

Chapter 7

Environmental Leadership Development: A Cambodian Case

Hironori Hamasaki and Hiroyuki Katayama

Abstract This chapter presents an overview of the activities of Asian Program for Incubation of Environmental Leaders (APIEL)'s Cambodia Unit and its self-evaluation. First, we clarify the reason why Cambodia was chosen as a location to implement APIEL's field exercise unit. Second, the basic concept and approach are introduced. Third, program components that include preliminary tasks, on-site program, and subsequent presentations and reports by students are shown. Finally, self-examination is given to propose recommendations to improve the Cambodia Unit.

Keywords ODA • Solid waste management • Sustainable development • Tourism • Water supply

7.1 Introduction

Cambodia's economic growth has been expected to accelerate to its fastest pace over a decade by a burst urban construction funded by foreign aid and investment. According to the International Monetary Fund, Cambodia's yearly average GDP growth rate over the last 10 years is 7.7% [1] and it will bring new investments. Likewise many other developing Asian countries where the economy is growing rapidly, environmental

H. Hamasaki
Research Institute for Humanity and Nature,
Kyoto, Japan
e-mail: hamasaki@chikyu.ac.jp

H. Katayama (✉)
Department of Urban Engineering, Graduate School of Engineering,
7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-8656, Japan
e-mail: katayama@env.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp

problems, such as water contamination, air pollution, and chaotic urbanization, have risen to the surface and are affecting people's lives and health in Cambodia. In addition, this country lacks both of physical infrastructure and human resource. It is urgent to draw the nation's pathway to build a sustainable society for the next generation.

Cambodia, on the other hand, has its unique history symbolized by Angkor Wat Temple and the Pol Pot regime. The Angkor Wat Temple, one of the most conquering kings of the Khmer Empire, Suryavarman II, constructed in the beginning of the twelfth century, is considered as one of the largest temples in the world. The number of visitors has been increasing substantially in recent years, and the provincial tourism department reported in the year 2012 that about two million foreign tourists visited this World Heritage site. However, the municipal government of Siem Reap that holds jurisdiction over Angkor Wat has been suffering from problems such as water supply, solid waste management, heavy traffic, etc. On the other hand, the Pol Pot regime was built by a communist party, Khmer Rouge, in 1970s. They attempted to build a farming society. However, it resulted in the death of 25 % of the country's population including those highly educated from starvation, overwork and executions (genocide). Even today, some are afraid of the re-emergence of a similar political reign. This sense of fear among people is still causing serious social issues such as low school enrollment ratio, and delaying the sound development of Cambodia, leaving the country in tough environment in every aspect.

These facts provide a hint why we chose Cambodia for one of APIEL's field exercise units' study site: this country was considered to be one of the best places where students acquire a holistic view over environmental issues with social and economic insights.

7.2 Basic Concept and Approach of the Cambodia Unit

The theme of Unit "sustainable development in Cambodia" reflexes the complex nature of Cambodia's environmental issues. The United Nations says in the Brundtland Reports that "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [2]." However, sustainable development in the context of Cambodia is wide-ranging and elusive.

Each student started with answering the core question that was "what is most important for sustainable development in Cambodia?" They had difficulty in the first place to respond this theme and struggled. However, eventually, they identified and addressed the emergent environmental issues to be solved through communication among group members. This process was what we intended. Environmental problems that were causing conflicts among stakeholders often had complicated relationships with other issues, such as poverty or social justice. The authors believe that the students should not choose their own topic of study for setting an easy answer. Students who wish to be environmental leaders must struggle throughout the discourse of problem identification with other stakeholders before finding *the* answer.

The main objective of the Cambodia Unit was to foster responsible environmental leaders who can bravely criticize and seek for fundamental solutions to the complex and broad environmental issues in Cambodia. In the course to find or define a problem, the students developed a very important quality: a sense of *responsibility*. The authors often encouraged students to enjoy struggling during the Unit. Why? In the real world, leaders have to go through a time consuming process of finding problems and solutions in order to bring positive changes to a society. Thus, this struggle at this phase was intended to encourage the students to improve their leadership qualities, namely the discussion and communication skills.

Authors observed how their opinions and ways of thinking would change during the implementation of this Unit. The result was quite interesting. At the beginning of the Unit, their opinions were based mainly on their own academic backgrounds and majors. In other words, they looked at problems from only one direction. However, the students' opinions after their trip became more multifaceted, and their reports were written from holistic viewpoints.

7.3 Contents of the Cambodia Unit

The Cambodia Unit consists of three parts: (1) preliminary lectures and assignments before visiting Cambodia, (2) fieldwork during a stay in Cambodia, and (3) final presentations and reports after the fieldwork. The details on each part are described in the following sections.

The basic idea of the Cambodia Unit is to combine one lecture with one associated site visit on the same day. One day, for example, we took up the case of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in the morning we had a lecture on JICA's operation in Cambodia, and then in the afternoon, we had a site visit that supplemented the details. Students seemed to recognize the importance of visiting and seeing sites. In other words, lectures provided rich information, but students were able to find more useful information by looking at real-life situations. Also, students uncovered the differences among themselves after visiting the same place, which brought out a good chance to experience the diversified ideas. This program construction reflected other intentions of Unit organizers. Students were supposed to understand the real situation of environmental issues in Cambodia as well as to think why those environmental problems are difficult to solve through site visits. This approach motivated students to investigate how big the difference between learning knowledge from textbooks and seeing things as they are with their own eyes is.

7.3.1 Preliminary Lectures and Assignments

Preliminary activities before the on-site program in Cambodia were significant for two reasons. First, preliminary lectures were necessary for students because

they have never visited Cambodia or known that much about Cambodia. Thus, these lectures focused on providing fundamental information and knowledge such as historical, economic, social, and environmental issues. Above all, learning the history of the Pol Pot regime was indispensable for understanding Cambodia; Cambodian society even today is suffering from its aftermath. In addition to that, as a collateral benefit, participants from different universities were able to get to know each other through a teleconferencing system before meeting together in Cambodia. Second, preliminary assignments were helpful for students to start communication, discussion, and interaction with each other from an early stage of Unit implementation. Sharing academic background sheet of each participant was also useful for students to have better idea about the others, helping them to discuss and exchange opinions more smoothly, even when using Web- and e-mail-based communications.

The significance of the preliminary meeting was typically seen when we compare the implementation of the Unit in 2011 with that in 2012. In 2011, students from the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) could not attend preliminary lectures because they did not have access to a teleconferencing system. That year, it took some certain time for RUPP students to mix comfortably with others from The University of Tokyo (UT) and Seoul National University (SNU). In 2012, the RUPP students attended the preliminary lecture through a teleconferencing system, thanks to the cooperation of World Bank and JICA. This three-way meeting enabled students from three different universities to communicate smoothly from the beginning to the end of the field exercises in Cambodia.

7.3.2 *Fieldwork in Cambodia*

7.3.2.1 Lectures

The topics of lectures held in Cambodia were deliberately wide-ranged since the main theme of this Unit was sustainable development. We selected several rather general topics for lectures, including water supply, solid waste management, rural development, Official Development Assistance (ODA), tourism, etc. Naturally, stakeholders related to these lectures have diverse views.

In 2011, we had lectures from JICA, the Korean International Cooperation Agency, Community Sanitation and Recycling Organization, urban planning consultants, local government officials from the city of Siem Reap, and the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap which is an organization managing Angkor Wat. Based on these lectures, all the groups discussed and decided on their own topics for their final presentations.

When we started the preparation of Cambodia Unit in 2012, we reviewed the program held in 2011 and found it necessary to prepare a lecture related to leadership. Therefore, we requested Mr. Ek Sonn Chan through local JICA office to give us a lecture (Fig. 7.1). He was appointed in 1993 as the General Director of Phnom



Fig. 7.1 Lecture on leadership by Mr. Ek Sonn Chan

Penh Water Supply Authority where he exercised strong leadership, and contributed to the reconstruction of the water supply system in Phnom Penh. In particular, he succeeded in collecting water fees from over 90 % of households, which is seldom the case with developing countries that suffer from weak or lack of governance. He is respected by the people in Cambodia and has been called an incredible person [3, 4]. His lecture gave some valuable insights on leadership to the students based on his experiences of struggle to overcome many obstacles. His message greatly impressed the students and helped them to appreciate the various aspects of leadership and their own lives.

7.3.2.2 Site Visits

The sites to visit were chosen carefully, taking the advices from lecturers. For example, for water supply and urban flood control projects arranged by JICA, we visited a water treatment plant as well as a pumping station, and observed the drainage system (Fig. 7.2).

In the Cambodia Unit, along with the specific environmental issues, students were required to think about the nation's history with a holistic viewpoint because of the impact of Pol Pot regime on various aspects of people's life in Cambodia.



Fig. 7.2 On-site lecture on flood control in Phnom Penh

Thus, the faculty members let students visit symbolic places of genocide, such as the “killing fields,” Tuol Sleng Museum in Phnom Penh, and the “killing cave” in Battambang, that turned out to be an experience that was beyond description. In addition, the visit to Angkor Wat revealed another issue that Cambodia is facing the conflict between economic development through tourism and environmental preservation.

7.3.2.3 Group Work

We allocated time for group work almost every day for around 10 days to prepare for final presentations. That means, students have to communicate with each other every day (Fig. 7.3). They seemed surprised to have found that, even though they visited the same place, they had different ideas about what they saw, and were interested in different aspects of sustainable development in Cambodia. They also realized the importance of listening to and respecting the others through their group discussions. The students then had to make decisions, as well as organize their thoughts, for the final presentations.

As mentioned in Sect. 7.2, we let each group determine their own topic by themselves from wide-ranging topics related to sustainable development. We believe that this was a good training for them to cultivate leadership. It took almost all the



Fig. 7.3 Interview with JICA staff as part of group work

groups a lot of time to agree on their own topic. They “struggled,” but later said in their feedback that this was a very good experience.

7.3.3 Final Presentations and Reports

It was a requirement for UT students to make final presentations and submit reports after the completion of on-site program. They made the presentations more informative and better structured than the ones they gave in Cambodia on the last day of the fieldwork. They re-arranged the contents and added some new materials they searched for after their return.

The final reports that the UT students submitted were interesting. The question for the final report was “What is most important for sustainable development in Cambodia?” the same question we asked for the preliminary assignment. Their answers were based mainly on their own academic backgrounds. However, on the contrary, their final reports were written from a holistic view; that was, not only based on their own chosen academic fields but also from diversified viewpoints. Their final reports became very rich and impressive. This result indicates that our strategy was effective for cultivating a holistic point of view, which is thought to be essential for environmental leaders.

7.4 Self-evaluation of the Cambodia Unit

The Cambodia Unit was successfully conducted twice in 2011 and 2012, respectively. The Unit was found to be satisfactory for students according to our self-evaluation. The following sections discuss the evaluation of the Unit.

7.4.1 The Improvement on Lecture Preparation

The theme of this Unit was too broad for them to approach from a holistic viewpoint. As a consequence, in 2011, students found it difficult to initiate group work with a concrete idea under severe time pressure. Therefore, in 2012, we offered the preliminary lectures using a teleconferencing system. This enabled students to have clear ideas about the environmental issues in Cambodia in advance of the actual field visit.

In addition, through the collaboration with many organizations, the lectures were carefully chosen from different stakeholders; government sector, foreign government-related organization, non-governmental organization, profit and non-profit organization. The topics included various environmental issues, such as solid waste management, urban flooding, water management and urban development. As is mentioned earlier, one of the characteristics of the development in Cambodia is that it does not depend on a solo stakeholder. The lecture which cover various aspects relating to environmental problems were essential to let the students think from holistic viewpoint.

On top of the scientific knowledge, the lecture from a real environmental leader based on his experience was added in 2012, which enriched the program contents. This lecture highly motivated the students and let them think about the qualities of an environmental leader, including the sense of responsibility, braveness, transparency, vision and passion. Lots of positive feedbacks were given by students on this lecture.

7.4.2 Reschedule of Site Visit and Lecture

One of the differences between the Cambodia Unit 2011 and 2012 was that the program components within 1 day. In 2011, the contents of a lecture and a site visit in the same day were not necessarily related to one specific issue while those were in 2012. In other words, in each day in 2012, the students gained the knowledge from classroom lecture and site visit on a specific issue and had a time for group discussion on that issue in the same day. In this case, ideas and impressions of students were well exchanged and students were able to integrate their new knowledge with their background knowledge step by step.

In Cambodia Unit, two areas, remains of Pol Pot Regime in Phnom Penh and Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, were chosen as mentioned before in order to give students general background knowledge to have holistic understanding about environmental issues in Cambodia. In 2011, we started our fieldwork in Phnom Penh and moved to Siem Reap where we concluded the program. However, we found that the students preferred to do more research in groups in Phnom Penh after they studied the issues in Siem Reap, from the students' feedback. The site visit was rescheduled in 2012 accordingly. We returned to Phnom Penh after the visit to Siem Reap. It was one of the alternatives to let the students conduct problem analysis and create their own research structure.

7.4.3 The Future Challenge of the Cambodia Unit

One of the challenges in organizing the environmental leadership education program that we found in Cambodia was problem setting: how much the broad range of environmental issues have to be narrowed down. The lesson learned from the first Cambodia Unit was that the students tended to lose their way to find issues to be focused on since they were given too much information about broader environmental issues without any guidance. After the self-assessment of program, students in 2012 were given an assignment that has five specific topics to study and discuss in groups. However, this resulted in students selecting their group discussion topics only from the topics listed in the assignment. Furthermore, the students did not go far enough to explain how those topics are related at a fundamental level and answer to the core problem, although this method led students to analyze their chosen topic at a deeper level.

Another challenge is the impact that a leadership education program can bring over to a society. Education is an investment that needs time to get the fruits. Thus far, APIEL is successful in getting the various local stakeholders involved in this program. However, it will take another while for the participating students to be able to make significant contributions to solving the problems facing the Cambodian society.

7.4.4 Leadership Development in Students: Strive for Holistic View

In case of the program of 2012, good amount of basic information about Cambodia through preliminary assignment, and the lectures and visits enriched the knowledge that students already had and gave them stimulation to investigate further. This combination enabled students to address diversified aspects of environmental problems that teaching staff expected them to find from the study area.

The students in 2012, divided into four groups from (a) to (d), initiated the group discussion and eventually set their presentation topics by themselves. The topics for final presentations were as follows: (a) Capacity and Management of Irrigation in Cambodia, (b) Water Supply in Rural Area, (c) Role of ODA in Sustainable Livelihoods in Rural Cambodia and (d) Solid Waste Management in Phnom Penh. They were able to present concrete and feasible propositions for the sustainable development of Cambodia. The authors believe that they became aware how important it is to think out when they face difficult challenges. The authors also believe that a proposition has to be made not only from subjective, or single point of view, but also from objective and holistic viewpoints.

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