

Abstract

Hygienic sanitation – the safe disposal and management of human excreta – is central to public health and has multiple non-health benefits. While its importance is recognised in global and national strategies, there remains a significant gap in achieving the sanitation targets set out in the Sustainable Development Goals. This thesis aims to investigate and understand the sanitation situation and its determinants in rural Ethiopia and Cambodia, with some attention to India for comparison. It includes the introductory text and four published academic articles. The research undertaken in this PhD project included the analysis of field-level data previously collected in rural Cambodia, participation in the design proposal, fieldwork, analysis and presentation of findings from research conducted in rural Ethiopia, and a comparative analysis of sanitation policies implemented in Ethiopia and India. The mix of research areas and designs enabled the study to address drivers of sanitation that operate at multiple levels - from the level of individual choices and behaviours to the level of communities and national policies. The research findings revealed an important role for contextual variations in the physical and social environment, including the negative effects of remoteness (both physical accessibility and institutional remoteness). The findings also highlighted the multifaceted role of policy. Sustained political support is crucial to facilitate sanitation change, and should include steps beyond a focus on reducing open defecation to address other aspects of the sanitation chain. However, we also observed instances of sanitation policy being misused to command and control the population at the grassroots level in Ethiopia. The research also contributed to a new understanding of the role of perceived social norms in sanitation change, among other findings related to the behavioural antecedents of sanitation. While confirming the importance of perceived social norms, the study showed that enforcing compliance with the new norm of unacceptability of open defecation can lead to negative outcomes and undermine the sustainability of sanitation change.

Key words

Behaviour; Cambodia; Community Total Led Sanitation; Ethiopia; Latrines; Open defecation; Sanitation; Social norms