



5 Things You Should Learn From Implementing a Rural Sanitation Project in Cambodia

**A Review of the Cambodia Rural Sanitation and Hygiene
Improvement Program (CR-SHIP)**

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Introduction and Purpose

Context is key in sustainable WASH programming. Social norms, engineering requirements suited to the local physical environment and the types of governance structures in place to support communities vary markedly and are specific to countries and their sub-regions. Although what marks large scale WASH programming in one place may not apply elsewhere, drawing lessons from these experiences remains valuable, if properly documented.

Plan International USA reviewed the programming experience within the Cambodia Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement Program and developed this synthesis of insights, based on an array of program and performance-related reports released during the first three years of the program. This review is designed to assist local advocacy efforts to bring community-led total sanitation (CLTS) to scale and share emerging themes and lessons learned to date from programming experience of relevance to other implementers in the WASH sector.

The Program

The Cambodia Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement Program (CR-SHIP), funded by the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF), increases access to improved sanitation and proper hygiene practices in rural communities of Cambodia through the promotion of latrine use, hand-washing with soap and drinking only safe water. In doing so, the program strengthens the capacity of the national government, local authorities and local NGOs in delivering improved sanitation and hygiene services. Programs are delivered through a set of non-subsidized approaches, including: CLTS; sanitation marketing (SanMark); information, education and communication (IEC); and behavior change communication (BCC) campaigns. Plan International Cambodia was selected to serve at the program's Executing Agency (EA) and manages overall implementation conducted through sub-grants. These sub-grants are implemented by local and international NGOs, now, collectively referred to by the program as implementing partners (IPs).

Methodology

In performing this review, Plan International USA analyzed program documents from a variety of sources including external evaluators, sub-grantees and Plan itself spanning the 2012-2015 period of implementation. Key documents in that review included:

1. *Cambodia Country Report for GSF Mid-term Evaluation (MTE)*(IOD PARC, December 2014)
2. *iDE Annual Report (iDE Cambodia, October 2014)*
3. *WaterSHED Final Narrative Report (WaterSHED, December 2014)*
4. *CLTS In-depth Review (Plan International, December 2014)*
5. *Report on Output Data Analysis of ODF and non-ODF Villages in CR-SHIP (Plan International, February 2014)*
6. *Mid-Term Outcome Survey of CR-SHIP (MTOS) (DC Research/CORD, September 2014)*
7. *Study on the Experiences of Existing MFI Models on Financing Sanitation in Rural Cambodia (MFI) (Emerging Markets Consulting, May 2014)*

For each document, an individual two to four page summary was produced, which gave a short overview of significant findings and an interpretation of their broader sectoral implications. For the purpose of this document, these individual summaries were aggregated and compared to explore common, cross-cutting findings, and key learning points for sharing. Five key themes emerged across the various project documents and the following analysis discusses specific project implications as well as highlighting key



issues for international WASH practitioners. This document presents the synthesis of these themes with brief interpretation, but does not represent the position of Plan International or CR-SHIP on these issues.

5 Things You Need to Know: Cross-cutting Themes and Findings

1. Understand Your Strengths and Weaknesses...

CLTS Implementation Quality/Implementing Partner Capacity

Village Selection

Prior to initiating CLTS activities, implementing partners (IPs) select villages in which to implement their projects. Criteria for village selection and use of targeting was often a key determinant for success, as physical, socio/political, and historical factors influenced the effectiveness of various approaches. Early in the CR-SHIP program, village selection was based largely on latrine coverage rates from secondary data sources. Villages with difficult topography, partial flooding, and past or current experiences with sanitation subsidies were selected for implementation on this basis, but typically ran into challenges and bottlenecks during the intervention. More recently, IPs stated using Participatory Village Assessments (PVAs) to inform village selection processes, providing clearer guidance on the key pre-conditions to meet for successful implementation of CLTS.

Village to Staff Ratio

Effective CLTS implementation requires intensive follow-up and facilitation to encourage community-wide behavior change. Where IPs were found to have a high ratio of villages to trigger and mentor per staff member, their ability to conduct frequent and consistent follow-up was limited, potentially impacting their success of achieving open defecation free (ODF) status.

Consistent Quality among Implementing Partners

The general capacity and expertise for implementing CLTS varies markedly across all IPs. CR-SHIP sought to increase the capacity of IPs and reduce the impact of staff turnover through frequent trainings on CLTS methods and WASH topics. Ensuring that the right IP staff are trained in the right skills at the right time was key to maintaining consistent quality of CLTS implementation. IPs are encouraged to share experiences, learn from each other's successes and provide mutual support to addressing common challenges.

2. Find Out Where the Money is...

Sanitation Financing/Subsidies

Financing

CR-SHIP experience indicates that access to suitable sources of finance are critical in developing both the supply-side sanitation market and increasing consumer access to sanitation. Through the activities of Sanitation Marketing (SanMark) grants in particular, Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) can play a pivotal role in linking both businesses and consumers to the necessary resources to engage in the sanitation market. From entrepreneurs entering into the sanitation business for the first time to existing latrine business owners (LBOs) expanding their operations, access to appropriate loan instruments through MFIs provide an important link to capital investment. Businesses may need new or additional equipment and training in skills specific to selling sanitation. Encouraging LBOs to access existing financial instruments to expand their inventory and to engage in active sales tactics increases their ability to generate and respond to demand for sanitation.





Appropriate consumer-level financing for sanitation is equally important. Sanitation can be a ‘lumpy’ investment, requiring a large initial outlay, and costly endeavor for households, particularly those that are vulnerable to financial shocks. In CR-SHIP, demand for sanitation is generated through CLTS activities as well as SanMark sales events in communities. The aim of CLTS triggering is to encourage communities to adopt and sustain sanitation and hygiene behaviors. If triggering is successful, households are motivated to immediately end open defecation and are encouraged to construct simple pit latrines or at least adopt the practice of “cat sanitation,” which involves digging holes and burying feces. In Cambodia, a strong preference for high-quality, pour-flush latrines has been identified (this type of sanitation technology ranks on the top end of the sanitation “ladder”). This preference for higher specification, more expensive products can frequently delay consumer purchases, and adoption of more hygienic sanitation practices, until adequate household savings are accumulated. Presenting consumers with financing and loan options can provide them with the ability to purchase sanitation products with minimal delay to capitalize on post-triggering momentum. However, increasing access to financing and loans may create new challenges for households as they accumulate debt, and sanitation programs engaging with MFIs should explore potential risks before promoting this option.

Working together with MFIs to offer financing for sanitation has increased uptake of improved sanitation, but can lead to new and unexpected challenges. CR-SHIP experience points to the following highlights:

- To maximize uptake, programs that facilitate access to loans and financing should engage MFIs as partners that actively contribute to program design;
- Sanitation financing through MFIs requires effective coordination of a number of ‘new’ actors including: loan officers/credit officers (LOs/COs), sales agents, and sanitation teachers (STs). Clearly understanding the motivations and defining the roles and responsibilities of these different actors is important to avoid confusion and increase incentives that encourage consumer participation;
- Loans for sanitation are typically small (requiring a larger number to meet target portfolio values) and often fall within the broader category of “social loans” (associated with a perception of unprofitability), both factors that can lead MFIs to limit their offering. Active partnership with MFIs can help to identify possible approaches to mitigate such risks to success.
- Loans help to address the financial barriers to construct latrines, but carry a risk of increasing the financial burden on households with already limited resources. Projects engaging with financing mechanisms should be considerate of household ability to absorb new financial liabilities

Subsidies

Where communities have current or recent exposure to sanitation subsidies, challenges often arise. Exposure to subsidy programs may perversely set householder’s expectations regarding payment for sanitation facilities limiting householders’ motivations to make their own investments — a key expectation of the non-subsidy CLTS approach. As a result, householders may be willing to delay their purchase of sanitation products, expecting and/or holding out for subsidies from external organizations. Assessment of the extent of recent subsidy arrangements in target areas needs to be built into village/community selection criteria and in determining appropriate modifications to CLTS triggering activities to improve effectiveness.

Although the past focus on hardware subsidies in Cambodia has created challenges for successful non-subsidy approaches, support of this kind is often proposed because of its potential to reach the poorest households. Cambodia has national poverty classifications “ID Poor 1 & 2”, which programs can utilize to identify households that may need additional support. Judicious use of limited subsidy instruments for these groups may be one method to ensure equity and access to sanitation for the most disadvantaged. Coordination of any subsidy program with concurrently operating market-based approaches has been found to be important to ensure they complement rather than compete with each other.

3. Keeping Up with The Demand is Essential...

Supply-side Approaches and Challenges

The SanMark approach focuses on developing a thriving sanitation market to meet emerging demand. The approach works to increase the number and capacity of LBOs, connect them to consumers, generate consumer demand for sanitation, link consumers to the necessary financing to act on that demand and expand the range/price of product options for purchase.

Under CR-SHIP, LBOs are supported with training on sanitation products, as well as business and marketing skills development. Traditional business models tended to be conservative, favoring passive sales and building stock supplies to follow demand. Through a SanMark approach, entrepreneurs are encouraged to examine their products and services, pricing, marketing tactics, and partners to maximize their sales potential. LBOs have begun to lower costs for improved latrines, offer a DIY latrine kit, engage sales agents to stimulate consumer demand, provide home delivery, engaging local government to support sanitation promotion, and partner with MFIs to offer customers installment payment options. They are also encouraged to offer additional complementary services including latrine installation, materials to construct the latrine superstructure, and add-ons such as tiles, mirrors, larger water basins and paint for walls.

When LBOs are unwilling or unable to increase production capacity, the demand for latrines may outstrip existing supply. LBOs often have businesses that produce a variety of products, including latrines, and negative perceptions of latrine products as being unprofitable can influence LBO willingness to expand that portion of their business. Labor costs and availability can also affect the profitability of latrine sales and LBO interest in the market.





In addition to working with LBOs, SanMark approaches serve to link communities and potential consumers with suppliers through a variety of actors, including: sales agents, STs and financiers at MFIs. Coordination of these actors is critical to ensuring that the sales process is efficient and effective. Incentives, such as base pay instead of commissions, and issues such as high turnover rates, due to pay dissatisfaction, are important factors to consider for successful implementation.

4. Context Matters When Measuring...

Indicators and Measurement

The primary indicators for monitoring program activity and achievement are the numbers of villages triggered and those that achieve ODF status. ODF status is an outcome measurement, but it is limited in that it is a binary indicator; a village is either ODF or not, but when it is not ODF there is no scale to show progress made towards that goal. In order to determine a clearer picture of progress, additional indicators are needed.

Village-level data on latrine coverage rates (compared against baseline figures), help to show progress in non-ODF villages. Baseline latrine coverage rates can indicate potential for speed of ODF achievement and consistent tracking of increasing coverage can help to identify successful cases to learn from or challenging areas to focus additional attention and resources. Additional background information that might influence sanitation uptake could also be monitored, such as village financial status, proximity to urban areas, and exposure to past sanitation projects.

The focus on ODF as a measure of success also presents challenges when households share latrines. In some villages when families are unable to afford building a latrine they have begun to share latrines with other households of their extended family/relatives due to high levels of communal cohesion. While this is important for reducing the practice of open defecation, qualifying as an ODF village per the Cambodian Government criteria requires 85 percent of households to build their own latrines and limits sharing to 15 percent. The ODF indicator also does not report what happens to latrine coverage after status has been met,



unless the coverage decreases below the national ODF standard. This is problematic for understanding the sustainability of increased access to sanitation. Despite increasing access to sanitation, the program notes that households report a lack of awareness as to their future options when their latrines fill up, creating a potential post-ODF sustainability issue.

Measuring and understanding the costs of program approaches is valuable to inform future programming. Basic, simplistic cost analysis compares total project budget with latrine coverage achievement and number of ODF villages to determine a value for the price per latrine and ODF village. Both CLTS and SanMark costs per latrine are typically lower than the average cost of purchasing a latrine in the market (estimated at around USD \$50). Given the greater need for facilitation and follow-up, CLTS tends to be more expensive than SanMark. This review points towards the finding that non-subsidy approaches have the potential to be cost effective, but the cost burden does not disappear; rather it tends to be transferred to the beneficiaries in terms of investing both time (to attend meetings) and money to purchase sanitation components.

5. All the Parts are not Greater than the Whole...

Uptake and Sustainability

Latrine purchase does not necessarily lead to latrine installation, sustained use and long term maintenance/emptying. Households purchasing pour-flush latrines may not know how to install the latrine themselves and if installation services are not included or offered at an additional cost, the latrine may go unused. Additionally, the latrine purchase includes only the substructure (ring and slab), but households must also construct the superstructure before they can begin to use the latrine. Packages that include the superstructure should

be offered at time of sale. Strong preferences for expensive and durable cement superstructures (over cheaper wood or corrugated metal) create an additional cost barrier and increase the importance of offering financing options to encourage uptake.

The preference for pour-flush latrines with concrete superstructures increases the need to develop and promote options for fecal sludge management. Latrines will eventually fill up over the course of several years and many households are unclear as to what will happen when that occurs. When the majority of latrines constructed are Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines, it is possible to seal them off when full and dig a new pit, but rebuilding the latrine is not an option when households choose improved pour-flush latrines with concrete superstructures. Pit-emptying services need to be cultivated and properly guided to ensure that removal is safe and waste does not reenter the environment, which would negate the positive benefits of ending open defecation.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Plan recognizes the importance of reflection and review of project activities for learning, improving ongoing implementation and approaches, and influencing the WASH sector more broadly. The key points emerging to date from the CR-SHIP implementation process revolve around the following issues:

- The need for consistent, periodic training for facilitation and CLTS follow-up activities. Mentoring programs, potentially through identified local actors, may offer practical ways forward;
- Situational assessments will help improve site selection and community targeting for CLTS. Coordination (either harmonization or sequencing) of demand and supply side approaches will help maximize the chances of success from these programs;
- The entry of MFIs in the sanitation sector in Cambodia is complicated by: transactional costs of multiple, different actors involved in loan approval process; and the negative perceptions surrounding the size and profitability of loan instruments;
- Entry of LBOs into the Cambodian market is significantly impacted by: perception of profitability of sanitation products and alignment of incentives for those operating within Sanitation Marketing initiatives;
- Preference for pour flush “top of the sanitation ladder” latrines and elaborate superstructures require large upfront investments which can delay household uptake of sanitation and can create new liabilities for vulnerable households that choose to take on debt to finance purchases;
- Cost analysis appears to be rudimentary and mis-representative of the (true) costs for implementation;
- There is a complex web of factors impacting on the sustained uptake and use of sanitation systems in Cambodia – both post-purchase and following the anticipated design life of a toilet (i.e., emptying).

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- SNV Netherlands Development Organization
- WaterSHED
- iDE Cambodia
- Cambodian Red Cross (CRC)
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