGOs, entrepreneurs and local communities. In Cambodia, Japan has played this role with organizations such as the Japan International Volunteer Centre. Japan has also initiated environmental education in primary schools and communities situated in Siem Riep province.

This article focuses on Japanese NGOs working in Cambodia. It explores how NGOs participate in environmental conservation and the outcome of their work. The study employs the database of the “Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board” of the Council for the Development of Cambodia plus secondary data from other sources. This study analyzes the factors that shape the activities of Japanese NGOs concerning environmental conservation in Cambodia.

The results reveal three factors that shape environmental activities of Japanese NGOs in Cambodia. First, environmental problems are perceived as an important global

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issue. The second factor is the relationship between Japanese NGOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The third factor is the seriousness of environmental problems in Cambodia and shortages faced in that country. The study shows that local people, the community and local stakeholders play key roles in Cambodian environmental conservation. Japanese NGOs play a supportive role more than a leadership role.

Keywords: Japanese NGOs, Environmental Conservation, Cambodia

Introduction

Concern for the environment is the core mission of many NGOs that focus on the interconnectedness between nature and society. NGOs are spreading knowledge concerning biodiversity, ecology, conservation strategies, resources and environmental management in order to solve environmental problems. NGOs are usually of a view that large developmental projects, monoculture and capitalist consumption are very dangerous to biodiversity. Thus, NGOs are trying to change this development pattern to an approach that is more diverse in terms of culture and biology. They must consider the history of an area as well as the community and local resource management.

Japan places great importance on environmental issues. Japan has demonstrated its commitment to the environment in several world forums concerning environmental protection. For example, in 2008 Japan proposed environment issues and climate changes to the G8 conference. It also announced the concept of “cool earth” in which Japan participates in environmental protection with other countries. Crucially, Japan has promoted environmental work that emphasizes

working closely with locals so that the workgroup has access to targeted areas and provides assistance that matches the needs of the local community. This has been done through local government representatives, NGOs, entrepreneurs and local communities.

In Cambodia, Japan has taken various roles in environmental protection. The Japanese government supports NGOs to play their role carefully with locals and to assure that locals are sincerely involved. For example, the Japan International Volunteer Centre (JVC) works with locals to initiate environmental education in schools and communities in Siem Reap province. They also cooperate with international organizations such as the Conservation and Landscape Management in the Northern Plains project managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

The objective of this study is to survey how many Japanese NGOs are working in Cambodia with emphasis on activities relating to environmental protection, how those organizations are involved and the activities they promote. The research analyzes the factors that shape the activities of Japanese NGOs working on environmental conservation

in Cambodia. The study is based primarily on data collected by the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board (CRDB) of the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) plus secondary information from various sources.

NGOs and their involvement in environmental issues

Various definitions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been established over the years. For example, Salamon and Anheier (1992) define 5 characteristics of NGOs: they are established officially; not under the control of government; not for profit; they are self-managed; and are usually volunteer-based. Similarly, Shigetomi (2002) defines 6 characteristics of NGOs: independence from government; not for profit; volunteer-based; established to work continuously; work for the benefit of others; and assist others without seeking anything in return. These definitions demonstrate the unique characteristics of NGOs. As problems in the world become more diverse and complicated, NGOs, governments and the capital sector have begun collaborating.

New issues are always arising in

addition to politics and economics (Lewis, 2009). Initially, NGOs emphasized social work. After the end of the cold war, NGOs expanded their duties to a wider array of issues. More recently, importance is placed on third world economic problems and social inequality resulting from development. As illustrated, environmental issues have become an important mission for NGOs.

Characteristics of Japanese NGOs on environmental involvement

Japan promotes environmental collaboration through its foreign policy to address environmental threats. Japan's environmental involvement appeared in the official development assistance (ODA) charter in 1992 with emphasis on environmental conservation and human development. In 2003, the charter of the ODA was revised. Several new policies focusing on threats to humans were brought into practice. At this stage, environmental problems needed to be addressed on a global scale.

Japan has presented a concept for environmental management, research and development, and public innovation that can be used as a model in other countries.

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For example, in 2008 at the G8 meeting in Hokkaido, one of the important issues was “environment and climate change”. A long term goal was set to decrease greenhouse gases to half of the current level by 2050. Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announced the concept of “Cool Earth” which comprised 3 elements: The Kyoto Protocol; international cooperation on the environment; and innovation. In addition, forestry, biodiversity and the 3R concept (reduce/reuse/recycle) were discussed. Education concerning sustainable development was also on the agenda (Embassy of Japan in Thailand, 2008). The government announced its intention to increase assistance to developing countries to help them cope with climate change relating to natural disasters. There was also the founding of “Green Climate” that aimed to reduce the effects of climate change.

More recently, delegates at a UN summit meeting in New York discussed a framework that emphasized international collaboration on disaster management (Japan Times, September 20, 2014). A proposal called “Japan’s Initiatives to Cope with Global Environmental Problems” resulted from amplification

of various threats. Japan realized that it could not manage the threats by itself and international cooperation was needed. A framework for international cooperation to cope with challenges was established. These included 1) climate change; 2) conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources; 3) conservation of wildlife and plants to maintain ecological balance; 4) conservation of forestry and resistance to their conversion into desert and the cause of drought; 5) Ozone protection, industrial waste and chemical management; 6) collaboration and giving importance to Antarctica and neighboring countries in Asia; and 7) giving ODA with regard to the environment by giving financial support to the activities of international organizations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2010).

Japanese NGOs are voluntarily engaged in international cooperation activities. Moreover, Japanese NGOs have special characteristics in developing countries such as responding to local needs more effectively than government aid programs. They have the potential to take immediate action to provide assistance. Norio Ehara explains that,

“...in the field of international

cooperation, Japanese NGOs are essential partners to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) for implementing Japanese aid with greater visibility. In recent years, MOFA has considerably strengthened its partnerships with NGOs. By working closely with NGOs, we aim to promote a broad range of participatory approaches to international cooperation as well as effective and efficient implementation of official development assistance (ODA)..." (Non-Government Organizations Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.).

Japanese NGOs are important partners of the MOFA for Japanese aid policy. They enhance the effectiveness of official development assistance (ODA). A paper written by the Non-Government Organizations Cooperation Division of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes the partnership between Japanese NGOs and MOFA on three levels: 1) Funding assistance for NGOs for overseas projects; 2) creation of an enabling environment for NGOs to build their capabilities; 3) dialogue and consulting with Japanese NGOs concerning policies for official development assistance and for government-NGO partnership.

At the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, Japan proposed the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Japan adopted the UN General Assembly resolution and the DESD commenced in 2005. In 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment proactively accepted the Rio+20, a document created by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development that was founded by NGOs and other stakeholders (Non-Government Organizations Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.).

For work concerning environmental issues, Japan cooperates multilaterally with other countries and international organizations. Japan is expanding its cooperation with organizations whose work is consistent with the needs of people in recipient countries through NGOs, local government and entrepreneurs. This approach emphasizes working closely with partners.

Environmental situation in Cambodia

Cambodia is facing a crisis that is embedded in a market economy that lacks efficient management. It faces serious

environmental problems that negatively impact biodiversity and deplete natural resources. These problems were first observed in the late 1980s when the Cambodian government pursued a policy that promoted a market economy. For example, they granted concessions for fishery areas where private concessionaires claimed their lawful right to exclude others. Then they pocketed aquatic animal resources as much as possible using modern fishery equipment. Licensed and non-licensed fishermen rushed to catch fish in the Tonlesap lake. Fishermen bribed government officials to allow their use illegal of modern fishery equipment (Somountha, 2008). Some of the fishery equipment greatly affected aquatic animal resources such as the use of poison, bombs, electric shock and fishing nets that were smaller than stipulated by law.

Meanwhile, illegal deforestation is taking place all over the country. Mining for gems along the border with Thailand has led to loss of local dwelling space and a decrease in biodiversity. Mangrove deforestation seriously threatens natural fishing and causes landslides. Residents in remote areas do not have access to clean water and there is a major decline

in fish populations due to illegal fishing and over fishing activities (CIA World Factbook, 2014).

The Country Environment Profile for the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia explains how Cambodia needs international organizations and NGOs to help it solve environmental problems:

“...The Cambodian environmental situation leads to a need for strong partner support at all levels, from regional policies and collaboration, to local peoples’ organizations, in order to reverse negative trends; build a foundation for sustainable growth that reduces poverty and includes an ever more active population; and enhances natural and social capital in a climate-smart fashion. This support should seek urgently to demonstrate viable alternatives to the depletion of natural capital. It should also work with a clear strategy of ‘doing good’, i.e. increase natural capital, and enhance green growth, inclusion and job creation...” (European Union, 2012)

Japanese NGOs and environmental conservation in Cambodia

Japan’s involvement in environmental conservation in Cambodia has

taken many forms. For example, in the Japan-Mekong Region Partnership Program in 2007, importance was placed on health and environmental problems. At the 2009 Mekong-Japan Summit held in Tokyo, Japan proposed methods to solve climate change that the government considers to be national policy. Moreover, it gave assistance in the form of a low-interest loan for a 3-year project on water resources and wastewater treatment. In addition, there has been cooperation on infrastructure, transportation, environmental conservation and human resource development.

An important document named the Tokyo Strategy 2012 for Mekong-Japan Cooperation focused on a sustainable environment. An initiative called Green Mekong proposed by Japan provides assistance on various environmental issues covering forestry management, biodiversity conservation, natural disaster management, water resource management, urban air pollution and a decrease of greenhouse gases (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

In Cambodia, Japan has worked with international organizations such as

UNESCO, ADB, FAO and WHO, plus governments of other countries such as Finland, Australia and Cambodia. Cooperation between NGOs from Japan and other countries is needed to establish a network that extends all over the country. Some are working collaboratively with stakeholders such as entrepreneurs and local communities. Japanese representative agents, both from governmental sectors and NGOs work in collaboration with partners such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR), Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), Japan International Volunteer Center (JVC), the PH-Japan Foundation (PHJ), the Japan - Cambodia Interactive Association (JCIA) and the Japan Team of Young Human Power (JHP). Numerous activities include providing funds, technical assistance and hosting activities.

Based on the CDC database, Japanese NGOs can be compared with NGOs from Cambodia and other countries in terms of their numbers and active projects as shown in the following figure:

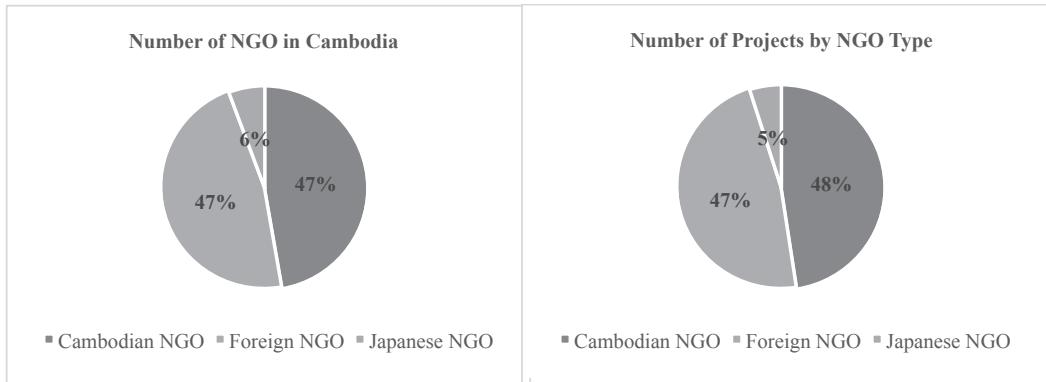


Figure 1 Number of NGO and active projects

Source: Calculated from the DCD database (http://cdc.khmer.biz/ngo/report/report_by_ngo_type.asp)

Data in the figure shows 529 active NGOs in Cambodia which include 250 NGOs from Cambodia and 279 NGOs from other countries. 30 NGOs from Japan account for 6 percent of the total. There are 910 active projects run by these NGOs; about 45 of the projects are run by Japanese NGOs. This is about 5 percent of the total. These projects include JACE NGO School run by the Japan-Asia Culture Exchange. It supports and promotes education and aims to decrease educational expenses in Cambodia. Another project called Community

Livelihood Improvement through Ecological Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (CLEAN) is run by the Japan International Volunteer Centre (JVC). Its objective is to give training in agriculture, small farm management and to provide education regarding environmental study at elementary schools in the community.

Japan is also multilaterally involved. Based on the database as of 2010, Japan took part in a budget supporting NGO activities in Cambodia worth USD 2,343,421.41 as illustrated in the table:

NGO Name	Project Title	Start Date	Completion Date	Amount	Own Fund
Hazardous Area Life Support Organisation Trust (HALO)	Mine Clearane in Cambodia	1/1/1992	12/31/2015	47,813.57	156,186.00
International Volunteers of Yamagata (IVY)	Development of Supply and Distribution System for Vegetable in SvayRieng Province	1/1/2010	3/31/2012	158,248.00	
Japan Mine Action Service (JMAS)	1. UXO Reduction Project in South-East Part of Cambodia 2. Community Based Demining	7/12/2005 6/1/2006	12/31/2012 9/8/2012	796,264.00 928,217.00	22,774.00 292,820.00
PH-Japan Foundation PHJ	Maternal and Child Health Project	1/1/2005	6/30/2011	63,893.48	171,340.00
Services for the Health in Asian and African Regions SHARE	Child Health Promotion in SvayAngtor Operation District	1/3/2008	2/28/2011	141,760.00	38,856.00
Shanti Volunteer Association SVA Library Project	Library Project	9/1/1993	12/31/2011	115,363.00	209,173.00
Tokushima International Cooperation TICO	Capacity Building of Maternal, Child Health Services and Primary Emergency Care in Operational District West	9/20/2007	9/20/2011	91,862.36	24,787.73

Source: the CDC database

15 NGOs took part in 26 activities regarding the environment and conservation in Cambodia. Most host NGOs were of Cambodian nationality and none of them were Japanese. However, Japan has been involved in several important partnerships. One partnership was the Institute of Environment Rehabilitation and Conservation (ERECON). This group ran an activity called Enhancing Sustainable Agriculture and Reforestation for Local Farmers and School Students in Cambodia. Their objective was to demonstrate sustainable agriculture and reforestation to local farmers and school students in Cambodia. The project ran from 2010 to 2014 with a budget of USD 484,914. Of that total, USD 270,931 was subsidized by the Japanese government. The project covered five provinces in Cambodia, including Battambang Kampong Cham Mondul Kiri Phnom Penh Takeo. The project was conducted in collaboration with the Royal University of Agriculture.

Another important partnership was called the Japan International Volunteer Centre (JVC). It ran a project called the Community Livelihood Improvement through Ecological Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (CLEAN)

in Siem Reap province. The objective was to provide agricultural training and materials such as seeds and seedlings. They also provided water resources for small-scale farming such as wells or ponds. Finally, they conducted environmental education at primary schools and in the community. This project ran from 2010 to 2013 with a budget of USD 672,677 in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Most of the staff on the project were local government officials.

The third major partnership is known as School Aid Japan. This is a non-profit incorporated foundation (SAJ) that runs 3 projects in Cambodia, one of which relates to the environment. That project is called School Aid Japan Farming Kampong Chanang province. The objective is to conserve the environment by educating the community about organic farming, and reusing waste rather than using chemicals for the benefit of the natural environment system. It is running from 2010 to 2017 with a budget of USD 531,707. The project is conducted in collaboration with the Cambodian government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. SAJ

aims to improve the employment rate by providing local communities and youth with training, knowledge and skills necessary to work in agriculture. The foundation encourages prospective farmers to learn recycling-oriented organic farming. They are taught to take full advantage of the natural system such as the capacity of soil instead of employing chemical fertilizers or synthetic agrochemicals. SAJ also aims to stabilize employment in areas surrounding farms by facilitating job opportunities on farms or at their training center.

Japan's intention is to provide environmental assistance to Cambodia. Importance is placed on the community and local resource management. This study found that Japanese NGOs do not directly lead environmental conservation in Cambodia. Rather, Japanese NGOs work collaboratively with international organizations, NGOs from other countries and local stakeholders such as the Institute of Environment Rehabilitation and Conservation (ERECON). Working collaboratively is consistent with the concept that the community and local stakeholders should play the key role in environmental conservation. This enables

projects to respond more effectively to local needs and problems. For example, ERECON conducts environmental conservation activities collaboratively with the Royal University of Agriculture. Similarly, the Japan International Volunteer Centre (JVC) conducts environmental conservation activities collaboratively with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The study found that projects and activities of Japanese NGOs typically focus on creating sustainable solutions to environmental problems. Many projects have solved environmental problem by educating local stakeholders. This approach develops human resources and enables them to solve environmental problem in their own area.

This study has identified three major factors that shape the activities of Japanese NGOs working on environmental conservation in Cambodia. First, environmental problems are conceived as an important global issue. Second, the relationship between Japanese NGOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is crucial. Third, NGOs realize the severity of environmental problems and shortages in Cambodia.

Environmental problems are an important global issue. Japan's involvement in environmental conservation in Cambodia includes the Japan-Mekong Region Partnership Program in 2007. Two years later, the 2009 Mekong-Japan Summit was held in Tokyo. Then, the Tokyo Strategy for Mekong-Japan Cooperation was proposed in 2012.

The relationship between Japanese NGOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has been shown to be very important as explained above. Japanese NGOs are important partners for implementing Japanese aid policy with greater visibility. The Non-Government Organizations Cooperation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d.) explains that "Japanese NGOs have special characteristic of helping people in developing countries such as the roles of Japanese NGOs can respond to grassroots needs better than government aid programs and Japanese NGOs have potential to take immediate action to provide assistance in response to the needs of people."

The third important factor that Japan recognizes is the severity of Cambodian environmental problems. Cambodia needs strong support at all levels. The European Union (2012) states

that Cambodia's environmental situation leads to a need for strong partner support at all levels ranging from regional policies and collaboration to local organizations. These are needed to reverse negative trends. They also need to build a foundation for sustainable growth that reduces poverty and includes a more active population. This approach will enhance natural and social capital in a climate-smart fashion.

Conclusion

Japanese environmental policy is to cooperate with numerous international partners. Japan employs the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NGOs to implement environmental aid and projects. Many Japanese NGOs have been working in Cambodia over the last few decades. Japanese NGOs typically play a supportive role to local groups. The key policy is that local people, the community and stakeholders in the area should play the key role in environmental conservation. Japanese NGOs highly value taking a sustainable approach to environmental problems as evidenced by the Japan International Volunteer Centre (JVC) and School Aid Japan project.

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