



## Review of the Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene for All Programme in Lao PDR

### Learning From Experiences in the Field

#### Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene for All (SSH4A)

The regional SSH4A Programme is a multi-country programme initiated by SNV in collaboration with IRC and implemented together with Government counterparts and other development partners. The programme aims to improve the health and quality of life of rural people in five Asian countries (Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal and Vietnam) by increasing access to improved sanitation and improved hygiene practices. The programme started at very small scale in 2008-2009, and was scaled up in 2010 with supplementary funding from AusAID.

The SSH4A programme comprises of four mutually reinforcing components based on evolving insights into sustainable rural sanitation and hygiene programmes. An additional cross-cutting regional component of the programme focuses on analysis, dissemination and learning within and between countries.

The SSH4A programme assists and strengthens the capacities of local government institutions, local non-profit organisations, local private sector actors and other stakeholders to develop and implement sustainable sanitation and hygiene service delivery approaches at scale.



#### SSH4A in Lao PDR

SNV Laos supports the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (GOL) to implement the SSH4A programme across four districts (Atsaphon, Phalanxai, Phin and Xonabouri) in Savannakhet Province, in Central Laos.

The first phase of the programme ran from June 2010 to December 2011 and was financed by the Australian Government (AusAID) through the Civil Society Water and Sanitation Fund and the Royal Netherlands Government (DGIS).

The programme is implemented in collaboration with the Savannakhet Provincial Government with the Provincial

Rural Development and Poverty Reduction Office being the lead agency. A multi-stakeholder coordination committee was established with representatives from the Departments of Health, Education, Planning and Investment, the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Youth Union. This multi-stakeholder approach was replicated across each of the four districts with representatives from each subordinate office formed into district programme implementation teams. SNV provided programme management, capacity strengthening, and technical support.

# The programme in Laos faced a challenging context starting in a new area, with new clients and a new team

The specific objectives and intended results of this phase of the SSH4A programme in Laos were:

- Increase sustainable access to improved sanitation and good hygiene practices for 25,000 people across 80 villages.
- Strengthen market-based supply chains for a variety of sanitation and hygiene consumer needs by supporting some 16 micro-enterprises.
- Develop, test and scale up localised behavioural change communication strategies for sustainable hygiene behavioural changes.

- Improve district level WASH governance for local business development and pro-poor support systems.
- Learn, document and share best practices of the programme nationally and regionally.

The programme in Laos faced some delays in the beginning, starting in a new area, with new clients and a new team. These delays, combined with the unfortunate floods during the 2011 rainy season, meant that progress initially was less than expected. Investments however started to pay off in 2012, as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: SSH4A Key Result Areas

AusAID WASH Core Indicators	Unit	Achievements		Target
		No.	Percent	
Number of additional people who improved their sanitation situation	People	15,491	82%	19,000
Number of additional locations with hand washing facilities and soap	HWWS stations	764	43%	1,755
Number of additional schools with water, sanitation or hand washing facilities	Schools	8	35%	21

Note: The results in this table reflect the programme outcomes achieved during 2012.

## End-of-Phase Performance Review

While comparing the actual programme results with the intended results (the key result areas up to end December 2011 are shown in the above table) it becomes apparent that the programme has had somewhat limited success to date.

An end-of-phase performance review was therefore carried out by an external consultant at the beginning of 2012. The main purpose of the review was to obtain a better understanding of what worked well and what did not work well. This was so that on-going and future programmes can build on and accelerate the movement towards universal access to improved sanitation and hygiene on the basis of lessons learnt.

The performance review focused on the following aspects:

- 1) Critical success factors with a particular focus on demand creation
- 2) CLTS evolution and advancement in Laos
- 3) Key challenges for scaling up rural sanitation and hygiene programmes in Laos

**The purpose of this learning brief is to bring together the insights gained during the implementation of the programme. By capturing the lessons learnt and turning them into better or best practices, it will become easier to achieve success in the future.**

## Lessons Learned

The programme has revealed that it is difficult to export a successful initiative from one part of the country to another location and expect immediate results. The following paragraphs will provide insight into this and other key issues that have affected the performance of the SSH4A programme in Laos, namely: **1) Capacity of programme staff; 2) Selection of target villages; 3) Sanitation demand creation; and 4) Post-triggering follow up.**

The discussions in this learning brief will go beyond the scope of the SSH4A programme and will consider broader sector challenges for going to scale.

Learning and recommendations collected during an external end-of-phase performance review debriefing session – organised in February 2012 with other sector actors – have been incorporated in this learning brief.

# Programmes working at scale should build in adequate time to develop the capacities of implementers

## Capacity of Programme Staff

Many of the programme challenges are related to human resource constraints and the general lack of large scale sanitation and hygiene service delivery expertise in Laos.

During programme implementation SNV had problems with retaining qualified programme staff. Furthermore, SNV's experience and expertise gained during 2009 and 2010 were insufficiently deployed to guide and support the programme. This was because some experienced team members had left the organisation but also because other programmes were competing for attention. It is therefore crucial that lead organisations continuously develop and anchor organisational capabilities, and maintain a critical mass of capable and dedicated staff to be able to innovate, design, develop and implement future programmes successfully.

The formation of multi-actor district teams responsible for programme activities – consisting of staff from five different district government offices and two civil society organisations – was an innovative and effective strategy, particularly considering the general human resource constraints in the districts, and the explicit wish to engage as many district actors as possible to build up a broad base of facilitators and to enhance coordination. Effective programme implementation was often hampered by the lack of experience and capacities as well as frequent staff turnover. In a number of districts,

staff involved in training and initial demand creation activities were replaced by inexperienced colleagues during subsequent stages. Programmes working at scale should build in adequate time to develop the capacities of implementers to plan, implement and monitor programmes effectively.

District teams had to go through a lengthy learning cycle to comprehend the intricacies of the approach and to master the basic skills to implement the approach effectively. The challenge for the future is to reduce the time it takes for new facilitators to go through their individual, as well as team learning and adaptation process, so that scaling up can be achieved more rapidly. The programme's ultimate goal of sustained change in sanitation and hygiene behaviour, requires first of all genuine changes in the attitudes and behaviour of the people involved in programme implementation. Capacity building initiatives should thus enhance personal (addressing and challenging existing perceptions and attitudes) as well as professional competences.

The existing pool of experienced CLTS trainers is insufficient to support the country's drive towards universal sanitation coverage. There is an urgent need to broaden and strengthen the narrow base of CLTS experts in Laos by organising new ToT in collaboration with other interested organisations.

## Selection of Target Villages

The selection of initial target villages by inexperienced district teams created a number of unwanted challenges. A number of villages with 'less favourable' conditions (e.g. lack of strong local leaders, difficult to access etc.) were selected, which negatively affected the outcomes of sanitation demand creation activities.

The challenge for future programmes is to find agreement on a well-balanced mix of selection criteria that is in line with government policies but at the same time allows for the selection of a shortlist of favourable villages. As district-wide coverage should be the ultimate aim of any rural sanitation and hygiene programme, the selection of 'favourable' target villages is a luxury that can only be applied in the early stages of a programme.

The selection procedure should not exclude any village; however, it should ensure that programme activities commence in relatively easier villages. This will help inexperienced facilitators to gain experience and confidence, and to develop a number of success stories, and then use these to move to more challenging villages. Future selection criteria should also reflect programme management concerns such as creating greater synergy and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of programme operations by concentrating interventions in geographic clusters (e.g. a group of adjoining villages).

The post-triggering phase is very important as village dynamics can change rapidly; sensitive external support is crucial

## Sanitation Demand Creation

Following the successful testing and adaptation of the CLTS triggering approach in other provinces in Laos (see [Map 1](#)), the programme embraced this approach to generate demand. Triggering in most of the villages, however, did not ignite a desire to change existing sanitation practices as seen in some other parts of the country. It did seem to be effective at raising awareness among villagers on the impact of open defecation, but in most villages this did not translate into a spontaneous, rapid and collective decision to take immediate action. Even in the more successful villages, the process of change was gradual.

Future demand creation activities should ensure that a sense of urgency is generated among the villagers as this is expected to lead to a collective decision to stop open defecation practices. Culturally sensitive methodologies, designed to create a 'shock and awe' effect and a collective sense of disgust, should not be excluded or adapted before careful testing in a number of villages.

Participation by men, and in particular more influential community members, was poor and this made triggering less effective. Participation should go well beyond the involvement of women and children. It should be large enough to be truly representative of the village as a whole and should include community and household-level decision makers.

Demand creation activities need to be conducted when villagers have the time to attend these activities as well as the time and resources to construct toilets – as a

means to stop open defecation practices – immediately thereafter. The ultimate time for triggering is therefore immediately after the harvesting and selling of excess cash crops.

Future programmes should also develop and test alternative demand creation approaches to cope with more challenging villages. Sanitation demand studies – which carefully research existing household behaviours, adoption decision, and drivers and barriers to sanitation uptake – will help to design more effective demand creation methodologies.

Although awareness raising and initial demand creation is a responsibility for the public sector, considering the potential health benefits for the general public, there is also a role for the private sector. Ideally the private sector should take an interest and responsibility in stimulating and supporting demand for improved sanitation products and services. Producers and suppliers of toilet components should spend considerably more time in promoting (selling) their products.

The programme also revealed that different technology and financial solutions need to be in place before demand creation activities commence. This is to avoid people who have been motivated to change their defecation practices being disappointed and losing interest as a consequence of delays caused by external parties. These delays have meant that villagers who were inspired or motivated to construct a toilet were unable to do so because other actors did not come up with the necessary technological and financial solutions.

## Post-Triggering Follow-Up

The post-triggering phase is very important as village dynamics can change rapidly. Sensitive external encouragement and support is crucial as timely and appropriate interventions make a huge difference. Follow-up without a clear focus and effective intervention strategy is bad practice and leads to inefficient use of scarce resources. Follow up should focus on encouraging and supporting villages to keep the momentum going, introducing appropriate sanitation technologies, matching supply with demand, and conducting additional hygiene promotion activities.

The programme discovered that organising post-triggering follow up in villages where triggering has not been effective can be quite problematic. It is therefore important that follow up strategies and activities are

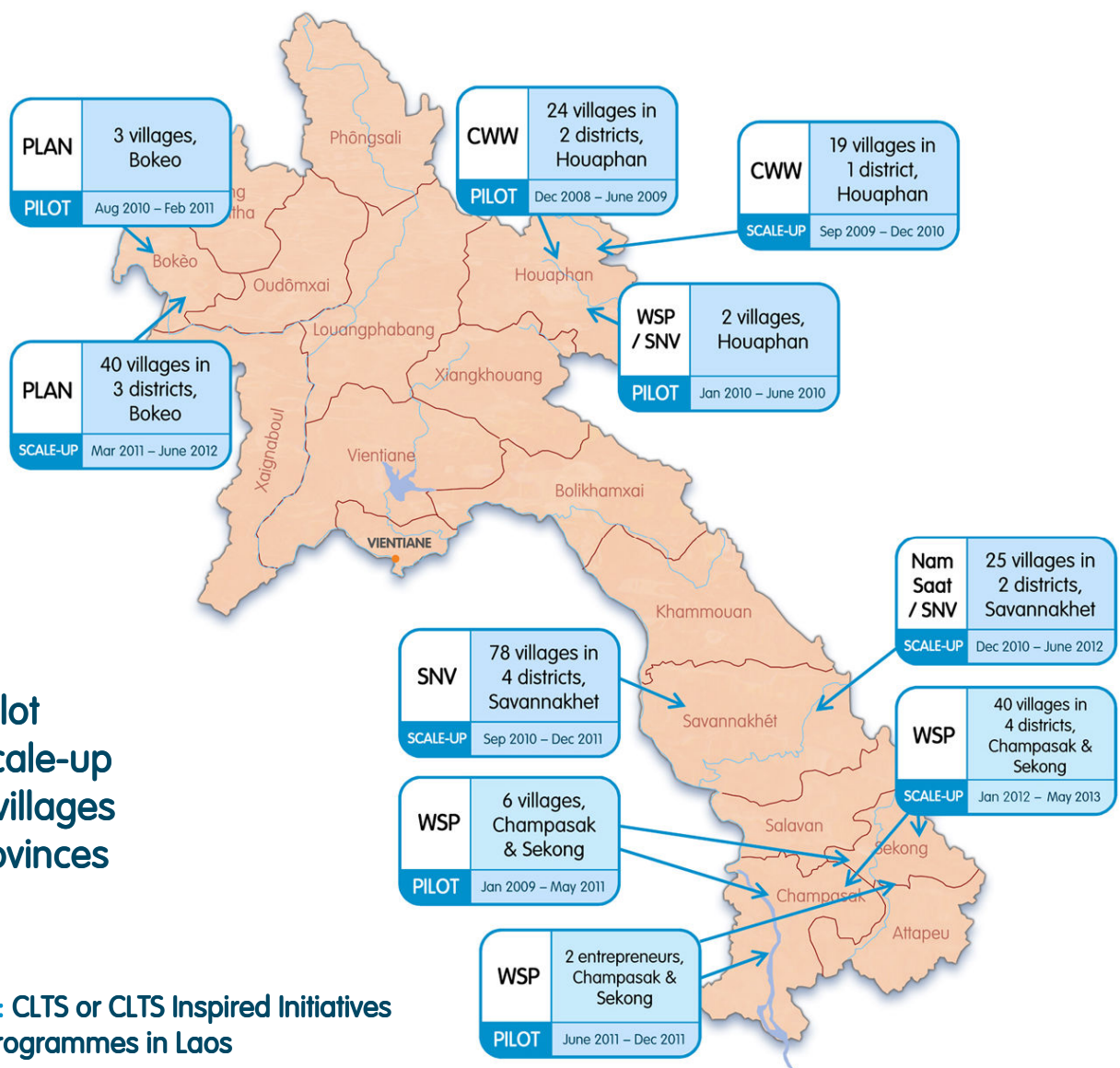
adapted and vary in contents and timing according to the response of each village. Facilitators need to be creative and flexible as villages are not identical. High intensity support is only effective and appropriate in villages that are responding well to demand creation activities.

Capacity building activities to enhance the capacities of relatively inexperienced facilitators by providing on-the-job training, coaching and guidance by experienced facilitators should continue. The back-to-office post-visit evaluations – to create a better understanding of what transpired during village visits and what specific action or follow-up is required during subsequent visits – should become an integral part of capacity building initiatives.



5x pilot  
5x scale-up  
237 villages  
5 provinces

Map 1: CLTS or CLTS Inspired Initiatives and Programmes in Laos



## Other Lessons

Use everything learnt from previous initiatives and programmes – whether they were successes or failures – to stimulate innovations and to continuously improve organisational capabilities and individual capacities. Best practices arising out of these programmes should be captured to imitate the successes and to avert the failures in future programmes. "Lessons learnt" must be shared with others within the programme team and applied immediately. Lessons learnt should also be shared with sector actors to positively influence the performance of the entire sector.

It proved to be too challenging to achieve satisfactory results within the limited time span of the programme. If the health benefits of sanitation and hygiene are to be secured, long-term programmes with sufficient resources and commitment are prerequisites. It is therefore essential to seek funding for long-term programmes.

The programme has shown that the approach of encouraging and nurturing the participation of a

multitude of actors at provincial, district and community level – including the public sector, the private sector, schools and communities – has the potential of working well in the institutional context of Laos. It therefore makes sense to embrace the same principle of involving multiple levels and multiple actors as the nature of at-scale programmes requires simultaneous engagement of many actors from different levels.

Mobilising political leadership is a key component of any programme working at scale. In countries where CLTS has been successful, there has been strong policy support for CLTS and high-level government buy-in. Leadership buy-in and commitment are also prerequisites for ensuring that increases in coverage are realised beyond the boundaries of the programme. Furthermore, it would create opportunities and open doors to institutionalise and mainstream the programme's lessons learnt and best practices into government policies and strategies.

**This Learning Brief was prepared to communicate the results and learning from SNV's work in the WASH sector to other development actors.**

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## Photo credits

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