Empowering Women through Sanitation at Household, Community and Institutional Levels

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Vietnam
Inadequate sanitation facilities disproportionately affect women and girls. 

Relatively little research exists on whether sanitation programs can go further in empowering women’s decision-making at the household, community, and institutional levels. Where such studies exist, they have generally been qualitative in nature.

East Meets West (EMW) has undertaken two studies to understand whether and how a large scale rural sanitation program in Vietnam increased women’s empowerment.
Overview of Analytical Framework

1. **Household**

Understanding the impact of EMW’s OBA approach at the **household level** (Study 1).

2. **Community and Institutional**

Understanding the impact of EMW’s OBA approach at the **community and institutional level** (Study 2, in partnership with UTS-ISF).

Overview of existing literature on WASH and gender

The literature broadly falls into three categories:

1. Studies of how WASH programs benefit women (and men)
2. Analysis of programs that seek to empower women to improve WASH outcomes
3. Assessments of how and to what extent WASH programs empower women

Where our studies seek to contribute
Key question: Do Women Get a Greater Say in Family Decisions to Purchase a Latrine?

- Focus on the decision to install a latrine
- Use data from CHOBA endline survey
- Key question: “Which member in your household made the decision to install this latrine?”

Analysis uses data from subset of 517 households with:
  - Data on both husband and wife (age, education, occupation, etc.)
  - Decision was taken by husband, wife, or jointly
Conceptual Model

Econometric Model

\[ Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 x_1 + \alpha_2 x_2 + \ldots + \alpha_n x_n \]

Where \( x \) are a number of explanatory variables grouped into five categories (taken from conceptual model):

- Human Capital
- Economic Resources
- Social Capital
- Family Characteristics
- Social and Cultural Norms
The Results

1. Human Capital
   The probability that the wife participated in the latrine decision increases with her level of education, age, and knowledge about what type of latrine is hygienic. Knowledge about the linkages between contact with human feces and diseases has no significant impact on the wife’s role in the latrine decision.

2. Economic Resources
   The wife’s decision-making role was increased if she earned outside cash income, and if the Women’s Union helped the wife to obtain and process a loan.

3. Social Capital
   No significance.

4. Family Characteristics
   Like most studies, we found that the effect of total family income was insignificant. Family size had negligible impact.

5. Social and Cultural Norms
   Women in Hai Duong (northern province, more traditional Confucian values) had less influence in decision-making than in Tien Giang (southern Mekong Delta).
Does EMW’s sanitation program make a difference?

1) How much is the wife’s decision making power changed by CHOBA?

We look specifically at 3 CHOBA-related variables and their impact on women’s decision-making:

1. VWU informed about hygienic latrine
2. The family obtained a loan from VBSP
3. VWU assisted in preparation of loan application

Without CHOBA, **wives would be the sole or joint decision makers in 45% of the households. Thanks to CHOBA this percentage increased to 69%.** Thus, key elements of CHOBA gave the wives a greater say in latrine decision.
Does EMW’s sanitation program make a difference?

2) Does the empowerment result in any practical consequences in terms of latrine choice?

- Promoting hygienic latrines and education on health benefits did not influence the “balance of power,” while **practical information** regarding latrine options, costs, and masons did increase the wife’s bargaining power.

- Men gave greater weight to costs while women emphasized health. When the wife decided, the latrines were more hygienic.

### Three Main Reasons for Installing a New Latrine

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<tr>
<th>Reason for New Latrine</th>
<th>Husband Decided</th>
<th>Wife or Joint Decision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience, Comfort, Cleanliness</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve family health</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable cost</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Husband Decided</th>
<th>Wife or Joint Decision</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Septic Tank</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Cost (Median)</td>
<td>5.9 M</td>
<td>7.6 M</td>
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Research on Gender in CHOBA – Women’s Union as an Institution

1. To determine the extent to which Vietnam Women’s Union volunteers have been empowered through their involvement with CHOBA.

2. To determine the impact of CHOBA on the status and level of influence of the VWU as an institution and Vietnam’s predominant organisation for women.
Methodology

*Structured in-depth interviews with:*

1. 20 randomly selected Vietnam Women’s Union (VWU) village-level volunteers
2. VWU representatives from CHOBA provincial and communal Project Management Boards
3. Other (non-VWU) stakeholders from CHOBA provincial and communal PMBs, mainly from the People’s Committee
4. Vietnam Women’s Union representatives at the central level
5. Other (non-VWU) stakeholders in the sanitation sector at the central level
6. East Meets West personnel at the central level.
Key Findings: Individual Empowerment of VWU volunteers

Of the 20 VWU volunteers interviewed, 14 (70%) reported experiencing at least one positive gender-related outcome that could be linked back to their involvement in CHOBA.

1. Positive changes in roles and increased status in the community
   - Most reported gender outcome (70%).
   - Learning skills and accumulating experience through CHOBA led to successful mobilisation and positive benefits for households in the community.

2. Increased self-confidence
   - Second most reported gender outcome (60%).
   - Knowledge gained through CHOBA coupled with the opportunity to carry out mobilisation through household visits.

3. Positive changes in household roles and relations
   - Third most reported gender outcome (45%).
   - Seeing increased appreciation and trust in the VWU volunteers shown by the community encouraged husbands to listen to and support their wives.
Key Findings: Institutional empowerment of VWU

COMMUNE LEVEL: 6 out of 12 (50%) stakeholders reported examples of increased influence.

- VWU was asked to work towards latrine coverage targets set by the health sector
- VWU was assigned data management tasks in the health sector
- Local authorities and leaders showed VWU more support.
- VWU recommendations now have influence for example, through the Commune project management board of the NRD.

PROVINCIAL LEVEL: 6 out of 7 (86%) stakeholders reported examples of increased influence.

- Increased budget support for VWU
- More responsibilities in NRD
- World Bank consulted the VWU on WASH
- WU successfully lobbied Provincial leaders for extra subsidies for building latrines
- PPC took on VWU innovations and recommendations
- VWU successfully lobbied for 77 billion VND in loans for households.
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